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Along Arizona's Route 66 Road Trip (W20A)

This wasn't actually a Route 66 trip, but I did visit a handful of sites along the Mother Road – and other more archaeology-oriented sites more to my liking found not too far from Route 66's replacement, Interstate 40, between Kingman and Winslow, Arizona. On the way home, I checked out a handful of historical sites along Highway 93 between Kingman and Las Vegas.

I spent three nights in Winslow, in the same motel I've spent nights in on past road trips to points further east. Flagstaff might have been a bit more centrally located, but it's a much bigger city, and a university town at that. With the ongoing pandemic, Winslow made more sense to me.

Winslow, of course, is famous for its mention in the Eagles' song "Take It Easy". You can actually stand on a corner in Winslow's Standin' on a Corner Park right next to a statue of co-songwriter Glen Frey, added to the park after he died a few years ago. I've been to the park on past stays in town, so I skipped it this time, focusing instead on destinations outside of town.

I generally avoided the Navajo Nation Reservation, too. It's located just to the north of a few places I visited, but it has been struck pretty hard by the COVID pandemic. One consequence is that the Navajo impose strict curfews that limit non-essential travel during those times. The curfews apply both to tribal residents and to those just passing through as the Navajo work to bring down their COVID numbers.

What could be a nice weekend getaway out of Las Vegas in normal times – drive to Flagstaff Friday after work; see Wupatki, Sunset Crater Volcano and possibly Walnut Canyon National Monuments on Saturday (all destinations on this trip), and then head back to Vegas on Sunday by way of the Grand Canyon, entering the park from its east entrance to see all the South Rim viewpoints – doesn't work right now, as the east entrance to the park is currently closed (it borders the Navajo Nation).

That's the kind of information one needs to consider when planning travel during the pandemic. Surging case number in states to the north have led me to cancel a different planned fall road trip. Arizona, which was in terrible pandemic shape this past summer, has seen a huge drop (75%) in its positive test count numbers after several jurisdictions instituted mandatory mask requirements.

(If Route 66 really is your thing, spend more time in Kingman and Flagstaff, and to a lesser extent Holbrook and Seligman, Arizona.)



Classic Route 66 kitsch motel sign in Williams, Arizona. A lot of today's Route 66 kitsch is actually of more modern origin, designed to appeal to tourists following the Mother Road today.



What's left of the what was the original Twin Arrows, now a ghost town along Route 66. This section of Route 66 was generally bypassed with the construction of modern Interstate 40, just to my left out of the picture.



Some of the ruins of nearby Two Guns, another Route 66 ghost town.



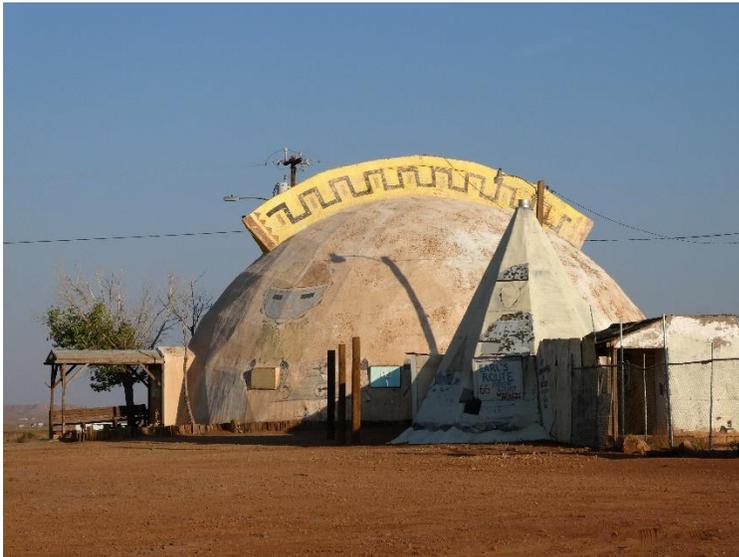
In 1922, Earle and Louise Cundiff bought 320 acres of land here and built a store, restaurant and gas pumps for an increasing number of travelers and tourists. A few years later Harry Miller leased some of the land with his own designs on appealing to passing tourists. Using stone, brick and chicken wire, he built a small zoo that featured mountain lions, Gila monsters, coral snakes and some birds. The following year, the road that passed Two Guns was designated Route 66.

