

Ormand Family Activity

July 2009: Southern California Summer Vacation Trip

Wednesday: On The Road

The day starts out with dealing with a problem that Jim Click Dodge handed us. Jerri took the car on Monday to have it "checked". When we got it back, they had flushed the radiator, flushed the brakes, flushed the fuel injectors, flushed the brake lines, flushed the power steering system, changed the transmission fluid, replace the water pump, replaced the belt tensioner, replaced all the brake pads, and turned all the brake rotors. *Gold-Plate City!!* The next morning, as we are leaving, the car makes an awful racket when the wheel is turned - they screwed up the steering system. So the first stop out of town is to get the idiots to repair the damage. It isn't much, we sit there for a little over an hour - but that is already later than we wanted to be.

So we finally leave Tucson. The trip through Picacho and Eloy is uneventful, and we hit the I-8 junction. Less than an hour we are coming up to Gila Bend, and we're thinking about lunch. I'm remembering the "A&W" restaurant, and that "frosty mug" of root beer, but Jerri is targetting Dateland. Now, Highway 83 is the new "Phoenix Bypass", from I-10 to I-8, and it arrives at Gila Bend. As we pass, I'm not seeing the "A&W", I'm seeing a truck-stop style "Travel Center". Curses - "progress".



More surprised await at Dateland. There used to be a little mom&pop restaurant and gift shop. It had character. It was interesting. Unique. *Arizona-ish*. Now it's a Quizno's at a "Travel Center" shop. Blaah. But they still make date shakes!

They also make other things. We don't try the cactus shakes this time. And I'm the only one who gets the date shake. I can't even get my kids to try it. Jerri says, "it's okay". A ringing endorsement!



Charity is doing freeway driving now, so she takes us through Yuma and up to El Centro, where I take over. Up through the mountain pass and the *l-o-n-g* descent on the other side. There are Border Patrol inspection stops all over the place. Through Jacumba, Pine Valley, Alpine.

Our first destination is the Creation Museum at Santee. This used to be part of the Institute for Creation Research, but ICR has moved to Texas (part of the migration out of too-expensive California), and they sold the museum to a Christian businessman. Who is expanding it! But we arrive just as they are closing, so we chat for a while with the lady shopkeeper, and leave. We will have to try it again, after the expansion is complete - and when we don't have stupid ripoff car problems killing our travel time.

At five o'clock, there's not many places open to see, but we can at least look at the outside of the mission: Basilica San Diego de Alcala, the first of the Junipero Serra string of Spanish California missions.



When my dad was posted to Edwards, we took the opportunity to explore a bit of California, including several of the missions. Never got down to San Diego. Now's my chance.



Again, we arrive too late for the tourist thing, but we still look around. Here we are at the door. The interior is larger than San Xavier, but not as ornate, and smaller than San Augustine's. It looks like they are preparing for a wedding, so we don't go in.

We do go into the garden. A beautiful place. There are some real church people about, looking at us like "what are you doing here?", so we don't hang a long time.



A view of the back side of the "campaniera", or bell tower. I wonder if they still use them. I heard about an old church somewhere else whose neighbors complained about the bells, and the city government made the church stop. A sign of the times - get ready for the ride.

Having seen as much of the mission as we can (including a peek at the archaeological dig in the courtyard, and the cross monument to California's first martyr - a priest killed by indians during an uprising), we leave, hop back on I-8, find "Hotel Circle", and our lodging for the next two nights. Jerri is a bit hungry - I'm not, really, after my Quizno's "Torpedo" - but we leave anyways. Rosencrans Boulevard splits off I-8 and heads into the northern part of the city. We will take this again tomorrow to check out Point Loma. We find Harbor, and follow it back south to the airport, and turn off at Harbor Island.

Harbor Island is the result of the Navy dredging the bay for their big ships. They piled the material here and turned it over to the city (rather similar to Key West). Now there are fancy hotels and eating places. Like Tom Ham's Lighthouse.



