

Sunday

Feb. 7, 2016

To AZ & Sonora Mexico  
by Jan

Leave home at noon. ~~30°~~<sup>37</sup> & partly cloudy.  
Super Bowl Sunday & the road is pretty empty  
(game starts in three hours).

Exit 40 at Kelso to Oregon 30. Couple dozen tundra Swans on the lake just south of Rainier, Oregon. So far 30 is a nice country road, along the Columbia. It's a warm sunny day now!

Arrive at Judy Gregoire's farm in Newberg OR at 4:15. She now lives here alone and her daughter and three grandchildren live in a house across the pasture.

We had a lovely visit & a delicious meal of cassoulet (a thick stew with beans, sausage, pork, & bacon), homemade crusty Italian bread, Grant's coleslaw, and apple pie. There's always so much to talk about & it feels like we barely scratch the surface. About 7:15 we tore ourselves away.

It was very dark on the country road south to I-5, and foggy/misty on the freeway. At 9:30 we stopped for the night at Gettys Creek Rest Area around mile 178.

Monday Feb. 8

With curtains & earplugs we slept like dead things! What a difference from when we stayed here a couple years ago without curtains, and bright lights shone in the window all night.

Up at 6:15, gas at Pilot in Rice Hill \$1.79. Light by 7, light fog, a little chilly.

As we climbed the Siskiyous thick blankets of fog lay in the valleys or clung to the trees like wispy ghosts, and the light was yellow & ethereal. Then we climbed up onto the Shasta plateau and into a bowl of blue sky. The mountain was spectacular.

A warm, sunny day in Redding. We met my cousin Mike Gerlach at Red Robin and got to meet his new girlfriend, Carol. (His wife, Linda, died three years ago.) We both liked her and are glad he found new happiness. Carol normally works (she's a preschool teacher) but as luck would have it she had the day off.

Leave Redding 1:30 pm.

Cluster of sandhill cranes south of Sacramento.

Dinner at the rest area at exit 385. Lentil Eggplant stew from home. We're sore! We've driven way more hours today than we're used to!

After dinner we drove one ~~more~~ more hour

to the rest area around exit 320, arriving about 8:30. I'm just a wee bit crabby, and ready to be done for the day.

Tuesday Feb. 9

Another peaceful night. Owls hooting in the morning. Chilly & clear. Up at 6:15, on the road 6:45 and it's already light. Sun a blazing orange ball rising quickly. Exit 309 Kettleman, heading west on highway 41 through treeless rolling ranchland.

Rest areas are trashed in the early morning, after the denizens of the night have passed through. Clogged toilets, sticky sinks, paper-strewn floors. Gratitude to the cleaners.

Now in oak juniper grassland. Watched a cow eating a plastic bag that blew into the fence line. I imagine a big vet bill coming... The hills are green this time of year. Signs say this is a high winds & dust area. Paso Robles area is wine country.

Walked on Pismo Beach near San Luis Obispo. Lots of surfers. Sand volleyball. Highway 1 south past the Oceano dunes.

It's nice to be back at the ocean.

Back to 101 through lush farmland, then south to Santa Barbara. Lunch at Subway then drove through the very quaint downtown. It's unusually warm here today.

Farther south we got off 101 and drove out to Malibu, forgetting that the view of the ocean is blocked by solid houses. We did get to see the ocean at Santa Monica, and glimpse the famous pier, before getting on the 10 and slogging to Long Beach. No pass required to use the carpool lanes ☺

We got to Dan & Kelle Erwin's at 3:30 and stayed until 8:15. We got to see Taro briefly. He's in his first year of college & living at his dad's. Julia is 11 and not too interested in hanging out with old aunts & uncles, but we did get to hear her play saxophone, and she sounded pretty darn good. We hadn't seen Kelle in a couple years and she had much to tell us. Dinner was omelettes & salad & we left a bit hungry, but we appreciated them feeding us, especially on a busy weeknight.

Arrived at David & Annie VonDerLinn's

about 9:15, visited for a few minutes, and crashed.

Wednesday Feb. 10

Up at 6:40 & it was light already. Finally got to see Ava after more than a year. She's 21 months and super cute. It will take her a while to warm up to us.

Grant & I went for a long walk before it got too hot. Supposed to be 88 today. David's at work & Ava is sleeping so we're having some down time. I made extenders for the car's sun visors using cardboard & duct tape.

Ava's not feeling well. She was fussy & took a long nap. After a yummy dinner of vegetarian tacos, David & Annie went on a date. Ava cried hard when they left. She lay on the kitchen floor sobbing & wouldn't let me near her. I placed her little Kermit figurine next to her. It plays "The Rainbow Connection" song. When it ended she pushed the button again & sang along between sobs. I tried to video tape it but she saw me & stopped. It was one of the cutest things I've ever seen, and

made my eyes well up. This tiny little fireball stretched out flat on the kitchen floor, limp with despair in her green footie pajamas, sobbing out words to the song between gasps of misery. "Why are there," sob, "so many," gasp, "songs about," sob, "rainbows."

