



In Search of Eldorado



Day 31
Monday
February 4th

*Organ Pipe Cactus
National Monument*

Weather
Low 60's and cloudy

Hello to Family & Friends

After breakfast and a shower I had a knock on the door. Ranger Rick (I don't really know what his name was) told me I was in a reserved spot and that I had to move. I already knew this, but because of the layout of the campground...think of it like this – an auditorium or theater with 6 seats in row 1 and 17 seats in row 16. If you cross through row 5, for instance, and can't find an open seat, you must walk down in front of row 1 and go up the right side again. Nothing in row 12? All the way down in front of row 1 and back up the other side. I felt it would be easier to take the first open site I came across, then reconnoiter on foot or bike to find another spot to move to. So I was prepared to move. It only took 10 minutes.

I wanted to attend the "Patio Talk: Eek! Leaping Lizards and Slithering Snakes" at the visitor center at 11:00, so I hopped on my bike and rode the mile and a half to the visitor center. I know it's not like back home, but the temp was upper 50's and the wind was about 16 MPH so the wind chill was probably in the 40's. I wore shorts and a fleece. I was cold.

The presentation was pretty good. The Ranger knew her stuff. She had frozen road kill lizards and snakes and a lot of information. Seems like I won't have to worry much about rattlesnakes or Gila Monsters, they are pretty much in hibernation at this time of the year.

After the talk I watched a video then wandered around the inside displays.

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!'

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was designated an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations in 1976.

As an International Biosphere Reserve, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was recognized as a protected portion of one of the world's most unique and recognizable landscapes. The monument protects critical habitat for a number of special-status species and serves as a benchmark for monitoring and understanding change in the Sonoran Desert.

LIFE-SUSTAINING SAGUARO

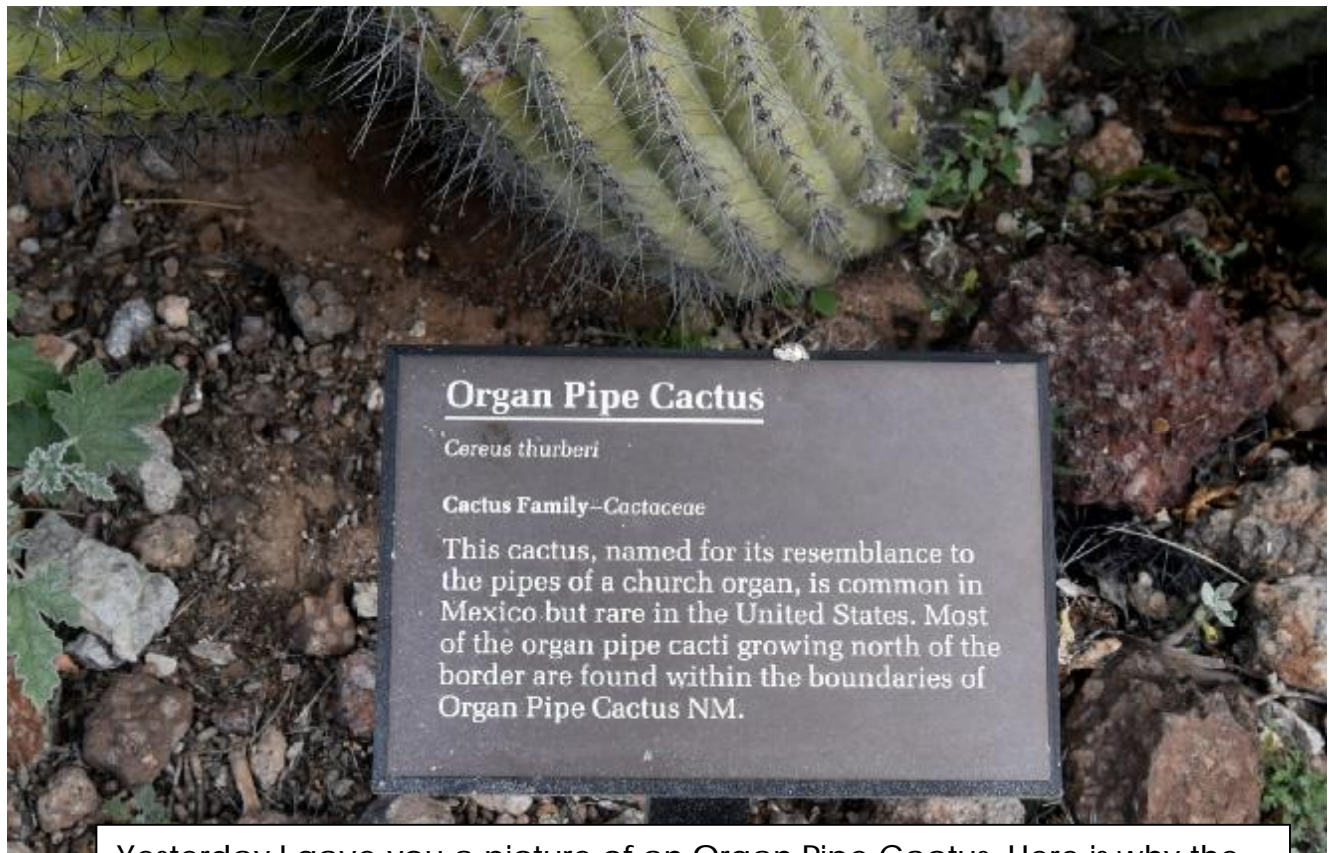
Nearly every organism in its range, including humans, is ecologically connected to the saguaro cactus in some way.

