

GREEN VALLEY TRIP LOG

April 1-15, 2009

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

We had a very early start for a flight that wouldn't leave Portland until almost noon! But, what with the every-90-minute HUT shuttle schedule and the warning to be at the airport two hours prior to flight time, we found ourselves hauling our suitcases through the quiet hallways of Avamere Retirement Apartments at 6:30 a.m.

We were reinforced in the quest for some sunshine as it rained all the way to the airport, and was properly gray with leaden clouds. Armed with our "A" boarding passes, obtained yesterday, we got through the TSA security checkpoint with the usual hassle of Barb being hauled off for a special once-over, thanks to the metal in her replaced right knee. Once she was again dressed, and shod, we headed for our gate. We still had about two hours before boarding, but Barb made use of the nearby Internet access stations. Just before lining up to get on the plane, we picked up a subway-type ham and cheese sandwich from a nearby "Hometown Hero" kiosk. Tucked into our carry-on back pack, this was our lunch as we flew a 3-leg, same-plane flight to Tucson.

We headed for the rear of the Southwest Airlines plane, hoping that we might manage to keep an empty middle seat between us. Alas, there was nary an empty seat for this first leg to San Jose, so we resignedly scooted over. Well, sometimes it works!

The clouds started to thin out as we flew over the Trinity Mts. of northern California and by the time we reached Point Reyes Nat. Seashore, we could see it in brilliant sunshine and clear skies. We easily picked out landmarks for the rest of the flight into San Jose.

A short time on the ground, and a new set of passengers. On this second leg, we each took a window seat, one behind the other on the starboard side, again hoping for a less than full plane. And, it pretty much worked. We each drew a single seat mate, but had the leg room from the middle seat and great views of central California as we flew on south to Los Angeles. The Sierras north of Bakersfield had a nice coating of white on them, while the wildflowers WERE blooming along the washes of the foothills separating the Central Valley from the Highway 101 valleys. Big "splashes" of yellow flowers coursed down the hillsides.

My seatmate enroute to LAX had the most unusual reason for her flight that I've ever heard! It seems her fiancée (and father of her 11-month old daughter) was going to appear on the "Judge Judy" TV show in Hollywood. The fiancée's ex-girl friend was suing him over a computer and had submitted her case to the "Judge Judy" producers. They offered this couple a three-day trip to Hollywood, all expenses paid and \$500. cash. (They got \$100 more for leaving the baby home with grandma!) So, they planned to sightsee, hit Disneyland, and of course appear on the TV show.

As the plane dropped down to the runway at LAX, we were greeted by a most cheery sight—thousands of California poppies happily blooming between the runways! How nice! Ah, sunshine, wildflowers and balmy temps when they opened the plane doors for departing passengers. We had found spring!

Not nearly as many people wanted to go to Tucson with us, so we each had our own individual row of seats, and enjoyed bird's eye views of desert, and more desert as we headed southeast. Borrego Springs was easily recognizable—the only swaths of dark green (alfalfa fields and grapefruit) to be seen among the treeless expanses of rock and desert.

As we approached Tucson, still under clear skies, we could see “Baboquivari” the holy mountain of the Tohono O’Odham Indians off to the south, and the white telescope housings on Kitt Peak a bit farther north. Also some HUGE mine tailings and one very deep open pit mine. Was it Ajo? We never figured it out. As we circled over Tucson on our descent, there were the huge copper mine tailings that stretch south from the San Xavier del Bac mission to Green Valley. Also the high ridges of the Catalina Mts. to the north and the Santa Rita Mts. to the southeast came into view.

We exited the plane at Tucson right on time, or even a few minutes early—about 4:30 p.m. and oh my! what a wonderful feeling to walk out into sunshine and a balmy light breeze. Just what we ordered! It took some false starts to find the right place to pick up the Budget car rental shuttle, but we connected and a friendly gentleman quickly got us set up with a Subaru Impreza four-door sedan. When he offered a tank of gas for \$1.79/gallon that seemed a great deal, and we took it. In Salem, gas was running \$2.19/gallon. So, we were to return the car as empty as possible!

