

Ormand Family Activity

July 2011: Los Angeles Vacation

This year, Charity returned from Northern Arizona University after having been placed in the "wrong" math class. To remedy this, she enrolled in a summer school class at Pima Community College. In PCC's great wisdom, the final examination for the summer school classes took place on July 5, the day after the Independence Day holiday. The second term, for which she intended to take her second math requirement class, started on the following Monday. As a result, if we were going to take a family summer trip (besides the ones we had already taken to Mt. Lemmon and Phoenix), it would have to be between July 5 and July 11. Where to go?

Faith had just gotten back from her Southern California SCUBA trip, and had some ideas. Plus, Jerri had wanted to see the Magic Mountain amusement park in the L.A. area. So that's what we did - we packed up the car, and as soon as Charity's morning exam was over, we were on the road for five days of sightseeing in the Los Angeles area.

We took the state route 85 bypass around Phoenix - a lucky thing, as there was a *terrific* dust storm in the Phoenix area which would have held us up for hours. This involves taking Interstate 8 toward San Diego, just south of Casa Grande, and going north on 85 at Gila Bend. This was also a convenient lunch stop. I was hoping to find the A&W restaurant still there, but alas, it is no more. Route 85 connects with Interstate 10 after a short drive, and then it's through Quartzite, over the Colorado River, and through Blythe into the Mojave Desert.



You know you're getting close to L.A. when you pass through the vast fields of wind turbines around Indio and Palm Springs. This was a travel landmark from my childhood, when we would go to Disneyland. The turbines are more active today, but they still cannot generate a fraction of the power needs of California. A fact that remains hidden in the current "renewable

energy" debate.

Chinatown

Charity has been driving the car since Gila Bend, and gets to experience L.A. freeway driving down I-10 all the way downtown. Downtown L.A. is an interesting looking area, and has legendary antique architecture in its big buildings, but that's not a destination for this time. Instead, she is guided to go north on Broadway just north of downtown, into *Chinatown*.

I can't decide if the ornamentation, like this stone lion outside a bank building, is honestly for the ethnic residents or for tourists. There are certainly ethnic residents, as all the signs are bilingual Chinese and English (very much like how the signs in Tahlequa were bilingual Cherokee and English), and the ethnic residents are speaking Chinese to each other.





Chinatown, of course, was settled by Chinese immigrants who arrived looking for *lebensraum* in the nineteenth century. Before the People's Republic. Before the Republic of China, for that matter, but those are the flags we see about.

There are shops up and down Broadway, with their goods hung out around the door to attract passers-by. We don't have time for a lot of that. Instead, we see this plaza across the street from our parking lot, behind this ornate gate. The crosswalk has brickwork with inlaid dragons. We enter a shop with clothing and jewelry and curios, and after a good bit of looking around, Faith picks out a beautiful Chinese dress and Charity gets some ornate shoes. We pay the storekeeper who can barely speak English and is clearly perturbed at us for handing her a credit card instead of cash.



At this point, it is late (around 7:30), it has been a long time since the Burger King at Gila Bend, and we're in *Chinatown*. After a bit of looking at candidates as we walk down Broadway, we enter the Yang Chow restaurant - and soon recognize it was a good choice. It is crowded, and we have to wait a while, but after we are seated and place our order, we are served with Chinese food every bit as good as Lotus Garden back

home.

(However, we are seated near the kitchen door, and occasionally, a large Hispanic man in an apron peeks out the door. Maybe I don't want to know...)



After dinner, we continue down Broadway to the Dragon Gate we passed through on the way in. This is a relatively new construction, dedicated in the 80's. Presumably there was a more archaic gateway at some time before. But actually, this is not the original location of L.A.'s

Chinatown, according to the tourist info.

What surprises us is how little activity there is here on a weekday night. Maybe the weekends are busier, with visitors from across the metropex. Maybe L.A. suffers from the same general disdain from its inhabitants for the downtown area as Tucson does. Maybe Chinatown has a crime problem... we didn't see anything disturbing, but my attempts to get cash from a bank ATM failed in what I later learned was a security hold put on my card in response to an attempt to withdraw from a Chinatown bank. Maybe the debit card company knows more about the area than we do.



