



# In Search of Eldorado

Link to the Eldorado Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VczD1olutQ8>



## Hello to Family & Friends

Above is my campsite at Mesquite Springs Campground. Not a bad location at all.

I had a visit from Donny, not a ranger but most likely the campground host. He asked me if I paid, no, then told me the pay station was out of order and I should stop in Stovepipe Wells and pay there. No problem.

It was a 22 mile drive to Stovepipe Wells Road and a short gravel drive to the actual well.

## Day 9

Saturday,  
January 11th

Death Valley  
National Park

Weather  
40's to 60's and sunny

## In Search of Eldorado

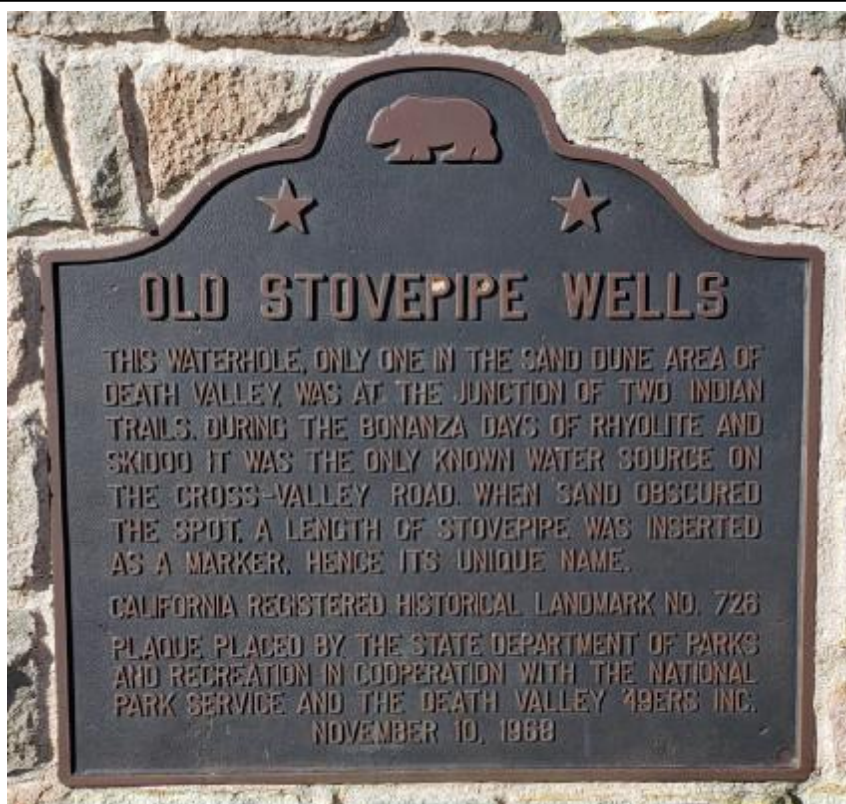
By Edgar Allan Poe

Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—  
This knight so bold—  
And o'er his heart a shadow—  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow—  
'Shadow,' said he,  
'Where can it be—  
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,'  
The shade replied,—  
'If you seek for Eldorado!'