That same year, Earle Cundiff and Miller had a falling out, and Miller shot the unarmed Cundiff to death. Miller was later acquitted of the killing, but soon after Miller was mauled by two of his own mountain lions and bitten by one of his Gila monsters. He soon left Two Guns.

Louise, however, kept at it for years, at least until such roadside attractions declined.

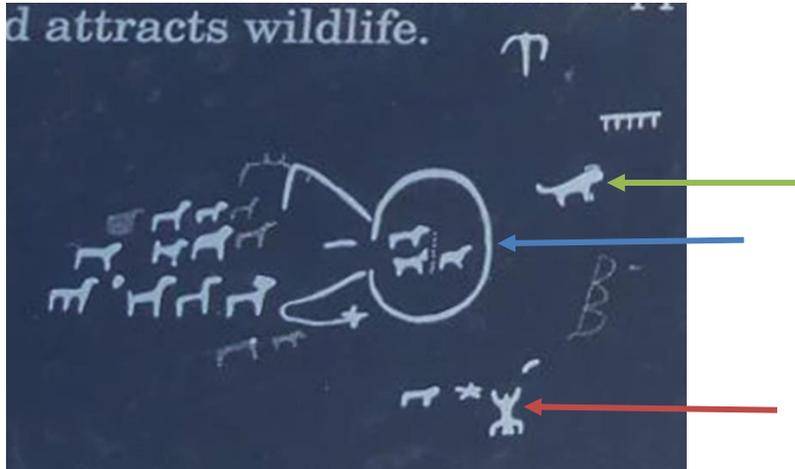


I first noticed Canyon Diablo while flying over northern Arizona last year, and I wanted to see it from the ground, checking it out at this spot a few miles north of Two Guns. Two Guns is located at the site where Route 66 crosses Canyon Diablo. The road originally descended down one side and up the other of the canyon before a bridge was eventually built.



Not far from here is the site of one of the world's best-preserved meteor craters. It's definitely worth seeing, but I've seen it before, and at \$22 I decided that it probably hadn't changed enough for me to see it a second time. But the nearby Meteor City Trading Post's dome shape evokes the image of a giant meteor striking the planet, don't you think? Well, maybe except for the fact that it's got a mohawk and some surrounding tepees. (Did you know that the mohawk is not associated with the Mohawk, Mohegan or Mohican tribes, but rather the Central Plains-based Pawnees. Why Pawnees here in Arizona? The Navajo, Hopi and Apache each have a strong presence in the region, but to a lot of tourists an Indian is an Indian, as is apparent in a lot of Hollywood-inspired tourist souvenir shops.)

My first significant sightseeing stop of my drive to Winslow was at the Keyhole Sink Rock Art site, just east of Williams. The small canyon, which has the shape of a keyhole, features petroglyphs created by the ancient Cohonina people about 1000 years ago. The Cohonina are believed to be ancestors to today's Havasupai and Hualapai.



Its most famous petroglyph panel features this image of deer heading into a keyhole-shaped canyon. But try as I might, I couldn't find the panel in the canyon. At least not until I was back at the hotel that evening.



I looked through some of the pictures I took while in the canyon, and eventually found much of this panel in the substantially enlarged upper left-hand corner of a picture I took from some distance of a different panel. As much as the Forest Service highlights this panel, it's not actually marked at the site.



The biggest petroglyph panel at Keyhole Sink. The panel was partially damaged by vandals and restored.



When I got to Winslow, I checked out the site of the Brigham City Ghost Town, one of a handful of early Mormon settlements along the Little Colorado River.

