

## Peaks, Plateaus & Canyons -9

... A Southwest US Journey ...

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**Tuesday** ... checking out time from Las Vegas. This is also the time we go our separate ways from Bob and Sandra ... they are heading back home to Las Cruces and we are embarking on some side trips through Arizona ...ghost towns and re-visiting Neel and Priscilla in Tucson. We compare notes, check our agenda, bid good-bye to our friends, and head out to meet I-15, a short distance from the Plaza Hotel. We'll have breakfast somewhere on the road. I-15, at 9 AM, is a virtual gridlock in Vegas ... but having no alternative on getting out of town we bear up with the noise, impatient drivers, and slowly make our way out of town. It seems that there is no end to the town ... no matter how far you drive "out of town" the town is still with you ... rooftops all the way to the horizon. This town has really exploded in population. We read that **Hoover Dam** is undergoing some construction and traffic is being delayed so we opt to take an alternate route to our next destination. We head south on Hwy. 95 to **Laughlin**, then to **Bullhead City**. Seems that every driver has the same idea. But the day was sunny and the passing scenery of interest so we just sat back and allowed the road to meet us. Fifty five miles later we turn to Hwy. 163 to **Laughlin**.

Our next destination was **Oatman, Arizona** ... a ghost town of some renown. Bypassing **Laughlin**, we had breakfast at a Denny's in **Bullhead City**. Bullhead City is a retirement town and it showed ... many new retirement communities ... lots of traffic ... even a Wal-Mart. It was about 11 AM when we finished our meal, headed south on Hwy. 95 and on the lookout for Farm Road 153 leading into the **Black Mountains** and **Oatman**. Fifteen miles later we are in Oatman proper.

***Oatman** ...elevation of 2,700 ft., once a metropolis of some 10,000 people, Oatman was reduced in the 1950s to a population of about 60 after it was bypassed by the rerouted U.S. 66. Now the number is up to a few hundred, with many residents making living selling items to tourists. They are hardy bunches who look upon visitors with a hit of a defiant eye, knowing their dollars are necessary for their livelihood, but wishing they weren't. Towering above the town of Oatman is a monolith known as Elephant's Tooth, a huge quartz outcropping that served as a signpost to prospectors, saying "look for gold right here." The original name of the town was Vivian, for the Vivian Mine discovered in 1902 by a half-breed Mohave named Ben Taddock (or Paddock, depending upon the source), who supposedly found gold glittering along a trail. Taddock sold his claim a year later to a judge and a colonel, who in turn sold it in 1905 to the Vivian Mining Company, which fully developed the claim. By 1907, more than \$3 million in gold had been extracted from the mine.*

*Vivian experienced a second boom in 1908 with the discovery of the Tom Reed Gold Mine. That year the town was renamed Oatman, a change the post office made official a year later. The new name honored Olive Oatman, a white girl who lived with a local Mohave Indian family for five years. Her safe return made the Oarman family's story famous throughout the West.*

*It began back in 1851 when Royse Oatman, his wife and seven children, en route to California, were attacked by a group of renegade Apaches about 25 miles west of present-day Gila Bend. They were all killed, except for sisters Olive, 13 or 14, and Mary Ann, 7 years old, who were abducted, and 16- or 17-year-old Lorenzo, who was thrown over a mesa edge and left for dead. Somehow, despite grievous wounds, Lorenzo lived and made his way back to safety. After hearing persistent stories of a white girl living with the Indians along the Colorado River, Lorenzo, by then in his 20s, was in California trying to organize a search party when he heard of his sister's safe return to Fort Yuma. Although sickly Mary Ann had died in captivity during a time of drought, Olive was found among the peaceful Mohave, who had bought her from the renegades. She had married, apparently, as her traditional Mohave facial tattoos indicated. But when another Indian came to the village asking for her and had horses and other items to trade, she left the Mohave and walked 200 miles to Yuma where she was soon met by her brother. After their reunion, Olive lived in Oregon and California for a short time. She married John B. Fairchild in 1865 and died in 1903 in Sherman, Texas.*