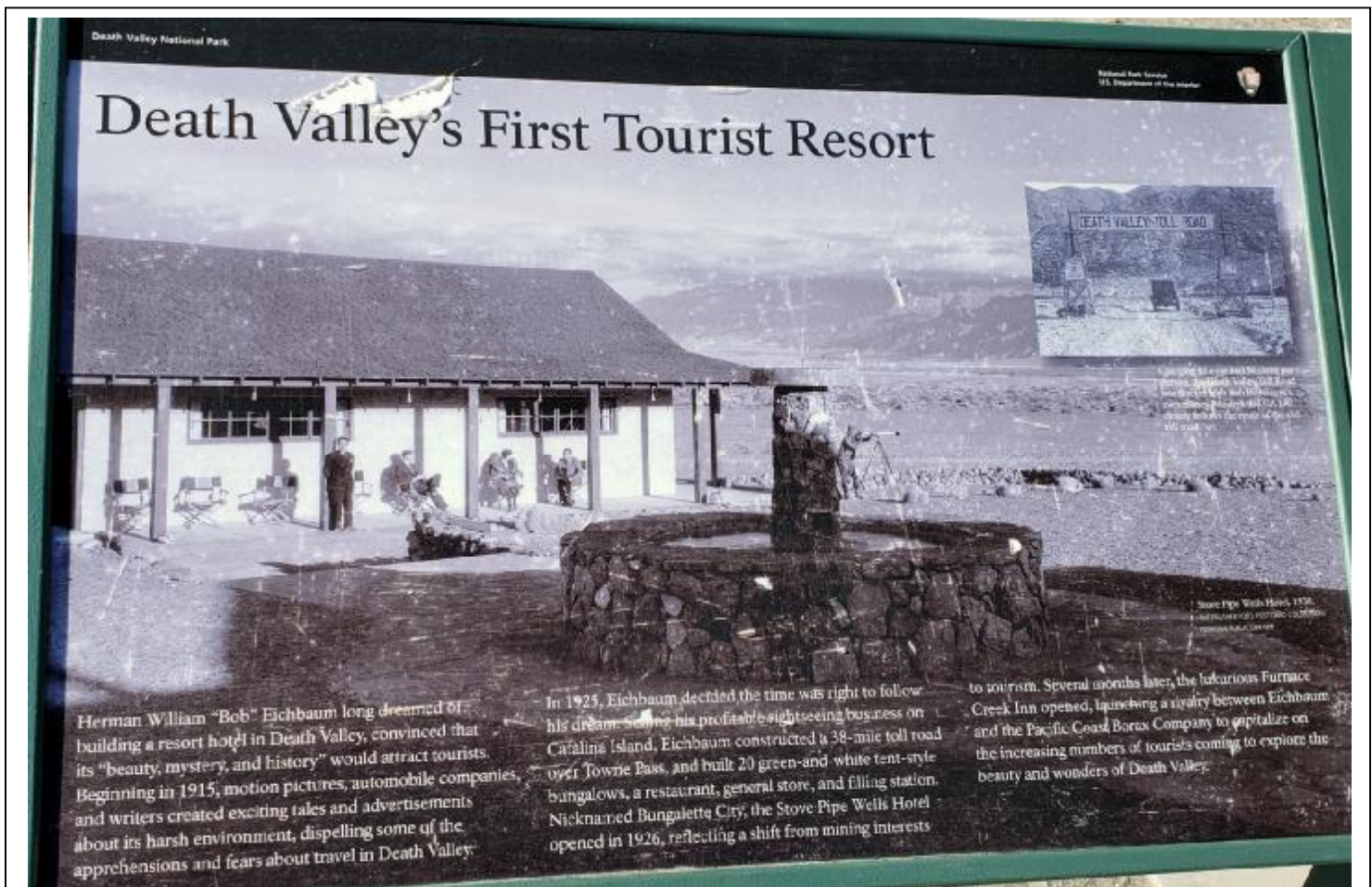




Just close your eyes and picture this – You leave Rhyolite on a wagon (the ghost town of yesterday), cross the mountains down into the vast plain of Death Valley, then have to find a stovepipe sticking out of the ground. If you don't, your bones turn to dust in the appropriately named Death Valley.

I made my stop in Stovepipe Wells, only to find the gas station here does not sell diesel. I wandered over to the Ranger Station, paid my fourteen dollars for camping (in two years it will be seven dollars) and asked Ms. Ranger if she knows whether Panamint Springs has diesel or not. She wasn't sure and gave them a call for me, but the phone on the other end wasn't working. Great. Either 25 miles to Furnace Creek then back through Stovepipe Wells, or take a chance. I still have about 80 miles left in the tank and Panamint Springs is only 30 miles away. As I was about to get into the RV, another Ranger parked next to me and I asked her about diesel. She was positive Panamint Springs had it. Excellent!

The plaque below was at the Ranger Station.





