Grand Canyon, 2012: The Roaring Wind, Rim-to-Rim Trip

Our first trip was “The Sciatica, North Rim Trip”; the second was “The South Rim Trip”; this year was “The Roaring Wind, Rim-to-Rim Trip”. We hope for more Grand Canyon adventures and for additional family members and friends to join us. It is Phil’s great dream to get most all the family there sometime.

As in previous years, plans for the Grand Canyon trip started at Christmas, 2011 when Phil suggested a Rim-to-Rim hike, the North Rim to the South Rim. This plan would allow Phil to re-experience the North Kaibab Trail -- this time without sciatica! A backcountry permit was obtained and the dates were set for May 26th into the canyon from the North Rim and May 29th out of the Canyon at the South Rim. Once this was in place, all other arrangements could be made: air travel, lodging at the North Rim (Kaibab Lodge) and South Rim (Yavapai), etc.

Another issue was who would be going? Scott signed on early; we were delighted. Although we were hoping Chris would join in this year with Scott, we learned suddenly that Kathy and Chris were expecting twins!! Cheers to Chris and Kathy but not for Grand Canyon. Phil’s brother Ken also decided that it was not for him, at least this year. So the backpacking party was Phil, Scott and Jo.

Suddenly, it was time to pack and time to go. Checking the weather at the North Rim and South Rim we were warned of strong, high winds, cold temperatures and possible snow! No way to leave the tent in Houston. Pack warm clothes. And hope the weather report was really wrong!!

**Thursday, May 24th.** Depart Houston at 9:30AM, arrive Las Vegas at 10:30AM. Easy trip, mild temperatures and off we went on highway 15 heading north, to highway 9 heading East, to highway 89A and into Kaibab National Forest and Grand Canyon National Park. Five hours later we arrived at the Kaibab Lodge. The air was cool and crisp, windy (as predicted) but sunny skies were overhead.

So far so good, but suddenly we learned that water mains were broken and that potable water was probably not running at Cottonwood campground or Phantom Ranch. So we headed off to the Backcountry Office at the North Rim to check it out -- right -- drinkable water was going to be an issue!! Luckily, Phil had brought a filter unit and a new UV probe to kill bugs.

We walked to Bright Angel Point again at the North Rim. By now it was late afternoon and sunny but cold and windy -- really gusty!! We headed back to the Kaibab Lodge for dinner and bed!

**Friday, May 25th.** We organized our packs and waited for Scott to arrive from Paige. Scott was riding his motorcycle from Granby to Paige, met up with friends and was using a friend’s car for the trip from Paige to the North Rim. His bike ride was also rough in the WIND. We were glad when he arrived and enjoyed lunch before we all headed down to the Ranger Station to again check on the water issue and the predicted cold, windy and snowy forecast for Saturday. NO CHANGES: i.e. maybe no drinkable water and likely nasty, windy weather at the
start of the hike. **The harsh realities were beginning to sink in!!** The 130F temperatures of the last 2 years were not going to happen this year!!

On our return from the ranger station, we stopped for gas at the Kaibab store that is across the road from the Lodge. The winds were blowing a gale and creating dust bowl swirls everywhere – a contrast to the “warm” beauty of the yellow aspens that shimmered in the sunlight and were one of the major highlights of the environs this year.

After dinner, we packed the tent, took all the warm (that means all) the clothes we had and prepared for a rough, cold, windy start. The wind was howling outside all night to remind us that tomorrow morning was not going to be easy or nice.

**Saturday, May 26th:** The wind was still howling when we got up. We put on lots of layers – Jo even had mittens!! Jo captured an ephemeral glimmer of sun in the aspens before we left the lodge and then off we went to the North Kaibab Trailhead. It was comforting (sort of?) to see that there were other crazy people who were going to endure the same climatic challenges. So into the winds we charged, with everyone’s fingers frozen, at least for the start. But luckily NO SNOW and NO RAIN that would have made life really miserable!

