

Ormand Family Activity

February 2009: Sabino Canyon

As part of Rodeo Days break, we decided to see Sabino Canyon. It's been many years since either Jerri or I were up here, and beyond the memory of our children. One of Tucson's most beautiful places.

On the way, we (I) take a misstep by going up Pantano to Tanque Verde, which is beyond Sabino Canyon road, and then going up Bear Canyon, thinking there is a connecting road between them. Turns out there isn't, so we ultimately had to turn back. While at the end of Bear Canyon, however, we found there is indeed a trailhead. Which was busy with Rodeo Day hikers... including (to Charity and Faith's embarrassment) some Desert Christian High School people. This is a place to come back to some other time.

Now, it turns out that part of the attraction of Sabino Canyon is Seven Falls, notorious hangout for Tucson young people who occasionally do stupid dives while under the influence of alcohol and kill themselves. But Seven Falls is some distance east of Sabino Canyon, and it looks like the Bear Canyon trail also ends up at Seven Falls. Never been there, need to. Definitely worth a return visit.

So we reach the Sabino Canyon recreational area, which is operated by the U.S. Forest Service. Our Golden Eagle Pass gets us in (looks like it expires this month!) and we finally find a spot in the overflowing parking lot. Of course, the Visitors' Center is our first stop.

There is a history and nature exhibit here, where you can learn that Sabino Creek runs most of the year, and has been occupied by Indians (Hohokam), farmers (raising crops rather than stock), miners (who left soon after their test shafts indicated there's nothing here), and seekers of natural beauty from the 1800s to the present. Neat photos. There's also a gift shop, where Mommy has to stock up on postcards and memorabilia.

But the gift shop is not the most expensive part of this visit. The shuttle tickets are \$8/ea. The plan is to take the shuttle to the top, then hike back the 3-and-a-half miles downhill. There's also a shuttle to Bear Canyon; I suppose to get you on the way to Seven Falls. But we get on the Sabino Canyon shuttle and sit there for fifteen excruciating minutes with two sillies making "tram", "spam", "ham", "glam" rhymes.

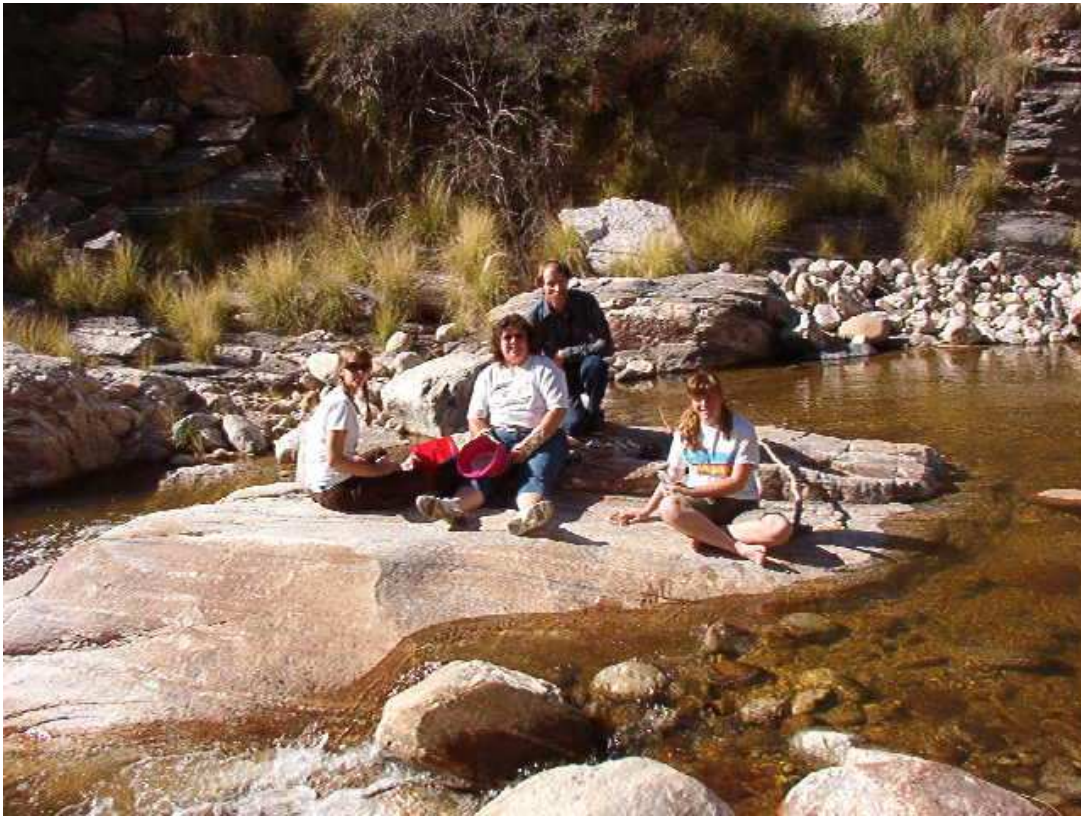
Finally the shuttle leaves. The tour is geared toward Tucson visitors, so the narration is pretty basic. However, we do get pointers to new landforms created by the flood that followed the big fire of just a few years ago. Between the Feds and all the volunteer labour, the Canyon looks pretty good. One of the most interesting stories: Of course, the Canyon area was developed by the WPA and CCC during the Roosevelt years, and so there are characteristic 40s-era structures, such as restrooms. Huge stones that came off

the cliff faces above the canyon bounced down the slopes - and landed right on one of those restrooms, obliterating it.

