

Southwest USA 2018 – More than just National Parks



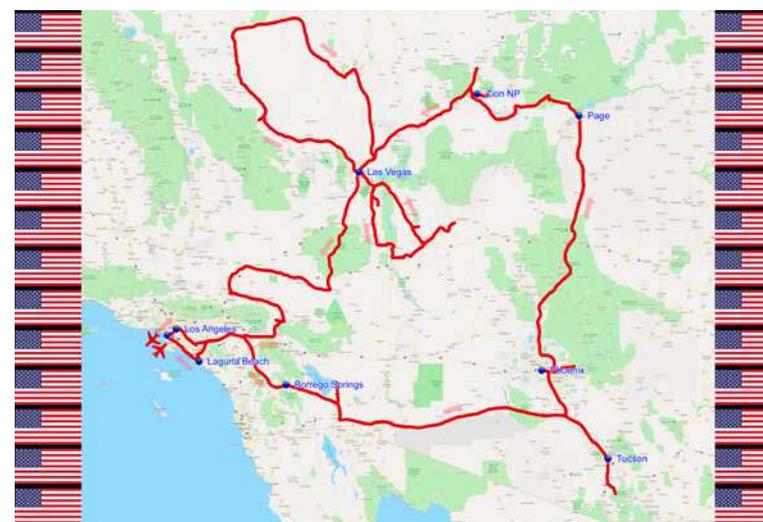
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Date	Destination	Hotel	Price	Milage incl. Tax [\$]	Milage day	Milage total
Thur. 26.04.	Los Angeles	Coral Sands Motel	212,20	14	14	
Fri. 27.04.	Hollywood			33	47	
Sat. 28.04.	Borrego Springs	Stanlunds Inn & Suites	91,80	212	259	
Sun. 29.04.	Tucson	Best Western	237,84	450	709	
Mon. 30.04.				93	802	
Tue. 01.05.	Phoenix	GreenTree Inn & Suites	91,11	232	1.034	
Wed. 02.05.	Page	Rodeway Inn	143,87	351	1.385	
Thur. 03.05.	La Verkin	Best Western	302,00	208	1.593	
Fri. 04.05.	near Zion NP			56	1.649	
Sat. 05.05.	Las Vegas Downtown	Main Street Casino	101,70	219	1.868	
Sun. 06.05.	Las Vegas Strip	The Linq	480,44	491	2.359	
Mon. 07.05.				382	2.741	
Tue. 08.05.				74	2.815	
Wed. 09.05.	Victorville	Comfort Suites	90,52	274	3.089	
Thur. 10.05.	Laguna Beach	Holiday Inn	---	199	3.288	
Fri. 11.05.	Airport LAX		---	55	3.343	

So, this year it's US-time again. Originally, we planned a trip to Bhutan, but as last year came to an end, it became more and more obvious that Freya's health condition will not improve fast enough for such a trip. Indeed, she was much more interested in staying at home with some short trips to wellness hotels than anything else. On the other hand, that is anything but vacation for Jürgen. So, we agreed that she makes her trip with Gisela, a friend of her, and Jürgen can spend some time in America.

I used some of my bonus miles to book a flight from Munich to Los Angeles and quickly added a car via USA-Mietwagen.de. The trip planning came next and until end of January all hotels had been booked (with cancellation option if the weather would be too bad).

The idea was to visit some of the interesting places I collected info for. Most of them are not typical touristic highlights; some of them are really off the beaten track. In the end I spent a single day in a National Park.



Thursday, 2018-04-26 – From Munich to LA

Getting up as early as usual and hurrying up a little bit gives me a buffer of some 40 minutes to be at parking service in time. This is quite common at the bigger airports in Germany: You can leave your car some 10 minutes away from the airport and the provider will bring you to the terminal. The price for that is much cheaper than parking at the airport and if you want they might even clean your car, change tires or perform other small services.

As expected I got stuck in a traffic jam,

but my buffer was more than sufficient. I'm in the Lufthansa lounge now and will have to leave soon as there will be a second security check before you can enter the gates where the US-flights are departing. You can spend quite some time there if you are selected to go through the X-ray channel, but I'm lucky and can go directly to the gate.

