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Subject: Postcard

The Trail Down



You could actually say it all began the night before the hike. Not the obsession, that began many years ago. But the immediate event was kicked off by our busboy. Oh my, I probably can't call him that now but I haven't a clue what the politically correct term is. So we'll just call him Ernesto. Ernesto with the cute ponytail. We had been having a good time with him for a couple of nights because he bragged to us he had never dropped a tray. That evening, as we slowly, decadently, shamelessly ate our flourless chocolate torte, he asked us what we were up to. We told him we were going down to Phantom Ranch the next day and hoped we could make it. He lit up! We discovered he came to Grand Canyon 20 years ago, hiked the canyon, and never left. He goes to the bottom all the time. When he found out we had already done the Indian-Garden-and-back thing, he told us we'd have no problem. Our confidence was pumped.

We got up with the sun, dragged our luggage quietly past the bull elk who thinks he owns our building, checked our bags with the bellman who also thinks he owns our building, followed the construction detour signs to the trailhead and asked the muleskinner to take our ritual picture.



With an exhilaration derived from – Was it the view? Was it the chocolate? Was it Ernesto? Was it just our cold fingers and toes? – we launched over the rim.

Bright Angel Trail to Phantom Ranch is 9.8 miles. We add 0.4 to get to the trailhead. It drops about 4400 feet over that distance and we can conveniently measure our progress by the restrooms we pass. Although it's not accurate to say we actually pass any.



There were a lot of signs we'd never seen before. This one reminds you not to get bit. Or a few might say bitten...



(But isn't it cute? The squirrel, not the hand, silly.)



At the first rest stop we picked up Betty and Veronica. When I say picked up I mean in the sense of fellow hikers who go a similar speed and you can't distance yourself from them. Betty and Veronica were a couple of valley girls who clearly missed their i-phones but thought hiking without water or formless clothing was special. Luckily, somewhere before Indian Garden, they hooked up with Archie and Moose on some sunny rocks and we never saw them again.



The mule train passed us somewhere after rest stop 2 and this year they weren't yelling "Yee Haw". That was a good thing. The park has cut way back on mule rides, to just one a day from each rim (I think it was 4 or 5 before). Pedestrians are delighted.

Indian Garden.



Sheila prays to the Red Rock God. She's praying her calves will loosen up. She says if you do it with your legs straight, it works.

We always thought of Grand Canyon as being totally dry, with the exception of the water that NPS pumps in. But at some point we began listening to the running water along the trail. Oops, then in 3 or 4 places it was running across the trail.



Is this Sheila, smugly rock-hopping across the creek? No, it must be an alien being that has assumed Sheila's shape.



We thought it would be pretty flat from Indian Garden to the river. It is, except for Devil's Corkscrew (more nasty switchbacks and stuff). At the top we met a French couple coming up who chatted away in heavily accented English about... I don't know what it was about. They both talked at the same time. Eventually I said "Vive L' France!" They stopped, she chuckled, said "Oui, Vive L' France!" and off they went.

By the time we reached the bottom of the corkscrew we were in t-shirts and our packs were stuffed with the warm layers.



Brave flower.

At last the Colorado.



Across the Silver Bridge is Phantom Ranch...

D&S