Magic Mountain

Our first-night hotel is up north in San Clarita, right outside the Six

Flags Magic Mountain park. The next morning we get our Raytheon Employees' Association discount tickets and head into the park. First, it's a run through the metal detectors - I remember their zero-tolerance policy from the last time I was here, and leave my 1-inch keychain penknife in the car. Then it's down the street to get a *Flash Pass* - the same wireless gadget we discovered in the Six Flags Arlington park that tells you how long the wait for prominent rides would be and allows you to reserve the right to bypass the line at one ride at a time.

Magic Mountain is primarily a roller coaster park. I explained this to Jerri, who doesn't go on roller coasters, but she wanted to come anyways. So over the next several hours, the other three of us use the *Flash Pass* to ride

- *Revolution* - The first loop-the-loop coaster.
- *Viper* - A slightly more vigorous loop-the-loop.
- *Riddler's Revenge* - the novelty is that the passengers are in a standing position.
- *Colossus* - A wooden roller coaster, not near as teeth-rattling and a lot more enjoyable than *Ghost Rider* at Arlington.
- *Apocalypse* - A wooden roller coaster with a "collapse of civilization" theme - that is, the entertainment is more than merely the ride.
- *Goliath* - A really huge steel roller coaster, very fast and high up. Our favorite

Some rides, we could take Mom on.

- *Grand Carousel* - We've been on better.
- *Orient Express* - The funicular railroad to the top of the "magic mountain".
- *Log Jammer* - Pretty good log ride. I'm not sure the one even at Castles 'n' Coasters in Phoenix wasn't as good, but this was unquestionably longer. We don't get *too* wet.
- *Roaring Rapids* - Not bad, not as active as the rapids ride at Arlington. However, we get *very* wet - and as there are no provisions for protecting your stuff or leaving it at the "dock", Jerri's camera is soaked... and ruined.
- *Gold Rusher* - The park's first roller coaster. Yes, we get Jerri on this one! Not too bad.
- *Wonder Woman's Golden Lasso* - A circular carnival ride, typically found at fairs.
- *Scrambler* - Another typical fair ride.

Even with the *Flash Pass*, we could not do everything, so we had to make some priority calls. Plus, several of the rides (*Tatsu*, *Sky Tower*) were shut down, and others (*X2* - the newest "Fifth Dimension" coaster, and *Batman*) were either not on the *Flash Pass* list or were so popular that the *Pass* conferred no advantage.



It wasn't all rides. We had to look in shops, too. Magic Mountain is sponsored by Warner Brothers, so it isn't surprising that Faith finds a Martian helmet.

You may note she is still damp from the *Log Jammer*.

Looks like they are using Windows for their announcement board. Should have used Linux!





During lunch, we observed some performers on stilts. One was a "tree", another was a clown. This was a "satyr" on interesting stilts under his shaggy pants on which he balanced on the "toe". Shirtless. And buff.

In addition to Warner Brothers, Magic Mountain is sponsored by DC Comics, so we have the superheroes of the Justice League walking about for photo-ops. At Arlington, it was pictures with a petite Wonder Woman. Here, it is Batman, the Green Lantern, and here, the Flash and Hawk Woman. We didn't really know about Hawk Woman, so we had to google her when we got back to the hotel. Sure enough, she is an old-style DC comic character.



It was my intention to leave a bit early, since it's quite a drive down 405 to Long Beach. To no avail; we don't leave the park until pretty much closing time. I find it odd that Magic Mountain is not a nighttime park, like Disneyland or Knott's, but there really are no lights. Even as we leave, we hear the last roller coaster rides rumbling in the dark.

Catalina Island

The next morning we leave our hotel on the east end of Long Beach and take Ocean Boulevard to the west end. Long Beach is an interesting city, with beach town-type shops and houses and apartment buildings along the main streets right up to the tall buildings in the Port area. I'd like to walk Ocean Boulevard some time, but today is not the day. We are rushing to get to the ferry office in time.

