



In Search of Eldorado



Day 38
 Monday

February 11th

Tucson, Arizona

Weather
 50's and sunny

Hello to Family & Friends

Easy day today. Saguaro National Park, a little hiking, maybe some bike riding, then we'll see what happens next.

I was surprised that Saguaro National Park has no RV parking, in fact they only have about 20 spaces, most of which were filled. I had to drive through the entry kiosk and ask the ranger if they had any RV parking, then make a U-turn and back into a spot. I was still sticking out a little ways, but the guy next to me gave me the thumbs up, so I put her in park. The no RV parking may have had something to do with the warning my infotainment center gave me that I was over weight for the entry road. At least I think I heard that right. Oh well.

I walked into the _____ (fill in the blank) and heard an announcement that a short film would soon be starting in the theater. I looked up and found I was standing right outside the door to the theater. How convenient. A minute later the film was rolling, but I walked out after about 4 minutes because the rest of the film was about the people who used to live where the park is now. Only the first 4 minutes were about the park as it is today.

It's an 8-mile, one-way, loop road through the park and I was really hoping to ride the bike and stop for some of the hiking trails. The ranger answered my question of someplace to lock up the bike at the trailheads with an "I'm not sure", and since it was a little chilly I decided to drive it. In a way I am glad I did. I asked about hills and she told me there was a couple at the beginning. HA! This road was up and down all the way, the RV struggled up some of them. Maybe the government shutdown, shutdown her memory.

Eldorado

By Edgar Allen 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?'

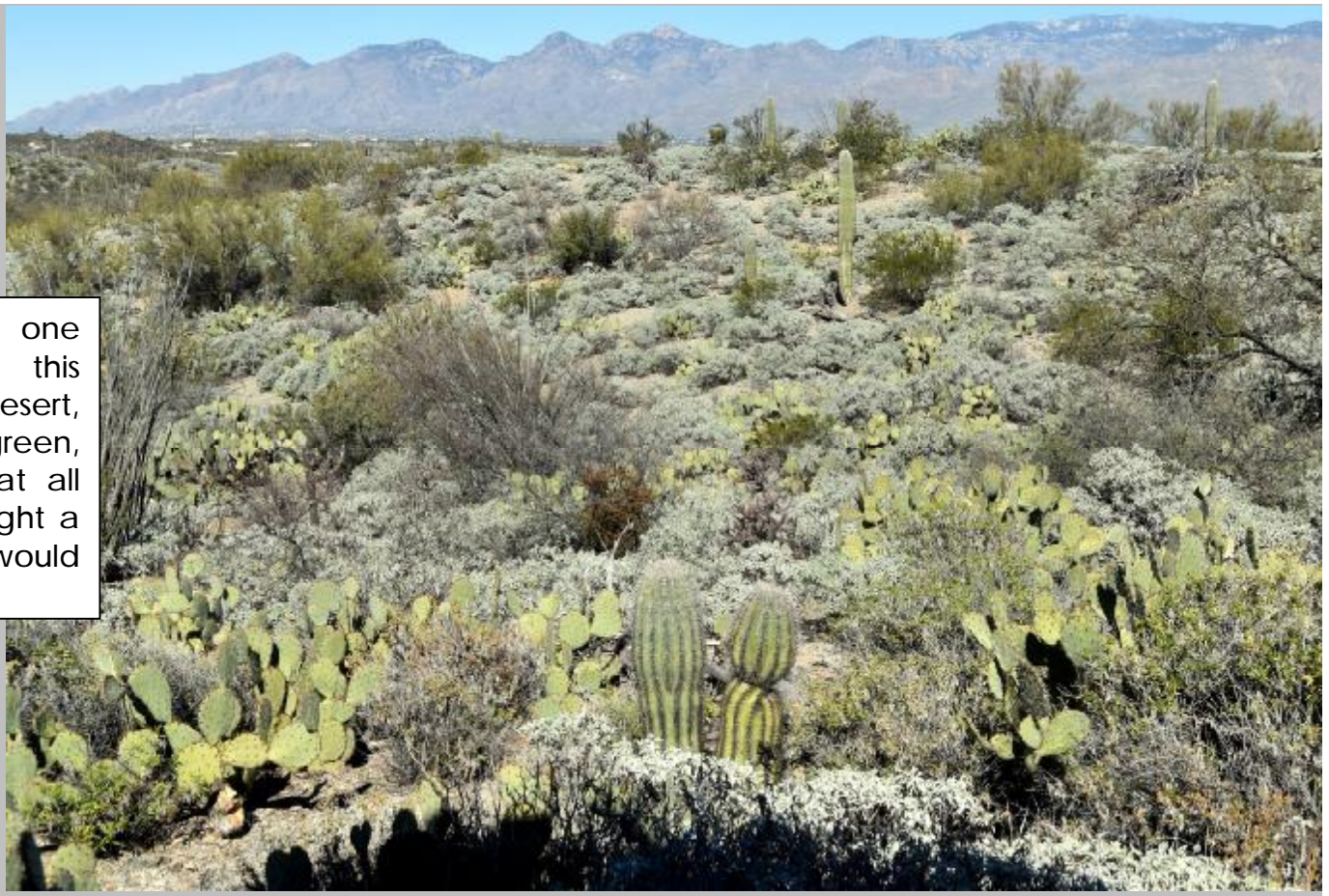
'Over the Mountains
 Of the Moon,
 Down the Valley of the Shadow,
 Ride, boldly ride,'
 The shade replied,—
 'If you seek for Eldorado!'