With packs strapped on we headed off, down to the Coconino Outlook where the dark skies tell of the cold and the wind. But our fingers were gradually warming up and so were we. The descent was steep, the gusts of wind staggered our gait and at times seemed about to whip us off the trail and into the ravines. Phil seems oblivious even though his pant legs were flapping like flags or kites ready to cut loose. Jo was frightened and hanging on for dear life. Scott seemed steady about the conditions, but had to hang onto his hat. Down and down we went. Eventually, the sun came out but the winds continued to roar and whip dust in our faces. Roaring Springs, the source of all canyon water, was beautiful in the distance and the Pump House was as before – a nice respite before the last stretch into Cottonwood campground.

After seven long miles, we reached Cottonwood Campground where there was, in fact, no drinkable water. So off we went to Bright Angel Creek to get water that we would “sterilize” (we hoped) with the UV probe ----. Only time would tell.

We rested a bit and then hiked down to a small creek (Wall Creek) that we had enjoyed on our previous trip 2 years before. Then we had dinner, put up tents, and went to bed with all our clothes on!! We were hoping the wind would die down by tomorrow.

**Sunday, May 27th:** The morning was cold, Scott was cold and hadn’t slept well. He had only brought the rain fly for his tent so the wind breezed through a bit and to make matters worse, his Thermarest mattress had sprung a leak and he slept on the rocky ground. Jo felt guilty but with so many clothes on she managed to
keep warm and sleep. We all groused about the out-houses – the worst of any in Grand Canyon 2 years ago and still on this trip.

Once on the trail, the sun warmed us up and the blue skies brightened our day. The winds were dying down and our spirits were lifting —- We were even eager to make a detour to Ribbon Falls. This is a fascinating waterfall surrounded by pristine rock and green and lush moss --a remarkably cool, moist area in the desert.

Back on the main trail again, we made the last stretch to the Colorado River and Phantom Ranch. After setting up camp, we wrote postcards and tried to call Griffin, Chris and Kathy — no luck today.

Phantom Ranch was a cool 95F compared to the 130F of previous trips. As before, Bright Angel Creek water felt good for sore muscles and was a nice way to wash off some of the dust from previous days and let our toes recover.

Luckily there was potable water — but it took a long trek down the trail to get it. There were even flush toilets for the ladies but not for the guys who had to lug buckets of water for the “flush”. But again, the walk took at least 5-10 min. Not a trek one wanted to make in the middle of the night.

A deer visited us at dinner. This was a pleasant sight. Squirrels wrecked a corner of Scott’s pack, not such a pleasant sight. This was a surprise because he only had a gatorade container in the pack pocket. They will truly go after anything!!

**Monday, May 28**: Now for the hikes up and out — first to Indian Gardens and then to the South Rim. We were ready for UP because all the DOWN muscles were still sore!! As we remembered, the Bright Angel Trail up to Indian Gardens was a pleasant hike, first along the Colorado River and then along a creek and in the shade for most of the way. We only saw a few people but surprisingly one was a young lady (Amy) that Scott knew. She was hiking in flip-flops and working for one of the adventure companies. Within 4 hours we were setting up camp again and enjoyed a relaxing afternoon reading/visiting. We had an early dinner (again honored by a deer) and then hiked part-way down the trail to the Lookout Point to watch the sunset. The weather was beautiful and so was the sunset. A warmer night promised easier sleeping for all. Indian Gardens is truly a beautiful, green and picturesque place. One can see why the Indians used to live here — a gentle place in the harsh desert surrounding it. Friendly frogs chirp all day long, little lizards scurry everywhere and the ancient trees speak of days gone by.

**Tuesday, May 29**: The last stretch of our trek looms before us — 4500 feet up. It looks almost impossible but we have done it before — so off we go again. Luckily, there is a rest area every 1.5 miles on the way up — with drinkable water!! We meet George from McGill who asked Phil if “we would mind if he asked how old we were”? Phil was delighted. Not many guys at 73 years are carrying a 35lb pack and backpacking across the Canyon. Cheers to Phil!! Along the way, we see a mule train, a Western Tanager and lots of squirrels! Step-by-step and then
suddenly we are through the 2 tunnels and out. And there was George again who kindly took pictures of us at the Trailhead. Our trek was over – we were euphoric but also sad. Now what!! Yes. Lunch would be a good idea!! A hiker’s salad at the Bright Angel Lodge!! Something GREEN after days of freeze-dried trail food, cheese, beef jerky and peanuts! Salt is good but after awhile the thought of fruit and salad sounds really good.