At last she quieted down & I sat next to her & read a story. She listened quietly, then turned & shuffled despondently to her room, where she lay on the floor. I read some more books & could see her getting sleepy, even though it was an hour before her usual bedtime. I asked her if she wanted to go in her crib. She said yes & was out like a light.

Thursday Feb. 11

Up at 7. Nice walk before it got too hot. Ava still not feeling well. On the road at 10. Clear day, no smog, the hills in sharp relief. I-5 to 134 to 210 to I-10.

Lunch at a rest area near Palm Springs. Grilled chicken breast on Dave's Killer bread with avocado, lettuce, mayo, mustard. Delicious! (Thanks David & Annie!)

Very pleasant temp in the shade.  
Gas in Quartzite (it's almost a dollar a  
gallon cheaper in AZ than CA).

Arrived at my parents' Scottsdale condo  
at 5:45. Had scallops and olive bread  
for dinner.

Friday Feb. 12

Up at 8 which, in our defense, was  
7 West Coast time. Long walk after  
breakfast. Cousin Michael JDL & wife  
Christine came for lunch. Ron & Clare King  
stopped by.

At 5:30 we went to Mark's for a  
dinner party with everyone except the  
Gallant & Ortega families, and the  
addition of Tom & Sandy Jones & Dot  
& Renee, all old friends of mom & dad's.  
Mark ordered pizza & put it in the oven  
to keep warm - in the boxes. The top  
box caught on fire! Luckily they had  
disconnected the smoke alarm. The  
towel was singed, the pizza (one) was  
a loss. Doors were flung open and fans  
set to whirring. There was still plenty of  
food. It got chilly after dark so Mark  
made a fire in the chiminea. Ava was

feeling much better, dancing on the grass, singing, & delighting everyone with her cuteness.

Saturday, Feb. 13

Birthday party day! After a nice walk on the nearby trail we began setting up for the party. Started at 9:30, the event began at 2, and we got back to the condo at 9:30. Totally exhausted. About 50 people came, including all the family. I used to love big parties, but now I find them overwhelming.

Sunday Feb. 14

Michael & Christine arrived at 8:30 & we<sup>(Grant & I)</sup> carpooled to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Gateway trailhead. Arrived at 9, already pretty crowded. Walked the Bajada interpretive loop then the ~~Saguaro~~ Saguaro, Horseshoe & Desert Park trails. We hiked about two hours. It wasn't too hot & the desert was quite lovely.

Back at mom & dad's we ate party leftovers, napped, & hung out by the pool with Ava. At 4:30 we ~~took~~ ourselves headed north to Harold's Cave Creek Corral, a noisy

sports bar with a western theme. Grant and I split an entree (lasagna) and it was more than enough food. Luckily they had acoustic music instead of their usual full band. The guy & girl duo were very good. But it was still very loud. We went out on the patio, which was quiet, and had heat lamps, and had a nice chat with the Kings. After a while the others came out and joined us. About 9:30 we said sad goodbyes to the East Coasters & headed back to mom & dad's. David & Annie are also staying here.

Monday Feb. 15

Nice long cool walk on the local trails with palm trees & blue sky. Grandma gave Ava a dancing hippo for Valentine's Day & she loved it and danced along. She alternated between happy & fussy. She sang for us, asked grandpa to read to her, and delighted us with her patter. They left about 1 and we drove away not long after. It will be very quiet for mom & dad.

The three-hour drive to Yuma was warm & sleepy, but it's mildly scenic & the traffic is fairly mellow (although it is President's Day).

We arrived at the Andrade border crossing at 5 pm (6 pm AZ time - the crossing is in California). Eggs, potatoes, sausage, cheese, onion for dinner (we call it Sloppy Jack). Nice to be eating our own cooking again. A lovely warm evening with soft air, a concerted breeze, and ... mosquitoes! In the desert!

Grant has set up a wireless hotspot with his phone and I am watching Downton Abbey (season 6, episode 7).

Tuesday Feb. 16

Up at 6 with the orange sunrise. We camp on a knoll next to the road, about a mile north of the border crossing (just past the casino, on tribal land). It's free. There are usually two or three other rigs. There's a pond nearby with birds, and a sweeping view of the desert. It's surprisingly remote - feeling for being so close to a road. The border is open 6 am to 10 pm.

quechar

Around 8 we drove to the tribal parking lot next to the border. For \$6 you can park until 10 pm in a secure lot. We had hoped to use the bathroom but they don't open til 9. Our appointments are at 10. It's amazing how many people come here. They're pouring in like visitors to the fair.

## Organ Pipe N.M.

Ask for tent camp at the far end or stay at Alamo primitive camp - cheaper, but no water.

Ha - turns out that Los Algodones is on Arizona time, not California. The internet said otherwise - yikes. We didn't realize until we left town that we had been late for our appointments. But they never said a thing, and got us right in.

We were both happy to not need any dental work. Grant thought he might need a crown & I thought I'd need a root canal, but no. We each had a cleaning & x-rays. \$30 for a cleaning & \$50 for x-rays.

There was a long exit line at the border but it went pretty quickly & we were out at 12:30. Had sandwiches in a sliver of shade on the south side of the casino parking lot. Gassed up at Fry's in Yuma for \$1.39/gallon (with 20¢ per gallon discount). I-8 east to Organ Pipe Cactus Natl. Monument.