*John Oatman, reportedly Olive's Mohave son, lived in the Vivian area. Years after his mother died, he may have influenced the town's 1908 name change from Vivian to Oatman. Following the Tom Reed gold vein discovery, another big strike occurred in 1913 when the United Eastern' mine was opened. It was then that Oatman's population exploded to 10,000. The activity caused Wesley M. Barr to exclaim in *The Oatman Miner* in 1915, "... the automobile climbs the last grade and suddenly stops in the center of the most talked-of mining camp in America. Everywhere is activity. Everywhere is confidence and determination. The visitor mingles with the throngs in the street, and above all he notes the absolute certainty on every face that Oatman has arrived, has removed its hat and is going to stay."*

*That "confidence and determination" continued well into the 1930s, when the Tom Reed finally shut down after bringing in more than \$13 million in gold. With the closure of mines, the town found a less glamorous life as the last major stop along U.S. Route 66 before entering California and having to cross the seemingly endless Mohave Desert. Main Street in Oatman features several buildings worth exploring, beginning with the Lee Lumber Company and the old movie theater. The Oatman Hotel, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is Mohave County's only two-story adobe building and stands in the center of town. Clark*

*Gable and Carole Lombard honeymooned here after their wedding in Kingman. A two-story wooden false-front building at the far end of the street has been, over its long life, a saloon called the Mission Inn, a drugstore during the Depression, an antique shop, and the "Gold City Hotel," the role it played in the movie How the West Was Won.*

*Humans aren't the only independent residents of Oatman. Wild burros, descendants of those let loose by miners, drop into town daily to cadge food from tourists. Try not to encourage them onto the boardwalks. As a shop owner said, burros leave more than footprints.*



In some ways Oatman was a disappointment ... far too many tourists ... even parking was hard to locate. One enterprising resident converted his front lawn into a parking lot and charged \$2 to park. There were lots of people mingling about ... going from gift shop to gift shop ... the old building indistinguishable, as banners hid many facades. Stayed here 30 minutes ... we're on the lookout for a real ghost town not a tourist attraction. We're back on Hwy. 153 ... **Back Country Byway Historic Route 66.**

*Back Country Byway Historic Route 66 ... a 42-mile paved Type I byway that begins south of Kingman, crosses Sitgreaves Pass in the rugged Black Mountains, passes through the historic mining town of Oatman, and finishes at Golden Shores near the California border. The Historic Route 66 Back Country Byway follows a 42-mile-long paved section of beloved Old Route 66, a 2,400-mile highway that linked Chicago with Los Angeles. For more than fifty years, from the 1920s until the 1970s when parts of five different interstate highways replaced it, Route 66 was America's national transcontinental road. The highway, traversing eight states, passed along so many small-town Main Streets that it was nicknamed the Main Street of America.*

We were unaware where we were until we saw a road marker proclaiming this stretch of road as historic. For the 26 miles from Oatman to I-40, we paid particular attention to this road as it presented some challenging sections, especially over the pass.



Reaching I-40, only 4 miles from Kingman, where we elected to spend the night, we felt that there was enough daylight left to visit some other ghost towns north of town. Without hesitation, in Kingman, we turned on Hwy. 93 and drove some 18 miles north. We were surprised to pass a small town actually called ... **Santa Claus** ... but we continued for another 6 miles to a turnoff to Farm Road 125 and **Chloride**.

*Chloride ... was one of the earliest mining camps in the Arizona Territory. Named for silver chloride ore, the town grew from the Silver Hill strike of the 1860s. Reaching the isolated Silver Hill mines required taking a river steamboat 300 miles upstream from Yuma to Hardyville (now underwater near Bullhead City), and then crossing 38 miles of unforgiving desert. It could be dangerous territory. In 1863, Hualapai Indians commandeered some miners' guns, shooting one and killing two more by throwing rocks down their mine shaft. Undaunted by word of these occupational hazards, fortune seekers continued to come. Chloride became a full-fledged town in 1864 and received its post office nine years later. By 1900, the town had a population of 2,000. Its two major mines, the Tennessee and the Schuykill, produced gold, silver, lead, and zinc on a major scale into the late 1940s. When the mines closed, the population declined, but the post office remained. Chloride has since seen a modest influx of people, primarily retirees, raising its population to about 350. The town's main street features the post office and well-preserved false-front general store, which was built during 1928. North of the main street stand two original - buildings, the jail and the Lorig residence. The mines are closed to the public.*



Chloride was a fun place to drive around ... many old homes were literally junk yards. But it was also indicative of the impact of retirees into town ... some homes on the outskirts were modern. We did not linger long here ... another mining camp was down the dirt road and we itched to see what it looked like ... **Mineral Park**.