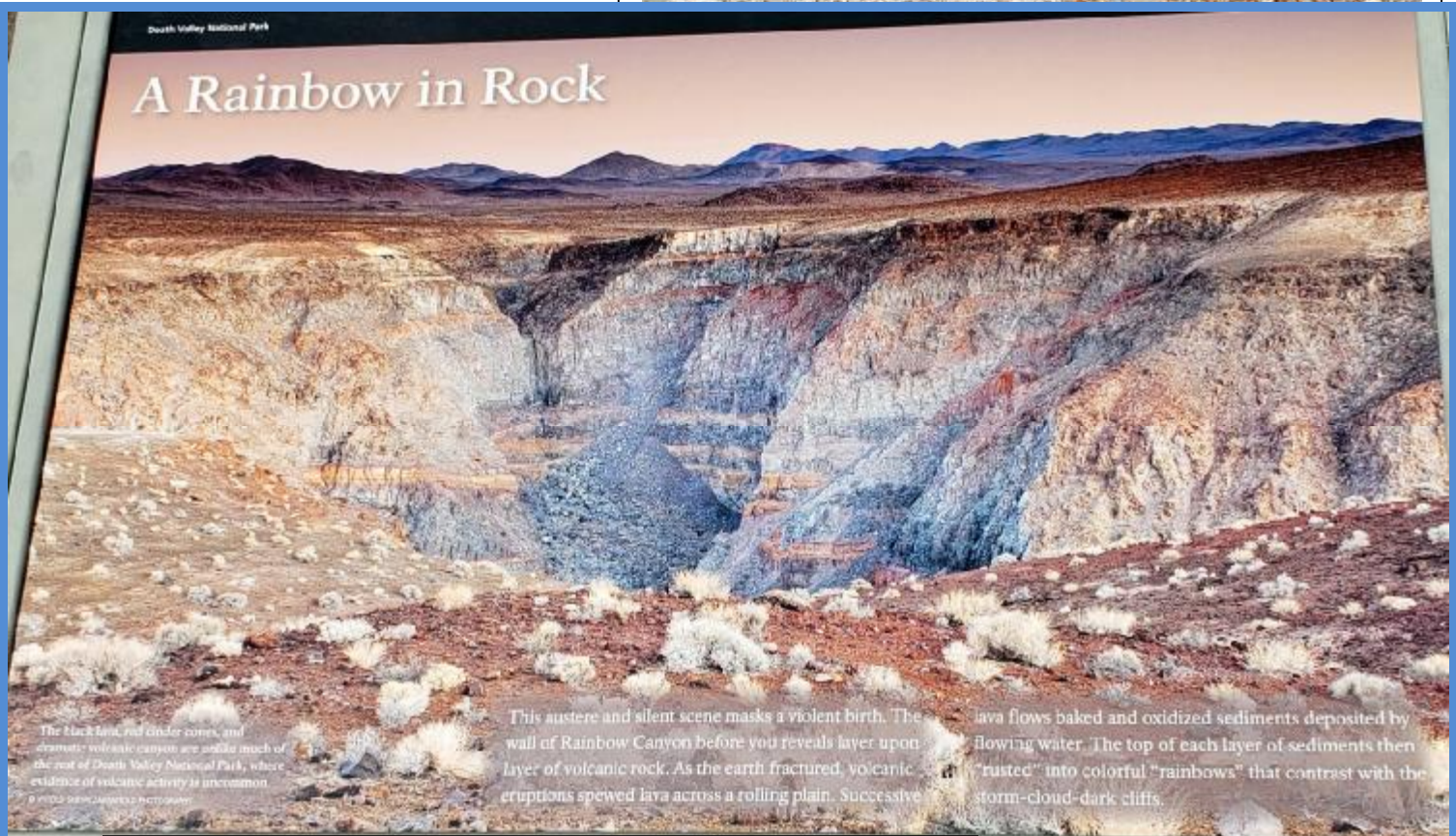
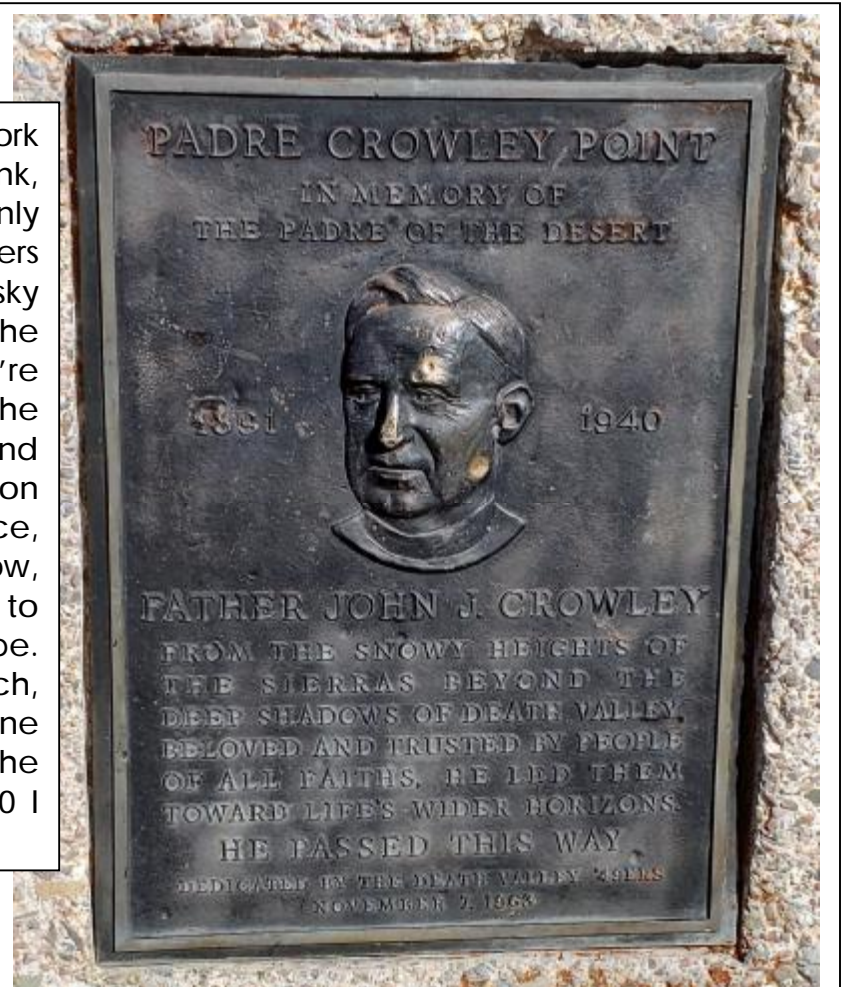
WOW. Was this a ride. Right from Stovepipe Wells I began to climb. At 17 miles I drove over Towne Pass, 4956', then a 9% grade down into the western Death Valley valley for 13 miles. My foot only touched the brakes for that 13 miles, no accelerator at all. In the picture above you can see the road ahead. You can even see a slight line on the other side of the valley where the road climbs slightly to Panamint Springs. After filling up in Panamint Springs, only \$5/gal instead of \$5.67 at Furnace Creek, I continued west towards Crowley Point. And I thought the first part of the drive was wild. YEE HAW!! For about 8 miles the road climbs steeply, very steeply. Top speed is 30-35 MPH because of all the twists and turns. Girls, Gpops, Grandma would have had heart failure.