It's a slightly fancy place, seafood of course, so it's a bit on the pricy side, but for a one-time, that's okay. The food is *very* good - and they like putting little purple orchids on all the dishes.



Our booth is by the window, and we have a wonderful view of the harbor - the seabirds plunging into the water after their next meal, the fishermen in boats and kayaks, the Navy installation on the big island, and the downtown area. Partly this:



When we leave, we will continue down Harbor Blvd. and visit downtown, after dark, when all the buildings are lit up with neon. We will drive down Broadway, where the big buildings are, and divert to the "Gaslight Quarter", an urban renewal district with lots of shops open late, restaurants and sidewalk cafes, and just *gobs* of (especially young) people. Next time, we will head down here for dinner. We will also find

"Little Italy", and its shops and restaurants, all viewed as we drive past in our little car. A beautiful city. If Tucson could figure out how to do downtown like San Diego, we'd have something.

We can see the landmark hotel building with the "gable roof", too. At the foot of this building is our usual San Diego stop, "Seaport Village". We aren't going there this time, but it's fun to recognize where it is.



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Thursday: Balboa Park

The big project today is to see Balboa Park. One of the chief attractions of San Diego, Balboa Park includes the San Diego Zoo, which we've seen before, but it has a lot more. Significantly, the major museums of the area are located here, rather like the Smithsonian museums around the National Mall in D.C. And more.

Like the Spreckel Pipe Organ. But it was closed up. Impressive architecture, all the same - almost everything was in the incredible complex baroque style. Also the "Japanese Friendship Garden".



Which was very nice, but pretty small, so it didn't take long.

But the Botanical Garden was closed, so it didn't take any time at all. The lily pond was nice, though.



The Park is quite walkable. There's supposed to be a free tram, but we didn't see it. We *did* see the for-pay city tour trolley, which circulates through most of the points of interest in the city, but we didn't have time for that. The center of the Park is El Prado, and that is where we find the "House of Hospitality" - the information center and gift shop. We got the "Day Excursion Pass" for \$29 each, which gets you into four attractions. If two of the attractions are the \$14 admission types, then the Pass pays for itself. Recommended.



The first museum we visit is the Model Railroad Museum. Tucson has one, too, on the west side, and there's one they set up at the Pima County Fair every year, and a permanent one under the stadium at the State Fairgrounds. This one is pretty good; of course, it's really just an excuse for the old boy modellers to play, but these old boys have done a tremendous

job. The dioramas are great, too, with little hidden jokes, like this shark in a backyard pool.

Number Two is the Science Museum. I was thinking in terms of the Smithsonian, where the Science Museum is a Science Museum, but this is more like a Children's Museum, with lots of (really good, high-quality) hands-on exhibits. We kept comparing Tucson's Children's Museum with this one. I'm sure the only real difference is money - Tucson's is more of a volunteer operation.



The Museum also has an IMAX theatre, admission included in the Day Pass. We see a coral reef film. IMAX is pretty impressive. We have yet to try out the one at Arizona Mills. This one is the only one in San Diego; I wonder if they also show pictures like "Kung Fu Panda", which we were surprised with on our family visit to Huntsville! The film was pretty good, but it was preachy about "Global Warming". It was annoying to have propaganda shoved at you, especially quasi-religious propaganda that an increasing number of real scientists are disagreeing with. Strong on emotion, light on facts and evidence.



Number Three is the Museum of Man. One of the chief symbols of San Diego is the Carillon Tower and the Dome of the Museum of Man. When I had seen this image elsewhere, I thought it was a church or a rich guy's house, but no, it's part of Balboa Park. Everything in the Park has this exquisite baroque pseudo-Spanish Mission motif, such as the facade

of the Museum of Man.

This is the Carillon Tower. *Very* impressive. The bells struck the time like a clock tower, and of course you can hear it all over the park.



