

Ormand Family Activity

September 2011: Flagstaff Vacation

It's been a busy summer. Faith had her school trip SCUBA diving in Southern California. We have stayed in Phoenix and on Mt. Lemmon, and visited the Los Angeles area. School has started again, and we took Charity back to Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, and ordinarily, that would be the end of it, but it turns out Faith has no school on Friday of Labour Day weekend, and Charity has no Friday classes. So I resolve to take a day of vacation from work so that we can spend a long weekend in Flagstaff. So less than a week after returning from Flag, we go back up there on Thursday night.

It's "only" a four-hour trip

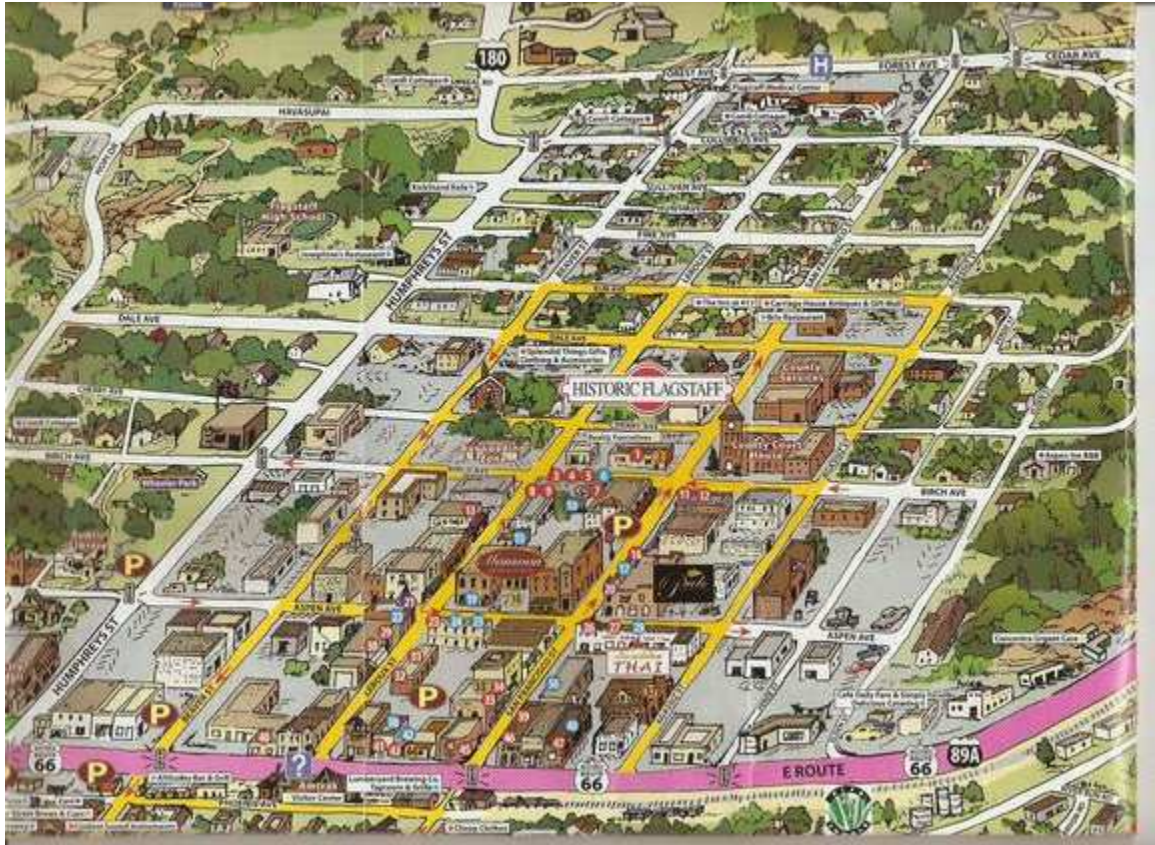
- Two from Tucson to Phoenix
- The better part of an hour to get through the Phoenix area (to Anthem)
- Less than an hour to Camp Verde
- Less than an hour (in spite of road construction) to Flagstaff

and leaving after work/school on Thursday gets us to the Ramada Inn on the east side of Flagstaff just before midnight. I thought Ramada was a pretty good name, but it seems there's a lot of variability. The one on the east side is really just a flop. But it is inexpensive, too, so this is probably a case of "you get what you pay for". The thing is, getting off I-40 at Butler, there's the Little America hotel right there, which turns out to be an attraction in its own right.