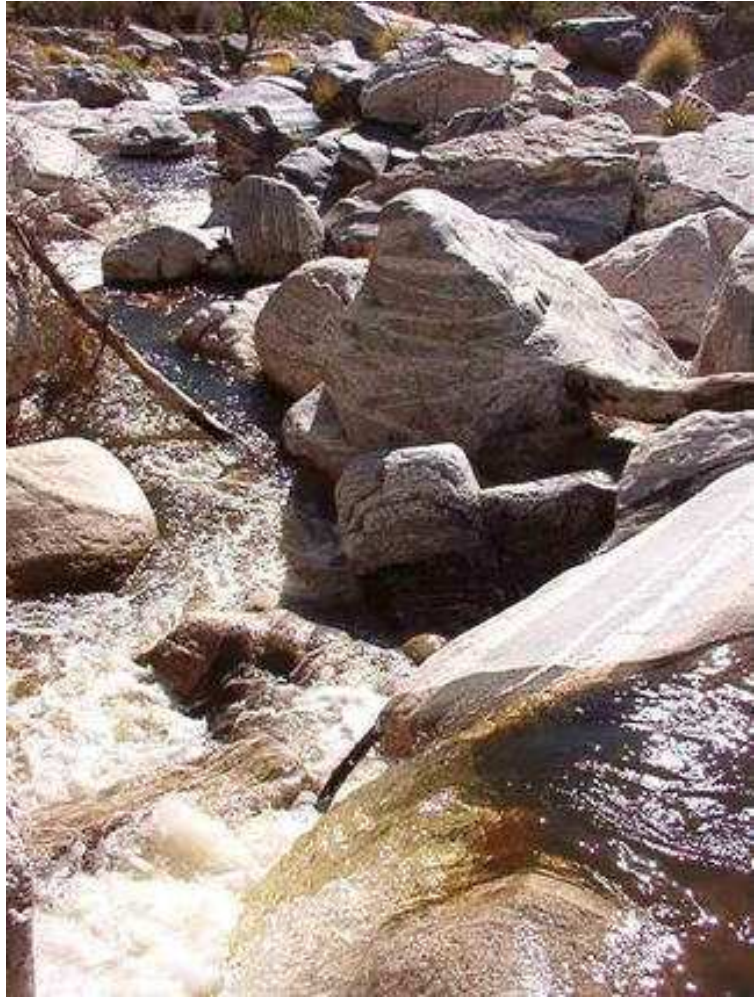


There are 9 shuttle stops, but going up, the shuttle doesn't really stop, and nobody is waiting to get on, and nobody wants to get off. About thirty minutes later, we get to the end of the road. There's really not anything up here, other than the mile marker here (3.7 miles) and the head of the foot trail on up deeper into the Catalinas. We hang out long enough to take this record, and get back on the shuttle. The plan is now to go to the next stop and walk back from there.

At the next stop, the creek is a short clamber over the rocks. We find this neat rock island in the stream, and settle down to enjoy our picnic lunch.