The flight is pretty boring and reminds me why I try to avoid long distance flights during daytime. I try to get some rest but as I hardly sleep on planes during the night this is quite a useless exercise. In the end I watched three movies. At least the food was quite good.

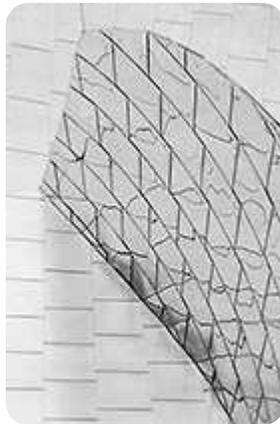
Immigration in Los Angeles looks pretty

confusing with different lines joining and departing again. All depending on your status and if you have to go for special questioning or not. I'm lucky again. Filling out the form on the service machine, receiving a piece of paper and I'm directed to the line where the immigration officer just wants to know the length of my stay. It takes me just 30 minutes from touch-down to leaving the building with my luggage.

I follow the signs to „rental cars“ and manage to be the last one to enter the waiting shuttle-bus. For whatever reason I was not able to choose the „skip the line“ option at home, just the online check-in. But that was good for nothing. At the machine I have to enter all my data again and have to decline all upgrade and insurance options. Well, it's still faster than on the counter.

After a while I finished all questions and get a printout of my contract. Here in Los Angeles Alamo has a choice-line where all SUVs are mixed-up. I take a Nissan Rouge with only 3100 miles. Quite a big car with a lot of electronic gadgets and surely not what I would have expected to be in the IFAR class. Quite interesting: No 4WD is available at all.

Different to other visits in the US Bärbel, our Garmin GPS, locates the satellites before I leave the Alamo station. It avoids the highway for quite some time, but as soon as I enter it I get stuck in a heavy traffic jam (and that at 4 pm). In the end it's no problem to reach my motel in Hollywood.



Walt Disney Concert Hall -
Los Angeles

After all the sitting I want to go for a walk. The Walk of Fame on Hollywood Blvd is not far away, just some 2 miles to reach the Dolby Theater. I don't have high expectations and they are fully confirmed. In the end I didn't take out the camera once. A lot of souvenir shops, bars and restaurants. A few people in costumes like Chewbacca trying to make some money, but even for free they would not be interesting enough to take a picture.

Friday, 2018-04-27 – LA citywalk

I'm more or less awake since 3am and up shortly before 6am. If I had to drive a longer distance I would have been on the road earlier, but as I stay in LA I'm leaving at 7am.

This morning is totally clouded, the sun should come out only by noon. Not the best for taking pictures during the citywalk. Traffic is ok, already quite some traffic on the freeway, but no bigger traffic jams. I park at the Grand Central Square Parking. This is the cheapest option I found if you want to park just for an hour or two.

As most places are still closed, I skip the Central Library that should have a nice interior and go directly to the MOCA, but it's not really interesting from the outside. The Broad and the neighboring Walt Disney Concert Hall would be great, but with the dull weather I have to focus on the details. The roof garden of the Con-

cert Hall is nice, especially these trees with the pinecones and red petals (I don't think they are pines) are great. Also, the fountain Gehry placed there in Honor of Lillian Disney is worth a short visit.

From here I continue to the city hall. You can visit the rotunda and go to the top to take a look around. They scan your bags and register your ID, but everything is pretty relaxed. From the top I take a look to El Pueblo de Los Angeles that was on my list as well, but after seeing what it looks like I decide to skip it and go back to the car.

Next on the list for today is Petersen Automotive Museum which is located in a fancy new building in the western part of LA. With 16 Dollar entrance fee plus another 15 Dollar for parking it's not cheap. But it's worth every single cent. I've been in quite some car museums, but this is most probably the best I've been. It's not only that they have lots of interesting cars but they are also presented in a way that



The Broad - Los Angeles

you have enough space to walk around them and take pictures from various angles. The range of cars goes from dedicated Porsche and Ferrari exhibitions, via movie cars to fully functional cars for kids. On the first floor they have a special exhibition of cars in art. It starts with paintings of cars and ends with cars that have a special painting and more.

