



In Search of Eldorado



Day 33
Wednesday
February 6th

Why, AZ

to

Casino Del Sol

Weather
Variable

Hello to Family & Friends

Why? Why is Why named Why? I'll tell you why. At one time HWY's 85 & 86 came together here creating a "Y" intersection. Stores sprang up, a gas station, and the area became known as the "Y". Eventually the people living here wanted a post office, but were told they needed a name for the town in order to establish one. At the time, Arizona required all cities to have at least three characters, so the town's founders named the town "Why" instead of "Y". And that is why Why is named Why.

I made a mistake last night, actually two nights ago, calling the campground the Howling Coyote. It is really named Coyote Howls West.



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.

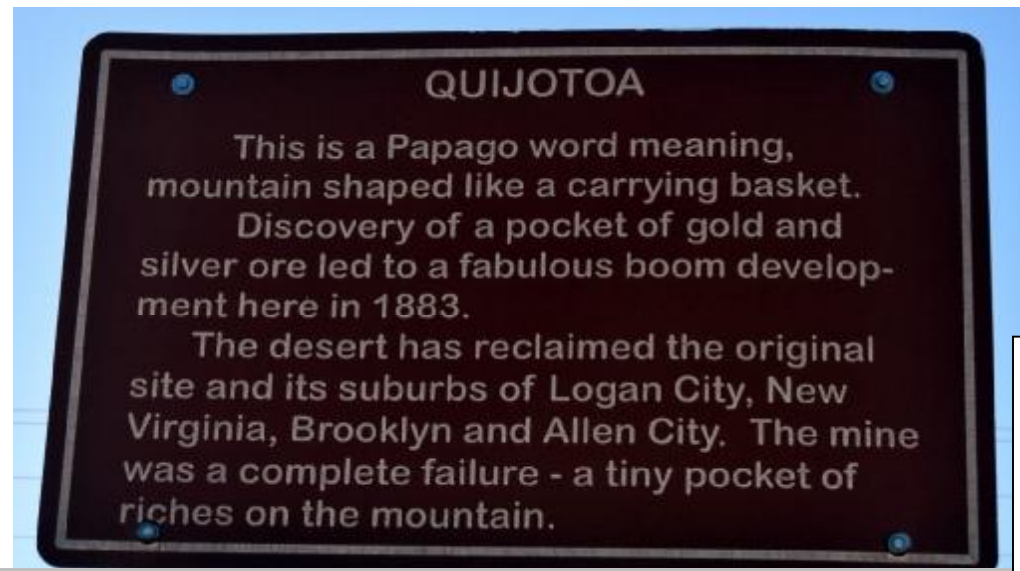
But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow—
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

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!'

Between Why and Tucson there is only one place to visit of any significance, and it's a big one, the Kitt Peak National Observatory. I made a reservation for the Night Observing Program. It starts about 4:30 p.m. and runs til 9:30. That is the reason you are getting this newsletter a half day late. By the time I found a place to park for the night it was after 10.

So bear with me as I cross Indian territory (the Tohono O'odham reservation) and make my way to Kitt Peak.



This was a historical marker along the way. I don't really see the 'mountain shaped like a carrying basket' in the photo below, but maybe you do.