*Mineral Park ... founded in 1871, was so named because of the rich cache of minerals in a parklike, juniper-filled basin at the foot of Ithaca Peak. It became the county seat in 1873, raking the title from nearby Cerbat. By the early 1880s Mineral Park not only featured paying mines but also served as a supply point for distant mines and a growing number of cattle ranches. It had all the usual mining camp ingredients: assay offices, a five-stamp mill, saloons, stores, and a post office. But it also had the trappings of a sophisticated town: restaurants, a hotel, doctors and lawyers, two stagecoach stations, and a weekly newspaper, *The Mohave County Miner*. One reason prosperity shone so brightly was the completion in 1883 of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad just 20 miles to the south, which cut the cost of transporting ore and supplies.*

*That same railroad, however, brought civic embarrassment to Mineral Park. The rail-stop town of Kingman grew so much faster than Mineral Park that by 1887 it had enough residents to claim the county seat. Despite a conclusive county-wide vote on the matter, Mineral Park officials refused to give up the county records. Outraged Kingman citizens subsequently raided Mineral Park, made off with the documents and, quite literally, took the county seat.*

*Losing the county seat was a sign of things to come. The mines began closing after 1887. Some were reopened briefly in 1906, but the town was moribund. Its post office was closed in 1912. Mineral Park has all but vanished. An open-pit mine, formerly operated by the Duval Mining Company and now by Cypress-Bagdad, has caused once-prominent Ithaca Peak to disappear completely. Across the gulch, north of the current mine, are scant remnants of earlier days. There two miners' shacks, one adobe, another wood, decay on the hillside. Mill foundations, rubble, and the headframe of the Keystone Mine are farther up the hill. Near a huge tailings dump on the east side of the road that leads to the mine, the adobe walls of the Mineral Park post office melt back into the earth.*



As the middle image shows, the open-pit mine is still active ... we were not allowed access. Any remnants of the town were out of sight. On our way out we took a detour and happened on the leaching field (extreme right). Ithaca Peak was cut down and no longer hugs the sky. We took leave and left the area ... returning to Hwy. 93 and **Kingman**.

There were few other things of interest in this region so we decided to forget **Kingman** as an overnight stay and continue on to our next destination ... **Wickenburg** ... some 110 miles south on the continuation of Hwy. 93.

By 5PM we arrived in Wickenburg and found a suitable motel / lodge at the edge of town ... **AmericInn of Wickenburg** (\$\$). Here we met a most amiable motel owner ... Louie Smith. Louie's been in the lodging business his entire career. Purchased this lodge with several other investors. Soon he will abandon the AmericInn franchise and become independent. As we got to chatting I mentioned to him that this place is really, really nice ... nicely furnished, very clean, excellent breakfast offerings and moderately priced. In fact, we found this place because of the sign advertising the room rate. Louie then went on with his open opinions of Wickenburg. The town does not like his advertising the room rate ... it wants to keep its image as a prestige destination. He told them at a town meeting that if they keep harassing him he will lower his room rate by \$10 every time they complain to him. That shut them up. His rate was below the competition ... even Motel 8 down the road charged \$15 more per night ... and its not even on par with AmericInn. Anyway to continue ... after complimenting him on his establishment, especially the breakfast, I mentioned that it must be difficult to deal with the public with high expectations. Sure enough, he countered ... in fact, he said, the other morning a woman patron complained that his breakfast did not include freshly cooked eggs to order. He had to remind her that this is a low-cost alternative to the Hilton and she should not expect 5\*\*\*\*\* treatment at a 2\*\* room rate.

Nonetheless, we continued our banter and he added some insight into Wickenburg when I mentioned all the expensive looking homes dotting the ridgelines. Louie said that Wickenburg is an "old money" town ... essentially a bedroom suburb to Phoenix, only 60 miles away. This "old money" does not like to see the town grow ... but to keep it under the radar so that "funky" people do not move in and disrupt the character of the community.

