

# John's and Barbara's Grand Adventure

*Home is Where We Park it*

## photographic highlights of our travels in 2008

Just after the first of the year we moved north to famous (to RVers) Quartzsite, Arizona, where tens of thousands of snowbirds flock for the winter. We dry-camped on BLM land and had an acre to ourselves. We especially enjoyed the peacefulness of it (and the super-dark sky), and ended up spending six weeks there. Then we spent five weeks back at our favorite resort in Borrego Springs where we again enjoyed the Anza Borrego Desert State Park. We were in Escondido and San Diego for two weeks, checking the area for a possible retirement home in the future and enjoying the beach. Then back to Arizona for another two weeks at Quartzsite. We spent most of April and May near Sedona in Northern Arizona's red rock country, ending May with a week at the Grand Canyon's South Rim. Then to St. George in June to visit friends and take care of business. We enjoyed a wonderful week at an isolated spot on the North Rim, followed by a week exploring Anasazi ruins near Cortez, Colorado. We spent July and August very slowly moving northward through Colorado, staying in Cortez, Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Leadville, Montrose, Golden, and Rocky Mountain National Park -- and it was wonderful. Rocky Mountain National Park was our northern turn-around point in mid-September. We spent the following six weeks in Moab, exploring the colorful canyon country on foot and by Jeep. Moab is John's favorite area.

The Grand Adventure abruptly went on hold in November 2008 when John was diagnosed with a non-malignant brain tumor, underwent surgery in Salt Lake City, and spent the rest of the year in the hospital. On Christmas Eve we returned to our home in St. George for six months of recovery.

In this collection of photographic highlights of the trip the most recent photos are at bottom.