85° at 2 pm in Yuma. Hotter than usual for this time of year.

Arrived in Organ Pipe Cactus Natl. Monument campground at 5 pm. Still campsites left but not a lot. This campground is fan-shaped, with no generators allowed on the top half of the fan. The outermost sites are for tent campers. We are in #170. We could hear

a generator nearby, but they turn off at 6 pm. Like all Ntl. Park campgrounds, spaces are close together. One neighbor is playing music (opera & rock), another is strumming Rising Sun on a ukulele, next door there was a cocktail party. We can hear it all, but it's OK.

It's quite windy. This time we brought a wind screen for the stove and a cover (lid) for the skillet, which helped dinner cook faster. Sloppy Jack again - yum. Half a moon tonight. The mountains turned purple when the sun set.

Wednesday Feb. 17

A gorgeous desert morning. Cool, no wind. Cactus wrens making their insistent castanet calls from the tops of saguaros. Gambel's quail gamboling from shade patch to shade patch, skittering like windup toys.

Hiked the 1.5-mile Desert View Trail near camp, with views out over the desert, and up close of the cactus & shrubs.

Stop at the visitor's center where I talked Grant out of buying another \$40 sun hat, then hit the road at 9:45. 85 N to Why then 86 E across the O'odham reservation.

On the road one must often take advantage of widely-spaced facilities. Pee here now.

The sky is full of fighter jets from the nearby AF base. Border Patrol trucks lurk in patches of shade by the road.

Vultures circling and ~~balance~~ tottering like slow-motion tilt-a-whirl.

Grant got take out at El Gueso Carelo in north Tucson. I made a sandwich & we picnic'd in the parking lot. About 1:15 we arrived at Mt. View retirement home to visit Grant's aunt Barbara. She was waiting for us in the lobby, dressed in pressed slacks, sweater, necklace, & matching earrings, her hair neatly coiffed, wearing lipstick. She uses a walker proudly. She is 96 and pretty confused, but she had plenty of lucid moments. First we sat in the lobby and sweltered by a fireplace, then we went up to her apartment. It's impeccably appointed, down to the elegant place settings at the dining table. We looked at old Erwin photos and she showed me her extensive jewelry collection (mostly costume). She was able to remember a few family stories. We said goodbye at 3:15, wondering if we'll see her again. She is a very spunky & funny person, and a lot of fun. She's very healthy except for her

vision, hearing, and memory.

After getting groceries at Frys we drove just 10 minutes to Catalina St. Pk. This time of year they provide overflow parking in their group campground. It kind of feels like a festival. Lots of old hippies, rigs of every shape and size, people chatting with their neighbors. (We're parked side by side.) Even the smell of hash. The shower building is fabulous, with hot showers that stay on. \$15 for the overflow sites.

Taco salad for dinner. There's a dish washing station with hot water and a light. Deluxe! It gets colder here at night. 55° at 7pm and we're told it was 37 last night! Half a moon. A road runner graced us with a long visit!

Thursday Feb. 18, 2016

Up at 7 - 35°! Hike the 1-mile birding trail. Beautiful! Sun up but still cool. This is a very popular trailhead but there are so many trails that we had ours to ourselves. Wide smooth trail with 2 washes to cross on easy stepping stones. Saw a pair of cardinals! Also gila woodpeckers. A road runner

peeked around the corner in front of us, saw us, and fled. We walked through a beautiful patch of mesquite forest with a thick green carpet of grass underneath. We're at 2600' in the foothills of the Catalina Mountains.

We left the park about 9 and drove to a hardware store to buy some shorter bolts for the platform bed. When Grant was sitting on the end of the bed, his clothing bin would catch on the bolts.

Then we began the 25-mile drive up Mt. Lemmon. It's 9000' high, and as you climb you move through different life zones: Sonoran desert to oak forest to juniper then pine and finally alpine fir. There's a ski area at the top and a summer cabin enclave called Summerhaven, with a few shops & restaurants. At about 8000' feet Grant developed a blindingly intense headache. It went away as soon as we drove down the mountain, so we thought it could be altitude-related, but it returned later in the day.

There are quite a few Forest Service campgrounds on the mountain. The lower ones are open in winter, and the higher ones in summer.

There's a visitor's center near the top. We saw many bicyclists toiling up the steep incline then gleefully soaring down. We stopped for a cool pine forest picnic on the way down. Clouds have begun to roll in.

We stopped at a McDonalds but it had no wifi. The adjacent Safeway did, but it wasn't strong enough to upload pictures to Facebook. With the clouds it was cool enough to sit in the van in the parking lot.

We took I-10 east to 191 & 181 to Chiricahua Mtn. Monument, about 2 hours from Tucson. The scenery is stark & arid, with stony mountains all around. It feels very remote. We hardly saw any cars. We expected the campground to be empty, but we got the last site! We arrived at 4 pm. The campground is at about 5400' in an oak-juniper forest. No fires are allowed.

A few pitter pats of rain and that was it.