It was a bit of a puzzle to figure out all the Subaru's bells and whistles, but Glenn deciphered enough to get us out on the Tucson streets and headed in the direction of the freeway to Green Valley. Having the late afternoon sun smack in our eyes as we headed west to the freeway was a real hazard, and it was a relief to turn south and get away from it.

Upon reaching Green Valley we made a stop at the Safeway in the Continental shopping center for the absolute necessities—beer, pretzels, and enough to make breakfast the next morning. McDonald's provided supper.

It was almost dark when we arrived at 2489 Calle del Dante about 7:15 p.m. The door key was waiting for us under the doormat, and we found all to be very comfy in our little one- bedroom, one-bath “casita.” TVs in living area and bedroom, all on cable, but alas, NO Internet access. We were hoping to “camp” on a nearby signal, but no such luck. Of course, most of the snowbirds had already headed for their northern homes and there appeared to be no one else in our row of four casitas. A few cars parked in other areas of the “Desert Hills Casitas” development, but we had the place pretty much to ourselves.

Tuesday, April 2

We woke to sunshine—no breeze, just a perfect day. Got unpacked and settled in. Made a date with Allyn and Lucy to have dessert with them at their home in the “Las Campanas” section of Green Valley—a few miles north of our Desert Hills casita.

We next headed to the Continental shopping mall and tested out their free wi fi access. Worked fine, but there were only a few tables where a laptop could be set down, and since the tables were across from the in-house Starbucks, we felt uneasy in using the laptop. But, we got a peek at the e-mails and let Mark and Karen know we could access e-mail.

The next order of business was to get those thirty-dollar RecreationCenter guest passes. This required a trip to the Green Valley Recreation office, located next to the Continental shopping mall. That accomplished, we headed for the local branch of the Pima County library. This is a gem! Right after the recreation centers, and the views of the Santa Rita mountains, comes the wonderful asset of this library. They have always granted us a library card, free of charge, and sure enough, once again, we were issued cards. And, the library offers not only a computer lab room where you can reserve computers with Internet access, but you are welcome to bring your laptop and take advantage of their wi fi access—both in the building and in the parking lot. We did some more e-mailing, checking stocks, etc. and also grabbed a couple books and some movie DVD's. After lunch, it was time to hit the pool! We drove south to the Canoa Hills Recreation Center whose pool has a nice shallow section for us “water walkers.”

We both agree that one of the major attractions of Green Valley as a winter resort is its collection of recreation centers. As the subdivision developer (Fairfield) worked its way south from the original housing clustered around Esperanza Blvd. they built a large recreation center for each section. Now, no house is more than a mile from a large swimming pool, a nice spa pool, a fully equipped exercise room, craft rooms, and meeting rooms. And, the membership in “Green Valley Recreation” gives the privilege of using any of the centers.

Friday, April 3

Barbara convinced Glenn that we should let the Indians feed us breakfast at their "Desert Diamond" casino about ten miles up the freeway towards Tucson. So, we set off in brilliant sunshine at the early hour of 8:30 a.m. We'd been told they had very good food at the casino. Well, probably so, at their buffet and nice sit-down restaurant, but all that was available at 9 a.m. was a little deli with a very minimal menu. We settled for the special—an all veggie omelet. O.K., but not up to Avamere standards! Then we turned to the slots and managed to while away the morning, gradually losing our gambling allotment. Gee! Just like the Oregon Indian tribes.

The casino is an interesting design. Very massive appearing on the outside, with the casino being basically a round building. The restaurants, cashier, and a video poker

parlor are located on the outer perimeter—a few steps above the main slot and table game floor. Perhaps this is based on a kiva design? Anyway, it allows easy access to the outside from any spot on the casino floor, and lets them spread the parking around the entire complex.