flagstaff.littleamerica.com

Friday - Downtown Flagstaff

The start of our little vacation is a downtown exploration. Last time here, we got an excellent little tourist map (available from www.discoverymap.com) with this downtown detail:



We dump the car next to Wheeler Park on Birch Avenue and walk on in. First stop is the Pow Wow Indian Trader on 66 just east of Humphreys; it's a *real* Indian-operated shop with native Indian music CDs and videos, posters of local Indian events, herbs, and other such along with the usual touristy kachinas and tee shirts and throw rugs. I think this is a valid "trading post", because behind the counter are some shelves with musical instruments, stereo equipment, and power tools! A little further on is a bead shop where Faith gets some jewelry craft goodies. There's some strange clothing stores, of course, and several "import" shops with a heavy Buddhist or Hindu theme. We pass Babbit's Outfitters, but we went in there last time so we skip it.



Across the street from Babbitt's is the Hotel Monte Vista. It appears that Flagstaff has a historic downtown hotel like the Copper Queen in Bisbee and the Gadsden in Douglas. The rooms are rather a bit more than at our Ramada Inn, but it would have been an experience... except

for two things:

- According to the remarks on review websites, the noisy downtown nightlife makes a restful night unlikely. This same critique applies to Hotel Congress in Tucson (which includes Club Congress at street level), and which we discovered first hand at the Copper Queen.
- Yes... it's haunted. Which means that I (and Charity, bless her heart) would have found it hard to sleep due to anticipation or tension of something almost certain to not happen.

www.hotelmontevista.com

By this time we are looking for lunch and stop in at a "Kitchen" place, but rather than selling food, they are selling... kitchen equipment. Interesting place; I find a pineapple corer, and vegetable peelers in both left-handed and right-handed versions. We end up at Bigfoot BBQ in the basement of what used to be the Penney store. It's not bad... but it's not Big Bob Gibson's.

After lunch we continue north into the "residential" area (formerly; now mostly lawyer offices - shades of Tucson) looking for an antique store, and finally find it. It's interesting. Curiously enough, they have some old partially used bank books - I can't imagine any general hobby antiquarian interest in bank books. Chamber pots, yes, but bank books? I notice next door to the antique store (actually in the same building, which was the carriage house for an early successful Flagstaff banker... wonder where his *house* is...) is Brix Restaurant - with \$35 entrees on the menu. That's pretty high-faluting for little Flagstaff!

We return back to downtown proper, passing through Heritage Square, a large open paved area where "cultural" events are staged, along with the free open-air movie on weekends (rather like La Placita in downtown Tucson). In fact, today is "Downtown Flagstaff Art Walk". We've picked up the promotional flyer; it's for participating downtown merchants to have "open house" with refreshments and special sales. Yes, there's also a movie at Heritage Square. But I can't get any interest from Mommy, so after we leave downtown to take Charity back to her dorm (she has some callbacks from her auditions for upcoming NAU Drama Department productions, and cannot join us this evening), the rest of us go to a paid-for movie at Flagstaff's only theater, on University west of the campus.

(There used to be a theatre at the Flagstaff Mall, we are told, but it couldn't get enough business to stay open. What possessed them to open the Mall on the other side of town from the Campus is beyond me - the city doesn't have an especially good transit system. We see the blue buses going by on 66, but they're not frequent enough to ferry students and their money to the Mall)

Saturday - Snowbowl Ski Lift

The next day, Charity is back with us, and we do something we considered last time we were here - go up to the Arizona Snowbowl formed by the four San Francisco peaks, and ride the ski lift to the top.