The road ahead



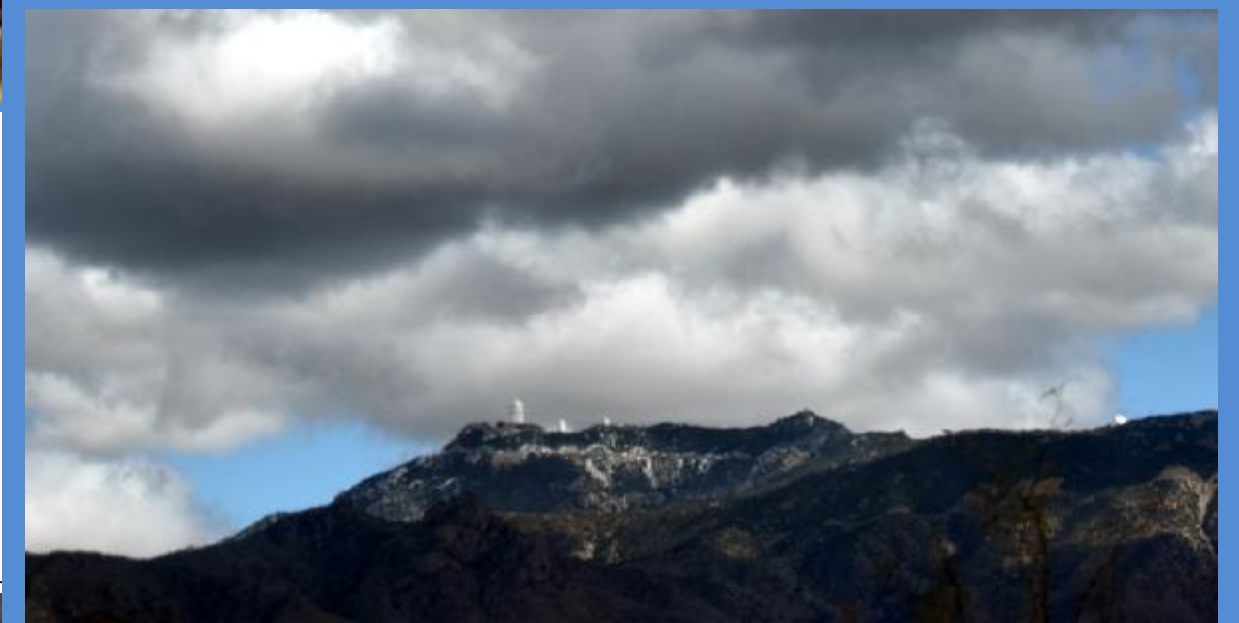
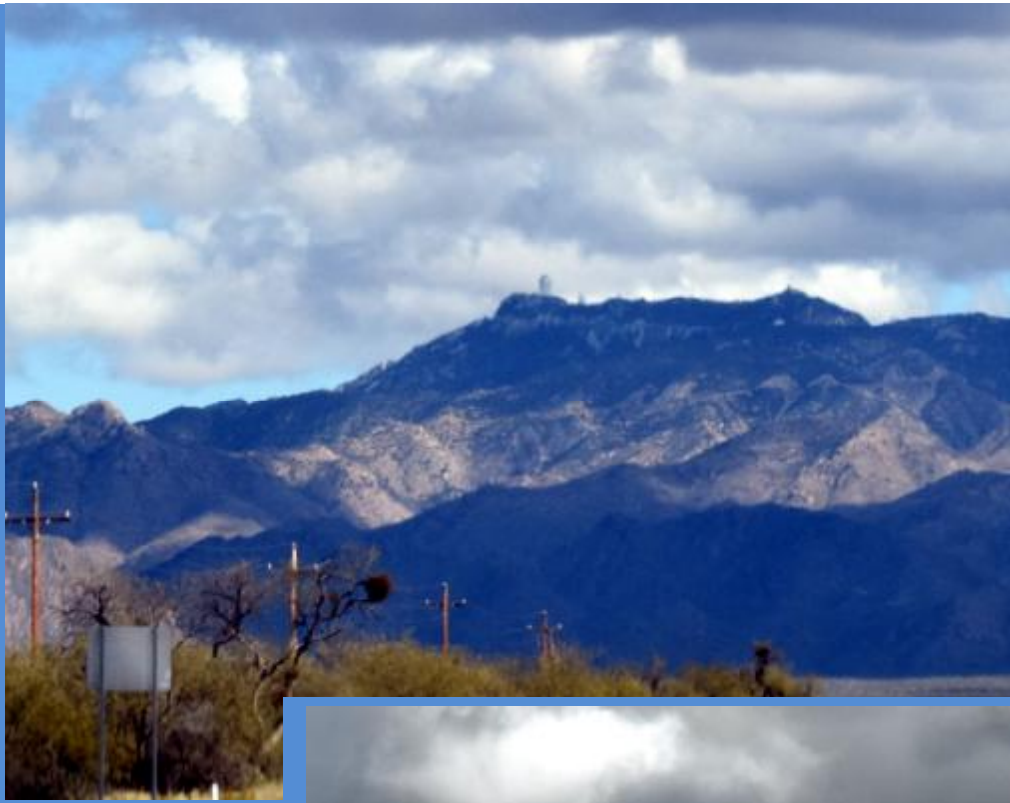
I'm not positive, but I am pretty sure this is a wild coyote. I stopped for gas and lunch at a station in Sells. Filled the tank and was in the RV making a sandwich when I saw this fella over by the gas pumps. He slowly wandered over to the RV and I took this photo through the window in the door. I think I could have opened the door and invited him in. He strayed around the front and I just missed the photo of him looking right at me through the driver's side window. Then he disappeared as I sat down to eat my lunch.