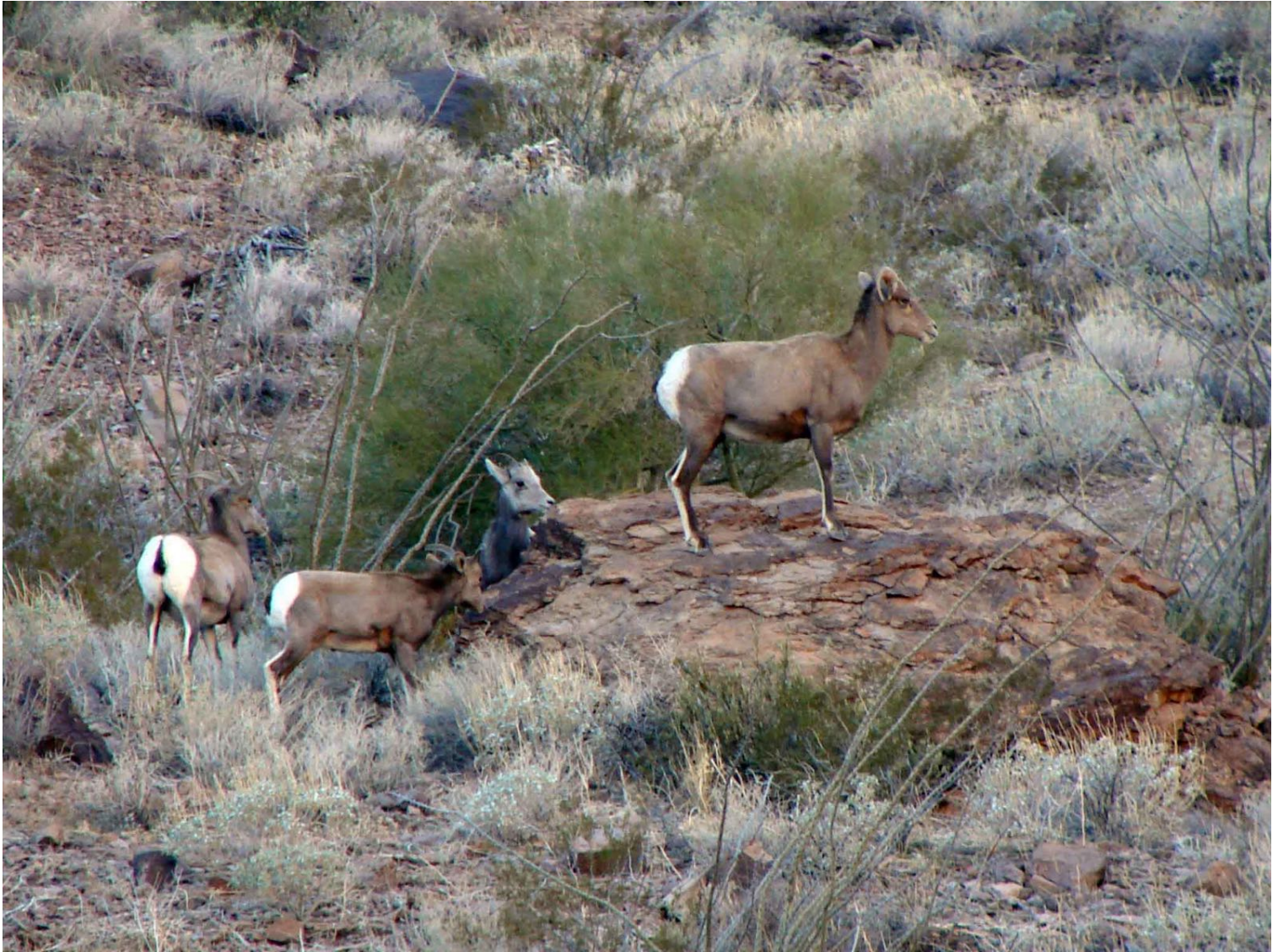


Can you spot the dental office in Algodones, Mexico? Algodones is immediately across the border from Yuma, Arizona, and snowbirds come here from far and wide for inexpensive dental work, eyeglasses, and pharmaceuticals. John had some tooth work done here too.



Early January 2008 found us in Quartzsite, Arizona, where we dry camped on BLM land for \$20/week. One fine day we went on a Jeep safari with neighbors into the nearby Kofa Wildlife Refuge; the highlight of the trip is the photo below.





We have looked many times for big horn sheep (we were looking in all the wrong places, evidently), but finally we saw some in the mountains near Quartzsite, Arizona.





Quartzite is metal-detecting central. We watched a "treasure hunt" sponsored by the local metal detecting club, and Barbara ended up buying the metal detector that our friend Griz (above) used as an early birthday present for John. Now John has a new hobby.





John had the Jeep lifted back in December for almost 50% greater clearance, and it can ride with the big boys now. Click [HERE](#) to view a 30-second video (5 MB; it may take a minute to load) of it coming off a hill in the Anza Borrego badlands.





We continue to seek out slot canyons, and there are quite a few in Anza Borrego Desert State Park. John feels he did a pretty good job of maintaining his footing while filming Barbara as they hiked up this narrow canyon. Click [HERE](#) for a 2-minute video without sound (14 MB; it may take a minute to load).





Patton's tankers practiced for their 1942 invasion of North Africa here, and in places you can find bullets, shrapnel, and odd bits of rusted metal. You're asked to report any unexploded shells you discover.





It's March, and the desert has come alive. Barbara rides her bike "around the block" (14 miles) most mornings and gets to smell the flowers. The temperature has finally hit the 80s after a long and surprisingly chilly winter.





John is off exploring almost every day, searching out interesting canyons and hikes. There are more great places here in the northern part of Anza Borrego Desert State Park than a person can visit in only a month or two.





The prettiest spot we've found in the Anza Borrego desert is Cougar Canyon, a 5 mile hike from the end of the dirt road. A real stream runs down the canyon, and there are plenty of waterfalls and even some shade.





A week in San Diego gave John a chance to try his metal-detecting skills on the beach, here at Mission Bay. So far he's found enough small change to pay for new batteries and a beer, but no treasure.