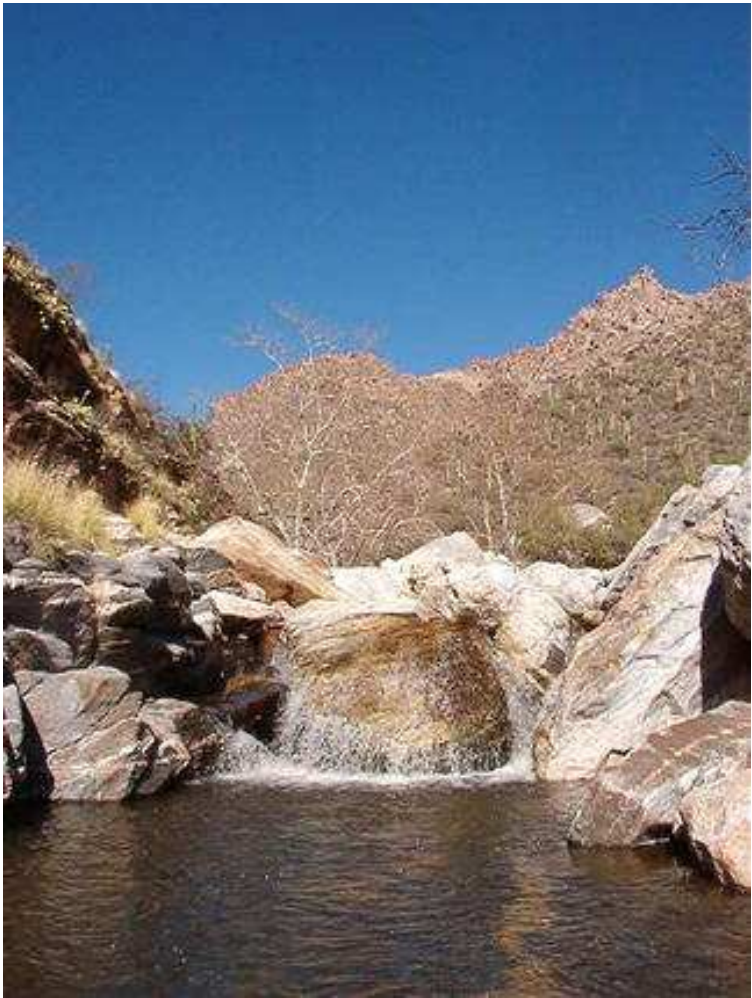


Just past our rock is a pretty little 4-foot waterfall.



Faith is the first one in the water. She says it's cold. Pshaw, it's just snowmelt.

As Mommy takes off her shoes to play in the water, one of them slides off the rock! Fortunately, there was an eddy in the little tumble at the side of our rock, and the shoe stopped there, or it would have gone over our waterfall and we would have been chasing it down the canyon! Here Faith retrieves the wet sneaker.



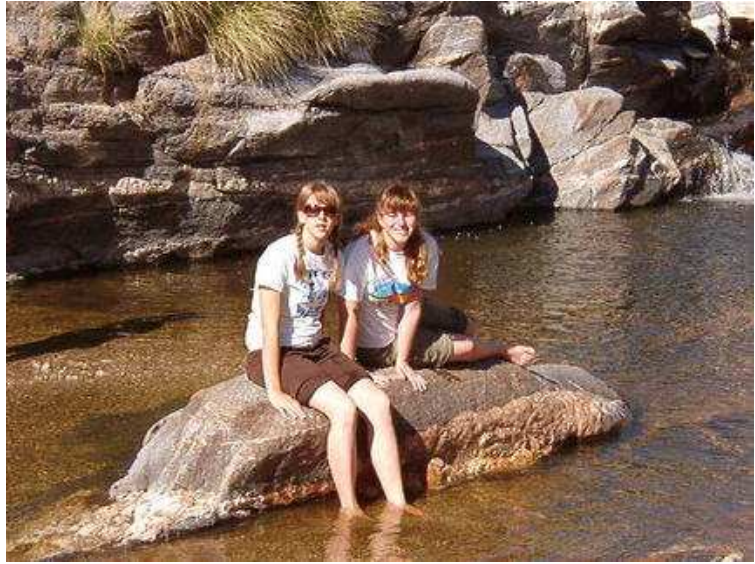
This is really a beautiful spot. At the north end of our waterhole, the entering stream splashes over this big rock.

All three girls are in the water, scouting for pretty pebbles. A gorgeous day in early Spring in Southern Arizona. God grant that in the next age, I get to live in the Upper Sonoran.



Here the channel is knee deep. Wow, the water IS cold. The rocks are slick with algae, and the coarse gravel where there are no big slippery rocks start bothering your cold-numbered feet after a while. It's a delight to get out on a sun-warmed rock after that.

Most of the time, Charity and Faith are pestering each other, enjoying their "sisterly love". Here's a calm moment.





Here's a view of Jerri on our rock from below the waterfall. It took a bit of climbing around the big rocks to get to this point; I'm sure glad we didn't have to chase that shoe downstream!

Or we would have been slowly following it down the creek. Past the cottonwoods and desert willows and Santa Catalina granite.



We are ready to leave now, and the plans have changed: there's no way we are going to walk 2.9 miles with Jerri in a wet shoe. Besides, it's about 4 in the afternoon, and we still

want to do other things at home this evening. So we get back up on the road and walk over one of the nine "bridges" over Sabino Creek to shuttle stop 7. On the way back, I get a pretty clear shot at this tremendous cliff over the canyon - the guide says the cliff face is 400 feet high.



It would be awesome to get to the top of that and look down into the canyon! But that's an adventure for another day.

We get back down to the Visitors' Center and the parking lot. The guide has told us that

one of the most popular activities at Sabino Canyon will start next month - the night tours, where the shuttle drives up and down the canyon road on a moonlit night. My brother Mike says he has been on that tour, and it's great! So we may be back at the Canyon in the near future (probably getting a new Golden Eagle Pass) - not sure how the pictures will turn out, though.