Although the saguaro cactus is a familiar icon of the Southwest, the only place in the world it grows naturally is the Sonoran Desert. The largest cactus in the United States, it grows very slowly, taking up to 200 years to reach its full height of 40 to 50 feet tall.

This majestic cactus provides food and shelter for many animals during the hottest and driest months of the year.



I never realized a Saguaro Cactus could live 200 years



Organ Pipe Cactus

Cereus thurberi

Cactus Family--Cactaceae

This cactus, named for its resemblance to the pipes of a church organ, is common in Mexico but rare in the United States. Most of the organ pipe cacti growing north of the border are found within the boundaries of Organ Pipe Cactus NM.

Yesterday I gave you a picture of an Organ Pipe Cactus. Here is why the government made this area a National Monument.

As I wandered outside I came across this memorial.

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

How We Remember

What will your legacy be? A question we don't often ponder, but our daily actions are already shaping our answers.

In the early 2000s, Park Rangers at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument were increasingly confronted by illegal cross-border activity. It was in this climate that Ranger Kris Eggle served as a steward of the nation's public lands.

On August 9, 2002, two men involved in a violent confrontation in Mexico fled through the desert and entered the monument illegally. Ranger Eggle and U.S. Border Patrol Agents responded. While pursuing one of the men, Kris was shot and killed.

The tragedy of Kris's death brought to light the challenges at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. New approaches to visitor and resource protection were necessary to fulfill the mission of the National Park Service.

As a public lands law enforcement officer, Kris was responsible for protecting visitors and the environment. His sacrifice underscores the dedication of men and women everywhere who serve in law enforcement.

Kris's work and sacrifice leaves an important legacy for all. Law enforcement staff has increased, new security infrastructure has been added, and, the partnership between agencies strengthened.

We continue our endeavor to honor the memory and legacy of Ranger Kris Eggle in the enduring stewardship of the public lands all around you.

The visitor center is named for Kris

Park Ranger Kris Eggle 1973 - 2002

Kristopher William Eggle was a Law Enforcement Park Ranger from Cadillac, Michigan. He was an Eagle Scout and valedictorian of his class at Cadillac High School in 1991 and later studied at the University of Michigan. Kris approached his entire life with a contagious enthusiasm that would inspire everyone who knew him.

In 1995 Kris accepted a Student Conservation Association position with the National Park Service at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He later served as a Park Ranger at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Canyonlands National Park before arriving at Organ Pipe Cactus in 2000. In addition to law enforcement, Kris performed duties as an emergency medical technician, wildland and structural firefighter, and search and rescue team member.

Ranger Eggle is one of more than 40 Law Enforcement Park Rangers who have died in the line of duty.



On August 9, 2002
While protecting visitors from harm,
United States Park Ranger
Kris Eggle
Was slain in the line of duty.

His service and sacrifice
To the National Park Service
And the people of this country
Will never be forgotten.

There was also a little nature trail behind the center with a brick paved path and plaques.