The inside is filled with human archaeology stuff. The big main hall is dedicated to Precolumbian American culture, like these steles. They also have a little exhibit on "The Crystal Skull", explaining how there really *is* an archaeological "crystal skull" interest, but it seems to be entirely fabricated.

There actually isn't that much *real* archaeology in here, but there's lots about human evolution upstairs. like this giant ape (and two smaller, more humorous apes). The exhibit was the usual loose association of chimp and gorilla anatomy with human anatomy, and the artistic "reconstructions" of human ancestors like Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon, which impresses young children, but doesn't admit the imagination behind them or the tenuous, often scandalous circumstances of where the fossils came from. Such as the actual "Lucy" skeleton which was here.



The real reason we came in here was to see Egyptian mummies. Somewhat disappointing, since there were only maybe three mummies here, including this one which had already lost its head and toes to grave-robbing curio dealers long ago, but there were lots of ancient Egyptian funeral artifacts, so it was well worth the visit. Some

non-Egyptian mummies, too, like a mummy of a (probably pregnant) female from Mexico, which was found in an attic of a San Diego suburban house - a previous owner had personally brought it from Mexico, put it in his attic, and forgot about it!

The museum had to convince the Sheriff that it was a thousand years (their guess, of course) too old to be a murder victim.



These guys, too, are mummies of a sort. From the Amazon, from long ago (they don't do this anymore) (as far as we know...). The second from left is a tree sloth, which young boys did as part of their "rite of passage" to manhood.

We didn't use the fourth ticket, because it was already pretty late in the day, and at the Park, pretty much everything closes around 5:00. So we retrieved our van and set off through the city to the Coronado Bridge, and Coronado Island, where our favorite beach is.



Not very many people out today. Surely it isn't because the water is *FREEZING* I'm not about to come this far and not get in, but a few neck-deep dips is about all I can stand. Faith is brave, and gets out quite a way, but Charity only goes leg-deep, and Mommy just gets her feet wet. At the lifeguard station, the weather and tide reports that the air temperature is 65F, and the water is 58F. After a bit of this, we hang up on the beach (not my favorite thing anyways), try to shake the sand out of our clothes and socks and shoes and feet (I hate beach sand), and return to our hotel.

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Friday: Old Town

San Deigo started, rather like Tucson, as an indian village near a river where the Spanish friars established a mission, and then the Spanish government located a presidio (fortress), and then the Americans moved in on it. The difference is that the original town of San Diego was pretty much destroyed in the mid-1800s by earthquakes and fires, so there's not much anything original left. Well, maybe that's not that different from Tucson. A merchant from San Fransisco arrived to check things out, and was instrumental in moving the city core from the San Diego River, some little ways inland, to a good harbor point on the bay further south. That's where "downtown" is now, and the "Embarcadero". It wasn't until later that Old Town was recreated as a historical park.

Faith's encounter with a recreated shop clerk.



This was at the McCoy house, which is an interpretive museum (like the Cordova house in Tucson). Upstairs, we learned that in the early part of the last century, somebody wrote a book, "Ramona", about an indian girl who married a Spaniard, or something like that; anyways, the effect was sort of like "Uncle Tom's Cabin", drawing attention to the plight of the native peoples and the glory of the Spanish colonial period. Entirely mythical, but it sparked the imagination of southwestern gringos. "Ramona Married Here" locations popped up all over the place.

The old Mason Street school, which is one of the few wooden buildings which is mostly original, from 1865. There were a few copies of "Ramona" for sale here!



Old Town is partly historical park, and partly a collection of merchants. Some of the merchants have set up in historical buildings, like (of course) the General Store, and a milliner, and a candy maker. Most have set up in a little district east of Old Town proper. Little restaurants are mixed in with it. There appears to be adequate parking, and quite a bit of mass transit (regular trolley buses). Very nice setup.