If you look closely you can see one of the observatory domes on the top of the mountain just a little left of center.

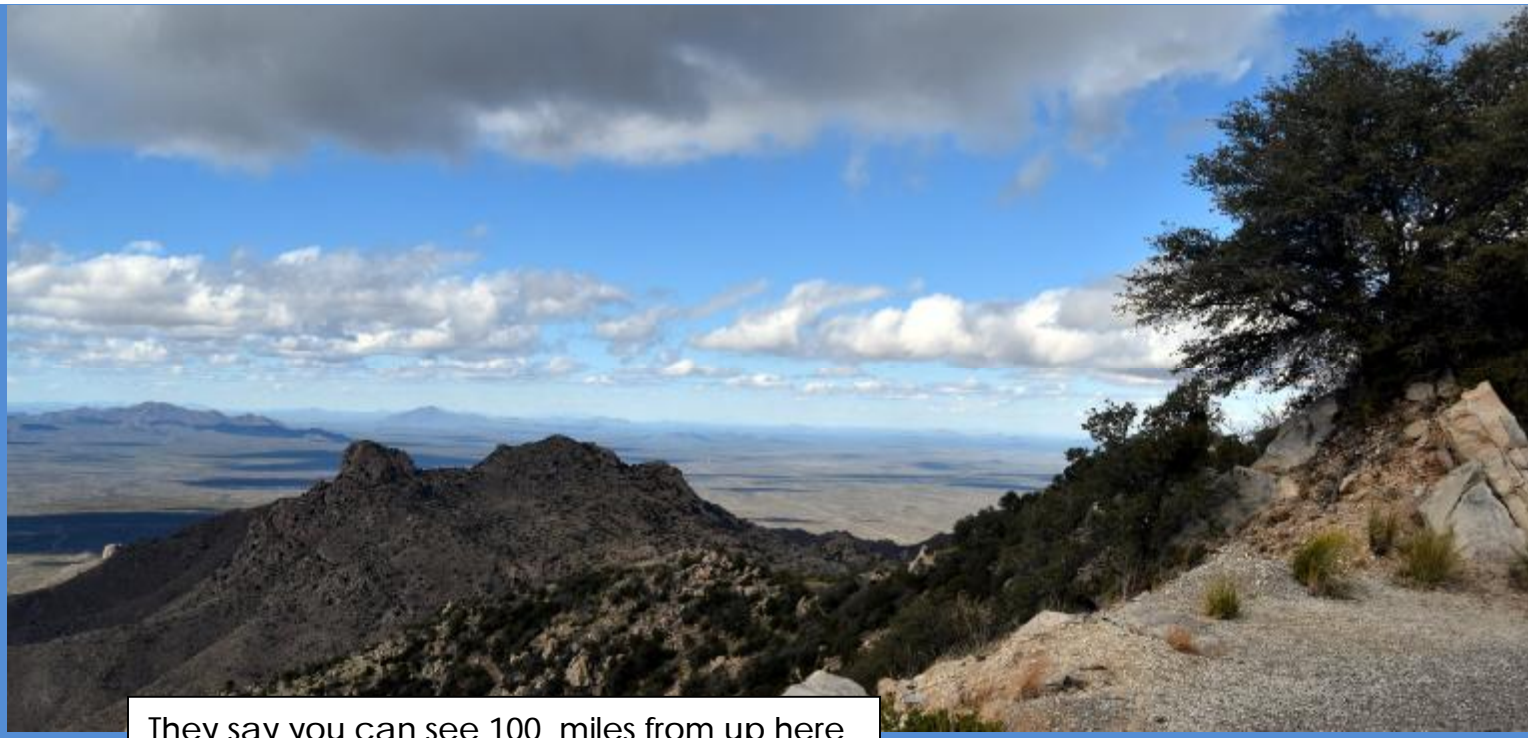
I made a blow-up of the same photo on the next page.