A Teddy Bear Cholla, pronounced choi-ah. Wouldn't you just love to give one a big hug?

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument
National Park Service

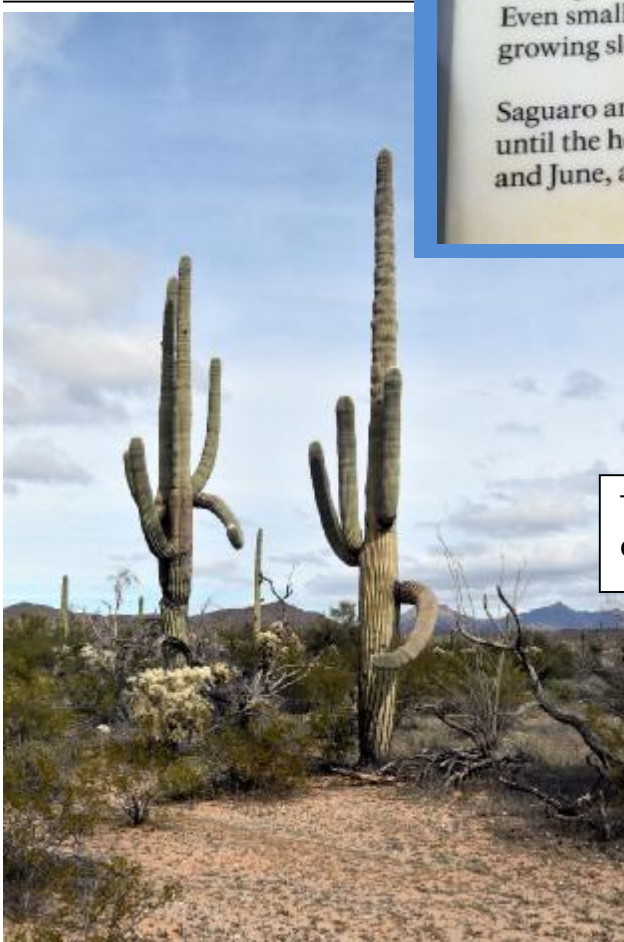
Waiting for Summer

Desert plants grow in slow motion. Cacti are the slowest of all. They always seem to be waiting and don't live life in a hurry. A tall saguaro may be over 150 years old – a large organ pipe over 100 years old. Even small species of cacti live a long time, growing slowly throughout their lifetimes.