Friday, Feb. 19

Up at 6:30. 46°. Cloudy. Went for a nice 50-minute walk on the trail from the campground. Cypress-juniper-oak woodland with yucca & prickly pear. Lots of Mexican jays.

Silvery light. No other people. The scenic road is closed for major repairs. When it's open they provide a free hiking shuttle: drive up, hike back to camp. Left at 8:15. 186 west to I-10. The road was semi-dotted.

they had block ice!

Gassed up in Wilcox ^ then 10 east 5 miles into New Mexico. This is Chihuahuan desert. No saguaro, and lots of yucca with very tall flower stalks. Very Seussian plants - they look like miniature Joshua trees.

80 south to Portal, a tiny town nestled on the east flanks of the Chiricahua mts. It's a very popular birding spot, in the spring & late summer. We stopped at the little store and two javelina (peccary) trotted right past us! Our first wild sighting. We also watched two acorn woodpeckers gorging on the bird feeders. Saw cedar waxwings in the forest.

There are numerous campgrounds just past the town, where the paved road continues into the Ntl. Forest. A short dirt side road, South Fork, took us to a trailhead by a creek, below some stunning orange cliffs dabbed with pale green lichen. We had lunch here. 72°.

We continued south on 80 to the border town of Douglas, then north to Bisbee, where we ogled the blood red pool at the bottom

of an old open pit copper mine. Then we parked in the busy old town and walked around a bit. It's a quaint old mining town with lovely old buildings, hotels, turquoise shops, and lots of tourists, but it's pleasant & felt a little bit like Mexico.

Farther west via ~~90~~<sup>82</sup> we stopped in ~~Sonoita~~<sup>Sierra Vista</sup> for wifi. The screaming children & slow internet speed left us both a bit crabby. Grant used FreeCampsites.net to find us a nice place to stay near Sonoita, along Gardner Canyon Road. The dirt road is surprisingly busy, though it is Friday night. Gorgeous sunset around 6:30. Hobo stew for dinner.

Saturday, Feb. 20

The big day: Washington Trails Association (WTA) BCRT summer work party signups. Had to be near wifi at 10 am Pacific time. On the road to Nogales at 6:45. 35°. Sky streaked with pink. The rolling hills east of Nogales are pretty. Ranching country. A sign says 'wine country' but we didn't see any vineyards.

Our first order of business in Nogales was to find good wifi. The library didn't open til 9

\* The librarian was the first gringo we'd seen, and very unusual, with thin, <sup>wispy</sup>~~wispy~~ hair, and considerably less intelligence than one would expect from a librarian. 19

So we checked out a McDonald's, but their wifi was flaky. We returned to the library at 9 to find their wifi was broken. We could have used their computers but decided to test the T-Mobile hotspot on Grant's phone.\* It worked great, so we decided to go for a walk. Nogales felt a little ghetto so we weren't comfortable leaving our car in the town, or walking on the unattractive streets. With his uncanny street sense, Grant headed for the residential area on the hill above town. Nicer houses seem to be on hills. We found a shady spot to park and walked for 40 minutes. The houses were once very nice Arizona style mid-century modern, now past their prime, but still clearly where the wealthier Nogaleses live. We hadn't seen a single gringo since we entered Nogales. (except the librarian).

On the walk we noticed the border fence. It bisects the town of Nogales like the blade of a curving knife, or a knife-edged Great Wall of China, following the contours of the hills. Nogales Mexico is plainly visible - you could practically talk to people on the other side. There are bright pink houses and you can hear church bells. We saw a yard sign that said 'Revitalize, not militarize, border towns.'

We found a shady spot in front of a grocery store so I could get set up and ready to sign up at 11 sharp (the WTA trips fill up fast). I was very happy to get onto all three trips I wanted!

That taken care of we were free to lazily finish our day-before-Mexico chores. A couple grocery items, gas, a picnic lunch. Showers at the truck stop were \$12 so we decided to do sponge baths at camp.

About 1:00 we drove a short ways northwest of town to Peña Blanca lake. There was space at the campsite but there was loud music so we decided to hang out at one of the picnic areas by the lake. It's 80° in the shade, but a nice breeze is blowing. We saw black phoebes, ruddy ducks, pied-billed grebe, Audubon's warbler, and a probable cinnamon teal. There's a nice short trail along the lake-shady.

Lots of Latino families picnicing here and they're speaking English with heavy accents. Wonder why they're not speaking Spanish?

We found a free spot in a former FSCG just past the official campground. Didn't even need to heat water for sponge baths. Lots of

pistol shots going off. Target practice on the hill. Hope they are careful!

If you have to have neighbors playing music, country is better because there is no thumping bass beat...

Leftover hobo stew. Made sandwiches for tomorrow so we can clear out the cooler for the border crossing. A herd of black cows watched us until the sun began to set and they moved single file up the hill toward home, mooing loudly. The sky turned crimson.

Today I juggled a bunch of houseguests back home. Tad is staying in his room Mondays to Thursdays. Mary Preus has been staying in the other room on the weekends, having a writing retreat. Muthu and Madhu are coming back March 1, before we return, so I texted and emailed Mary to ask her to clean the room for them. I had to make sure Mary were OK overlapping with Tad, and let Tad + Patience know. It feels like long distance hand waving! I love being able to share our house with people who need it, plus make a little money too.