FATHER CROWLEY  
VISTA POINT  
→



I really wanted this part of my trip to work out. The nearby Airforce base, Nellis I think, uses Rainbow Canyon for practice. Only they call it Star Wars canyon. Jet fighters and bombers come down out of the sky from the south into the canyon, below the point where you're standing. You're actually looking into the cockpits of the planes as they dive into the canyon and out the other side. Watching the videos on youtube was great. If you get a chance, check it out. I knew weekends were slow, but I was hoping for at least one jet to make a run. Alas and alack it wasn't to be. I arrived before noon, ate lunch, wandered around, played on my phone until about 1:20, hoping that maybe the pilots were just at lunch also. Near 1:30 I headed back.



## A Rainbow in Rock

The black sand, red tinder cones, and dramatic volcanic canyon are only a much of the rest of Death Valley National Park, where evidence of volcanic activity is uncommon.

This austere and silent scene masks a violent birth. The wall of Rainbow Canyon before you reveals layer upon layer of volcanic rock. As the earth fractured, volcanic eruptions spewed lava across a rolling plain. Successive

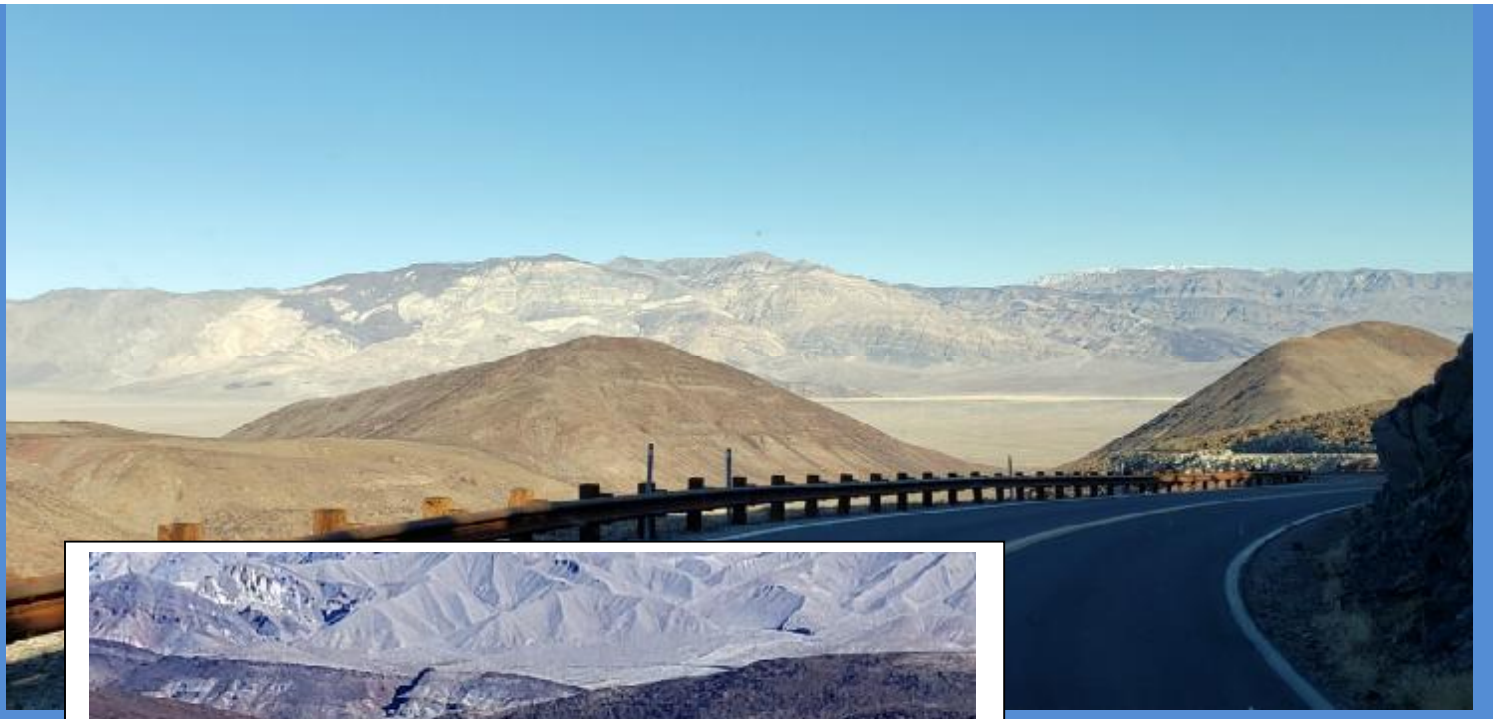
lava flows baked and oxidized sediments deposited by flowing water. The top of each layer of sediments then "rusted" into colorful "rainbows" that contrast with the storm-cloud-dark cliffs.

Not quite the same color today as in the plaque photo. They must take these right after it rains or something.



What goes up must come down. Eight miles up to Crowley Point, eight miles down to Panamint Springs. The photo above is a panoramic, as I am sure you can tell, since the RV shadow is on both sides. The scenery was incredible on this drive.





Many of Death Valley's roads are like this. Not the smoothest. In fact what you see to the left is rather tame.