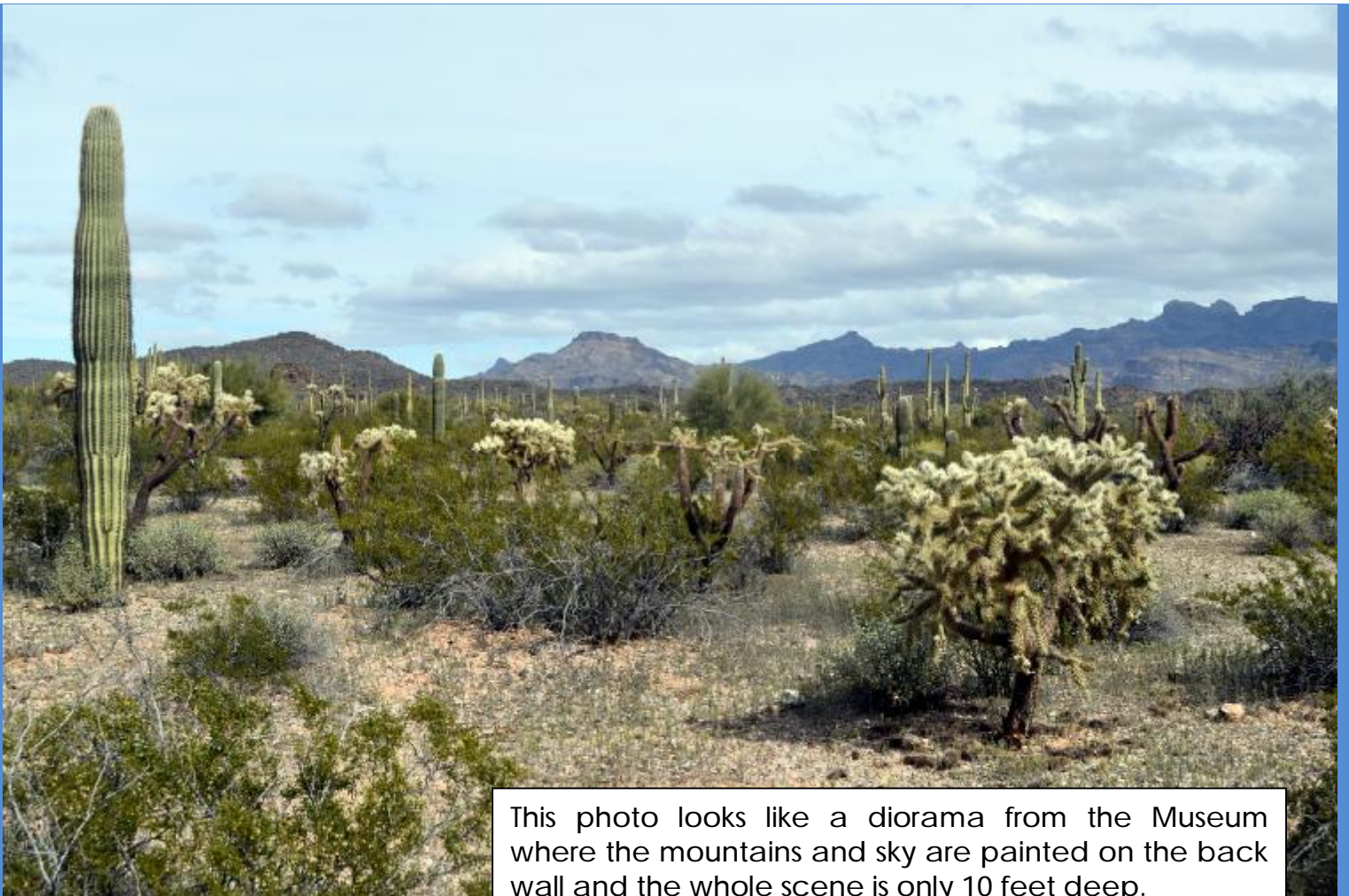
Saguaro and organ pipe cacti wait to bloom until the heat of summer, usually mid-May and June, and bloom only at night.

Their timing is perfect for the lesser long-nosed bats. These animals, too, have patiently played the waiting game. Their migration arrival is just in time for dinner.

Throughout summer nights the bats slurp up the sweet nectar, and in the process pollinate the blossoms. Bats also eat the fruit and disperse the seeds, just in time for summer monsoon rains to encourage the seeds to sprout and grow into new plants.



They sure can get into some weird looking shapes can't they?



This photo looks like a diorama from the Museum where the mountains and sky are painted on the back wall and the whole scene is only 10 feet deep.

My original plan was to bike the 24 mile Ajo Mountain Scenic Drive and hike the two trails along the way. But it was too cold and windy so I decided to hike the Victoria Mine Trail which leaves right from the campground. I hustled back to the RV using the throttle most of the way for extra speed, knowing I would be putting it on the charger while I hiked. After lunch, with camel pack backpack for water, my Blue Ridge Parkway rain jacket, hiking poles, camera and hat, I set off on the 5.2 mile hike.



Enjoy the scenery



This is usually the home of a Gila Woodpecker



A slightly easier trail to follow than the last time. Shows the difference between a Wildlife Refuge trail and a National Monument trail





This piece of quartzite is about a foot long



As I crossed one of the many washes, the dark brown square in the distance caught my eye.



Yup, an old rusty door. I must be getting close to the mine.

This was a neat area. The old building, the rusty cart wheel and about 4 mine shafts.

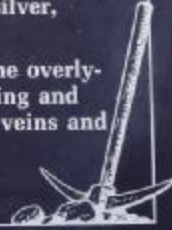
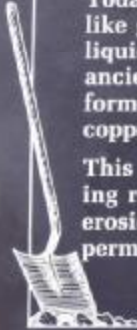


Gold And Silver Geology

Most of the monument landscape is composed of young volcanic rocks with little mineral value, but the 50-million-year-old granite of the Sonoyta Mountains is extensively mineralized.

Today this granite is shattered, weathered and crumbly like grapenuts cereal, but it was once molten and in this liquid state was squeezed (intruded) into fissures in ancient schists deep within the earth. These intrusions formed veins of mineralized rock containing silver, copper, lead and gold.