Twelve miles of winding mountain roads in an RV, and my confirmation caller told me it snowed the night before. It's not going up that worries me, it's coming down in the dark on icy roads.

Temperature here in the valley? 50 degrees.



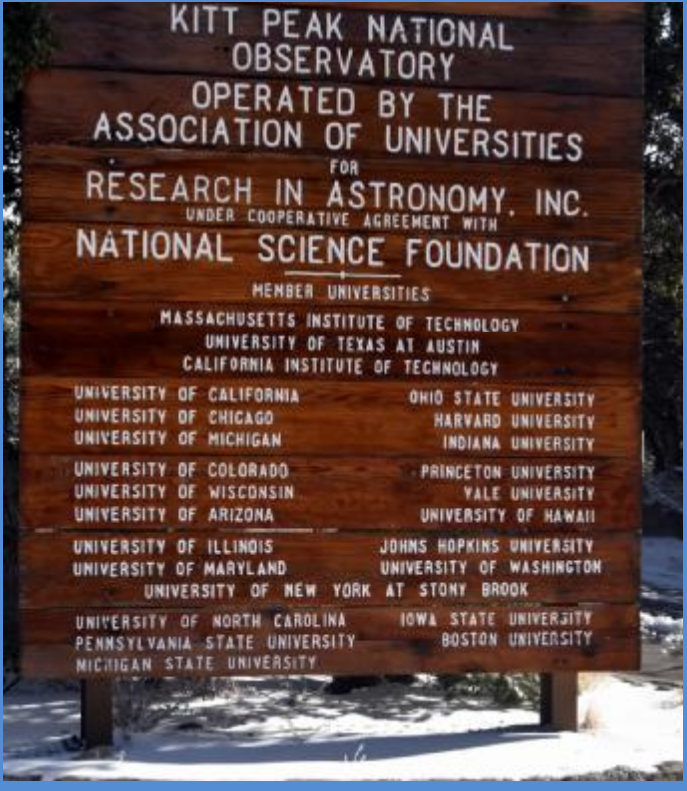
They say you can see 100 miles from up here



It kept feeling like I was going to drive off the mountain around the next turn. Usually you can see other mountains in the distance, but not here, just open sky.



A view of several of the observatories



The temperature at the visitor center, elevation 6875 feet? 33 degrees and very windy.





This is a model of Kitt Peak and all the observatories built up here. I never did get around to asking HOW they built all this stuff up here. Some of the mirrors and dome sections weigh over 15 tons. That must have been an amazing feat in and of itself, especially in 1958.



