

Date: 10/30/2012 8:43:18 PM

Subject: Postcard

---

## The Trail Up



We re-crossed the Colorado in dawn's early light. No we did not sing the national anthem.

At about a half-mile we overtook a pair of middle aged women who had been dumped off the riverboat yesterday to climb out today. They were already distressed and it hadn't gotten seriously steep yet. Uh oh.



To our delight the sun found us before we left the river. Golden rays made golden rocks and golden rocks made golden reflections. It was tempting just to linger and watch, but the trail turned south and we followed.



We next encountered a pair in shorts and tees using their trekking poles (think 21st century hiking sticks), absolutely hustling down the trail. We asked one of them where they had started, expecting to hear it was Indian Garden (halfway) but she said instead “At the top, two hours ago”. I had to turn to speak as she went careening past. “In the dark?”, I asked. She said over her shoulder “We have lights” and they were gone. They were part of what we decided are Grand Canyon “Extreme Hiker” subcultures.

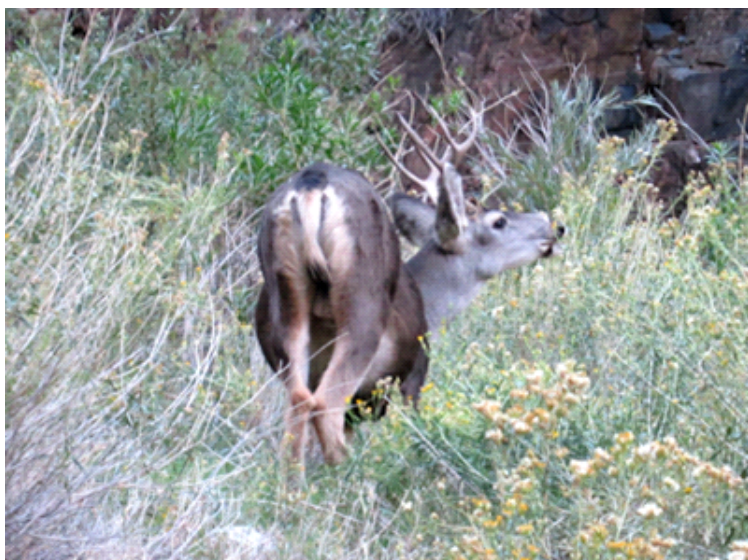
Some fast-hike with sticks, like the couple above. Others just run. They go down and back in the same day, or down one side and up the other, carrying only water. Some get jobs at the park, like Ernesto did, and they hike the canyon as often as possible. In one variation we saw four from the Bright Angel Campground in headlights running up the North Kaibab trail before we went to breakfast. Carrying full packs.

Some groups we encountered are in a different subset. They travel in squads of 4-10. They are 20-40 years old, tall, strong, carry big packs, and camp along the side trails. They talk exclusively to each other. Glare. Flex. Snarl. Move on.

To extreme hikers, everyone else is just so much trail clutter. As you might expect, though, they are few in number and pass by quickly.

A buck leapt across the trail just in front of Sheila, as the grass was apparently greener on the other side. Or more likely he was just showing off. He flicked his tail and waggled his big mule ears at her.





We moved in and out of canyon shadows. The sun rose higher and occasionally warmed us.



This guy came up behind us, moving fast. I said "Are you looking for Robin". He replied "No, he's up in his room playing video games while I'm out here keeping you safe". You can't invent this stuff.



We were glad he was quickly gone. He was interesting but we preferred the deer.



There are also extreme hiker pretenders. On the way down one 55ish guy asked us what hike we were doing. We told him, then politely asked him the same... which is what he was angling for. He said he was going to the river and back the same day. He did it when he was twenty and he would do it again. Big poop.



The terrain got steep right before Devil's Corkscrew and we pulled out our own poles. They are collapsible and we carry them strapped under our packs. We use them selectively. When we do, they give us balance, ease the impact on our lower body joints and increase trail speed. We also use our headlamps selectively. Or would, if we had any.





As we discovered, they are perfect for fording creeks.



We thought of the Breakfast Warden and picked up about 5 discarded wrappers along the trail. We didn't pick up the Q-tip.

At Indian Garden we knocked off part of the lunch provided by the Phantom Ranch canteen: bagel, cream cheese, apple and Oreos. We had left the greasy sausage packs on the table in our cabin. Very primly.



We saved the pretzels for a rest stop boost and brought the raisins all the way out for disposal. Raisins don't get no respect.

We felt good but fatigued and we took almost no more pics until near the top. We were kept busy working our way through the weekend visitors who concentrate at the top of the trail. Incredibly we saw Batman once more as he was going *back down*. He is an extreme hiker subculture of one.



Made it back up 20 minutes faster than going down. Picked up that trail litter. Good karma.



D&S