On our way out, our last stop is the Estudillo home, which was the hacienda of a Mexican rancho. Quite elegant, and many bedrooms for family and guests. Here we stand by the "horno", the outdoors baking oven near the kitchen.

Our intention is to get to Los Angeles by 7:00, since we have a reservation at the Rainforest Cafe at Downtown Disney, so we can only stay for a few hours. I think we see most everything - including a little troupe of two people performing "MacBeth" in the town mall. Leaving Old Town, our next stop is Point Loma.

While Jerri gets her National Parks Passport Book stamped (half the reason we are here), we check out the view of San Diego Harbor. What a magnificent day; the bay is full of sails.





The other reason is to update our photographs of children at the Point Loma Light. The last time, they were around 6. Now they are teenagers.

Got to keep our schedule. We leave San Diego with lots of ideas of what we want to do the next time we come here. The next stop is the Birch Aquarium of the Scripps Institute, in La Jolla. Jerri has wanted to stop here for a long time. Scripps is a Big Deal, we expect the aquarium to be big, too.



Here's a big fish. Unfortunately, this is about the biggest fish we encounter.

And here's another. We were somewhat disappointed, expecting some Big Tanks with Big Critters, but there really weren't any. We did the museum justice in just over an hour.



In fact, one of the four wings of the place was dedicated to "Global Climate Change". Including the now-largely discredited "hockey stick" graph of global temperatures. The fact that the activists prefer "Global Climate Change" to "Global Warming" indicates that the evidence that the globe is actually warming is slim to none, but museums still push the propaganda on children. Like the human "ancestors" at the Museum of Man at Balboa Park. Some museums still have the now-discarded "Evolution of the Horse" story, and Haeckel's fabricated "embryonic recapitulation" theory. A lot of textbooks do, too. It's very much like a cultural religion. We don't spend a lot of time in this part of the aquarium.



I think this was the only non-aquatic animal here. Pretty neat, though. They had chameleon toys in the gift shop, with little knobs for moving the eyes.

The exhibit we spent the most time at was the tidal pools, where you could touch the anemones and sea cucumbers and other shallow-water animals.



The exhibits on sea horses and sea dragons and jellyfish were as good as any we've seen anywhere. But no Big Tanks with Big Fish. So having looked Birch Aquarium thoroughly, we are ready to leave.

An hour and a half of driving on I-5, and we arrive in Anaheim. We find our hotel, and discover that Downtown Disney, where the Rainforest Cafe is, is a ten-minute

walk across the parking lot across the street. Jerri was clever in phoning in a reservation weeks ago. We pretty much get right in.



The food is okay, the place is noisy, the staff is very good, and to cap off the experience...
VOLCANO!.

After leaving the Cafe, we walk around Downtown Disney, which is pretty much an outdoor shopping mall with a heavy Disney merchandise component. We find a Disney store. This shirt pretty much says "Faith".



It's a pretty interesting place. There are several open-air musicians performing,

including a man on a hammered dulcimer, and an excellent violinist. We go all the way to the end of the area, where Downtown Disney opens on the plaza between Disneyland and California Adventures. It's not a bad walk, but we will take the shuttle tomorrow.

As we leave, the nightly fireworks erupt over Disneyland. Wow. Wonder what they will be like tomorrow, the Fourth of July?

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Saturday: Disney Parks

One of the objectives of this little vacation is to visit the "California Adventures" theme park, part of the cluster of Disney attractions in Anaheim. On the morning of the Fourth of July, we get on the shuttle bus and arrive at the gate. Jerri has arranged "Park Hopper" passes, so we go right in.



The first stop is the "Tower of Terror". Slightly different than the one in Disneyworld. Not better or worse, just different.

Outside Monsters Inc. is a quiet fountain - less quiet now, with Faith around.



