

South-Western USA - April/May 1982

(Arizona, Utah, Nevada and California)

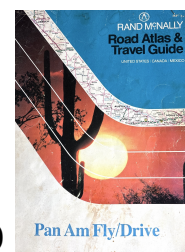
This is an account of our driving holiday in the South-West of the U.S.A. It included the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Zion and Death Valley. We continued on to Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles before returning to our starting point at Phoenix Arizona.

I have written it almost 45 years later, in 2026 – relying on memory and a small collection of photographs.

It could be regarded as a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ experience. This is not entirely ‘positive’. Our normal preference for holiday travel is for gentler and far more attractively scenic places than the aridity of Arizona with vast distances to drive across apparently never-ending deserts. And roadside motels are not our preferred choice for interesting places to stop!

But, yes, of course it was a memorable trip. And in retrospect we were lucky to have done it in 1982, somewhat ahead of today’s mass tourism! And visiting a friendly America, pre-Trump.

Our preparation was a Pan-American Fly-Drive booking – providing the flights between London and Phoenix – and the car-hire arrangements. It also included a ‘free’ Rand-McNally Road Atlas. The rest was up to us. We were on our own to an extent that now seems amazing – no phone, no GPS, no internet, no advance bookings no apps. We were out-of-touch for the entire period. (No doubt we could have located a phone if we had to, but we never did. How on earth did we manage?)



So read on.

The outward and return journeys from London were almost certainly easier than they would be today. We flew to /from Houston in Pan-Am Tristars still regarded as more quiet, spacious and comfortable than other aircraft of that time – or the present day. The flight time was much the same as today but those were times when ‘security’ was not an issue and airport and immigration procedures were much quicker and less bothersome. From Houston we continued by air to Phoenix picked up our car and checked in at a motel nearby.

The next morning we briefly stopped at the Phoenix Desert Botanical Garden before setting off for Flagstaff.

Rather than driving directly north, we headed east into the mountains, passed Apache Lake and then across to Flagstaff.



Entering Flagstaff we stopped at this point for the view of Humphrey's Peak just north of the city. I can see that this area is now utterly changed, This was the old State road, but very soon after this photo the multi-lane Interstate was opened close by, with sprawling commercial development on either side.



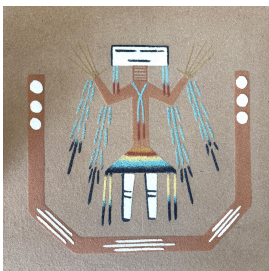
Continuing towards Grand Canyon we detoured twice, first to the rim of Sunset Crater and then to the Wupatki National Monument .

This photo is of a large 'commune' built by the Pueblo Indians in about the 13th century.



Next stop the Grand Canyon!

Back in 1982 the visitor numbers were far fewer and today's sprawling 'Grand Canyon Village' was not there – just a few Indian traders with sand-paintings for sale.



Entry to the Grand Canyon National Park was something like \$3 per car. Times have changed! Of course the charges are higher like everything else. \$35 per car is not surprising – **but A Trump Presidential Decree has targetted foreign nationals!** Non U.S. residents must also pay a supplemental fee of £100 per person. And pay again at the next major National Park such as Bryce Canyon !!!!!



Now we were heading north towards Utah. To cross the Grand Canyon and Colorado river we had to go north-east to Marble Canyon – a 70 mile drive. Part way there we took a side road into the Navajo Reservation towards Tuba City and beyond that the Hopi Reservation. One could not help noticing the discarded liquor bottles on the verges – discarded no doubt by Navajos in their pick-up trucks heading home. The reservation was ‘dry’ but procuring liquor just outside the reservation was easy for the Indians.

Just before Tuba City we stopped at an abandoned hogan. We then turned round and rejoined the main road. We were still within the reservation and somewhere before Marble Canyon we encountered an Indian-run motel. It was simple and clean with a bit of character so we spent the night there.

The Marble Canyon bridge took us over the Colorado River and then to ‘House Rock’ an appropriately named abandoned dwelling.