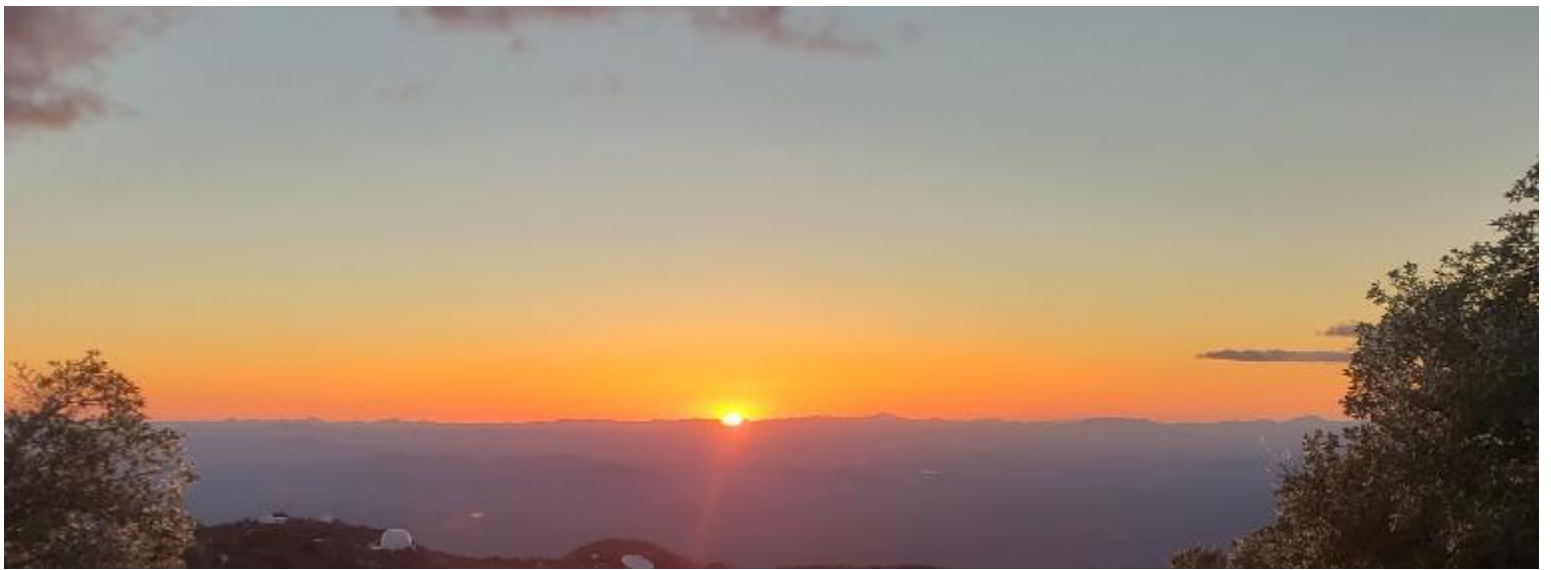
And you thought it was all sunshine and warm temps down here.