After a short drive up Humphreys Street and the connection to the highway north out of Flagstaff, we pass the Arizona Pioneer Museum - maybe we will have time to look at that on our way back. Then a little further on, the Museum of Northern Arizona - ditto. Then a right turn onto the road up the mountain through the ponderosa pines, which eventually give way to aspen and spruce. At the top, we park at the lodge, get our tickets, and board the lift chairs. It's a *long* ride - at the bottom, you look *way* up the mountain, and can't see the end of the lift. It's a forty-minute ride!

The ski lift goes up Agassiz Peak. Humphreys Peak, the highest spot in Arizona, looms beyond.



At the ranger station at the top of the lift is the "highest toilet in Arizona". It's really a drafty latrine - or so Charity tells me.



The Snowbowl faces northwest, and thus southern features, like the city, are not visible. However, the path continues to almost the top of Agassiz peak, and the shelf cut out on the shoulder provides a southern view. Without binoculars (rats, forgot to bring them *again*), the most prominent landmark

is the white Sky Dome.

Here's the girls on a bench almost at the top, with the western vista as

a backdrop. Tremendous. Has the view from Mt. Lemmon back home beat to pieces.



I am standing as high up on Agassiz peak as you are allowed to go. Here's the top of the ski lift with the northern vista beyond.



And here's the reason you can't go all the way to the top of Agassiz Peak. This does *NOT* explain why the Forest Service did not continue the hiking trail to the top. Mild feeling of being robbed. Aggravation with the misguided Endangered Species Act which mostly inhibits Americans from enjoying their own country.

After looking around a bit more (and having the ranger describe the various volcanic formations visible), we are ready for the return trip. By the time we get in the chair, a light rain is falling.



Before long, the light rain turns into a five-minute hailstorm, leaving the evidence on our laps.

On the way up, Charity and Faith point out a tree along the route that is festooned with Mardi Gras-style bead strings. On the way down, we see the rest of what they saw on the way up: hanging in the same tree are some bras that, Mardi Gras-style,

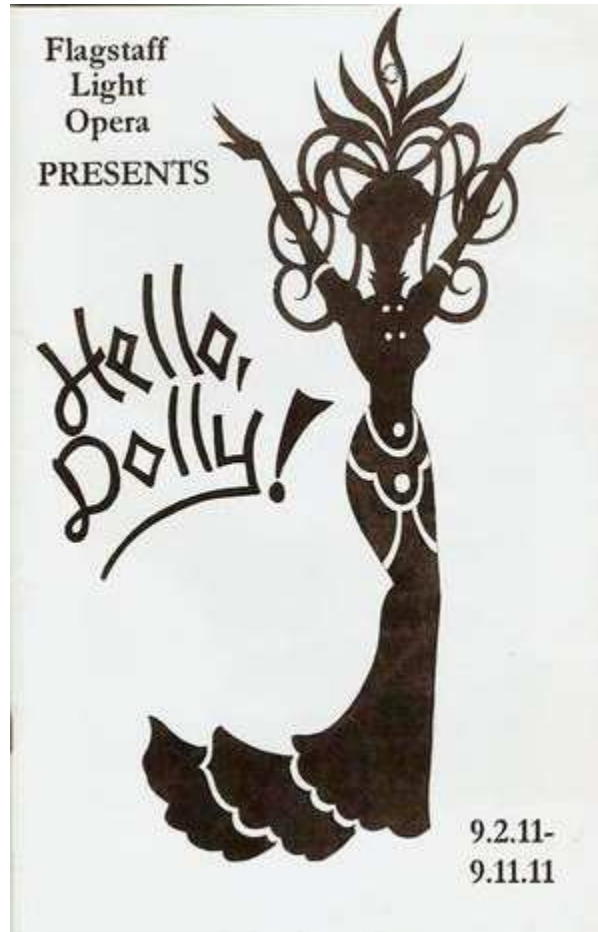
naughty girls took off and threw in the trees.