So excited to go to Mexico tomorrow! Nearly full moon lit the sky all night.

Sunday Feb. 21

Up at 4:15. Stop at Pilot to brush teeth & fill water jugs. Get to the border at 5:30 and park in front of gate. At 6 am the gates opened and they waved us through. Luckily we had some internet notes about what to expect or we would have been a bit confused. After driving a few miles down a walled road we came to a toll booth where we paid 52 pesos to an attendant. A short way further we saw the sign for visas but it was poorly marked and we sailed right past it. We pulled into the Oxxo parking lot and couldn't find a way to drive back. So we walked over and were the only ones there. We woke the workers. I was glad to have gotten our car permit & insurance ahead, as it would have taken a while. Getting our visas & changing money took a few minutes & we were on the road by 7. It was light by then. A man hopefully asked if he could clean our windows ...

We drove on a nice road through saguaro cactus countryside. Lots of gas stations (all Pemex) and Oxxo convenience stores. We stopped at one to stretch and it had a clean bathroom with toilet paper. We began to see organ pipe cactus. The small towns we went through had huge speed bumps. You have

to really pay attention to see them! The drive was kind of exhausting because you had to focus so intently on signs, speeds, obstructions, and traffic. There was a lot of construction with narrow one-lane roads and people driving too fast & passing. Ciudad Obregón was crazy, with dirt streets, no lane markings, and enormous potholes that would destroy your car. It was also quite hot, even with the ac on. By the time we got to ~~out~~ our turnoff around 3 pm we were exhausted.

It's 14 miles on a dirt road to the field station. Washboard & deep ruts. We picked up a local woman and gave her a ride about 4 miles to a tiny town. We drove through a mix of crop fields & cactus forest, and finally saw the estuary. We couldn't tell which driveway was the field station and first drove down one that turned out to be a friendly local family who pointed us to the next driveway. We went down that driveway which turned out to belong to two gringas, who pointed us to the next driveway. Meanwhile we found the station buildings & my old professor, Steve Herman, now 80 years old and going strong. His daughter Sallie & her husband Adam run the station each winter. Sallie gave us a tour of the compound and showed us our campsite, right

on the shore of the estuary. It's gorgeous here! In a 10-minute walk before dinner we saw frigate birds, roseate spoonbills, a black-crowned night heron, white ibises, and a few dozen other shorebirds, herons, pelicans, terns, & gulls. Wow! The moon is full to boot.

Dinner was spaghetti & salad & homemade donuts. We got to meet the ~~the~~ rest of the current inhabitants. Four young interns from EVERgreen, a couple with their young son & his friend, a 7th-grade birding prodigy. Several former students of Steve's. Actually Steve is the glue that ties all these people together.

The conversation & stories were fascinating. Steve told us about hunting with his peregrine falcon!

Grant loves it here, and I'm so pleased. About 8:30 we all straggled off to bed exhausted. We can hear bird calls from the estuary. There may be a few mosquitoes but they haven't bothered me.

Today we also saw caracara & another roadrunner!

Monday Feb. 22

Slept fantastic with the salt air, cool breeze, and bird noises. Heavy condensation on the windows filtered the bright full moon shining in. You can hear the waves of the Sea of Cortez pounding in the distance, behind the offshore island. Early this morning I heard coyotes yipping.

I woke up early. Mist was rising off the inlet and the sky was glowing. Wandered down to the shore and looked at birds, including yellow-crowned night herons and Royal terns.

Coffee in the courtyard. Breakfast at 8:30 - eggs, beans, chips, salsa. Then we walked around the inlet to an abandoned house on the beach. Two people are camping on the beach. It's beautiful but there is lots of litter.

Adorable three-year-old girl named Ximena is here with her mom & grandma, who are the cooks. They are Mayo Indians.

We tried canoeing in the estuary, which was beautiful, but it was too uncomfortable for Grant, alas. By 10 it was hot and we ducked into the palapa for shade.

Lunch at 1:00 — beans, potatoes with chorizo, tortillas, leftover spaghetti, cabbage-carrot-raisin salad.

Two boa constrictors sleeping in the rafters. They don't bite and are safe to handle. Most of the gang went to the "uva"; a nearby pond, to look for ducks, but it's a bit hot for us. Banana bread is baking in the solar oven. This compound has many clever systems for living off the grid. A solar electric system, a propane shower, pit toilets with rain-proof toilet paper holders. They ring a dinner bell at meal times. Two people practiced fiddle together all afternoon.

Grant swam & I waded — there was a stiff breeze and the water was a bit chilly. We took nice cool showers, then sat on our chairs in the shade of the Van & read. Around 4 we went for a walk and chatted with the couple on the beach. They told us a good place to camp in Alamos. The neighbors were having a raucous gathering on their porch and there was much hilarity from folks in our group as well — guitar strumming and cocktails. Steve has a big full laugh that's quite infectious.

Dinner was barbacoa, a pork stew with

potatoes, tomatoes, chiles, and olives. Delicious, though a wee bit spicy for me. Banana bread for dessert. We weren't feeling terribly social and headed back to the van for some quiet time.

