



In Search of Eldorado



Day 32
Tuesday
February 5th

*Organ Pipe Cactus
National Monument*
to

Why, AZ

Weather
Low 50's and cloudy

Hello to Family & Friends

On the road again today. I think there might be a slow leak in my passenger side front tire. It's a little low and before I tackle 25 miles of gravel I need to fill it up. The closest town is Lukeville, right on the Mexican border, only 5 miles down the road. Believe it or not, the air was free. This is a photo of the border crossing from the gas station. As long as I was there I decided to drive through into Mexico and back. It was probably 1968 when I was last in Mexico.

As I crossed the Mexican Border Patrol station I told the agent I just wanted to turn around. She said "Really?" Yup, as long as I'm this close I might as well cross the border. She smiled and I made a U-turn and entered the US Border Patrol station. She asked for my passport and I told her I had just driven through the other way and turned around. She said "Really?" and I said "Really!"

Next test was the Ajo Mountain Rd to see how bad the gravel road actually was. You can drive about two miles before it meets the end of the loop and becomes a one way road. It wasn't too bad. Some washboard, but it was pretty wide. So I turned around and drove across the street to the visitor center to drop off the bike. In the process about 3 other Navions, different models and ages than mine, pulled into the RV parking area. It was a Navion mini convention. For the next 30-40 minutes we all talked about this and that, unique adjustments we had made, took a look inside each other's units and finally got back to our own separate plans. I locked up the bike and made sure everything was secure.

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!'

Ajo Mountain Drive

Ajo Mountain Drive is a 21 mile (34 km) loop offering scenic vistas, a variety of plant life and trailheads for hiking.

The road crosses the Sonoyta Valley and the Diablo Mountains. It follows the base of the Ajo Mountains before returning to valley near Diaz Mountain, an extinct volcano. The road turns to the west returning through Teddy Bear Pass to the two-way portion of the drive. There are picnic tables along the route, check you map for locations.

Opportunities on Ajo Mountain Drive:

Hiking Trails

- Old County Road
- Arch Canyon Trail
- Estes Canyon - Bull Pasture Trails

Points of interest

- Concentrations of saguaro and organ pipe cactus
- Views of Ajo Mountains
- Views into Mexico

While driving scenic roads:

- Road conditions often require slower speeds.
- Do not attempt to cross flooded washes.
- Road may be subject to temporary closure.
- Collection of or damage to natural and cultural resources is prohibited by law.

Please forgive the glare from the windshield in some of these shots, it was cloudy, 55 degrees and very windy. Very cold for along the Mexican border, at least that's my opinion. I didn't want to get out of the RV.