Headed back in the afternoon a bit poorer. The calm, sunny weather we've had the past two days changed—fairly cloudy and really strong winds. The TV weather forecasts were full of high wind warnings, and sure enough, at least one forest fire broke out in eastern central AZ. The outdoor pools aren't so nice on a really windy day, so we opted to just relax, read, nap and get into this vacation mode.

Saturday, April 4

Today we did a bit of washing and tidying up before our company, Allyn and Lucy, arrived about 2 p.m. Barbara even cooked!! Well, actually she baked a frozen Marie Callender apple crumb crust pie. A bit of a gamble to bake something for guests when she wasn't even sure the oven worked, but it turned out fine.

A much nicer day weather-wise, only a light breeze and the sunshine was back. After enjoying the pie ala mode on the patio, Allyn and Lucy drove us out to the end of Camino del Sol, probably four miles south to see where the new homes are currently being constructed in Green Valley. This is probably at the end of the “Canoa Rancho” property which Fairfield bought many years ago for future development. Every desert wash between our casita and the end of the property is now filled with homes, golf courses, and a new recreation center, called the Canoa Ranch Center. Besides the individual homes, there is a new housing idea for Green Valley—a multi-story condo development called “Wyndham Canoa Ranch Resort.” Both it and the rec center only opened a few months ago. We walked through the model condo apartments which were located just off the lobby. The Wyndham Company is managing the condos and rents out vacant apartments when the owners are absent. Rates were about 129.00 for the hotel room, up to \$200-\$300 for the suites, some of which had two or three bedrooms and were over 1500 sq. ft. They have their own pool, but probably also have access to the nearby recreation center.

Sunday, April 5

Yesterday's winds dissipated and we had another five-star southern Arizona day to enjoy. We started it off with our Sunday tradition (pre-Avamere days) of hot cakes and sausage at McDonald's in the Continental shopping mall. Truthfully, they weren't nearly as good as Avamere's Belgian waffles. I guess that is the good news!

We drove down the I-19 freeway to Tubac. Usually we have seen the “Fairy Duster” wildflower shrub with its pink blooms along this route, but no sign of them this spring. There is now quite a bit of housing on both the west and east sides of the freeway near Tubac. A couple signs of the times—a US Border Patrol car went zooming by us, heading south, with its lights flashing, enroute to Tubac, and the stationary check-point

between Green Valley and Tubac has expanded to several lanes with several agents checking the occupants of cars heading north.

All was peaceful in Tubac on a Sunday morning. Too early for the museum to be open, but our perennial favorite shop, “La Paloma de Tubac” had its doors open. We enjoyed browsing their amazing collection of ethnic pottery, fabrics, silver, you name it! I think a sign in the store said they had opened in 1971. The shop is still in the hands of the original owner, and they still have little notes about the indigenous artisans who created most of their items. We checked on the Brazilian pots we bought there several years ago. Only a few, very large, still on sale. Barbara settled for a very small item—glass earrings from Ecuador for \$9. Living in a small apartment really restricts the shopping urge!

We made a slow drive through the other gallery-lined gravel streets of Tubac, considered an ice cream cone stop, but decided in favor of returning to Green Valley for lunch and a swim.

Monday, April 6

Another wind-less day, so we decided to re-visit our favorite destination—Madera Canyon. They now emphasize in their signage that there is a \$5 fee to park anywhere in the Canyon. However, our Golden Eagle pass was valid, so we spent only gas while there. Our first stop was at the Proctor trailhead, near the entrance to the Canyon. A few “token” wildflowers, but overall, a sparse display. Glenn found some AZ poppies, a small blue Phacelia, one Prickly Poppy, and a few red Thistles. A fire had obviously run through most of this area, charring even some of the Prickly Pear cactus and the Mesquite trees. There was water in the stream along the trail, but pretty minimal. We drove on up to the very top of the Canyon where the Forest Service has obviously been spending some money. There is now an extensive picnic area, spread over several sites, with a nice covered observation area and even handicapped-accessible picnic areas, plus nice new bathrooms. The uppermost parking lot was full—probably most people had struck off up the many trails that radiate out from the end of the road.