Before lunch, we do the following activities:

- **Tower of Terror** - A drop tower with a Twilight Zone theme
- **Monsters Inc.** - Basically a carnival ride with black lights, pop-up monsters, and theme sets
- **MuppetVision 3D** - High-quality 3D movie based on "The Muppet Show" (connection with Disney?...)
- **Golden Zephyr** - Multi-passenger "rocket" cars on swing ropes, that move in a leisurely circle about the central pylon
- **Mulholland Madness** - Pretty much the same as a little roller coaster at the fair.
- **Aladdin Show** - Well-done stage production of the movie
- **Soarin'** - Suspended seats lift you up before an IMAX screen, with film from airborne viewpoints of amazing California features

Our ratings:

Ride	David	Jerri	Charity	Faith
Tower of Terror	8	X	7	8
Monsters Inc.	4	5	5	2
Muppet Vision 3D	7	8	8	10
Golden Zephyr	5	3	2	8
Mulholland Madness	5	8	6	9
Aladdin Show	8	10	10	10
Soarin'	8	10	5	9



Around 2:00, we get our lunch at the "Taste Pilot Pad". Charity doesn't want a burger, and the only way chicken nuggets come is as a kiddie meal.

Mom and Faith munch their more traditional theme park junk food meals.



After lunch, we do the following activities:

- **California Screamin'** - A steel roller coaster (smooth) with a wooden coaster feel. One loop. High-speed acceleration start
- **Mickey's Fun Wheel** - Ferris Wheel. Some of the cars are standard, fixed ones; most run on tracks, so as the wheel turns, the cars roll and swing. Unfortunately, most of the time was spent loading and unloading passengers. Not sure a Ferris Wheel really works in a high-volume park.
- **Carousel** - With a mermaid theme
- **Maliboomer** - Drop tower that accelerate up, bungee-bounces down
- **Grizzly River Run** - A rapids raft ride - "You will get wet, you may get soaked" (fortunately, we don't get "soaked", but I walk around in wet shoes the rest of the day)

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Ride	David	Jerri	Charity	Faith
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Mickey's Fun Wheel	5	2	5	7
Carousel	5	8	7	8
Maliboomer	7	X	5	8
Grizzly River Run	6	9	4	9



Do not mistake my expression for any excitement for this carousel ride.

After seeing "California Adventures" to our satisfaction, we *do* make it over to Disneyland. We start about 5:00, and see The Haunted Mansion and Pirates. Jerri has arranged our dinner at The Blue Bayou, which was an excellent (but slightly pricey) meal.



When we emerged, people were already camping out for the fireworks show. Soon, park attendants are waving glowsticks to direct foot traffic and setting up ropes. At first, we think it's a parade, but no, since the fireworks show for the Fourth of July will be an occasion of special magnificence, they are already staking out observation points. But we have a "Fast Pass" for the Indiana Jones ride at 8:20! So we spend about an hour moving through shops and battling the tides of humanity, and do our Indy ride.

When we come out, the crowds have packed into their places behind the ropes. We go pretty much all the way to the end and find a spot mostly behind trees. It's still okay to see the "Fantasmics" light and water show on Tom Sawyer's Island (oops, now it's Pirates Island), and immediately afterwards, the Fourth of July fireworks show. It is a

spectacle of special magnificence! And to think, the Tucson City Council chose not to do fireworks at all...

After the show, the masses of people start flowing toward the exit. We manage to divert into the Tiki Room. I love this show, and at Disneyland, they haven't ruined it by "updating" it. Then we head toward Small World. On the way, I show my kids the secret passage through Sleeping Beauty's Castle with the little scenes from the story. Disneyworld doesn't have this; instead, the Castle is a restaurant. One of the things I feel makes Disneyland *better*.

After leaving Small World, it is about 11:30. The park closes at midnight. We walk through Tomorrowland, just so we can say we had been there.

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Sunday: Universal Studios

Anaheim is some distance south of Los Angeles proper. Hollywood is some distance north of it. After the better part of an hour of freeway driving (with the occasional silly, characteristic stop on the congested freeway), which takes us through downtown L.A. (the big buildings look more exotic at night on our return, lit up with neon, nestled in a glowing haze), we get to Universal Studios.