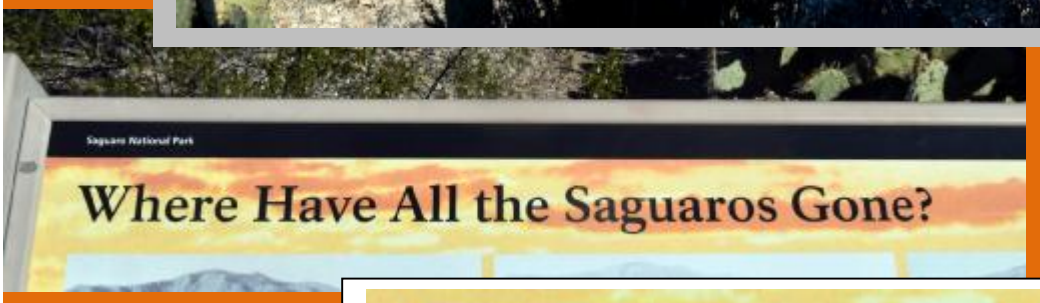
There's that CCC influence again. I may have mentioned that my Uncle Jerry was with the CCC in northern Wisconsin



I was surprised. I was led to believe the Saguaro created a forest here. Looks kind of sparse to me.



I will say one thing for this Sonoran Desert, it sure is green, and not at all like I thought a desert would be.



Saguaro in 1935

The view from this hill has changed a lot over the years. In the 1930s, this was the most spectacular cactus forest in Arizona. But no one knew that these aging giants were near the end of their lives. Today we speculate that mild weather in the late 1800s may have nurtured this forest of giants. Those who created Saguaro National Monument in 1933 believed the forest would last forever.

Maybe this plaque will give us some answers.

If you remember back in Organ Pipe I mentioned the profusion of Saguaro Cacti on my hike. Their presence was very prolific. Then on my drive to Old Tucson the view was again filled with Saguaro. I remember thinking to myself, "just wait til I get to the National Park, it should be terrific."



Saguaro in 1960

In February 1937, a cold front brought record low temperatures to Tucson. A few years later saguaros began to die at an alarming rate. For a decade, scientists and the public struggled to deal with the “cactus blight.” Following another killing freeze in 1962, researchers realized that temperatures below freezing for more than 20 hours could kill saguaros.



Saguaro in 1985

Before 1980 almost no young saguaros could be found here. Predictions of doom were made: “the last saguaro will die in the 1990s.” In 1979, the National Park Service acquired all grazing rights in the Cactus Forest. After decades of trampling by cattle, young saguaros began to sprout under palo verde and mesquite “nurse trees.”

Look at the young saguaros all around you. The trend toward renewal continues today.