The park bus (blue line) got us to the Yapapai Lodge, we settled into yet another venue, took showers, washed our hair and some clothes --- heavenly. We then explored the North Rim Visitor Center, bought some momentos and then were ready for dinner at the Bright Angel Lodge. It is a small world because there we met a colleague of Jo’s at BCM, Susan Marriott and her husband.

**Wednesday, May 30th:** We spent a leisurely morning hiking along the trail of ages, taking in views and reached the “Geological Exhibit” area. The air was cool and comfortable; it was a nice relaxing time in the Canyon.

We then trekked our stuff to the Bright Angel Lodge to take the Trans-Canyon Shuttle back to the North Rim. But first lunch and an ice cream cone to keep us alive for the 4.5h trip through the desert of the Navajo Indian Reservation, across the Colorado River at Lee’s Ferry, along the Vermillion Cliffs and then up into Kaibab National Forest. At the North Kaibab Trailhead, our car was safe and sound and we were back at Kaibab Lodge by 6:30PM. Our accommodations were in the “Deerview” cabin that was actually a made-over trailer house. There was lots of room for all, two separate bed rooms and areas for us to re-pack for the trips home. Scott was heading to Paige before his long bike trip to Granby. Phil and Jo were heading on to Zion on the way back to Las Vegas and Houston.

We had a final dinner at the Kaibab Lodge. Now the weather was mild and the wind was gone. Many deer were in the meadows and the moon was half full.

**Thursday, May 31st:** At breakfast there were many birds outside the Kaibab Lodge window: a humming bird, evening grosebeaks, pine siskins, western blue birds, robins, all kinds of sparrows and little warblers. Amazing and wonderful. Then we had to say our “good-byes” and head out.

Scott went north and then east to Paige. We went north out of the Canyon to Fredonia and Kanab then west to Zion National Park. The drive into the park was far different from Grand Canyon. Zion is made from more recent sand dunes piled up and up and swirled around making patterns in the rock walls of both white sand and red sand. The road to Zion was dark red clay with bright yellow lines – a unique feature. The peaks in Zion are also unusual, round white towers atop red stone, much like the Gaudi Cathedral in Barcelona! Zion Canyon itself is not as spectacular as Grand Canyon. The Virgin River is much smaller and the canyon is narrow. Buses are needed to take people in -- there is no room to turn around and certainly no way for individual cars of all tourists to enter.
We had a nice hike, saw lots of flowers in the weeping walls -- and Susan Marriott and her husband again!!

We stayed at the Zion Canyon Bed and Breakfast, run by Liz, Larry and Mychal. The place is nicely decorated with Western and Indian motifs with great views of the peaks around. We enjoyed watching the humming birds that visited orange flowers on the deck, had a delicious meal at Parallel 88 and relaxed as the sun set and revealed a bright moon overhead. A lovely spot to recover from the rigors of Grand Canyon.

**Friday, June 1st:** Breakfast at the B&B was delicious. Yogurt, berries and cereal were served in an open circular bowl. This was followed by toast with eggs over-easy placed in circles within the toast. Two salsas garnished the toast with a sprig of rosemary. Coffee was served in a French press with an hour glass timer – nice touch.

After a quick walk around Springdale (much like Taos or Santa Fe but smaller), we headed out, drove to Kolob Canyon (part of Zion), took a short hike (Jo in flip-flops!!) and then headed for Las Vegas. We stopped in St. George for a BLT (split between us) and a malt (Phil) and soft ice cream cone (Jo).

We were up-graded to first class so we got dinner on the plane coming home. We left at 6:30 and arrived at IAH at 11:15.

Home to the kitties – and suddenly it all seemed like a dream. Did we really backpack through Grand Canyon again? I guess the pictures will verify that we did!