By this time, it's rather late in the afternoon. Our evening plans will not permit a visit to either of the museums we saw along the road. After a

snack in the lodge restaurant, we get back in our van, descend the San Francisco mountains, return to Flagstaff and Humphreys Street and Route 66. We hang at the hotel for a little while (marvelling at the hotel staff's perverse insistence on supplying the room with three bath towels, three hand towels, and *one* washcloth in spite of repeated trips to the Desk and even written notes to the maids), and then proceed to our dinner destination: Black Bart's Steakhouse (www.blackbartssteakhouse.com).

Black Bart's appears to be Flagstaff's answer to Tucson's Pinnacle Peak. Granted, Pinnacle Peak is situated in Trail Dust Town, with the little shops and the carousel and the train ride and the characteristic gazebo bandstand in the flower bed. But instead of the campy "wild west" stunt show and the necktie-cutting and the intimidating actors circulating in the dining room, Black Bart's has singing waiters. From the moment we arrived to the time we left, a perpetual act was occurring on the stage to the accompaniment of the most talented young pianist. Usually solos and occasional group numbers, the young people - music and theatre students from NAU, many of whom Charity recognizes - belt out show tunes and pop songs and old favorites. The food is quite good, also. Except for the absence of Trail Dust Town (Black Bart's is situated in an RV park!), I think Pinnacle Peak Steakhouse has been upstaged!

But the musical evening isn't over. Our final destination is the Sinagua High School auditorium, where the Flagstaff Light Opera Company (thefloc.org) is performing a reduced version of "Hello Dolly". Charity found out about this and suggested we try it out. Turns out it is quite the community production - some of the band members we see before the show are high school or middle school people. Many of the leading roles are NAU drama students. Only a few have stage experience beyond Flagstaff. We guess from the choreography that many of the girls are not really singers, so the production was revised with lots of dance scenes. There are a few noticeable mis-steps. The sets are about what you would expect given the resources of a school auditorium backstage. Was it Broadway? Was it polished and professional? No. But it was a community effort, which speaks to me more highly for an indigenous culture than any flashy travelling show could. I think they did very well given their budget limitations. It was *good*.



Sunday - Coconino County Fair

We've seen the Calvary Chapel of Flagstaff - way out on the east side. We've passed a "Harvest Christian Fellowship", which is usually code for a Calvary Chapel spinoff, on Route 66, but their website is only a sales outlet for the preacher's sermon CDs and their telephone answering message only tells you that their mailbox is full. Bad scene, people. So it's back to Northland Christian Assembly for our weekly dose of Sunday Morning church activity, which is in bike range for Charity, where the other two are definitely NOT. (Actually, I scouted some other fellowships in or near the campus, but the road work around NAU is so bad it was impossible to find them.)

Afterwards, we get up on I-17 and join the line of cars at the exit, slowly being directed by state troopers and Navajo parking attendants into the overflowing Coconino County Fairground parking lots.



Eventually, we get in and make our way to the gate. Admission is more than for the Pima County Fair. Inside, we find an unusual arrangement - instead of a couple of huge barns for the livestock and two or three large halls for

the craft and home industry and 4-H exhibits and the commercial booths, there are about fifteen permanent structures. Only one is "large hall" size, for the commercial entities; all the rest are 15 by 30 foot "small house" buildings, all arranged around the paved square occupied primarily by the food vendors. The carnival is outside this square - operated by Brown's, rather than our familiar Ray Camak, and they deal with metal coin tokens rather than paper tickets.