These types of clouds do not make for great outdoor photos

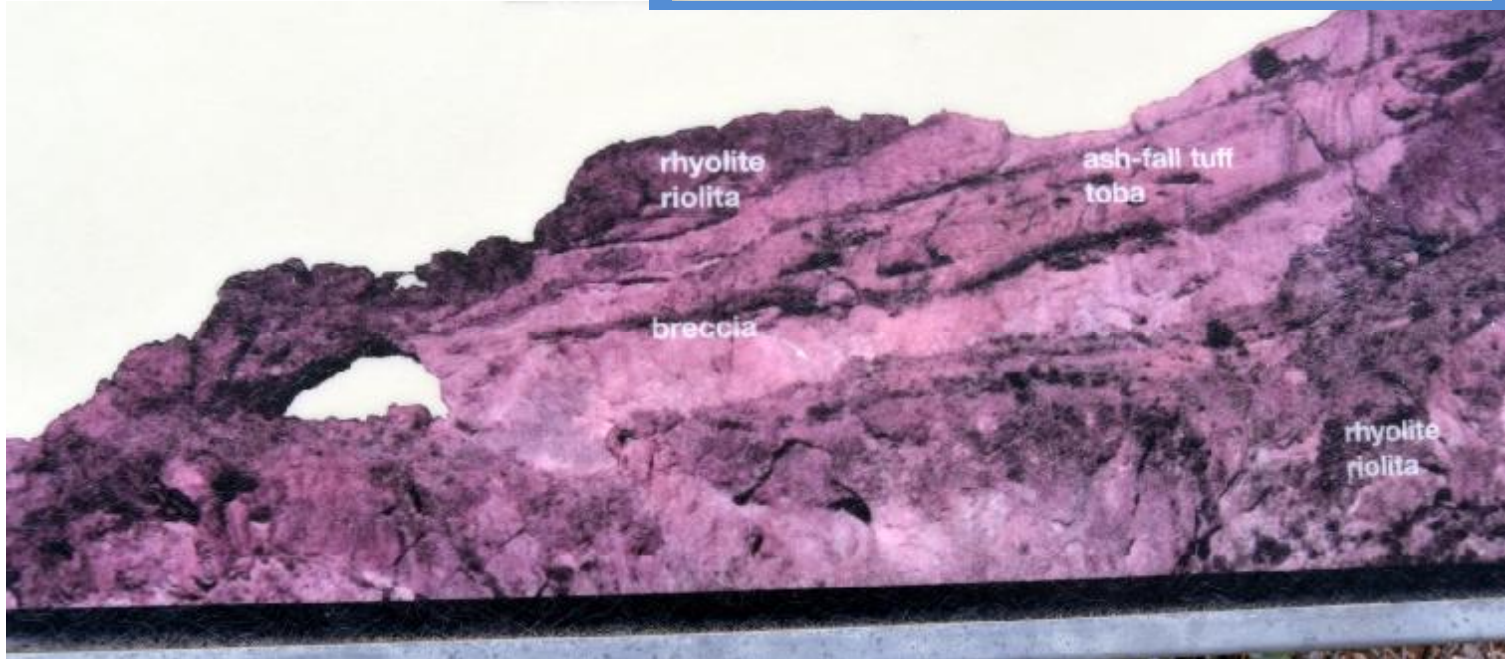




This is the Arch Canyon Trail. You can see the arch in the upper right.

Violent eruptions of ancient volcanoes – similar to Mount St. Helens – created the rocks of this canyon. Hot ash blown from these volcanoes fell in layers. As the ash cooled, it solidified into a rock called “*ash-fall tuff*”.

The pinkish to chocolate-colored rock you see within the Ajo Mountain range is *rhyolite*. Like the basaltic lavas of Hawaiian volcanoes, it flowed over the surface of the earth and cooled quickly. However, rhyolite flows are much thicker, slower moving, and richer in silica than basalt. As the rhyolite flow moves, it often scrapes up fragments of other rocks, cementing them together to form a new rock – ‘*breccia*’ (BRAY-CHAH).





The long distance views turned out better than the closer ones.



Looks like a Gila Woodpecker apartment building

The major problem on a drive like this, other than a flat tire, flying stones damaging something vital underneath, the entire contents flying around the interior, or the back end scraping bottom as you head up the far side of a wash, is that my eyes are mostly on the road watching for washboards, rocks, boulders, dips, low branches, side branches, the smoothest route possible, and not on the scenery. So I probably missed some of the scenic views that might otherwise be noticed.



That one turned out pretty nice.

Goodbye to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

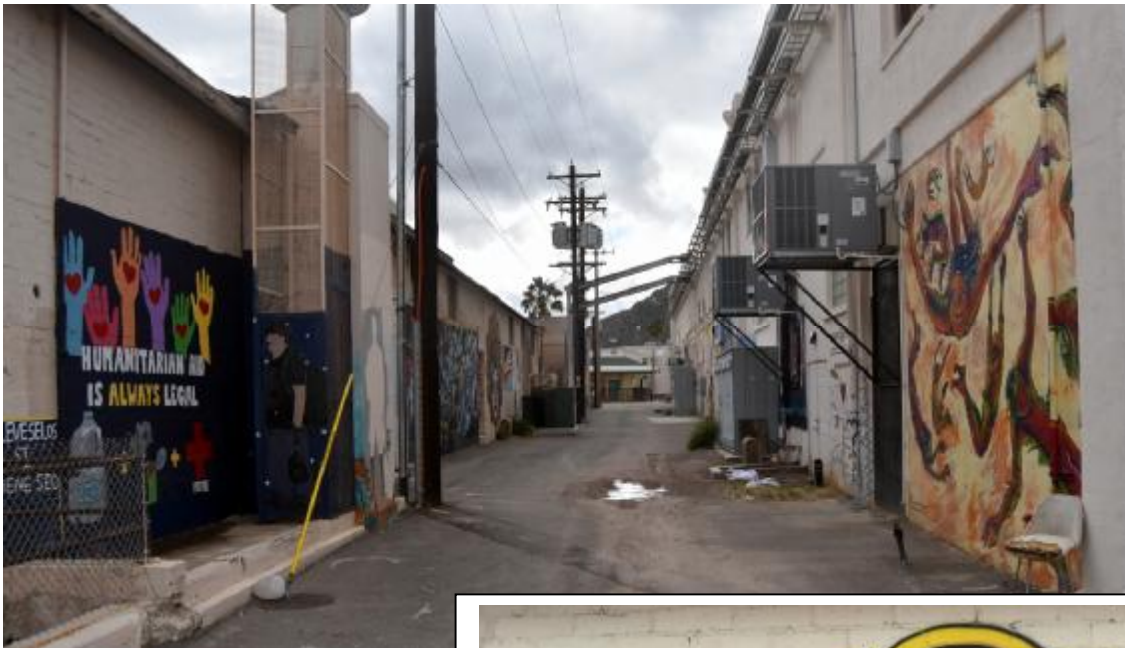
As I mentioned previously, I wanted to go back to Ajo and look around, so that's what I did.