Wickenburg has a population of 6,500 in the winter and drops down to 5,000 in the summer. The town's main problem and continuing issue is garnering enough help and labor to maintain its businesses. Young people do not want to work and older people work in Phoenix. In fact we saw Louie doing some menial tasks when we were inquiring about room availability. When we probed him on this he mentioned that he just had to fire a staffer who did not like to work ... just show up and "bullshit". He went on to explain to us that this is a real ongoing problem in town ... and he cited a recent example. Hired a person for maintenance work ... a person that was on welfare. Person spent a day in training ... worked only half a day the following day due to personal matters ... and could not work the third day because it was their birthday. The fourth they called in ... they quit. Reason? They were getting more on welfare, housing subsidy, food stamps, and other benefits that, by working, they would lose all of their assistance. So why work? I neglected to ask if that person was Caucasian or ethnic.

As the hour was getting late we located a decent enough place to eat ... **Golden Corral**. Place was devoid of customers ... expensive ... and the pork chops overcooked and dry. But the other establishments in town did not hold any greater promise so we just shrugged it off. Filled up the car with gas before we settled in ... caught some TV ... and turned the lights out.

**Wednesday** ... time to see a real mining camp ghost town ... the **Vulture Mine**. Breakfast at **AmericInn** was above average ... in fact, excellent as a continental. Besides the usual juices, coffee, and sweets they offered French toast and egg roll-ups. We both commented how good it was and went back to the bar a few more times. After checking out, we drove back through **Wickenburg** to **Vulture Mine Road**. Day was exceptionally bright, sunny and with a hint of a promise that it would be quite warm. Turning left on **Vulture Road** we drove through a desert landscape some 18 miles until we approached, and turned into, the **Vulture Mine** itself. We were the only visitors at the mine ... a treat ... for there would be no interruptions or distractions during our tour.

*The Vulture ... prospector Henry Wickenburg came to Arizona from Austria in 1862 and discovered a promising outcropping of gold quartz a year later. Further investigation proved him right - he had indeed discovered a rich deposit. Two stories address his naming the claim the Vulture. One suggests he found the quartz while retrieving a buzzard he shot. Since there is no great purpose to wasting ammunition on a buzzard (unless it sees you as a prospective meal), this probably is not an accurate accounting. A second, more plausible, version is that on the day Henry Wickenburg made his discovery, he saw several of the big birds circling the mountain now known as Vulture Peak. As one of Arizona's richest gold mines, the Vulture became an important supplier of bullion for the Union cause during the Civil War.*



*Henry Wickenburg was not a "hard rock" miner. Instead of doing the work, he contracted others to do the mining and milling, keeping a flat \$15 per ton for himself. In 1866 Benjamin Phelps purchased an 80-percent interest in the mine, but, according to one account, never paid Wickenburg the total agreed-upon price. Wickenburg, who preferred other pursuits to begin with, left mining and tried the cattle business. His Wickenburg Ranch established the place-name for the town that bears his name. In the first six years of Phelps' mining operation, more than \$2.5 million in gold was "officially" extracted. Unofficially, the total was believed to have been far higher: An estimated 20 percent to 40 percent of the ore is believed to have been "high-graded" (stolen) by the miners who worked there. One account says 18 of the high-graders were hanged.*

*James Seymour purchased the mine in 1878, despite popular sentiment that the veins had played out. Seymour's instincts were right. The Vulture came back to life with such vigor that Seymour added a stamp mill along the Hassayampa River, about 12 miles from the mine. He named the community that formed around the stamp mill after himself. Then, in 1880, the mill was dismantled, moved to the Vulture to furnish parts for a new mill, and the town of Seymour died.*

*The Vulture thrived well into the 1890s. The town featured a large stone assay office, miners' dormitories, houses for company officials, a mess hall, a school, a post office, and an 80-stamp mill. The post office closed in 1897, although production continued on a diminished scale through the 1920s. In fact, it was not until 1942, when President Roosevelt's Executive Order 208 banned mining of non-strategic material during World War II, that production ceased.*