- We rush to the first scheduled demo, "Robotics" at the 4-H building. One leader and one young person were doing a crude synchronized interaction of two LEGO Mindstorm robots. Timing only, no sensors. I give them marks for trying, but I think the leader would have done better getting a few NAU engineering students to help figure out the potential of the Mindstorms. Or gotten some BOEbots, with *much* better teaching potential.
- Being in Navajo country, I was expecting a big deal for sheep. Nope. One small building, maybe five or six animals. Afterwards, my friend John Hill from Holbrook advised me that most Navajo children live on the reservation and never get involved with 4-H, which is really what gets shown at the Fair.
- There *was* a gem and minerals exhibit. I was not expecting much; Tucson is of course the center of mining activity for the state, as well as the home for the internationally famous Gem and Mineral Show. But it wasn't bad, and it had one display that I was totally not prepared for - gallstones, kidney stones, appendix stones, other mineral formations removed from human bodies! Wow... I think... innovative...
- There was a model train setup - *excellent*. Better than the setup at the State Fairground in Phoenix. With local emphases: the trains

were predominantly Burlington, Northern, and Santa Fe, just like the trains passing along Route 66 downtown every five minutes or so. On a miniature mesa (through which a train tunnel was cut) was a Navajo *hogan* and a large sheep herd. At the other end was a reconstruction of Monument Valley. Really very good.

- Faith and Charity were delighted by the very large rabbits. We all marvelled at the Beautiful Silkie Hens.
- No Piggly Wiggly's. But there was a variety of food styles. After we all got what we wanted and sat down to eat it, we ended up sharing the table with a man who was a NAU student and his mother who turns out to be from an old Tucson family. We chat with them for some time before we go and get our
- Dipping Dots! By then, most everything is shut down except for the band playing '80s music on the stage. So we end our day at the Coconino County Fair.

I think we are all agreed that our favorite part of the Fair was experiencing the Kent Family Magic Circus. This was a marvelous affair of a "sawdust in his veins" magician / performer who married a Japanese lady and raised seven children and incorporated them into the show. His two older sons are excellent performers as well, one with fine juggling skills and the other demonstrating "bed-of-nails" and bullwhip skills. His younger son is a Houdini-style escape artist. His three elementary-age daughters were charming magician assistants. Even his disabled wheelchair-bound son made a stage appearance. His older daughter is currently attending college, but her place was filled by a Japanese girl acrobat who is travelling with them this season. Victor



Kent did up-close fire-eating tricks that are rarely seen anymore, as well as other tricks, like our favorite: "eating" a blue balloon "sword" (actually, entering his mouth and never thence reappearing) and then pulling a brown balloon from his pants, bending it into a doggie, and presenting it to a young audience member. Yes, a bit scatological, but amazing all the same.

kentfamilymagiccircus.com. They are based in California, but travel extensively with their show. One of the more entertaining aspects was Mr. Kent's monologue of political and cultural commentary accompanying whatever act was on stage. Plus they are *evangelical Christians!* A different sort of Christian Geek!

Monday - Lake Mary

During the weekend, the rips in Charity's pants progress to the point of rendering the pants unwearable. The only place we can get these kind of pants (so we're told) is Penney. The only Penney around is at the Flagstaff Mall. So we spend the morning at the Flagstaff Mall, leaving with rather more than pants. At this point, we really are done with Flagstaff for the weekend. Charity has been to Lake Mary with friends before, so we get a Kentucky Fried Chicken picnic lunch and go out of town to the southeast a ways to see what she saw.



Lake Mary is within the Coconino National Forest, and the official parking and picnic areas are fee-based. We opt to stop at a wide part off the road and carry our stuff down under the pines by the lake.

After lunch, we sit for a while watching Faith doing her Advanced Biology plant collection project.

The lake is a couple of miles long and a few hundred feet wide. The water has worn the volcanic rocks bare for a few feet above the current level. The lake is strangely vacant for Labour Day weekend; just a few people fishing off the banks or taking their cocker spaniels for rides in their kayaks. There are a few boats running back and forth, some water-skiing, a jet-ski. But nobody swimming or wading, which, in my experience of the lakes in Oklahoma, is strange. Maybe the locals know



something we don't. Maybe the remains of crawdads among the rocks have something to do with it. I can't even get my kids to take their shoes off and put their feet in. But then, I don't, either.



I guess Zonies look for any excuse to put their boat in the water, even in water as small as Lake Mary.

Just before we leave the lake, to take Charity back to her dorm and start our trip back to Tucson, we take our family picture. Here's to long memories (preserved in digital form!) of a great weekend.

