

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

Travels Before Thanksgiving

It's great to be home for Thanksgiving! This is Pat's favorite holiday – not nearly as commercialized as Christmas. Thanksgiving is a time to relax, enjoy good food, and spend quality time with family and friends – no gifts to buy, cards to send, and no seasonal parties to attend.

I say it's great to be home because Pat and I have done quite a bit of traveling lately.

In late August we drove to Oceanside, California to escape Tucson's summer heat and to try out the new seaside Wyndham Resort, which was excellent. We used some extra time-share points to get an apartment with an ocean view; the famous Oceanside pier was right out the window. With Oceanside as a base, we explored the nearby Temecula wine country and visited Mission San Luis Rey, founded in 1798. But we spent most of our time on our balcony, enjoying the sea breezes, watching the surfers around the pier, or snapping photos of the fantastic sunsets. We walked around town, along the beaches, and out on the pier several times – enough to really appreciate this mostly undiscovered California coast town.

We finished off this trip with a visit to San Diego to visit my son John and his wife – both in the Navy - at their house in Coronado. While there, we were privileged to attend John's promotion ceremony to the rank of Captain. Note: Earlier this month Captain John Ring deployed as Executive Officer (second in command) of the nuclear aircraft carrier, the USS Nimitz.

In early October we took Pat's son David on a short birthday trip to Bisbee and other attractions in southern Arizona. Our first stop was Singing Winds Bookshop, near Benson, where Winn Bundy showed us her extensive collection of southwest books, housed in her old-ranch-house home.

That afternoon, on the way down to Bisbee, we stopped to take the Rotunda Tour at beautiful Kartchner Caverns. The most interesting thing to me, having visited the larger Mammoth Cave and Carlsbad Caverns national parks, is the story of the slow, careful development of the cave for tourism and the extensive atmospheric control employed to conserve the cave's delicate environment.

In Bisbee we took rooms for two nights at the Copper City Inn on historic Main Street. We've stayed at half-a-dozen different places in previous visits to Bisbee; this one moves to the top of our list – roomy, comfortable, artistically decorated, and at a reasonable price. Interesting side-lights: no check-in/out - before your visit, you are given a four-digit code for the lock on your door, and the Inn's owner/manager tends bar a few doors down Main Street at Bisbee's best restaurant, Café Roka.

We had a delightful next-day walk around town in a light drizzle, stopping at the site of my grandfather's old jewelry store (1921-1986). You can still see the blue-tiled sign, Brehm Bros. Jewelry, inlaid on the sidewalk entry. We visited all the art and jewelry stores around town and

concluded that Bisbee was beginning to prosper again – we sure did our part. We finished off that day with a drive around my Mother's old stomping grounds in Warren, a suburb of Bisbee, a few miles south of Bisbee's historic district.

The next day, our last on this trip, we drove northeast to Chiricahua National Monument where we hiked among the beautiful rock formations. My aging body had no trouble with a three-and-a-half mile hike at 6,000 feet altitude.

By mid October Pat and I were ready for a getaway trip for ourselves only. We flew to San Francisco, via San Diego, where we waited an extra 3 ½ hours for a record down-pour to stop in San Francisco. From the airport in San Francisco, we used Super Shuttle for the first time for airport-to-hotel transportation – worked out very well; we'd certainly recommend it.

Looking to use up our time-share points before they expired this year, we stayed at another Wyndham Resort, the Canterbury, on Sutter Street in downtown San Francisco. Very nice – and it turned out to be centrally located for our subsequent excursions.

Having missed dinner due to our late arrival, we were up early the first day to have breakfast at the famous Sears restaurant, where the specialty is Swedish pancakes. Then we purchased Muni passes that gave us unlimited access to streetcars, busses, and the metro.

We spent our first day just hopping around town on the cable car system – getting a feel for the city. On our second day we bussed over to visit the de Young Museum to see the King Tut exhibit, where we comfortably saw more impressive artifacts than we'd seen at the overly-crowded Egyptian Museum in Cairo a few years earlier.

Every time we pulled out our map to find our way, a local person would stop and ask if we needed any help; we found San Francisco people to be very friendly. Donation-seeking homeless people were around in the crowded downtown shopping areas, but we didn't find them to be a significant problem.

On our third and final day, we eagerly made our way to Fisherman's Wharf, anticipating a boat tour of the harbor, only to find the city and the harbor socked-in with fog. Greatly disappointed, we ducked into an indoor shopping center for thirty minutes and came out to find that the fog had suddenly lifted. So we did get to enjoy a wonderful San Francisco Bay cruise – including boating out to and under the Golden Gate Bridge, a close pass-by of Alcatraz Island, the location of the historic maximum security prison, and a view San Francisco's fascinating hilly terrain and impressive architectural skyline.

Your usually meat-and-potatoes columnist was also able to enjoy splendid San Francisco dining at Italian, Japanese, and seafood restaurants.

But I'm ready for turkey and dressing today! Happy Thanksgiving to you!



This is only one of several beautiful sunsets we saw from our Oceanside, California balcony. (Courtesy of Pat Wood)



This majestic rock formation highlighted our hike at Chiricahua National Monument. (Courtesy of Pat Wood)



Would you believe that the other end of the Golden Gate bridge was shrouded in fog? (Courtesy of Bob Ring)