Tuesday Feb. 23, 2016

Nice walk just as the sun was rising. Ran into the camping guy, Mike Foster, who had given us tips about Alamo. He's making a video for a conservation organization that hopes to purchase land on the estuary (Nature + Culture International). He has been traveling in Sonora for many years. He told us about the deer dancers. During Lent (now) the deer dancers do penance by not showing their face or speaking for 40 days. They wear animal masks and ask for money to eat. He said to give them a peso. It's OK to take photos of the Mayo Indians (wearing white shirts) but not the Yaqui Indians (no shirts). He said the Yaqui are fierce and get really mad if you take a picture. We saw a booby! Probably a brown, but it was hard to tell. It was soaring out over the water and we saw it dive.

The breakfast today was yogurt, granola, mango, and banana bread - yum!

There isn't enough gas for us to go out in a motorboat. So we set up our canopy next to the van so we can have shade and the lovely breeze. We're reading The People's Guide to Mexico and learning a lot of tips about driving and camping in Mexico.

Yesterday I watched a shorebird eating a crab it caught. It dropped the crab on the sand, ate a leg, the crab tried to escape. The bird pulled it back & ate another leg, and repeat. When only the body was left it chomped on it for a while and then gulped the whole thing down.

In the afternoon I wandered over to the shore and watched the two boys playing "war" with the kayaks. What fun they were having and what an incredible experience this is for them.

Tino, the handyman, spent the afternoon repairing the nets the students use for capturing and banding birds.

Later I met Lalo, Tino & Lupita's brother, a charming and handsome man whose Spanish is easy to understand.

He fishes and does construction. He told me about illegally entering the US 13 years ago, walking for 3 days across the desert. His feet bled, his lips cracked, he was a mess when ~~he~~ he arrived, even though he brought enough water & food. He worked for three months in Colorado and came back with enough money to build a house.

Years later he tried to go back but a coyote kept him locked in a house for several days and he escaped and came back here.

It really is a small world. Lanny, JT, & Nicky have property on Anderson Island and are friends with Grant's sister Vicky and her husband Paul. <sup>+ his wife</sup>

Today is Steve's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Lupita made fabulous fish tacos with mullet Lalo caught. She said she ~~normally~~ normally makes them with blue corn tortillas but she couldn't find blue corn. Whole pintos, fish, mayo, salsa, cabbage. Carrot cake for dessert!

After dinner we sat around a blazing fire & people took turns playing guitar & singing songs.

Nasopatia means "plugged with prickly pear." The fishermen used to make a prickly pear gate to trap the fish when the tide was going out.

This place is a paradise. We aren't very good at the beach scene, but it is just gorgeous here. And the bird life is amazing. You have to keep pinching yourself to believe you are surrounded by masses of exotic species. A cardinal visited me at the W.C.

Today I read books to Ximena and gave her horseback rides. She's so cute, but her Spanish is a bit hard to understand.

Wednesday Feb. 24, 2016

This morning, we really began connecting with a lot of the people at the station, which made it harder to leave. The people are:

Nicky, JT, their 11-year-old son, Finn, and his 13-year-old friend, Hatcher.

Eric + Lanny, friends who drove down with Steve.

Joelle, Eva, Jen, + Ricky, interns from Evergreen. Eva's boyfriend, Dan.

Sallie, Steve's daughter, and her husband Adam, who run the station.

After breakfast off potatoes, eggs, beans, + chips, we said sad goodbyes

and drove away. The 14-mile dirt road back to the highway seemed shorter & less rough than on the way in.

More notes from the field station:

Saw a broad-billed hummingbird sipping nectar from a bright yellow agave flower. We have sand everywhere, and everything feels slightly damp from the moist air. That's life at the beach! Watched several dolphins fishing just off shore this morning.

We were on the road at 9:15, and back to highway 15 by 10. Gassed up at ~~Pemex~~ Pemex. They pump your gas & clean your windshield. The bathroom was clean. Gas is over \$3 a gallon here. Our fillup was \$86.

15 north was pretty empty and the road was mostly newly paved. However, there are no shoulders, so you really have to pay attention. In ~~Navojoa~~ Alamos we headed ~~west~~ east toward Alamos. We saw a deer dancer in town but didn't stop, hoping we'd see one in Alamos. The road from Navojoa to Alamos is about 50 km. It's a really nice, empty road.

We found our way fairly easily to Rancho Acosta campground after asking a few people for directions. It's unmarked. It's an oasis with shady camp spots, tall palms, a swimming pool, tables and chairs, a cooling fountain, and what appear to be motel rooms. Just a few skeeters. Clean bathrooms with showers.

The only other camper is Sam, from Bisbee. He said the proprietor would find us to collect our money, and that it is very laid back here.

It's 90°. We walked to town to find lunch. We stopped at a small grocery to see what they had and I bought Horchata to try. It's sweetened rice milk, basically, and quite tasty. We waylaid a gringo going into his house and asked him for restaurant suggestions. We ended up at Doña Lola's (Koki's). It was quiet & cool. I had a delicious ham & cheese torta for 30 pesos (under \$2) and it was huge. Grant had one of the house specialties "Deditos de pollo," chicken strips sauteed with onion & poblano and served with rice, beans, and tortillas. 80 pesos (\$5). He said it was delicious.