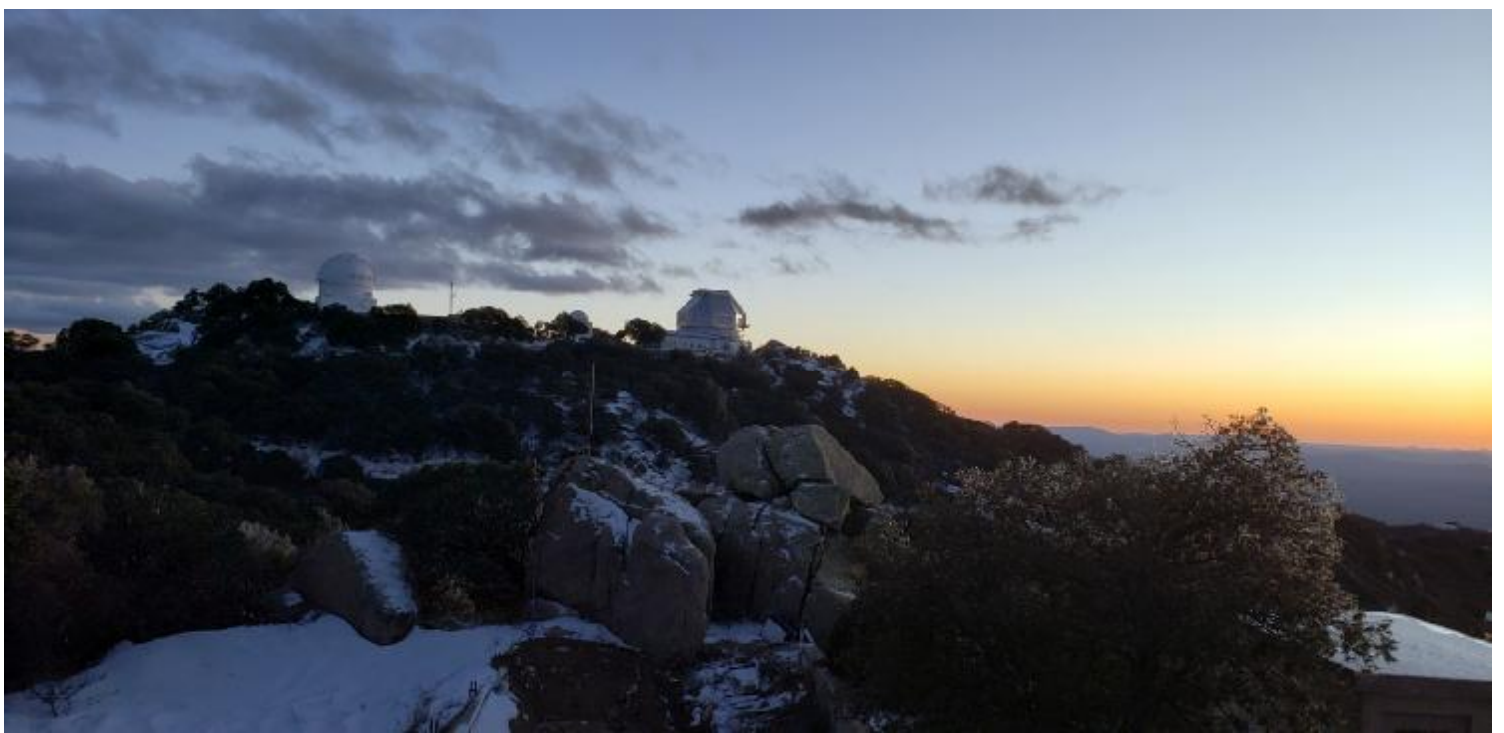
Shirt, hooded sweatshirt, golf wind shirt, winter coat, stocking cap, gloves, insulated socks and hiking boots.

I arrived about 2:30 and decided to have a look through the visitor center. Scheduled arrival for the program is 4:55, dinner at 5:15, sunset viewing at 6:10, then an hour looking through one of the telescopes, and another hour looking at stars with a pair of binoculars.

The VC closes at 3:45, but there were already several of us there for the program. A video started playing at 4:00. I should say videos. These were documentaries produced by the BBC with Sam Neill (Jurassic Park) as the host. I had never seen them before and they were very interesting and well done. Covered the creation of the universe, how the Earth was created, where we came from, black holes, super novas, all sorts of space stuff.

Dinner wasn't bad, turkey, cheese and lettuce on a croissant with chips, a cookie, power bar and water. We were each given a red flashlight to use in lieu of any white light. Our eyes adapt better to red light in the dark than white, and white can disrupt data collected by the telescopes if someone were to shine a light that direction. Also, no cell phones. Since it was very dark I did not get any photos of the evening other than the sunset and buildings below.





After dinner I joined tour guide Lucas and we ascended to the visitor center observatory. Lucas would select a celestial body on the computer, the telescope would robotically move to that viewing position, then Lucas would rotate the dome so that the telescope was pointed through the opening. There were 15 of us in the group and we took turns looking through the eyepiece.

Just because I could not take any photos does not mean there aren't any. The photos below are what Lucas chose for us to see in our 45 minutes with the telescope.