April, and it's back to the desert near Quartzsite Arizona -- a great place to set up the portable telescope. John's waiting for the sun to set so he can get down to business. The nearest streetlight is *miles* away, and Phoenix, Yuma, and Palm Springs are all faint glows on the horizon.

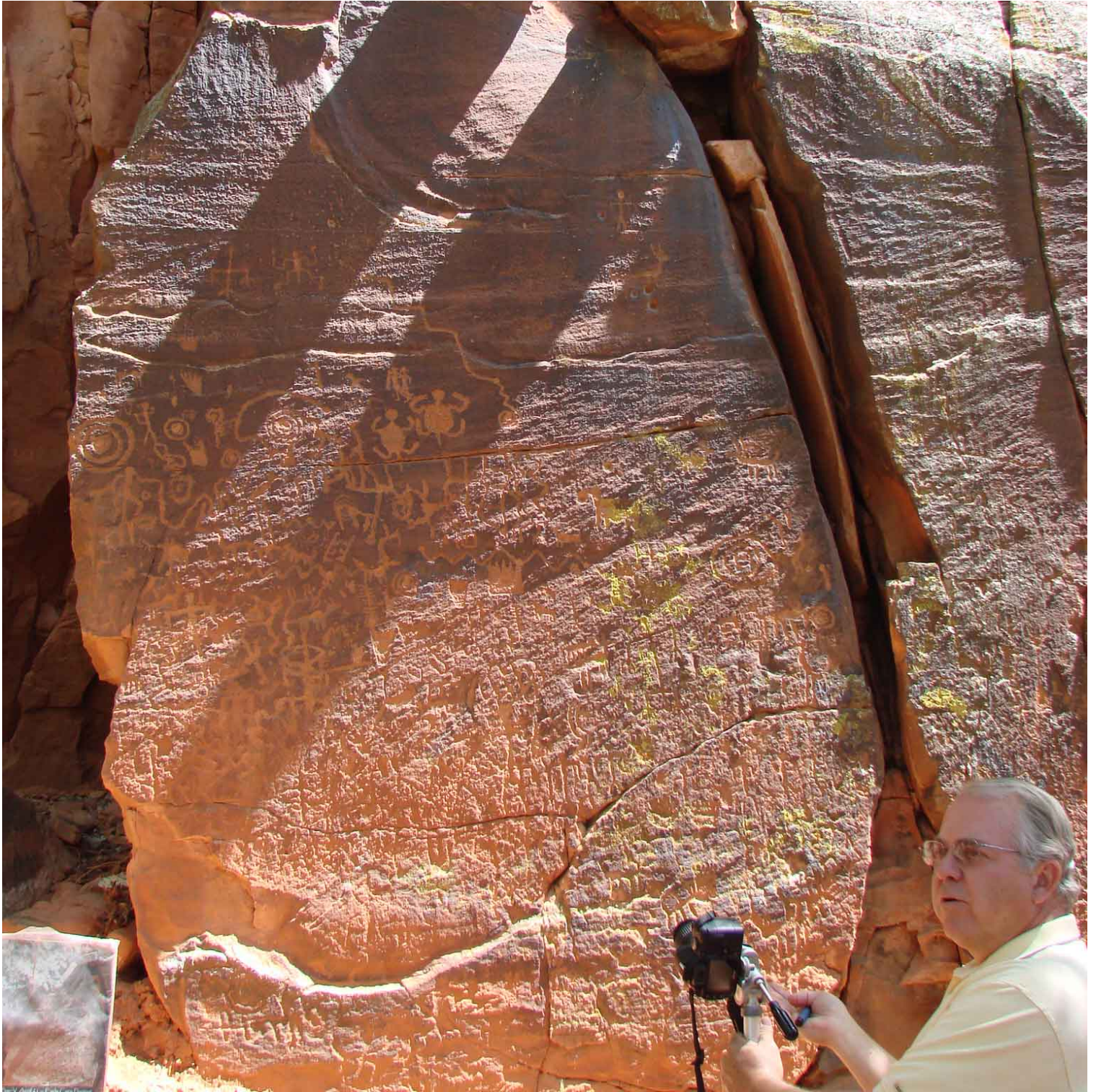




Barbara *really* likes cats, and at Out of Africa Park near Sedona she got to meet a big one. Our friend Ann Pruitt captured Barbara feeding a tiger through a fence. Earlier, when Barbara hand-fed a giraffe, there was no fence between them -- but the risk was less with the giraffe.







Most of the many petroglyphs we've seen have no known meaning. These at the V Bar V Ranch State Park south of Sedona are special: a shaft of sunlight illuminates certain glyphs on specific days (especially the equinoxes and solstices) to maintain a solar calendar. On April 21, the first day of the planting season, a corn-planting glyph is illuminated. All this was figured out by archaeologist Ken Zoll, and we took this picture of him taking a picture of it on April 21. His excellent web site [www.sinaguasunwatchers.com](http://www.sinaguasunwatchers.com) explains it all.





The Red Rock area around Sedona is a little piece of Southern Utah that somehow found its way to Northern Arizona. The rocks and plants are identical to what you find in Zion National Park, and so is the scenery. Not bad hiking!





Are we having fun yet? We made arrangements to take our RV in for service in Flagstaff in late May, and we parked overnight in an adjacent mall lot so as to be first in line next door in the morning. It snowed that night, and we awoke to three inches of the horrid white stuff. But our propane heater kept us warm and we were first in line at the RV repair place (and we got to shop at JCPenny's).





Grand Canyon 1: Perhaps *the* highlight of 2008 was our May 30 hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon -- and back up! At this overlook we're about half-way down the Kaibab Trail. You can see a continuation of the trail at extreme lower right, where it ends on the relatively flat Tonto Platform. The Kaibab Trail is wide, steep, and dusty. What a thrill!