It was hot & the town was siesta-ing so we went back to the campground. Wifi on the breezy porch.

Walked into town about 6. Dinner at Los Tesoros, recommended by Mike Foster, the guy we met on the beach. The guy we met in town today, who gave us the lunch recommendation, was there with his wife. They've had a house here for 25 years, and drove their VW Van around Mexico for many years before that. They recommended the Caesar salad, which was delicious, if a bit pricey (75 pesos, almost \$5). Mike had recommended it for the atmosphere, he said, not so much the food. It's in the courtyard of an old hotel. Alamos was a silver mining town built by Spaniards from Andalucia in the late 1600s, so it has a lot of history.

After dinner we ran into Mike & Sam, and realized that this is a very small town. They recommended the church (it was closed) and the hotel Dos Santos grounds (couldn't find it). We got ice cream by the Parque Alameda, a sleepy strip of benches on the road median, and watched the boys cruise in their cars. There were very few people or vendors out. We were back at our camp by 8 for sponge baths. We're not sure what attracts people here. It's certainly a very traditional Mexican town.

Thursday Feb. 25, 2016

On the road at 6:30. We still hadn't paid so we stopped on the way out to talk to the guardian/gardener guy. Just then one of the women workers arrived. She said it was 10 dollars. She didn't know how much in pesos, so I guess they get mostly foreigners here. Dogs barked all night & roosters took over in the morning. Overcast & cool.

Northbound through Ciudad Obregón was in much better shape than southbound. Traffic was surprisingly light.

We could tell right away that San Carlos isn't our kind of town. The coast is beautiful & craggy. There are sandy beaches and turquoise water. But the town is all about rental houses. There are strip malls along the road and rental houses between that & the shore. There are gated communities with not a soul in sight. We drove up to the mirador, or viewpoint. Vendors sold schlock and a tour bus disgorged gringos. The view was nice.

We drove farther west, looking for the beach scene. We found a cluster of restaurants on the beach, two of which had

been recommended by the couple we met in Alamos.

We parked and tried walking on the beach, but it was soft sand and tough going. At noon we chose the Soggy Peso for lunch, because they were playing the quietest music. We sat in the open air space, under cover. A few people had staked out lounge chairs on the beach beyond, where they could order drinks. The wind was strong & I grabbed my sweatshirt. We were hoping for fish tacos but they didn't have any fish. The waiter spoke English. We ordered paninis, which were cold. 70 pesos each, about \$4.50. We had planned to spend the night here but couldn't imagine how we would fill the time. So we decided to head for the border.

We cranked the tunes to stay awake. Parts of the road were riddled with large potholes. Parts had no shoulder and a sheer drop, sometimes 6 or 8 feet. We passed acres of grape vines. There was a checkpoint way south of the border, but we have no idea what they were ~~ok~~ checking for.

It took us five hours to reach the border. We had to stop to return ("cancel") our vehicle permit, but there was no Mexican exit check. The line at the American border didn't take too long. It was 6 pm when we got through. We hit Safeway for a roast chicken and a caesar salad mix, gassed up at Pilot, and drove out to Peña Blanca Lake, where we had stayed before crossing into Mexico. We arrived at 7 and had our quick, easy, yummy meal. We were hungry, and now we're tired! A coyote yipped right next to the van in the night.

Friday Feb. 26, 2016

Leave camp at 6:30. Chilly! (44° in town.) Stop at the good old Pilot Travel Center to use the bathroom & get hot water for our coffee. North on 19 to Tucson. The mileage signs are all in Kilometers all the way to Tucson. Groceries in Tucson then a 50-minute hike on the Kings Canyon Trail in Saguaro Ntl. Park. A nice cool wind was blowing. We hiked up the main trail, which was a bit rocky, and back in the wash, which was sandy and had big rock shelves you had to step down. Lots of perennials in bloom.

Drove 86 west and 85 north to avoid

I-10. Takes 45 minutes longer. Stopped at the McDonalds in Gila Bend for very slow wifi. Gassed up in Yuma, where it was 87°. Took 115 north to 111 and up the east side of the Salton Sea to the campground we like in the State Recreation Area near the north end of the lake. A roadrunner crossed the road. Arrived at camp about 5:40.

As we drove through the agricultural fields of onions & greens north of I-8, tiny bugs were pelting the windshield in such numbers it sounded like raindrops.

Spaghetti with onion, mushroom, grated carrot, and no meat. Dark by about 6. (We're back in Pacific time.) After dishes & sponge baths we sat by our first fire of this trip. It's peaceful and dark here, except for some road noise, trains, and music from the next camp, which is thankfully pretty mellow. There are more people here than usual, but the campsites are far apart. It's a delightful temperature now, with a gentle breeze.

When we arrived here the table was heaped with garbage someone had left behind, including a lot of usable stuff, overflowing a milk crate, and weighted

with rocks. Strange...