At Jacob Lake there is an access road leading to the ‘North Rim’ of the Grand Canyon. I think we took it – but we have no record or recollections.

We were now heading for the dramatic scenery of Bryce Canyon – in Utah. In the 1870s Ebenezer Bryce moved livestock into the area and said “It’s a helluva place to lose a cow!”

The road climbs as you go further into Bryce Canyon, and eventually we found ourselves between banks of snow.



Leaving Bryce, we drove some 70 miles to the Zion National Park.



Zion is surely scenic grandeur at its most impressive! The only reason why we didn't stay longer and drive further is that the car was low on gas! Urgent!

That sorted we drove on 150 miles to Las Vegas. Not our scene, but two reasons for going there. Firstly of course it was hard to avoid! In 1982 there were no east-west highways avoiding the centre – not on our map anyway. But more important, we had a tyre which worried me. The tyre place rang our hire company – no problem, soon fixed. I don't remember what else we saw in Vegas – and we took no photos.

So onward to Death Valley. We crossed over, through Furnace Creek and Stovepipe Wells. The temperature was around 100 degrees F. Once we were amazed to pass a runner! It must have been a feat of endurance!



We climbed out of the valley to reach Lone Pine. From there, snow was visible on the Sierra ahead. But I don't think we expected it to be a problem. After all it was May – and only just behind us was the heat of Death Valley.



So we stopped at a motel in Lone Pine expecting to cross the Sierra to Yosemite the next day.

We needed to drive north along the east side of the Sierra to turn towards the Yosemite eastern entrance. Closed by snow! But surely one of the next two passes would be open in May. No luck. (In fact we would have needed to wait until May 28th.)

So we gave up on Yosemite and continued north towards Lake Tahoe and Reno – where we knew that roads to Sacramento would be open.

In fact we did not have to go that far. We turned towards Markleeville, an old silver mining town founded by Jacob Marklee in 1861. (He died after a gun fight not long after. We stopped at a one-man motel/gas station. In the morning the owner dashed back and forth between serving gas the old way and cooking our American breakfast.



A road down a gold-rush valley took us to Jackson and then to Sacramento.



In Sacramento the California State Capitol is close to the Old Sacramento Historic District. One of many features is the California State Railroad Museum on the site of the former Pacific Railroad Terminal. It has an amazing collection, focussed on the early trans-continental railroads of the USA – and Canada. I remember that while there I had a ‘deja vu’ experience which was not an illusion! On entering a railroad carriage on exhibition I suddenly found myself travelling to Winnipeg in 1953. It was a Canadian National Railroad sleeping car/ day car precisely as I remembered it from 30 years before!



Our next destination was San Francisco. We explored the City Centre on foot as the cable-cars rattled by, and we viewed the bridge from the waterfront.



After that we drove north over the Golden Gate Bridge but relatively soon returned to continue our journey south along the Pacific Coast Highway.

I think we must have taken the scenic “17 Mile Drive” around Pebble Beach.

This is Bird Island. I suppose the white capping is guano. Lower down seals were basking.

A little further on we drove past famous Pebble Beach Golf Club. It was lunch-time and we turned in towards the Club, found the then modest club-house and had a sandwich. This was actually the year when Tom Watson won the US Open at Pebble Beach, beating Jack Nicklaus.



We drove on past Big Sur and Hurst's Mt Simeon without stopping – just enjoying the scenic ride. I think we stopped in Santa Barbara before reaching Los Angeles, our destination that day.

Our stay in Los Angeles was brief – just enough to walk on Hollywood Boulevard and see Graumann's Chinese Theatre.

We then headed east to the San Bernardino Mountains. First to Lake Arrowhead and then following the Rim of the World Drive to Big Bear Lake and Big Bear City. (where we stayed overnight) Lovely scenery – from now on it was going to be desert to Arizona and on to Phoenix.



But the first section was interesting. That took us through the Joshua Tree National Park.



Then enough time back in Phoenix to relax before the flight home !