We arrive, get our tickets, and join the throng boarding the ferry. We pick out seats in the outside area. The ferry is rather like an airplane, with seats in rows; not at all like other, larger ferries (for vehicles) I've been on. It is clearly intended for passengers with at most light baggage. There is even a "first class"; we could have upgraded at \$15 to the private "Commodore's Lounge" with roomy seats and attendants. All the same, it is a pleasant hour-long trip, with mounting excitement as the island comes into view.

When the boat docks and we disembark, we are at the Avalon Harbor Landing. Jerri gets our tour tickets, and we board the bus with our garrulous tour guide.

Note the structure on the tile Welcome sign. That is the "Casino", a characteristic landmark of the city of Avalon.



Avalon is a little town about a mile square. The guide explained that the town forbids development outside the city limits in order to preserve the natural environment of the island. As we wend up the side of the canyon, he points out the sights:

- The chime tower whose carillon rings every fifteen minutes.
- The houses built for the children of William Wrigley, the Chicago chewing gum millionaire who bought the island.
- The "pueblo" built by Zane Grey! I thought he was mostly an Arizona character, but he was closely bound with Catalina! The "pueblo" is now a hotel (with no phones or televisions)... and

currently for sale, we learn...

- The gateway to the interior, home to a buffalo herd and a Wrigley ranch, and the Zip Line - a lengthy zip line ride with eco tourism aspects.
- The mansion of the Swanson family - of the frozen food industry - with a "bird's eye" view of the harbor.
- The Bird Zoo built by Mrs. Wrigley and stocked with exotic birds, now the Avalon preschool.
- The field formerly used by the Chicago Cubs for spring training. The same dimensions as Wrigley Field, it is now a soccer field.



We also see the Wrigley Mansion from below. The Wrigleys had several mansions, in Chicago, Phoenix, Pasadena, and here. Presently, this is a hotel - at \$450 to \$600 a night! Not available for public viewing, unlike the Wrigley Mansion in Phoenix.

The tour bus stopped at a few places for us to appreciate the view. Such as the panorama of Avalon Harbor. The Mansion is on the top of the hill at upper right. The ferry is still at the landing on the opposite side, at the mouth of the harbor.



The tour ends at the Casino. The guide explains that "casino" is "meeting place" in Italian, and has nothing to do with the gambling connotation that Americans put on the word. The Casino was built by Mr. Wrigley, not for gambling, but as a ballroom and a movie theatre that could accommodate both silent and talking pictures. The little Catalina Museum is in the basement of the Casino, where we learn interesting things about the island:

- It was "discovered" by Juan Cabrillo (a very busy Spaniard whose monument at Point Loma in San Diego we have visited several times).
- It was acquired by the Banning Brothers, who started developing a resort near the beach. They were doing pretty well until a fire destroyed half of Avalon, and they just couldn't recover.
- William Wrigley then purchased the island for \$5 million, and started aggressively developing it into a resort for all classes of people. It became very popular with the Hollywood crowd, until air travel opened up more alternatives.
- Wrigley's son continued to develop the resort, but donated the island to a Conservancy foundation, which manages it to this day.

After the museum, we go up to the front door of the theatre. *Cars 2* is coming soon. There is a tour of the Casino, but we don't have time for that. It is enough to marvel at the beautiful Art Deco architecture and ornamentation, like the murals.



After the tour, we walk along the waterfront, looking at boats and the tourist shops, and have lunch in a pizza place with an ocean facing window, and peanut appetizers (you are supposed to throw the peanut shells on the floor, a la Texas Roadhouse). We arrive at the "Pleasure Pier" from which the boat tours leave. Since Jerri has always wanted to do the "glass-bottom boat" tour at Catalina (shades of the '60s Doris Day movie), we already have tickets from our tour package, so we just get on the boat.



I was expecting a large common viewport; instead, there are five booths, each with its own viewport. The kelp forest was amazing, and we got fish food to drop down the chutes for the sea bass and the opal-eyes and the garibaldi fish in the sealife preserve within "Lovers' Cove" just outside and south of the harbor. There were fish identifier plaques for our use inside

the viewport well, but we only saw the three kinds of fish. The pilot drifted around the sandy areas hoping to find a shark or a ray for us, but to no avail.

After the boat returned to the pier, we looked in a few more shops for a few more hours, and then it was time to return to the landing to catch the return ferry. Half an hour late, here it comes.