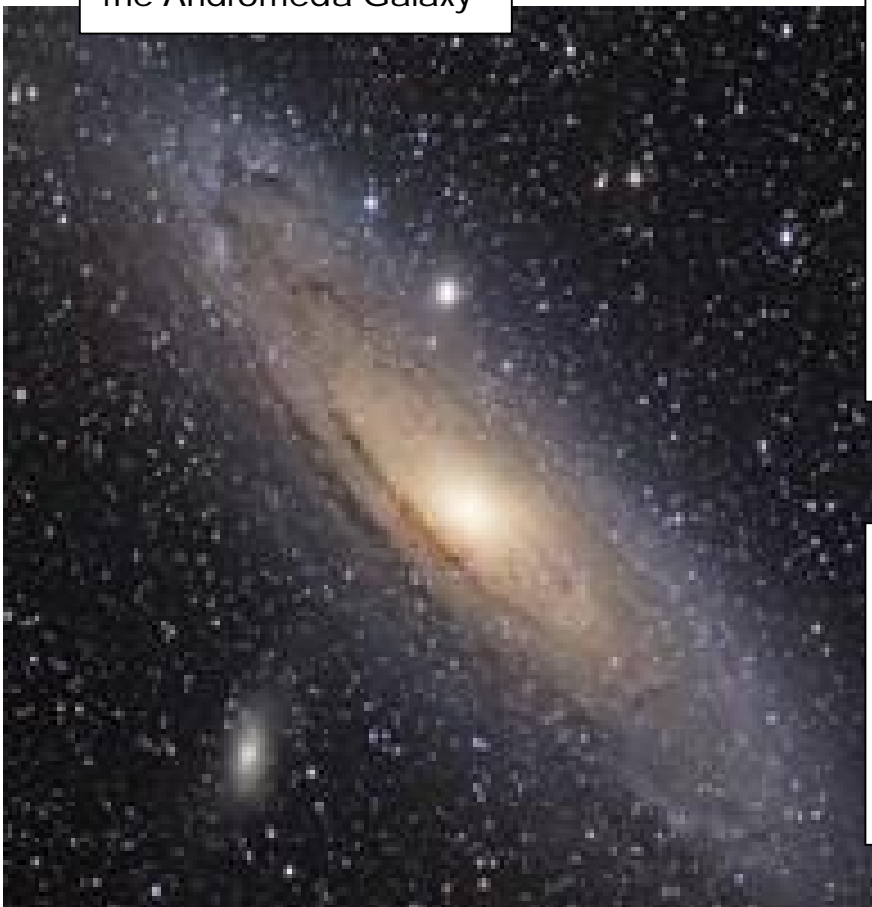


The Orion Nebula

Mars



The Andromeda Galaxy



Keep in mind that what you see here is not what we actually saw. The Orion Nebula was pretty much just the bright center, no colors. Mars was not red, just a small round ball. And the Andromeda Galaxy was just a flat layer of light with a brighter bump in the middle.

When I was told that the sights we see through the telescope would be on a website, I thought it meant what we actually saw. But it was cool, no pun intended, nonetheless.

We then switched places with the other group and used binoculars and a Planisphere to locate stars and constellations in the sky.

Overall, a very unique experience, but very cold. Glad I participated.

When I started the RV the Temperature was 22 degrees. Going down was not that bad. Eyes on the road and I could not really see anything else anyways except the taillights in front of me. Temp back in the valley? 37 degrees. I had to drive another 40 miles east to the Casino Del Sol to find an overnight parking spot. Gotta love those casinos.

I am near Tucson and the weather is supposed to warm into the 60's for the next week. Still only 55 today. 60's are ok for bike riding, 50's are a little on the chilly side. Hopefully I will use the bike to explore Tucson.

There might not be a newsletter tonight. It is already noon and I am not sure if I will actually get around to any sightseeing today. Maybe a little.

Until next time.....