I remember doing Universal Studios a long time back, and it was just the tour. Actually, we visit a little history exhibit in the Studio and learn that Universal was conducting tours starting in the '20s, quit after talking films started (visitors disrupted work in progress), then resumed in the '60s when the Studio figured how to keep the tour and the real work separate. Now, the tour has morphed into a big tourist thing. We park (in a system of parking lots that reminds one of Disneyland), walk through "Universal City" (an outdoor mall that reminds one of Downtown Disney), and come to the theme park (which reminds one of Disneyland). I think they're trying to copy another success model.

Three girls ready for yet another day of walk, walk, walk. Note that Charity is not really dress for getting wet (more on that later).



The park part is designed to entertain tourists and separate them from their money. Lunch for four is another \$50 affair. They have photographers staked out around the park to take portraits, which can be purchased near the park exit. There is an "all you can eat" meal plan for sale. Hawkers with "free" Universal Studio tours accost you, to get you to sign up for an annual pass. Instead of the Disneyland "Fast Pass", there is a "Priority Access" plan, where you pay an additional fee and get a card that gets you special seating at events and the fast-track lane at rides.

We don't do any of that.



The park has an upper part and a lower part, since the original backlot was built in a canyon, so the new "park" part is at the top, and the more "movie-ish" things are at the bottom, in some sound stages committed to the purpose. In the upper part, there are some "actors" reprising roles from some Universal pictures, like the eccentric inventor from "Back to the Future" (who attracted Faith's attention by riding around on a Segway). We also

saw "Donkey" from "Shrek", "Groucho Marx", "Frankenstein", and a silly policeman (from some unknown film, perhaps).

Things we did in the upper part:

- **Shrek 3D** - Like it says. The seats were rigged, so they would jostle during chase scenes, and squirt you in the face when Donkey sneezed. Not much more than gratuitous 3D effects.
- **Terminator 3D** - This one was better. Supporting the 3D video were some live actors that descended from the ceiling or rising from the floor or through the screen (!).
- **House of Horrors** - What we thought would be a depiction of famous horror films and the monsters turned out to be a Halloween-style haunted house. Lame, lame.
- **Animal Actors** - Real movie animal handlers put some of the animals that actually appeared in films like "Evan Almighty", "Babe", and "Meet the Fockers" through their paces.
- **Waterworld** - A stunt show based on the Kevin Costner flop. Pretty well done, and a refreshing change from the Indiana Jones stunt shows we are used to at Disney theme parks, and the wild west gun shows we are tired of as Tucsonans.

Things we *don't* do: Curious George (a water play area), Simpsons ride (just say "no" to Simpsons), "New Creature from the Black Lagoon" (in which the Creature makes like a singing star in a rock concert), and Blues Brothers (a musical show).

The entrance to the studio tour is also at the top. The van-boarding process needs work, but we eventually go on the tour. *This* is why we came.

Most of the first part of the tour is of the outside of the sound stages and the bungalows used by visiting production companies and actors. One really nice thing about the updated tour is the use of video monitors on the tram cars, so we can see and hear the tour guide better, and also so we can see film clips. After a bit we pass some prop cars, like this speeder from "Serenity" (and we see a clip from the film with the vehicle in use).





When I did the tour in the past, we would see effects like this flash flood in a "Mexican" village, and I always thought they were fake effects made just for the tour. Now that they have the video monitors, we can see that they *really did use* this set in films like "Big Fat Liar". So in some cases, they are real. In other cases (like the "Mummy" effect), they are clearly made for the tour.

A crashed airplane set from "War of the Worlds". This was a real 747 that was trashed just to make this movie. I was amazed (sickened) at the way real objects are trashed to make movies, like a magnificent supercharged '72 Dodge Charger destroyed during "Fast and Furious".