*Henry Wickenburg, who was left behind during the Vulture's prosperous years, was not a successful rancher either. In 1905, elderly and penniless, he killed himself with a Colt revolver. But Wickenburg's legacy remains. He donated to settlers a portion of his land where the town bearing his name now stands, and the strike that he made at Vulture had a tremendous impact on Arizona's development. Before his discovery, the area between Tucson and Prescott was virtually uninhabited by Anglos. When Vulture became the third-largest town in the Territory, the need for food for miners and feed for livestock increased dramatically. The solution lay in a small community 60 miles to the southeast and the irrigated farmlands of the Salt River Valley. Phoenix began to grow.*

*Present-day Vulture features several buildings under roof, including a two-story assay office, a blacksmith shop, ball mill, powerhouse, apartment house, bunkhouse, combination mess hall-kitchen, mining officials' residences, and two schoolhouses. Almost every building features interesting items of antiquity, including a marvelous wooden ice box in the rear of the mess hall-kitchen and an enormous 1904 German diesel engine in the power-house*

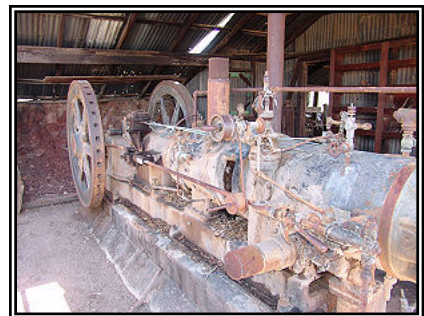
*Almost lost amidst these impressive structures are the walls of Henry Wickenburg's tiny adobe home. They stand mute in the shade of the "hanging tree" (right) from which the 18 high-grading thieves are said to have swung.*



Assay office (above row) ...



Head frame with power plant (above row) ...



Stamping mill (above row) ...



Mine main power plant (above row) ...





Mess hall and kitchen (above row) ...



Bunkhouse (above, left) and the two school houses (above, center and right) ...

This **Vulture Mine** and the **Creede, Colorado** mining camp were two of the finest examples of "ghost towns" encountered on this trip. Both were self-touring and allowed for a true close-up-and-personal experience ... not to be missed

The Osborne's were the caretakers of this historic mine. The husband was a cancer patient and was extremely amiable and cordial in explaining this mine's history, operation and future potential. The wife was equally friendly ... very knowledgeable on gold mining. A few of the things we learned about this mine ...

The owner is in actuality a "spoiled rich brat" type of fellow who retains the ownership as a hobby. The asking price for the mine and 300 acres is \$6,500,000. An offer for the property was made recently but was rejected because it was primarily a "get rich" scheme and hardly serious. There is still a substantial amount of gold in the tailings and in the "glory hole" ... \$1,500,000 was pulled out in the late '90s and it was essentially underestimated due to poor recordkeeping. The Vulture Mine is used often nowadays for shooting TV ads and "promo work". Vehicles are not allowed on mine property ... everything has to be hand-carried throughout the property. Reason ... over 18 miles of shallow shafts that are prone to collapse if under surface load ... that is why, before touring, we had to sign a release form. Visitors are stealing artifacts left and right and the custodians are ever-vigilant for bulky pants and large purses. We spent an hour visiting with the Osbornes and enjoyed their retelling of their parent's care of the mine (the wife's mother is in actuality the legal custodian.)

After this satisfying tour what else is left in this region? Actually, there is one little bit of touring left on our Arizona agenda ... the nearby ghost mining town of **Stanton**.

We retrace our drive and return to **Wickenburg**; take Hwy. 93 north and soon after take on right on County Road 89 north. Sixteen miles later we're in **Congress** (right) ... and two miles farther we turn on primitive **Stanton Octave Road** towards **Stanton** itself.