We were content to find a picnic table under a shady oak tree, and enjoy the cool breeze and our lunch. A woodpecker flitted by, but we didn’t get a good enough look to identify it. Lots of signage about the famous “Elegant Trogon” which lures the serious birdwatchers to Madera Canyon. One of the few places in the USA where it can be found. We had learned from previous trips that you can hike way up the canyon and still never see the Trogon, so we didn’t even try.

High up on the east Canyon walls we could see evidence of the lightning-caused wildfire of July, 2005. All of this area looks so dry to our Northwestern-attuned eyes. It is hard to see why it has not ALL burned in these drought years.

Coming back down the Canyon, Glenn figured out another feature of the Impreza—a lower gear for going downhill, and he was glad to have that working as we dropped back down from this “island in the sky” as these southern Arizona mountain ranges are known.

We made a brief stop at the Santa Rita Lodge, which is a hangout for the birdwatchers. They oblige the birders with many feeders, a water fountain and pond—all designed to lure in the birds—especially the hummingbirds. This canyon is famous for the large number of different hummingbird species who spend part of the year here. Today, though, we saw few hummingbirds. Instead, the ground was being pecked over by a flock of wild turkeys! Don't remember seeing them on any of our previous visits.

We have developed a daily routine here that includes a stop at the library for its Internet access and maybe some new DVD's. Then, it's time for a dip in one of the Rec Center pools before dinner. Not a bad way to spend a vacation! We stopped at the local Kentucky Fried Chicken and picked up "fixin's" for dinner enroute back to the casita.

Tuesday, April 7

We left the casita about 9 a.m. for a leisurely drive to the San Xavier del Bac Mission. We took the "scenic route" following Mission Road as it wound past the huge tailing terraces of the Sierrita Mts. copper mines. In a good wildflower year this route has been very good for a variety of blooming cactus and other flowers. Hardly anything to be seen this time. But, the copper mine tailings have been growing! With copper prices way up, they have been busily digging out copper ore and piling up the waste rock. The tailing terraces extended from Green Valley almost to the mission. Very impressive.

We arrived at the Mission a few minutes before ten. The morning light and the deep blue sky really set off the brilliant white of the mission bell towers. What a lovely church! Supposedly it was built without any architectural plans by the Franciscan priests, way back in the 1780's. Maybe they WERE divinely inspired. Hard to imagine a more beautiful mission church anywhere.

Right at 10 a.m. Betty's sister, Jan, and her father, Ray, appeared, as we had all planned a few days ago. Neither Ray nor Jan had been to San Xavier del Bac for many years, so they enjoyed seeing the colorful interior which was painstakingly restored a few years back. We then found some benches in the cool shade of the mission garden and visited for awhile. Jan drove us all to a nearby "Carl's Jr." for lunch. Ray appears to be thriving at his new home, an assisted living center north of Tucson. Jan and her husband live in "Oro Valley" where they have beautiful views of the Catalina Mountains

The Tohono O'Odham tribe which owns the Mission also owns the "Desert Diamond" casino just a few miles south. Since we took the freeway route back to Green Valley, it seemed like a good idea to stop at the casino, gamble for a few hours, and then maybe take advantage of their Prime Rib "Early Bird" special dinner. It was fun to try their slots again, but hardly profitable. We decided to try the dinner special another time, and headed back to Green Valley and a light meal from the "dollar menu" at McDonald's.

As we left McDonalds, just about sunset, the skies were putting on a fine display. It had clouded up while we were at the casino, and now the conditions were just right for one of those famous Arizona sunsets. The weatherman later explained that the brilliant colors of

the sunset were thanks to the chemicals being erupted from Mt. Redoubt up in Alaska, which has been having a series of ash eruptions for the past couple of weeks. Thanks, Mt. Redoubt!