Below is my picture of pretty much the same angle as those taken above. It looks like there are even less than in 1985. But as I hiked the trail I did notice many smaller cacti, 6' tall or less. Six feet is equivalent to 35 years, just about right for 1985 to 2019.





I think this may be another example. Those eight new limbs are all from the same time period. They are about 6' up, which would correlate to 1985 again.



I think this Saguaro was trying to show off his muscle





The trail ahead



This area was a little better. The photo just does not do justice to the actual view. The various types of cacti are amazing.

Javelina Rocks

The layer-cake-looking rock here is called Javelina Rock, named after its favorite inhabitant, the javelina. Other small animals also find these rocks ideal for shelter and shade.

The rocks in this area are composed of *Catalina Gneiss*—ancient granite changed by forces deep in the earth along a detachment fault. Now raised to the surface, the rocks reveal bands of minerals, caused by the stretching and movement of the earth's crust.

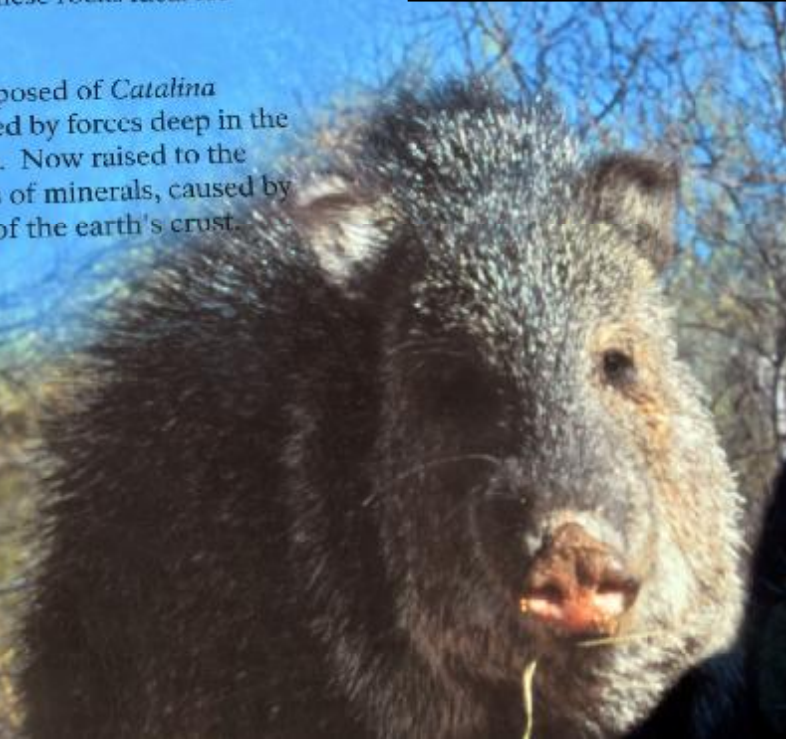
Javelina Facts

Javelinas are peccaries, not pigs.

Javelinas bear only 1-3 young at a time.

Javelinas weigh up to 60 pounds.

Javelinas have scent glands on their backs.