*Stanton ... originally called Antelope Station, was a small community that developed along Antelope Creek. Most of the residents were miners, but some merchants settled there too, providing goods and services. The stage station owner was an Englishman named William Partridge. The general store was owned by G.H. "Yaqui" Wilson. Pigs belonging to Wilson broke into Partridge's property, beginning an enmity that was to serve a newcomer well.*



*Charles P. Stanton came to Antelope Station in the early 1870s, having left the post of assayer at the Vulture Mine. He conceived a plan to use the Partridge-Wilson feud to eliminate both men, which he believed would leave the two principal commercial enterprises of Antelope Station in his hands. He told Partridge, "The owner of the pigs is out to get you," a statement that was patently false. Partridge, however, believed the threat and shot Wilson on sight. Partridge was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison in Yuma, where he claimed to be haunted by Wilson's ghost.*

*However, things didn't immediately go as Stanton had planned. Wilson had a silent partner named Timmerman. And the incarcerated Partridge had creditors, who sold his stage station to Barney Martin. Undeterred, Stanton hired a group of desperadoes led by a man named Francisco Vega to dispose of Timmerman. This done, in 1875 the town was renamed Stanton, with Charles P. Stanton as postmaster. Besides Stanton, the only remaining person of power was Barney Martin. In July of 1886 the remains of Martin, his wife, and children were found in a charred wagon not far from town.*

*Charles Stanton brutally achieved the control he sought. But not for long ... in November of the same year, a young member of the Vega gang, Cristero Lucero, shot Stanton to death because Stanton had insulted his sister. As he fled town, Lucero met another Stanton adversary, Tom Pierson. When Lucero told him what he had done, Pierson is said to have replied, "You don't have to pull out. If you stick around, you'll get a reward."*

*Within four years, Stanton, the town, was almost as dead as Stanton, the man. The post office closed in 1890 as mines played out, then reopened in 1894 along with the mines. About 200 people lived in the community, which featured a new store, a boardinghouse, homes, and a five-stamp mill. The post office closed for good in 1905. For many years Stanton was closed to the public, which probably accounts for its restorable state. Since purchasing the site in 1978, the Lost Dutchman Mining Association has improved roofing, shored walls, and, happily, allowed the public to visit. Only three buildings stand at Stanton today, but they are excellent reminders of the Old West.*

*One is Charles Stanton's old stage stop and store, in which he was murdered. Another building, the most substantial structure on the site, was a saloon and now serves as a recreation hall. At the north end of the interior one can see where a shelf once was attached to the wall. It is not widely known, thanks to Western movies, that most saloons in the Old West did not have tables and chairs. Men stood around the periphery of the room, facing the center, their drinks positioned behind them on a narrow sill. This allowed imbibers to keep an eye on each other and anyone who came through the door. In a town with the likes of Charles Stanton, Fernando Vega, and Cristero Lucero, the arrangement had definite advantages.*

*The weathered Hotel Stanton is the other outstanding building at the town site. Originally Partridge's stage station, the hotel features a main lobby and a series of rooms stretching down a boardwalk. Each room has its own front and back doors, another prudent architectural consideration for a town with a treacherous past.*



The access road (first row, left) is a primitive road. Hotel Stanton (first row, center), the recreation hall (first row, right), and the train depot (second row, left) are preserved in pristine condition, considering their age. The town site itself is now an RV park with visitors still engaged in rudimentary gold prospecting (second row, center).

This concluded our sojourn through peaks, plateaus, and canyons ... encompassing five states and thousands of road miles. It was a trip that revealed many interesting sights ... interesting people ... remnants of western history ... and the glitter of new found gold (Las Vegas.)

Before returning home, we stopped in Tucson, Arizona ... met with old friends Neel and Priscilla ... enjoyed a pot luck spaghetti dinner at the Elks Club where they volunteered ... and listened to karaoke music in the lodge bar (loud but tolerable.)

Our trip ended on a high note ... the nights sleep at the Comfort Inn was comforting ... and the 275 mile drive back to Las Cruces ... uneventful.

WOW ... what a trip !!!!!

Prologue ...

We trust that you enjoyed traveling with us. It was our intention that this write-up served more as a visual travelogue than a narrative of "what we did on our vacation."

We hope some of the images instilled in you a sense of wanderlust and a desire to see some of the hidden corners of the USA ... especially the southwestern region.

The majority of the people we encountered on this trip, be they fellow travelers or local denizens, gave us a glimpse into the true spirit of an American ... free to travel, free to explore, free to savor the gifts that freedom bestows upon us all. Every encounter with every person taught us some valuable and long-lasting lessons ... we are all appreciative of this land with its myriad of opportunities in recreation, living standards and freedom of expression.

We're glad ... no, honored ... to be living in the USA ... what a great and beautiful country!!!!

Ed and Dolores

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