Wednesday, April 8

Time for some household duties today. Included was washing the bedding, and our accumulation of dirty clothes. There is a stacked washer and dryer in the little storage closet off the patio. Thanks to a skylight, it is a very well-lit area, during the daytime. The laundry pair doesn't have a very large capacity, so it took all morning to get everything washed and dried.

We made our usual trip to the library and put the laptop to good use. We really appreciate the wi fi card that Mark installed on the laptop.

It was back to high wind warnings today, so we opted to go to the newest Rec. Center, at Canoa Ranch. A good choice, as we could swim in the indoor pool and sun on their deck which was pretty well protected from the wind. A nice view of "Elephant Head" and the Santa Rita Mts. from their deck—a bit marred by the fence surrounding the Rec. Center though.

Mt. Redoubt provided ANOTHER beautiful sunset this night. We enjoyed it from the front porch of the casita.

Thursday, April 9

No wind this morning—just another Practically Perfect day on the desert. In other years, we've usually stopped by the current model homes to see what is being offered in new construction in Green Valley. But, times have changed for us. This morning our destination was "La Posada" a huge "continuing care center" on the east side of the Santa Cruz River, and nestled in a former pecan grove.

Allyn and Lucy are planning to move to La Posada, but are waiting for some new, and larger, homes to be built there. This is not a new development in Green Valley—it's been there for 30 years, and we have visited a now deceased friend who spent her last years there.

Our first stop was at a consignment sales store near the entrance to La Posada. Residents can use this to dispose of their surplus furniture and other items. We were impressed with the quality of everything on display. Most looked brand new, or totally restored if an antique piece. And, very reasonable prices.

Next we drove through the entire center—it is huge, by Avamere, or Salem standards. Two large apartment buildings, many "garden homes" surrounding the apartment buildings, a separate Alzheimer's unit, a health care center, long term care center, a

fitness center, a nursery school (for employees' children?) and even a small astronomical observatory with a 13-inch mirror near the bank of the Santa Cruz river!

We were impressed with "La Posada," but not to the point of signing up! This is just not a climate that Glenn could tolerate long-term.

Friday, April 10

Good Friday was Windy Friday in the Santa Cruz Valley. We had a lazy morning, even including a nap for Glenn. We're definitely on vacation! We headed for the Canoa Hills pool earlier than usual—about 12:30 p.m. The strong breezes lulled us into thinking that the sun wasn't all that hot. Wrong! After our swim, we soon found out we were both a bright shade of pink. (The itching came later.)

A little after midnight, we heard loud rattling noises on the casita's skylights as heavy raindrops, maybe even hail, came pounding down. Apparently the Tucson weather man is trying to condense six months' worth of desert weather into our two weeks! Earlier tonight, he even declared that we will see snow on the mountain tops in the morning. (And he was right.)

Saturday, April 11

It not only rained last night, it kept it up for most of the day. We made our usual visit to the library, not only to check the e-mail, but also to make a reservation for next Tuesday in their computer lab room. We will need to check in with Southwest Airlines exactly 24 hours prior to our Wednesday flight, if we want those coveted "A" boarding passes. We needed access to a computer printer to get hard copies of the boarding passes.

A quiet, Oregon-type day—reading, watching TV, etc. at the casita while the rain showers rolled in and out. Quite chilly too—no doubt the rain was coming down as snow atop the Santa Rita and Catalina mountains, but they were hidden under the clouds all day.

Sunday, April 12

The storm clouds rolled away during the night, and we were treated to that rare sight on the desert—snow-capped peaks! As the sun returned the snow quickly disappeared. It being Sunday—Easter Sunday, in fact—we treated ourselves to a McDonald's pancake breakfast, then headed for the Desert Diamond casino. If we thought the Indians would be kinder on Easter, we were wrong.

Back in Green Valley in the afternoon, we took advantage of the beautiful day to drive to the western part of Continental Road beyond the houses, and close to the mine tailings terraces. We took photographs of some prime desert cacti and even a few little wildflowers. The best site was around the campus of the new Pima Community College's Green Valley Community Learning Center which shares space with the Green Valley

Performing Arts Foundation. The Center has beautiful views of the Santa Rita Mountains.