Grand Canyon 2: We're at bottom, on the Tonto Platform, with the Inner Gorge behind us and the North Rim in the distance. We didn't go to the river, but instead went down the Kaibab Trail, traversed the Tonto Trail, and hiked back up to the rim on the Bright Angel Trail for a 13-mile loop.





Grand Canyon 3: The end of the day is a 3060-foot climb in 4.6 miles. Barbara is at lower left, headed up (and up, and up ... and up). We're proud to say that we middle-aged hikers completed the ascent in less than one-half the park service suggested hiking time. We slept well that night!





A colony of condors live at the Grand Canyon, and you can sometimes see them soaring over the depths. Adults have a 9-foot wingspan. John really likes the zoom lens on his Sony camera.





We treated ourselves to an all-day boat ride across Lake Powell to see the famous Rainbow Bridge. It is indeed impressive. You can't tell the scale of it from this vantage point, but you could fit the Statue of Liberty beneath it. It's amazing that such a huge free-standing structure can exist.





In late June we returned to a favorite camping spot in this peaceful meadow north of the Grand Canyon's North Rim. It's just a pretty spot in the national forest, not an official campground, and we had the entire place to ourselves.





Southwestern Colorado near Mesa Verde is "cliffdwelling central," and we learned that the population was greater 800 years ago than today. We're thoroughly enjoying seeing ruins of all sorts and in all stages of repair or decay. This particular structure is in Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.





On the way from Durango to Silverton we paused to watch the narrow-gauge steam train that makes the run up the mountain and has connected the towns since 1882. Old steam engines are so romantic (says John).





The color is correct. Most lakes in the Rockies are blue, but Ice Lake, above Silverton, is turquoise because of rock flour brought into the water by glacial action above. At 12,100 feet, Ice Lake is in the alpine tundra, well above tree line.





We've enjoyed the many 4WD roads up the passes and down the other side, all with grand views. This is from Engineer Pass at 12,800 feet. The Jeep handles the passes very well. (Note -- it's seldom this clean.)