Looks like a catamaran or a trimaran, so it should be a bit faster than the monohull ferry we were on for the trip out. Charity makes a point to be on the boat as soon as possible so she can cop some seats at the aft part of the outside seating area. We notice people are able to move to the stern rail, so I get Charity to go down there.

Queen Mary

The ferry is fast enough to kick up salt spray that coats our faces and moistens our clothes, but it still takes about an hour. On the way, we see huge outbound freighters and tankers, and some oil platforms on the horizon. As we approach the Port of Long Beach, we see our destination for this evening: dinner and an overnight stateroom on the Queen Mary.



After checking into the hotel and depositing our baggage in our stateroom, Faith and Charity put on some new clothes they bought just today in Avalon, Jerri puts on a dress she brought for the occasion, and we dine onboard at Chelsea's Chowder House. After our excellent (but expensive) meal, we venture out on deck. The casual day visitors to the Queen Mary are gone, so the restaurant patrons and the hotel guests have the place to ourselves.



Over the rail, the city lights of Long Beach gleam enticingly.





The stateroom is toward the end of the ship, so the floor slants a bit. It's especially noticeable in the bathroom. There doesn't appear to be anything archaic left in the room, unlike other vintage hotels we've stayed in, like the Gadsden or the Copper Queen, and there's nothing that

says "ship's stateroom". It is simply a comfortable hotel room. With a television, phone, and wireless Internet, just like most any other hotel room. Just with portholes!

Which can be unbolted and swung back. Sticking our heads out, we can see the hull of the ship stretching down to the water, with the innumerable rivet heads above the iron. In the morning, we notice a big cruise ship tied up behind the QM, and people at the railings looking at us sticking our heads out the porthole.

There are a few indications other than the porthole that we are on board the Queen Mary.



Solvang

The next morning dawns. We arise, take our breakfast at the (expensive) Promenade Cafe, and look around the ship some more, particularly the shops in the Main Deck, Grand Staircase area. But today is going to be a full day of driving, so it is already late by noon when we leave the Queen Mary. The destination is Solvang, a place that Faith visited during her SCUBA trip a few weeks ago, and she recommends we see it, too.

After a long drive up 405 to where it intersects U.S. 101 north of the metropolis, and another long drive up 101 through Santa Barbara, we get off the road to see the Channel Islands National Park. There is a string of islands off the coast of California called the Channel Islands, of which Catalina is one, and the only one with a permanent settlement. Ferries go from the Santa Barbara area to take hikers and campers to the other islands, but that would take too long for us. We are here to get a stamp for Jerri's National Parks passport book.



While we are here, we look around the Park Visitor Center displays. In addition to the giant elephant seal model and a description of life among the Chumash Indians who inhabited the islands before the Spaniards arrived (Cabrillo, again), there was this display of the skeleton of a pygmy mammoth discovered on one of the islands by a NAU professor.

With the usual 100,000 years date (and no evidence to support this assertion; simply presented as a "fact").

A little bit of driving through the Central California interior, we arrive at Solvang. This town was once the center of a Danish colony, and remains as a touristified attraction with a bit of Danish culture, rather like Fredericksburg, near Austin Texas, is for German culture. Sometimes for special events, some of the people dress up in traditional Danish garb as sort of a recreation, but today isn't one of those days.

Charity and Faith express their appreciation for a bust of Denmark's favorite son: Hans Christian Anderson.



It is 4:00 by the time we arrive. That's a long time since the breakfast buffet on the Queen Mary, and people are hungry. Unfortunately, most of the lunch-type places are already closed. One sympathetic restaurant worker directs us to the "Bit of Denmark". There, Faith and I discover a dinner buffet of breaded meatballs, sausages, sweet and sour red cabbage, and other authentic Danish fare. All very good. We also learn from the hostess that nearly all the shops close between 5:00 and 5:30, and the bakeries are closed by 6:00, so we lose no time getting out to walk through the town.



Inside this clock tower is a fabulous antique shop, specializing in the most amazing clocks. With prices to match.

In the village, Faith shows us the big clog outside the shoe store that she and her friends saw during their trip here a few weeks ago.