This area has been uplifted and faulted and the overlying rock has been eroded. The uplifting, faulting and erosion all helped expose the mineral-bearing veins and permitted discovery by early prospectors.



Above right is pictured one of the mine shafts.



They cover the mine openings with big metal grates to keep humans out, then insert these plastic tubes in the mouth of the mine to let the bats in and out.



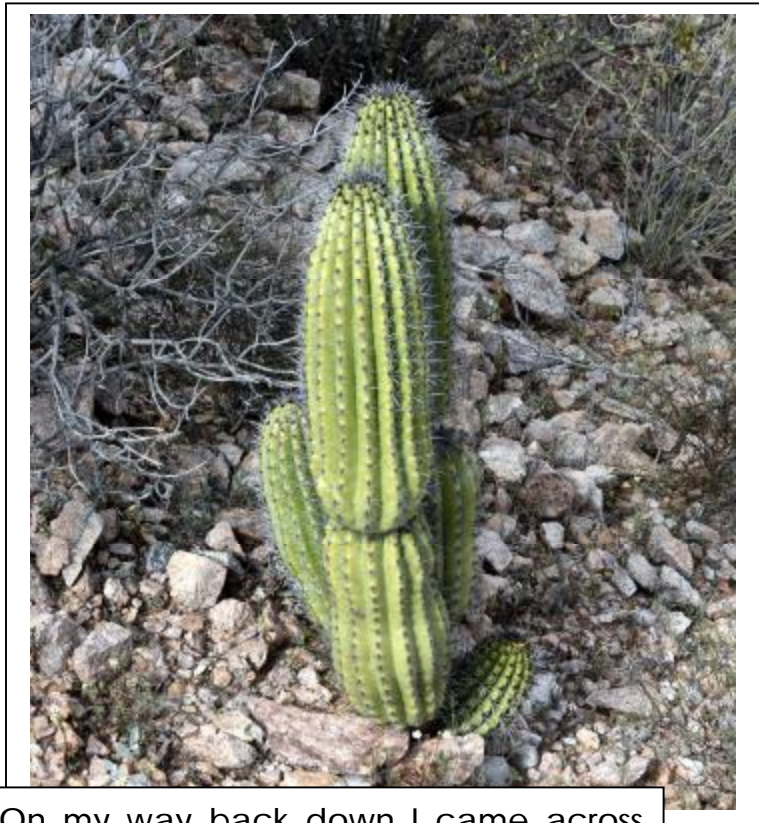


As mentioned in Chloride, I found this very interesting. You can still see the remnants of the ties that held the track for the ore cars leading right up to the mine shaft. The ties look to be only 4x4 and 3' long. Much smaller than a full size 7"x9"x8' tie. For you youngsters out there picture the Donkey Kong mine carts.





They sure had a nice view from that shack



On my way back down I came across this little guy. It's only about 2' tall. I wanted to take it home with me. Too bad it won't stay that size.



This is almost like the classic cactus pose you see all the time. Strangely enough, this is the only one I saw like this and I was purposely watching for one on the way back



This was the only wildlife I saw (except for a few butterflies). He scurried out of my path, then stopped to have his picture taken. He is only about 3" long. From the Patio Talk this morning I now know this is an Ornate Tree Lizard.



This one seemed to be a little confused on which way to grow.

As you can see from the pictures throughout the previous pages, there are ALOT of Saguaro Cacti out here. They outnumber the Organ Pipe Cacti 20 to 1, maybe 50 to 1. It is hard to imagine there could be a place where they are even more dense. But in the Saguaro National Monument it is said they are like a forest. That will be interesting to see.

It is supposed to be colder and still windy tomorrow, so I have altered my plan again. I will talk to a Ranger before trying it, but I sure would like to tackle the 24 miles of gravel scenic drive. That's right, 24 miles of gravel. I am really getting to dislike gravel roads. I think I will lock up the bike at the visitor center though. No sense that thing getting all dusty and dirty again.

Then? I'm not sure. Most hikes are in the same area I was in today, the Blanco and Sonoyta Mountains west of HWY 85. Where the scenic drive is on the east side of 85 and in the Ajo Mountains, you can tell from the photos they look a lot rougher than where I took you today. If I start, it is all one way, no turning back.

Until next time.....