For my first full day out of Winslow, I headed to an area north of Flagstaff to visit Wupatki and Sunset Crater Volcano National Monuments. I'd been to both parks a couple times, but not since 2004. A loop road connects the two parks. I started with Wupatki at the north end of the loop – Wupatki photographs better in the morning and mid-day, whereas Sunset Crater Volcano looks best in the afternoon light.



Wupatki preserves hundreds of Ancient Pueblo People (Cohonina, Ancestral Puebloan and Sinagua) archaeological sites. Most are off-limits to casual visitors, although five major ruins sites have been stabilized and are open for visitors, including the ruins at Lomaki, pictured here.



The Citadel was a three-story pueblo built atop a volcanic outcropping on the edge of the Citadel Sink.

In the distance you can see Humphreys Peak to the right, the highest point in Arizona, and Sunset Crater Volcano towards the left.

And if you look carefully elsewhere around the landscape from the top of the Citadel, you can see a handful of off-limits nearby ruins sites.



From the top of the Citadel, you can see some of the 600 volcanoes of the San Francisco Volcanic Field, located north of Flagstaff. The volcanoes range in age from about 1000 to 6 million years old. Humphreys Peak is an extinct stratovolcano in the San Francisco Volcanic Field.

But a bit closer you see the upper rim of a shallow canyon that cuts across the picture. Many of the ruins at Wupatki are built along such canyons. After scanning the rim of this canyon, I spied one of a number of such ruins sites I observed from the Citadel. But at this distance, was it really a ruins site or just a natural rock pile. Well, Google Satellite answered that question that evening back at the hotel.



Note the squarish-shaped rooms outlined in the rubble in this satellite image of this location.



The park's loop road briefly leaves the park. Along this stretch I stopped at the Doney Picnic Site, where a hike up the Little Doney Craters gave me this view of Big Doney Crater.



Along that hike I came across this small ruins site. Archaeologists think that this may have been a shelter for those who farmed the fields below.



Wupatki Ruins is the most extensive of the ruins sites open to the public in the monument. That's the Doney Mountain Crater in the distance.



It also features this ball court. Such ball courts were common in Mexico and southern Arizona, but much less so further north. This is the northernmost of these ball courts found to date.



The Wukoki ruins site



One of the park's back roads leads to a remote section of the Navajo Nation Reservation. I took it only as far as the apparently dry Little Colorado River, which marks the boundary between the park and the reservation.



After leaving Wupatki, I headed for Sunset Crater Volcano, pictured here, where I took a couple short photo walks.





This feature is called a “squeeze-up”. Basically, some thick molten lava is pushed up through a crack in the cooling surface lava resulting in this ridge of lava.



Aspens in their bright fall colors stand out against the background that resulted from the Bonito Lava Flow.

The Bonito Lava Flow is less than 1000 years old. It is believed that ash from the Sunset eruptions helped make farming more successful at Wupatki, as the ash would help the land retain water.

The Colorado Plateau covers about 130,000 square miles of the Four Corners region, including the southeastern half of Utah, the northern half of Arizona, northwest New Mexico and western Colorado. It is basically a big, stable chunk of the earth's crust that was more or less uplifted as a whole starting about 600 million years ago, a sharp contrast to the geological jumble that is the Basin and Range province to the west and the mountain building that created the Rockies to the east. The uplift increased erosion resulting in many features preserved in the regions national parks and national monuments. Colorado Plateau boundaries are readily apparent in a number of places, including a couple I saw on this trip. The Mogollon Rim marks 200 miles of its southern boundary in Arizona.



On my second day, I took a morning drive looking for views of the Mogollon Rim, such as this one at Christopher Creek, Arizona. The rim rises as much as 3000 feet above the land to the south.



On my way back to Winslow, I stopped to check out Jacks Canyon.

That afternoon I made a return visit to Homolovi State Park. I visited it on a rainy, overcast day a few years ago, but had it as a sunny day option if my Mogollon drive left me with plenty of time to fill.