With all of the mountain driving you would think my gas mileage must suck. But even though I'm using more gas on the climbs, my descent was 17 miles without touching the gas. 14.3 miles per gallon. Not bad for an RV.

I forgot to mention earlier that when I left Stovepipe Wells I was planning to hike Mosaic Canyon, but I could see two or three cars in the parking lot and another five raising dust on the road there, so I skipped it for later. Then when I returned several hours later, the lot and the road were just as busy. I prefer not to hike in a crowd.

## Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes

Sprawling 14 square miles across the widest part of Death Valley, these dunes are the best known and easiest to access in the park. The highest dune is about one mile from here, but many dunes must be crossed to get there. There is no trail in the dunes so you are free to explore on foot wherever you please. A large area of rarely visited dunes is to the east where you may find footprint-free sand for photography.

# Sand Trap

Sand is everywhere in the desert, but sand dunes are not. For sand to gather into dunes it takes three things: a supply of sand, strong wind, and something to slow that wind. Sand erodes from the mountains around Death Valley. Winds from the north carry sand down the valley until they hit the bulk of Tucki Mountain towering behind you, causing the sand to collect at its foot. Southerly winds form a huge eddy in the leeward side of the same mountain, adding even more sand. The sands shift with every windstorm, but the dunes are trapped in place.

I didn't walk out to the dunes. I was on the sand at White Sands and I plan on visiting Great Sand Dunes National Monument in the future. Dunes are not what I came to Death Valley to see.

The photo below is the dune field from the parking lot



Surfboard on the roof. I must be in California.



A half mile from the dunes parking lot is the road to Grotto Canyon. I was advised NOT to drive this one. It was in rough shape for the first ¼ mile, but not too bad after that. I took Ms. Ranger's advice and parked on the highway shoulder. Not too far up the road I met a couple coming back. They told me the road keeps going on and on and they never really found the trailhead. I was told it was about 2 ¼ miles to the GROTTO, then scrambling as far as you want to go up the wash from there. I hadn't done any hiking today and needed the exercise, so I decided to push on and turn around when I felt like it.



A much better view of the dune field from up here.



A little over a mile in I came across the wash above. It looked interesting so I thought I'd give it a try. Can't be any worse than the boring, gravel road.

This was the first time I have seen this plant. My hiking pole tip is there for size perspective. I saw several more as I made my way along.







Looks like I found the road again, about 50' below me. I think this might actually be the Grotto, but it is a bit large. The flat down there is about two football fields from left to right.



It's hard to tell, I should have stuck my foot in there, but the jagged line across the middle is the edge of the cliff. The boulders are 50 feet below me.



Seems like someone with a sense of humor was up here before me.



Just in case you couldn't tell what it was from the other photo.



I thought this was....different. You don't usually see large boulders protruding from a bunch of conglomerate rock, but it was in there solid.



This might be the best shot of the dunes



Sunset on the Kit Fox Hills.

Most of the remaining sights I want to see, or hike, are down Badwater Road towards the southern park exit, so I decided to stay off the grid down Echo Canyon Road tonight. It was a little rough. I'm thinking that in the future it might be worthwhile to pay the lousy twenty bucks and save the wear and tear on the RV and my nerves (worrying about the RV). Just call me cheap. There are at least three other campers out here so at least I know I'm legal here.

Tomorrow is probably my last day in Death Valley. I was planning on 3 days and will end up spending 4 here. There was a little more drive time than I planned on within the park. Desolation Canyon, Devil's Golf Course, Artists Drive, Natural Bridge Trail, Badwater Basin, Sidewinder Canyon and the Ashford Mill Ruins are on the slate. If possible, I am going to try to get to Dante's View, even though it is still closed.

Another item I missed today was the Darwin Falls Trail. Another four mile gravel road then a two mile hike to the falls. I did start the drive but shortly turned around. I gave some thought to using the bike, but it's a little chillier up in the mountains. 44 degrees as opposed to 66 at Stovepipe Wells. Maybe next time. I really would like to visit again with a good 4 wheel drive, off road vehicle. Visit those rarely seen gems.

Tomorrow is game day. Not sure if I will be able to catch the game anywhere or not, so,

**GO PACKERS !!!!!!!!**

Until next time.....