Most Colorado ghost towns are not much more than building foundations and collapsed heaps of lumber, but St. Elmo, about 40 miles south of Leadville, has more than a dozen structures from 1880-1882 that remain intact. Even the boardwalk is authentic.





We fled the Leadville area when a severe storm came in, and we had the fun experience of driving our RV over a pass in a blizzard (on August 16!) toward lower elevations and warmer temperatures near Denver. Many of the trails we hiked last week are now under a few inches of snow.





We spied a small flock (herd?) of mountain goats at about 13,500 feet near the summit of Mt. Evans. Normally they don't let you get so close, but a telephoto lens helped. They're kicking aside the snow that fell a few days earlier (see photo above) to get to the munchies beneath.





This is the view through our RV windshield at our national forest campground at 10,350 feet, just south of Rocky Mountain National Park, where we stayed 9 days. The view is toward the Continental Divide. The little arrow points to Pawnee Pass (12,540 feet) which we hiked to and experienced hurricane-like winds.





Another scenic lunch spot for us retired folk! This is Lake Isabelle, below Pawnee Pass.





Our first camping spot in Utah (September 15) was on BLM land on a bank of the Colorado River just west of Moab. John came down to our private beach each evening to enjoy the sunset. The photo doesn't do justice to the sunset colors.





Barbara admires the "Great Gallery" suite of pictographs from 2000-1000 BC, located in a sandy canyon east of Hanksville, Utah.





This small herd of lady big horn sheep browses nonchalantly on cactus and weeds alongside the Green River in Utah, watched over by Mr. Big Horn.





This unidentified stone cabin beside the Green River in Utah has some history associated with it, but we've not been able to track it down. Cottonwood trees here are wonderful, and some look to be 1000 years old.





We've seen a *lot* of balanced rocks and usually don't bother about them, but this one is so spectacular that it seemed worth a shot. Barbara is in the foreground; the balanced rock is almost the size of a school bus. It's on BLM land in the San Rafael Swell.





There was a flurry of uranium mining in the Moab area in the 1950s (which is the main reason there are so many Jeep trails today). It's sobering to realize that this mine was worked when we were kids. The mine is at upper left (there's a steel gate to keep the curious out) to the upper left of the derelict wooden structure. In the distance is Temple Mountain in the San Rafael Swell.





Nothing lasts for ever, and that includes the arches in Arches National Park. Wall Arch collapsed last month (August 2008), and the park service has no plans to reassemble it. I guess you should be careful which arch you sit under.





The Grand Canyon of Arizona is world-class impressive, but the views from the Island in the Sky district of Canyonlands National Park outside of Moab are equally spectacular. This particular view includes Dead Horse Point at left, the La Sal Mountains in the distance, the Shafer Trail at left, and Canyonlands at right. What a place!





John thinks the Moab area has the greatest hiking on the planet, or at least in the United States. You can see sections of a Jeep road winding into the distance that we hiked. This is "Behind the Rocks", west of and above Moab. Our Jeep won't make it up these roads, so we hike.





The canyon country goes on forever. We hiked the Jeep trail in the foreground. Dead Horse Point and Canyonlands are in the distance.





One day while Jeeping we came across a tortoise out for a stroll, and Barbara kept him company for a few minutes. This particular tortoise is a visitor from Central Africa and his owner was nearby; there are no tortoises native to the Moab area (too cold in the winter).





Barbara camped in the parking lot of the Intermountain Medical Center in Salt Lake City for five weeks while John recovered from surgery in the tallest building at left. The "campground" is not fancy, but they provided a free electrical hookup and it's adjacent to the hospital, so we were very grateful for it.





On Christmas Eve we returned to St. George. John walked 2 miles around the RV park with his canes on a cold Christmas Day. In early January we moved back into our Kayenta house and put the RV in storage. We stayed home until June.

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