Monday, April 13

This morning we were treated to a morning concert by the Green Valley Chamber Music Society, of which Lucy is a member. The event was held at the Parish Hall of St. Francis in the Valley Episcopal Church. A good-sized audience was treated to very professional renderings of several classical works. They even started off with a Vivaldi concerto—which must be technically difficult.

After the concert we went to Allyn and Lucy's home, and were joined by three other members of the Chamber Music Society. Later, we all adjourned to "Manuel's" restaurant at the north end of Green Valley. This restaurant was recommended to us by several people in Green Valley, and their food was every bit as good as described.

We followed that very pleasant outing with a stop at the library, then back to the Canoa Hills pool for a swim.

Tuesday, April 14

After successfully grabbing two low-number "A" boarding passes, we turned in all the books, DVD's and CD's we've been enjoying courtesy of the Green Valley Library and got down to the serious business of packing up our suitcases for tomorrow's flight to Portland.

We did get in one last swim on another of those "practically perfect" desert days.

Wednesday, April 15

Having taken Thrifty Car Rental up on their offer of "Buy a tank of gas at \$1.79/gallon and bring it back empty" we had to make a decision on just how much gas was really left in the tank this morning! As we left the casita, the warning "low on gas" light started flashing, and we decided to buy a couple bucks of gas in Green Valley rather than find ourselves sitting at the side of I-19. The high winds had returned to the Tucson area overnight, and the mine tailings at Asarco, just south of the Mission San Xavier, were releasing a great cloud of dust into the air. It was difficult to see downtown Tucson through the gritty atmosphere. This also meant a bumpy departure on take-off.

Turning in the rental car took all of five minutes, and then we were on the shuttle and back at the airport in no time. The Tucson airport is "human-sized" and not at all overwhelming. Our return flight required a change of planes in Los Angeles, and a stop in Oakland; so again, we got a good look at a large portion of the Southwest along the way.

Our flight from LAX to Oakland was delayed almost an hour. When we realized the plane was coming from Las Vegas we speculated whether Betty and Jason might be on it. And, when it finally arrived, and passengers were filing out of the jet way, sure enough, there they were! They came to spend a week with Betty's dad, Jan and some of her college friends. We had a quick reunion before they headed for the car rental desk and we climbed aboard, bound for Oakland.

None of our three flights was more than three-fourths full, so we always had the luxury of an empty middle seat, or an entire row to ourselves. It was late afternoon when we left Oakland, and as the plane flew northward, it was just a bit west of the Cascade Range. We were treated to beautiful views of Mt. Shasta, Crater Lake, Mt. Jefferson and Mt. Hood. All the peaks and Crater Lake were still under a blanket of snow.

Unlike our last return to PDX on Christmas Eve when we found the baggage pick-up area piled to the ceiling with unclaimed luggage, we found the area almost empty. We had about an hour's wait for the HUT shuttle and then an uneventful trip back to the Red Lion hotel in Salem. The HUT driver announced they now had satellite Wi-Fi on the bus, so of course Barbara had to try that out with the laptop. It worked very well, except for the bumpy ride. They obviously did not put very good shock absorbers on the bus. So, it was hard to keep your fingers on the right keys!

The Buick had patiently waited for us—even looked a bit dusty which was odd, considering the many rain showers that must have passed over it in the past two weeks. It was about 11 p.m. when we let ourselves into the very quiet Avamere apartment building. While we were gone, the maids had "freshened up" the apartment, so it was very nice to return to a clean, neat apartment and Barbara was greatly comforted by the thought that somebody else would be cooking breakfast, and lunch, and dinner the next day.

It was a pleasant and relaxing desert interlude, but green, green Oregon, with its blooming flowers, trees and shrubs made for a very welcome return.

Barbara Halliday April 21, 2009