Like Wupatki, the park preserves a number of archaeological sites. However, the ruins sites open to the public have undergone much less restoration and reconstruction than you see at Wupatki, so they more closely resemble what archaeologists more typically find at such sites.



Pottery shards found at one of the archaeological sites.



Petroglyphs found along Homolovi's Tsúvö Loop trail. I also hiked out to Sunset, which like Brigham City Ghost Town was an early Mormon settlement along the Little Colorado River.



Before starting my 2-day drive back to Las Vegas, I made a return visit to the abandoned Little Painted Desert County Park, north of Winslow, to check out its Chinle Formation landscape in the morning light. I saw it in the afternoon light a few years ago. I like it better in the afternoon light, but either is good.

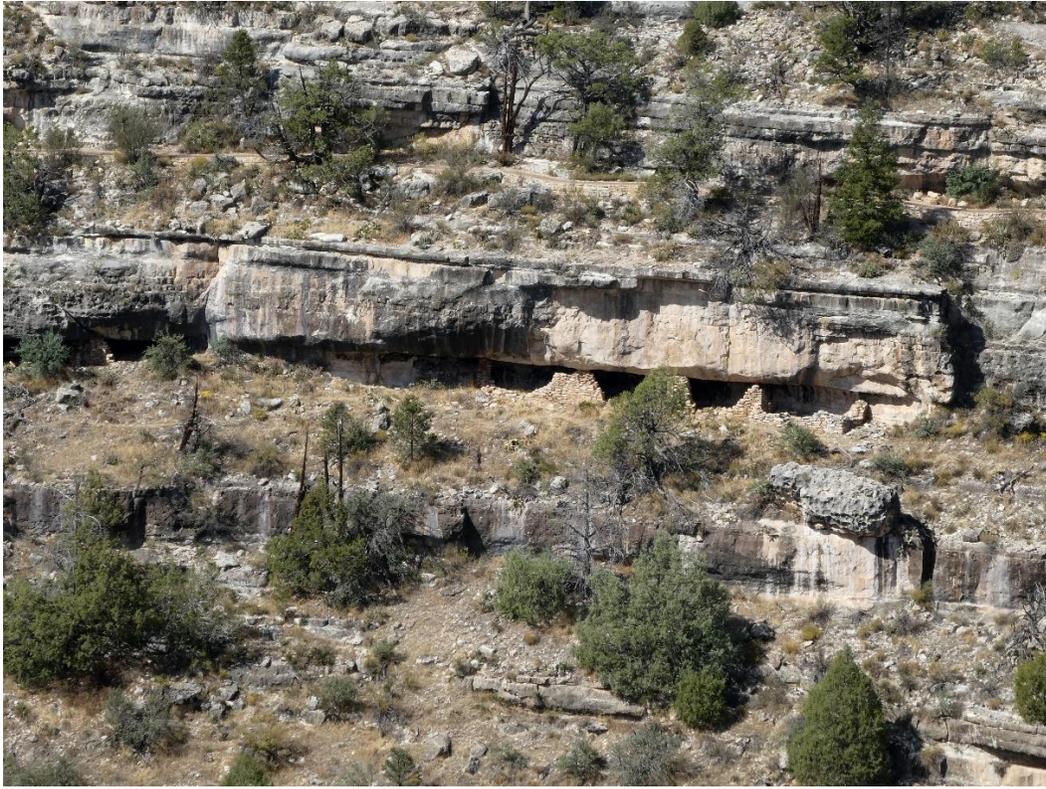


On my drive west, I decided to make a return visit to Walnut Canyon National Monument. I checked out the 900-year-old Sinagua ruins here back in the 1990s, and then I made it back here in 2016. The primary feature is a loop hike that descends 185 feet to “the Island” and then back up, passing a number of ruins along the way. I took that hike in 2016, but it started raining on my way back up and then it rained off and on when I hiked the Rim Trail. I had no need to hike down to the Island again, which my recovering foot was grateful for, but it was nice to hike the Rim Trail with sunny skies.