Across the ~~bay~~<sup>water</sup> a long string of city lights  
is reflected in the still lake.

Saturday Feb. 27

Up at 6 to a pink sky. For some reason there is no strong salty smell here like there usually is. Lots of birds, including shovellers and white pelicans. Chilly but pleasant. The lake level seems a bit lower than last time we were here.

On the road at 6:45, arriving at Anza Borrego State Park about 8:30. The visitor center doesn't open til 9 so we did internet stuff until then. Then we picked a hike, but when we drove there we found an \$8 day use fee. So we went back to the VC and free parking and walked from there. By then it was 9:30 and getting hot. We walked for an hour. It was nice but not as beautiful as I remembered it.

We took hiway 22 into the park from the east side. The town of Borrego Springs seemed very pleasant and attractive.

We took hiway 22 west and it was beautiful, climbing over an almost-5000' pass through lovely boulder-strewn hillsides. The sky solid blue. I love the silhouette of the granite blocks against the blue sky.

We got on hiway 1900 north, which took us through cool, high desert and over another summit. Pine trees! Montezuma Valley was beautiful. Green fields, rolling hills. This scenic windy road is popular with motorcycles and sports cars.

In the tiny town of Warner Springs we had lunch in a shady roadside park. It was cool enough for sweatshirts.

371 to Anza, 74 to Hemet, 79 to Beaumont, 10 to Redlands. Arrived about 2:30. I watched Downton Abbey at the library while Grant got the layers of dust washed off the car.

At 4 we drove to Grant's cousin Gretchen's house at 125 S. Michigan. Redlands is a really nice town, with palm trees, craftsman style houses, and wide streets. It has that idyllic California vibe. Not crowded or busy. Gretchen is renting and adorable 1920s bungalow.

She is ~~at~~ housesitting so we went over there and made a wonderful meal of grilled chicken, quinoa salad, and sauteed vegetables, and olive bread. She has kindly offered us her bungalow. We'll sleep in the van but will use her shower in the morning. She loaded us up with local oranges & lemons.

Sunday Feb. 28, 2016

Slept great in the alley next to her house. Up early for a shower and then a nice walk around the neighborhood. Lots of wonderful old houses. Gretchen said wealthy people built summer homes here in 20s? There is a delightfully eclectic mix of styles, as if each owner hired a different architect. A cool morning, perfect for walking.

On the road at 8. 1-10 to 215. It's Sunday but we still want to avoid L.A. The bypass/alternate route takes about 20 minutes longer but is much more scenic & serene. Joshua Trees blooming on 138. Cloudy in the San Joaquin Valley. Orchards in bloom - acres of pink & white blossoms help relieve the monotony of 1-5.

Button willow rest area for lunch. Colusa rest area for dinner. Red Bluff rest area around 7:30.

Just before arriving we had a scary incident with a crazy trucker. It was dark. We were in the left lane going the speed limit and passing a truck in the right lane. Suddenly he put on his signal and started to move into our lane. We're certain he saw us. We tried to pass quickly and he turned on a blinding light pointed back at us! It was really freaky. Then he started to move left again. It was a bit terrifying. We were both shaking when we got past him. We have no idea why he would have done that. If we weren't scared of him we would have gone back to get his info and report him.

Monday Feb. 29, 2016 Leap day

On the road at 5:45. Slept great thanks to curtains & ear plugs. Stopped at TA travel center for hot water and they were playing Christian music. Ribbons of color across the sky. Light at 6:30.

Stop at exit 718 Sims Flat CG for a walk along the river. COLD! Ice on the bridge. There's a nice F.S. road for future walks. Mt. Shasta brilliant against a blue sky, like a soft serve ice cream cone.

97 from Weed to Klamath Falls is gorgeous. High plains dotted with cinder cones, faceted snow capped peaks in the distance.

The Grass Lake rest area would be a great place to spend the night. It's a vast shallow lake with grasses growing in it. Lots of ducks & swans.

Patches of snow beside the road. Frost in the shade like an old man's 5:00 shadow. Butte Valley is beautiful - high flat plains. Ranching, hay, flooded fields full of ducks, Wildlife Refuges. Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway. Groceries in Klamath, a thriving mill town. Snow piles along the road, but today the road is bare, dry, above freezing,

sunshine. A woman with two young kids was begging at the Klamath rest area on I-5. Nearby was an old man chain smoking, clearly part of her entourage. Some guys showed up and chatted with the woman and man. Grant thinks it was a drug deal. It was so sad seeing those kids living that way. It was cold & drizzling.

We took 58 to Eugene. The route through Klamath Falls only takes about 20 minutes longer than I-5. Worth it for the scenery and lack of sevis. It's also less mountainous. But it's not always passable in winter.

Light rain & clouds began in Eugene. Forsythia and daffodils blooming.

Potatoes, eggs, & "European-style" bacon for dinner at Tontle rest area. Dark at 6:15. Arrive at Alice's in Ruston at 7:45. Rained all night.

Tuesday March 1, 2016

On the road at 7:15. Rain stopped. Heavy traffic of course. Grant thinks I'm crazy for not just driving home last night, but I like to get home early in the day so I can unpack. Home about 9 am.