

Date: 5/3/2014 4:24:37 PM

Subject: Postcard

Day 3 – Bright Angel Trail

We were up with the sun, had packed our packs, dropped the duffel bag at the mule station, mixed Gatorade in our empty plastic jugs and were standing in the breakfast mob. Here's the meal deal – everyone gathers at the front door of the canteen. A bell is rung and the hostess/waitress/busgirl appears and reads the rules. One of the rules is that you are checked off her list and assigned a table. This morning we got table 3 and we sat down with empty chairs facing us. Soon they were filled. Across from Sheila was M. Holy crap.

After some uncomfortable staring we managed to start a conversation using the 3 basic mealtime exchanges: which trail you came down, how many nights you are staying and which trail you are going up. M was going up the Bright Angel the next day. When he discovered we had done it before, he got downright talkative and wanted to know about our experience. Sheila and I agree he never actually smiled, but he was articulate and demonstrated some appropriate social skills. OK, now maybe he's M for misunderstood.



The early sun set the cottonwoods aglow along Bright Angel creek to the river...



...it backlit a Datura



... it reflected off the river



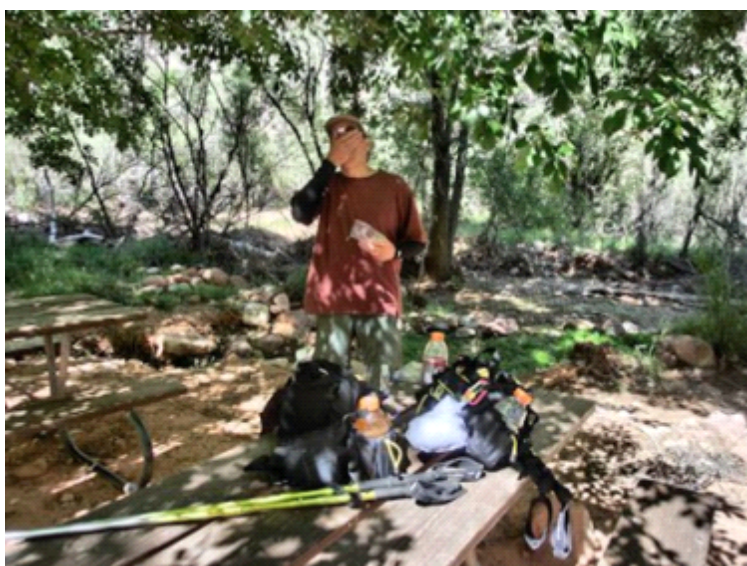
...it warmed a lizard

...and it got us into the perfect state of mind to tackle the trail.

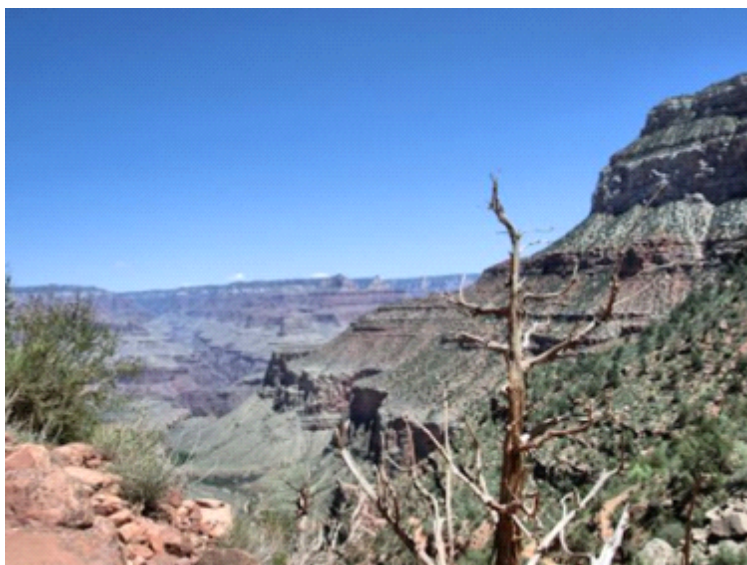
There is a pit toilet at the place where the trail heads away from the river and up the canyon. A uniformed young lady was just starting to clean it and she apologized for not having it ready, although it looked really clean even then. She told us she stays at Indian Garden (about 3 miles and 1500 ft. up) and she walks to work each day. We told her those were the cleanest dirty toilets we'd ever seen and she had the best worst job ever. Two pit toilet paradoxes! At the bottom of the Grand Canyon! What a vacation!



This is Devil's Corkscrew (you've noticed that another natural feature is named after the evil one, but we're done trying to figure that out). It's a set of steep switchbacks that have to be negotiated just before Indian Garden. Shortly after we did it, the Pit Cleaner whooshed by with a big smile and bulging calves.



We selped.



When we got within 1.5 miles of the top we took another break. We had caught up with Bob from Montana and his daughter Alison from New York City, who had left Phantom Ranch an hour before us. Alison stood and chatted while Bob sat and panted. Bob finally got himself up and off they went. We did some more recharging and trekked on.



Closer to the top Bob and Alison were parked along the path. Alison stood and chatted. Bob sat and panted. We bade them farewell and continued ahead.



We're still smiling. Or maybe smiling again. When you reach this tunnel it's only 100 ft. to the top.



Arrived.



The park has an extravagant new sign. And we were OK with that.

We walked to Bright Angel Lodge to check in. No room yet. We took the bus to Back Country parking lot to pick up Vici, threw our stuff in and cruised for a parking place near our room. Found the perfect opening although it required a parallel park job, which we executed the first time, much to my amazement but Sheila's expectation. Back to the Lodge. No room yet. Went to the bar for a cup of coffee and there were Bob from Montana and Alison from New York City. Alison chatted and Bob sat. And drank many beers.

We went to El Tovar for dinner which we topped off with flourless chocolate cake – a thick layer of chocolate frosting over chocolate ganache on a blond-brownie crust, garnished with whipped cream and a chocolate leaf and decorated with patterns of colored cream sauce. Unpacked our stuff and contemplated our unopened jar of Arnica Muscle Erasing Salve. Want the 9 bucks back.

D&S

PS – Unretouched photo of M – his eyes really did glow.



Alright, no they didn't.

Final note on M. The next day we couldn't decide where to eat. We walked to nearby El Tovar to look at the menu – way too fancy and expensive for lunch. We walked to the nearby Arizona room to look at the menu – nothing of interest. We then walked quite a way to Maswik Lodge for a plain old burger, taking the stairs down to the tracks, picking a route across them and past the mule barn. We ate. Decided to follow the main road back to our room at the Thunderbird, which took us past the Bright Angel trailhead. As we walked by the big new sign, M popped over the rim right in front of us. He was truly excited about making it in 6½ hours and had to tell someone. There we were. Destiny. M was for Meant to be.