It was a great tour, and the tour guide was fabulous, and the video monitors really added a lot (even if there was a tendency to watch the monitors instead of the reality passing by outside the trams).

We are now done with the top part. There is a l-o-n-g series of escalators to get down to the canyon floor. In the lower part, we see pretty much everything:

- **Special Effects** - This one was great. Visual effects (including blue and green screen superposition techniques), horror effects, and sound effects, with volunteers from the audience. The presenters were just great, really funny.
- **Backdraft** - The making of "Backdraft", the challenging fire effects, the involvement of the Chicago Fire Department, and the admiration of the actors for what real firemen deal with.
- **Universal Archives** - Some props from famous Universal pictures, and a brief history of the Studio.



And, the Mummy Ride. There was a big emphasis on this film; it showed up all over the place. Also "Fast and Furious". This ride was oversold, I thought; it was okay, but not *that* good. Shucks, even Jerri managed this one!

And, the Jurassic Park ride. Another river raft ride through sets from the movie, with squirting dinosaurs and other gratuitous water jets. I got totally soaked at the big drop at the end. So did Faith. So did Charity, who wasn't dressed for it (remember?). Mommy did not - she bought a rain poncho at the entrance, and wimped out. It really wasn't that bad, except that this was the last thing we did, at 8:00, and there wasn't enough warm sunshine to dry out.



So we leave in our wet clothes. Well, actually, after stopping at the Marvel shop, and getting postcards at the gift shop at the gate, we were pretty much dry when we went into a Chinese restaurant in the Universal City part we had to walk back through. I thought the Universal City thing was a bit better than the Downtown Disney thing; not quite so artificial, and a lot more visual stimulation. Kind of like those scenes of Downtown Tokyo in films; denser, lots of neon.

It was a long day. We started it thinking we would do Universal Studios in a few hours, and return to put in a few more hours at Disneyland. If the trip to Hollywood and back had been shorter, and the Universal Studios thing was just the backlot tour, it might have worked. But Universal Studios was much more than just the tour, and it was near 11:00 by the time we got back to Anaheim.

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Monday: Joshua Tree National Monument

We sleep in a bit (or some of us do; others can't really sleep in the morning, so they update websites), have a leisurely breakfast at the nextdoor Denny's, pack, and are on the road by 11:30. The day's plan is to visit Joshua Tree National Monument so Jerri can get another stamp for her passport book.



Traffic is good, and in less than two hours we have traversed the L.A./Riverside city complex. We can tell we are getting close to the turnoff when we see the windfarms near Indio.

We are amazed at all the homes and villages along the nowheres route to 29 Palms. However, 29 Palms is a big Marines facility, so I'm sure a lot of those homes are for military families. At the town of Joshua Tree (a bit of a hint?) we find the visitors center where we get the stamp, some postcards, some maps, and a peek at some great photographs of Wildcats from the area (no, not students; literally bobcats).

Minutes later, we have used our newly-purchased (at Point Loma) National Parks pass on the gate guard, and are standing under an official Joshua Tree.