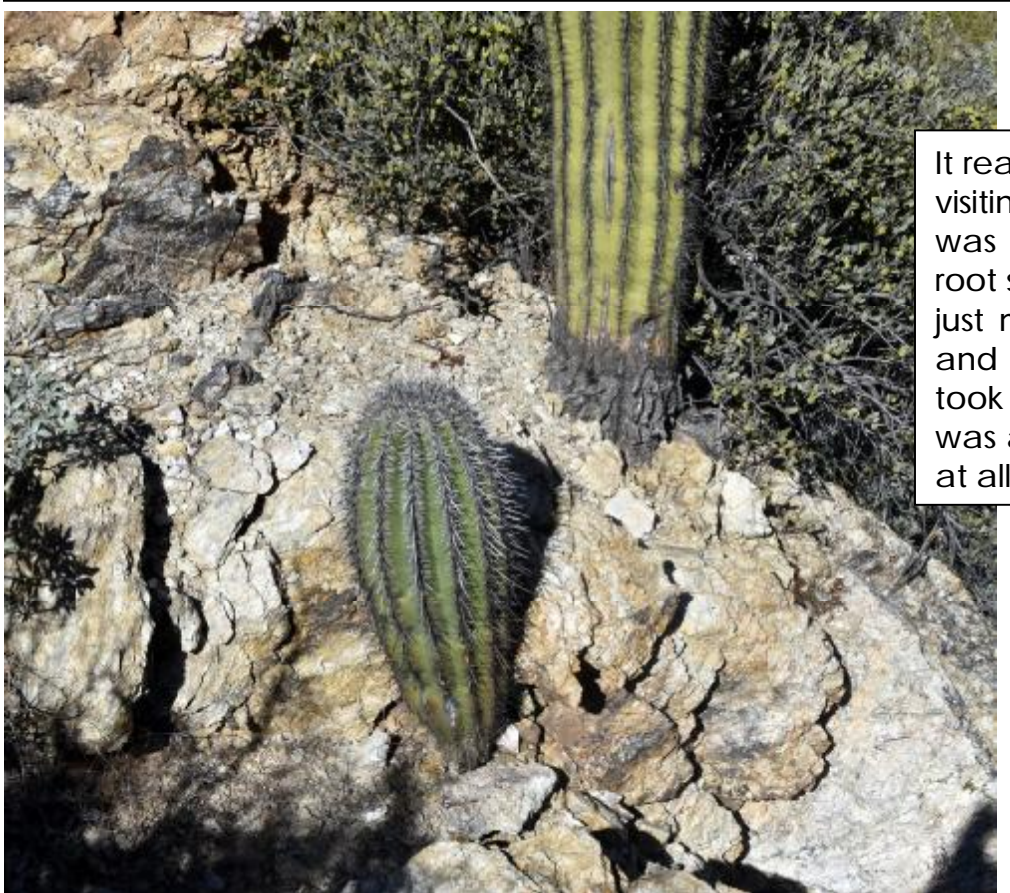


I have yet to see one of these Javelinas in person. Morgan and I saw none on our visit to Big Bend National park. I think this is what my mom would have referred to as 'an ugly cuss'.





This was a little more to my liking, climbing amongst the rocks and boulders. Don't worry, I didn't fall.



It really is kind of weird....just before visiting this Javelina Rocks pullout, I was wondering how much of a root system a Saguaro cactus has. I just might have to stop at the VC and ask. Then I hiked a little and took this photo. I guess my question was answered - not much root ball at all.



This is what is referred to as 'The Invisible Horse Sculpture'. Why invisible you ask? Looks perfectly visible to me.

This is the view from the horse's rump



This is a head on view. Look closely.

Roadside America - A sculpture of a mare and foal in the empty median of a highway, cleverly designed so they're invisible as you approach, then appear as you drive past.

There are a few things I have learned about Arizona since I've been here: There sure are a heck of a lot of cacti. Cacti, cacti, cacti. Truthfully, I am growing a little weary of scenic drives featuring cacti. Don't get me wrong, they are fascinating plants, but enough is enough. I think I need to see some pine trees. The ground – In the Midwest we are sure used to green grass and dark brown dirt. Here – it all seems to be gravel. Granted, it is different sizes of gravel, but gravel nonetheless, not dirt. The weather – not bad during the day, but it gets cold at night, and I mean once the sun goes down until about 11:00 the next morning, then it heats up quickly and cools down fast. As I filled up with diesel today, standing in the sun out of the wind was very comfortable. A step around the RV into the shade and the wind felt like a 20 degree difference. It is hard to dress appropriately when a step or two requires an additional layer of clothing. So far, it is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live here.

That's it for today. I took a walk around a shopping mall, filled up the RV with diesel, water and LP gas and headed back to the casino.

I am just about done here in Tucson. I would like to spend another couple days here riding all of the bike trails around the city, there are a lot of them, but I am too wimpy to ride in the 50 degree weather, so that will have to wait for another time.

I think I may hit a couple sights south of Tucson tomorrow, then possibly over to Sonoran Desert National Monument or Ironwood National Monument before I head to Phoenix.

Until next time.....