The shops are actually quite good, not the touristy stuff I was expecting, but unique stuff and handmade stuff and real variety. The bakeries and chocolatiers are also real attractions; we get some chocolate-covered butter-creams for later, and ice cream cones. There are other signs, however, that scream *TOURIST*, like the windmills and the plastic pelicans on the roofs and the wooden bars that would be holding down

the thatch roof of a real archaic Danish building but are here resting on a shingle roof. But I can take that in stride and enjoy our day in Solvang (which means "Sunny Meadow" in Danish) and our fellow tourists - some of whom are speaking French and German.



Lighthouses and Seaport Villages

The next day is our last day in California. We start the day by retracing our route from yesterday: down Route 101, down 405, down to Palos Verdes Boulevard that picks up near Redondo Beach. We learn while staying on the Queen Mary that William and Kate, the "royal couple", are visiting Los Angeles, but we aren't troubled by their presence. We also learn that the California Highway Department is planning on shutting down the 405 freeway for repairs later this month, which L.A. drivers are dreading as "carmageddon". Fortunately we don't have to deal with that, either. So it is a smooth and quick drive to the seaside cliffs of the high land between the western beaches of Los Angeles and the ports on the south of the City at Long Beach and San Pedro.

As we drive along Palos Verdes, we see a bit of the Redondo Beach area, and then the affluent neighborhoods on the high land. These are the

people with the money to live in Southern California - and probably the ones who keep re-electing the politicians who have brought California to the brink of economic doom. It is cool up here, and swathed with mist, and we can look out to sea, over the roofs of the big, fancy houses and see sailboats.



Eventually we get to Point Vicente, our first destination of the day. This is a lighthouse operated by the Coast Guard, and it is open for public viewing on the second Saturday of the month. Guess what today is?!

Jerri makes it to the top of the lighthouse. We can't go outside, but we can admire the big fourth-order Fresnel lens array that warns ships away from Point Vicente to this day.





Outside, with the girls providing a scale reference. The visitation day is being managed by Sea Cadets, which appears to be an organization for disciplining teens (a la "boot camp") and preparing them for service in the Navy or the Coast Guard. Even though this isn't a touristy lighthouse - it's a real, working U.S. Government facility - the lighthouse keeper can get out his stamp for Jerri's Lighthouse Society passbook when we step into his office and ask.

Leaving Point Vicente and continuing down Palos Verdes, we arrive in San Pedro, at the very end of Gaffey Street, at Fort MacArthur and the park where the Point Fermin lighthouse stands. On weekends, the lighthouse is open for guided tours, so we sign up and wait for our turn.



(Fort MacArthur is hosting a re-creation event similar to Fort Lowell Days back home. The difference is, Fort Lowell was only an Indian

Wars-era affair, so the re-creators wear Civil War period clothes and Cavalry uniforms, stack their muskets in stands, and have their Shelby tents set up. Fort MacArthur was active from the Civil War period up through World War II, and there are re-creators representing the relevant periods. We don't have time to visit, but it sounded quite appealing. We also hear the report from the cannon firing demonstrations now and then during the afternoon.)



Like the Point Loma lighthouse we have visited several times in San Diego, the Fermin lighthouse is integrated into the keeper's house. Also like Point Loma, the Fermin lighthouse is no longer useful as such, and a committee of San Pedro people had to struggle to prevent the Government from tearing down the lighthouse. It is rather more spacious than the Point

Loma lighthouse, and we find it was actually built for two families - one to maintain the light, and the other to maintain the foghorn. However, at that time, foghorns were steam-driven machines, requiring lots of fresh water. Los Angeles is in a coastal desert - it was only after the wells were sunk and the Aqueducts were built that L.A. acquired the tropical lushness that characterises it today. So the government-standard foghorn aspect of Point Fermin was never realized, and the lighthouse keeper and his family had the entire place to themselves.

Nowadays, the foghorn is a buoy out in the harbor, operated by electricity.





When we have seen the lighthouse, and had lunch in a biker bar (which is the only facility serving food in the area), we leave Point Fermin, go up the hills on Gaffey Street, and turn down Sixth, to the Maritime Museum and Ports O' Call.

We stop to admire some tall sailboats in the marina at the tourist park. There are shops with clothes and knick-knacks, harbor tour boat rides, and several seafood restaurants.