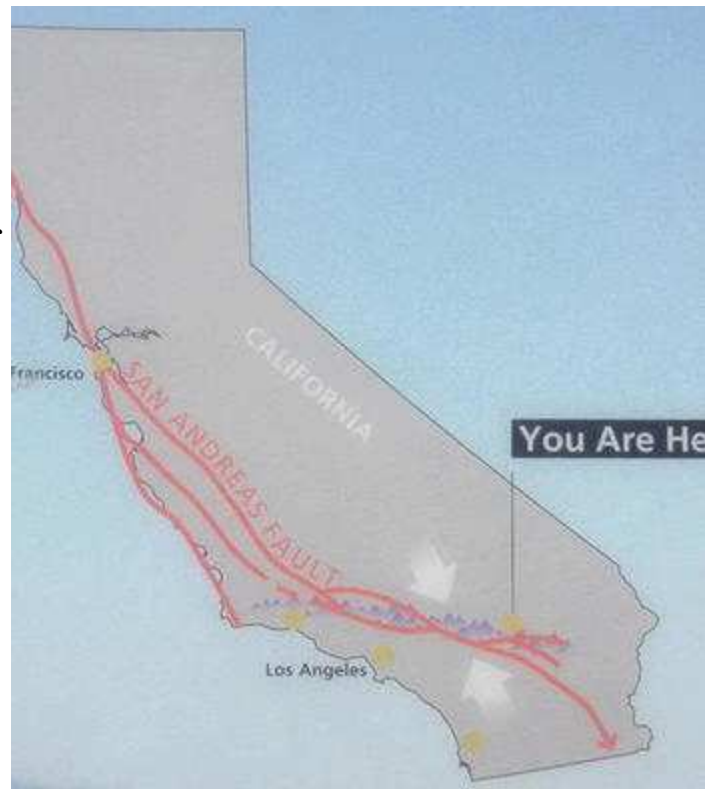


My children get a live glimpse of the Mojave Desert, where I was at about their age. I walked all over the desert around Edwards. My children are not impressed, and continue reading their books.

Until we make them get out of the car at the Keys Overlook. On a clear day, you can see the Salton Sea from here. As it is, you can sort of see the valley of the San Andreas Fault. Palm Springs is down there, about center-frame.



In the city area, particularly L.A. and San Fransisco, where the ground is pretty soft, probably mostly river silts, the earthquakes associated with the San Andreas Fault slipping are of course legendary. In the granite hills here, I wonder if they would even be noticed. I'm speculating here. What the map says is, the two sides of the Fault are drifting about an inch every few years. Naturally they have to apply the proven (hah!) rule of uniformitarianism and estimate how they will have moved several feet in a few hundred years. Of course they provided data to back up this scientific statment (*not*).





The one big misadventure of the day was our visit to Skull Rock. The ranger at the visitors center said "right off the road". The map said "access from Jumbo Rocks Campground". We got to Jumbo Rocks, and the little trail map said 1/2 a mile. Well, I'm thinking, a half-mile is pretty much "right off the road", so we set off the trail. Very nice trail, but it's taking a long time, and we notice the main road is parallel to our foot trail. When we finally find it, it turns out there is a pull-off on the main road right there. Skull Rock is *literally* "right off the road"! As penance, I leave the girls here and walk back a

quick as I can over that half-mile trail, fetch the car, and pick them up. This costs us about an hour.

Up to now, we have been stopping at the little educational signs that the Park Service puts up along the road in monuments like these (Saguaro National Monument has bunches). No more. The road through the Monument to the other side is long. And windy. Therefore slow. By the time we *finally* get to the Cottonwood Springs visitors center, it is after five, and the visitors center is closed. Rats! No stamp at this end! Very disappointed.

Half a mile away is the actual spring. We visit. And are disappointed again. I have in mind the beautiful real natural spring at Agua Caliente, near the junction of the Santa Catalina and Rincon mountains. There is certainly a spring here, or these palm trees and the cottonwoods further down the arroyo wouldn't be happy. But there's no access into the palm



grove, so I'm guessing there's nothing else to see here. Except for an *arrastra* - a burro-driven ore crushing feature from the early part of the mining history - and even that takes some imagination to make out. A three-mile hike away is the "oasis", which I assume actually has surface water, but we are clearly not going to do that now.

So we get back in the car, leave Joshua Tree National Monument, and make it to Chiriaco Summit for gas (Jerri was driving, and we didn't fill up before entering the Monument) and a rather inferior late afternoon lunch (it's okay; breakfast was finished just before noon). Charity drives us out of California.



A welcome sight! But it's 7:00. Even taking the Phoenix Route 85 Bypass, it will be near midnight before getting home tonight. And I have to go to work tomorrow...