This is the bottom of the U shaped plaza. It used to be the railroad station, but it now houses the visitor center and a gift shop. And it was open! They had a lot of brochures, from all over the state. I picked up several for my destinations over the next few days.

As I am sure most of you already know, I can sometimes be a real dunce. The lady in the visitor center talked about the walking tour of Ajo, and I made sure I had a brochure with map and descriptions. I tossed the future brochures back in the RV and started my walking tour. The map showed it was best to start along Railroad Ave. I assumed (ugh) that I was parked on Railroad Ave since I was just in the railway station. Hmmm....that street name does not match the map. But that looks interesting.





It seemed kind of weird to have an alley for showcasing the artistry of several artists

The one below was, I felt, the only one worthy of a photo

Continuing my walking tour I made my way up a side street, then around the block and back down the right side of the plaza, then through the park in the middle towards the Curley School. You remember the Curley School from a few days ago. I asked at the visitor center if there were tours, nothing planned, but if I asked for Bonna or Hope, they would show me around. The gymnasium has a great wood beamed ceiling and the cafeteria is pretty cool also. Great.





Note the wise old owl above the arched window



This was the best shot of the bell tower with the sun behind me.

I went inside but the gallery, where Bonna sits, was closed. I wandered out back into the clay works and took a look at the work in progress, wheels and kilns and talked to some of the ladies working there. The gymnasium was locked and I could not find the cafeteria. Still trying to figure out where these streets are. Maybe the historic downtown is a little further north. Back to the RV.





I followed directions from the VC to check out the open pit copper mine overlook. The mine ceased operation in 1985 when falling copper prices and labor disputes could not be overcome. At one time the mine employed 3000 people.

Copper was discovered here in 1854 and the open pit mine started in 1912. Between 1916 and 1930, three hills were leveled before digging went "sub-surface". The mine is 1100 feet deep and a mile and a half across. In 1959 it was the third largest open pit mine in the United States (I think we toured the largest on a family vacation back in the 60's). Four towns grew up around the mines. Two of them were demolished by the growing mine and the other two merged into Ajo. This is why so many of the buildings were constructed around 1920.

Of course the overlook visitor center and the museum were closed. Since it was getting late I decided to check out a possible BLM camping spot for the night. There is a scenic 7 mile loop road, basically around the mine, that starts just a couple blocks over. I followed VC directions again and found myself on this scenic road. You guessed it, dirt and gravel. After about a mile and a half I had enough and turned around. I did get the photo to the right though. The cross honors John Campbell Greenway, first mine superintendent and founder of Ajo. The townspeople erected this cross shortly after the beloved founder's untimely death in 1926.

Heading north further into town I finally pulled over to check the GPS. What the hey? Google cannot find any of these Ajo streets on the walking tour map. TomTom's turn. You have got to be kidding me. Check the brochure again - Historic Downtown Wilcox, Arizona Walking Tour. Idiot. I grabbed the wrong brochure. No wonder the streets could not be found.





I spotted this lizard on the wall of a house before heading to the grocery store. This is one of those sights that should be on Roadside America. The circle is about a six foot diameter.

Gotta love these small towns. The Olsen's put together an Ace Hardware store and an IGA grocery store in the same building. After the dairy section you wander through the hardware aisles until you get to the freezer section on the far side. Back past the beer and lumber, wine and screws to the checkout lanes.

There must have been some kind of Wisconsin connection in the food store, they had Oscar Meyer Braunschweiger, Mercks Cheese, Kaukauna Cheese (I know, same company), and Old Wisconsin Summer Sausage. The generic foods were Food Club brand, the same as PDQ and Piggly Wiggly.

I needed breakfast, lunch and dinner. Guess what? The deli was closed. The meat department was closed. It was about 5 p.m. Doesn't anybody eat after 5 p.m. around here? Oh well, their loss.

Picked up a few items and looked for a boondocking spot between me and Pipe Organ as I had to head back south to Why before turning east. There is BLM land, but I am a chicken at heart I guess. I thought it would be safer to be in a campground tonight than all by myself on some desert pullout, especially since the desert pullout might be on an Indian reservation.

The campground is the Howling Coyote in Why. Right now all I hear howling is the wind. Only \$22 for a full hookup.

As Scarlet O'Hara once said "After all, tomorrow is another day" Make sure you use a southern accent when you say that.

Until next time.....