We don't have time for a harbor cruise, so Charity and Faith have to settle for something less.

Ports O' Call is part of the Port of Los Angeles, the busiest commercial

seaport on the West Coast of the U.S. Faith and Charity watch an enormous Chinese freighter making her way down the harbor out of the Port, moving past a pretty little schooner tied up at the dock.



The port is tremendous. Here, a mammoth freighter is being unloaded. There were giant cranes and huge ships in both Los Angeles and Long Beach ports, and on Terminal Island between them, thousands of shipping containers - emblematic of both America's prosperity and our woeful trade imbalance with the Chinas.





We leave Ports O' Call and drive over the two Ports on giant bridges and arrive at our last destination - Shoreline Village in Long Beach, and the Parker's Lighthouse restaurant.

Unfortunately upon arriving, Faith discovers she left her purse at Ports O' Call! Mommy and Charity stay here and look over the shops (not as numerous as Ports O' Call, they inform us later) while I take Faith back across. Of course, the purse is gone; fortunately, the worst of the damage is the loss of her driver's license.

Upon returning, we rejoin Mom and Sister at the restaurant, put in our name, get our wireless annunciator flasher gadget, and sit outside to wait. We also inspect the menu posted at the door. Looks like it's going to be another wallet-buster.





The little waiting area outside is interesting in that it has a firepit - natural gas is piped in, rises through a bed of glass or crystal fragments, and burns on top. Very pretty. Faith can't resist playing with the glass bits away from the flames.

Parker's Lighthouse from the harbor (taken two days ago from the Catalina ferry). We were seated on the water side, right next to the big fake cannon. During the meal, watercraft were going up and down the harbor in the dark, including a big stern-wheel riverboat. Sometimes boats would come in and tie up at the dock visible at lower-right; a water parking lot for people coming to shop or dine at Shoreline Village. We also observed a couple of feral cats outside the glass wall... and inside!





We also observed this fake lighthouse in the marina, all lit up pretty at night.

The same fake lighthouse in daylight (again from the Catalina ferry). There were people walking around the water-circled mound. It would have been fun to have explored more, and looked around Long Beach proper, but there's only so much time in this life. And now the time has come to leave Shoreline Village for our hotel in central Long Beach.



As we go through town, we eat our Danish chocolate-covered butter-creams - quite melty from their day in the hot car.

San Jacinto Tram

Today is Sunday, and Charity's class starts tomorrow, so it is time to take the 710 freeway toward Pasadena and get on I-10 to the east and back to Arizona. We leave the Los Angeles metropolis, out into the desert, and past the wind turbine fields around Indio. This time, however, we take state route 111 toward Palm Springs. Along the way is the Tram to the top of the mountain. One last California adventure.



Tickets are about \$25 each. We buy them for the next departure, and immediately join the queue. In a few minutes, the car arrives, disgorges the returnees, and we walk aboard.

The original cars were retired some years ago, and a Swiss company came in to rebuild the towers and set up these circular cars with a rotating platform to give everyone a 360-degree view of the climb. It's a ten-minute ride up a very steep canyon, in which we see thick vegetation fed by springs in the side of the mountain. I'll bet Tucson could build a tram to the top of Mount Lemmon, but then, Tucson can't even install a street trolley in a reasonable amount of time. Too much time, money, and bureaucratic red tape. I guess the day for monumental projects like the San Jacinto Tram has passed.



The top station houses a gift shop, a meeting hall, two restaurants (we get sandwiches and yogurt for lunch), a movie theatre (playing "The Construction of the Tramway" endlessly), and the office for the California State Park of San Jacinto Peak. I think it's interesting to have a state park in a place where the only practical way to get to it is via a privately-owned tram with a \$25 fare. There are viewing platforms all around the station, and after our lunch, we go out on all of them to look around.



Down in the valley is Palm Springs, which we learn later, really is a town founded on golf. We enjoy the cool breeze, the mountain vistas, the sunshine, and the sight of the cable cars coming and going, until we get in the queue for departure and go back down the canyon to the lower station. Our California adventures are over, and we return to Arizona and the Route 85 bypass through early July monsoon rains.