Here’s a view down into Walnut Canyon from the Rim Trail. If you have a keen eye, you’ll spot a number of ruins sites on the canyon walls. It’s hard to imagine life like that. Even just getting water to bring back home meant heading to the bottom of the 365-foot-deep canyon.

The park preserves a few miles of Walnut Canyon, so I suspect there are a lot more ruins than the ones I’ve seen here, but this is the only area in the monument open to visitors.

Pictures of some of the ruins follow. Fortunately, my camera has 30x optical zoom.





I planned to spend the night in Kingman, Arizona. I got there by mid-afternoon, so I thought I'd check out nearby Hualapai Mountain Park, a county park centered on the peak of Hualapai Mountain. It's got a mix of camping, cabin rentals, hiking trails and scenic views – making for a pretty decent local park.

It's only 100 miles from Kingman to home. On past trips I'd plan to hit some historical sites along the route, only to skip them rather than spend a night in Kingman, saving them for some "next time". So, I planned this trip as the "next time" trip.

First thing in the morning, I checked out a historical site on the edge of town, Camp Beale Springs in the Cerbat Foothills Recreation Area. In the 1850s, the War Department wanted to construct a wagon road west along the 35th parallel. The department's agent found the springs during one of his survey trips. A military outpost was established at the site. The spring would become an important water source in the early days of Kingman.



The spring



Mineral Park, established in 1871 and more or less abandoned by 1912, was once the biggest city and one-time county seat of Arizona's Mojave County.



Downtown Chloride, another faded mining town. This is more of a near-ghost town than a ghost town, as it still has some residents and a couple businesses. And it puts on a gunfight show Saturdays at noon.



From my first visit to Chloride, back in 1996. That "WHOA" painted on the street at the same intersection pictured above made my stop here back then a bit memorable. With the loss of "WHOA", I guess Chloride is no longer even a one-horse town.



Chloride's "Cyanide Springs" western town is the setting for its weekly gunfights.



In a canyon in the mountains just above town, you'll find the "Chloride Murals", originally painted in 1966 and restored twice by the original artist. It's called "Journey – Images from an inward search for self". If it were untitled, my reaction would merely be "meh". But when I consider that title? The work incorporates a number of spiritual symbols from a variety of cultures and systems, striking me as more cliché than inward search. (The snake's mouth open around an orb of sorts, for example, reminds me of the Serpent Mound earthworks in Ohio.) Yeah, everybody's a critic.



I mentioned the Colorado Plateau earlier. The Grand Wash Cliffs rise above northwest Arizona, marking not only the southwest boundary of the Colorado Plateau but also the west end of Grand Canyon National Park, where the Colorado River flows out of a gap in the cliffs.



View towards the Grand Wash Cliffs and the west end of the Grand Canyon.

My last stop was a return visit to the Pearce Ferry area of Lake Mead National Recreation Area. It is located a few miles downstream from where the Colorado River flows out of the Grand Canyon at Grand Wash Cliffs, and enters what would be Lake Mead if water levels in the lake currently weren't so low. Pearce Ferry provided one means for early Mormon pioneer settlers to cross the Colorado River and get from what is now southeastern Utah to St. George, site of a Mormon temple. Because of the Grand Canyon, the next such crossing area was hundreds of miles upstream at Lee's Ferry.

I was curious if there was a hiking trail that followed the Colorado River from Pearce Ferry to the western end of the Grand Canyon. I didn't find an official trail, but either hikers or cows have worn a path at least part of the way there. My left foot's recovery still didn't allow for a long hike today, but it's something for me to keep in mind for the future. After all, I'd like to be able to say that I've hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back, and this route would let me do so without having to deal with the canyon's pesky elevation changes (the canyon is more than 3000'-6000' deep in places).

I'm rather clever about such things.



Walking along the Colorado River at Pearce Ferry towards the mouth of the Grand Canyon

After finishing up at Pearce Ferry, I headed home.