In the end the resolution to take less pictures to make the sorting and editing easier

is obsolete already at the second day. Back home I have to realize that the lighting is pretty harsh. You would have to spend hours to get rid of all the unwanted reflections. Still the museum is a clear re-

commendation.

Originally, I wanted to continue with the Getty Museum, but after being in the Pe-

antime, it's sunny and the views are kind of nice. But Los Angeles is mostly a flat, wide spread city – not really photogenic. That means that I also delete the visit of

Griffith Observatory from my to-do list and return to the hotel.



Petersen Automotive Museum - Los Angeles



Petersen Automotive Museum - Los Angeles



Petersen Automotive Museum - Los Angeles



Petersen Automotive Museum - Los Angeles

tersen Museum for nearly 3 hours I'm not in the mood for that. So, I change to plan B and take a tour along Mulholland Drive. It's pretty crowded for the first few miles, but getting better after a while. In the me-

Saturday, 2018-04-28 – Sculptures in Southern California

Again, I leave the hotel around 7am. Today is mainly a driving day down to the south with the final destination in Borrego Springs. But the first stop is already in Garden Grove near Santa Ana. The former Crystal Cathedral has been bought by the Catholic Church some years ago and is still under renovation. Originally announced for 2016 the reopening will now be only mid of 2019.



The Christ Cathedral -
Garden Grove

Given that and that it is 7:30 on a Saturday morning the parking lot is nearly empty. I take some pictures of the spire in the morning light and some of the figures showing scenes from the bible. As there isn't more to see, I'm back on the road within 30 minutes.

The traffic in the greater area of Los Angeles is crazy. Ok, not early Saturday



Ricardo Breceda Gallery and Sculpture Garden

My next stop is directly at the CA-79. Ricardo Breceda is an artist who creates huge metal sculptures. You can find quite some of them near Borrego Springs, the main reason why this is my destination today. When I planned the details of the route I found out that he has a Gallery where you can find more sculp-

At 4 I'm ready to go. I've downloaded a map with the locations, but that wasn't necessary – just follow the crowds. There is not a lot to do here, so whoever comes to this place is going to visit the sculptures. It's not really bad, therefore this place is still too remote, but if you think you're going to be alone,



Ricardo Breceda Gallery and Sculpture Garden

morning, but I'm driving freeways with 6 lines in every direction that have been extended by two additional speed lines you have to pay for. On the way I make a brief stop at a Walmart in the middle of nowhere to buy the basic stuff I will need the next days. Bärbel, our Garmin GPS, is directing me via backcountry roads to the south east.

tures and have the chance to buy them. They are looking great, but aside the fact that transport to Germany would cost a



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

forget it.

It took me roughly two hours to see most of the sculptures. For sure I've missed some, because

so big that I ask if this is really for one person only.



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

fortune, they wouldn't make it long in our cold and humid weather. Anyhow: It's a great place and for sure worth a stop.

It's 2pm when I reach the motel in Borrego Springs. I'm going to make a break until the light is not that harsh anymore 😊 and then I'll search the dinosaurs .

not all of them are near the roads. They also differ in size: Some are 10 feet (3 meter) tall, but some might have only 1.5 (50 cm).

Dinner today is at a small Mexican Restaurant (not the one recommended by TripAdvisor, but the other one right across the street). Much better than the Thai yesterday and portions are



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

Sunday, 2018-04-29 – The long way to Tucson

I didn't sleep well last night, so I get up at 5am and decide to go for some sunrise / early morning light shots.

Knowing the interesting sculptures that are facing in the right direction is now a benefit. Very soon I realize that getting out early will be most probably the best decision of the day. The light is beautiful, some clouds in the sky where the sun is rising and the best of all: No one is around! Well, except for some rabbits wondering why I'm disturbing them so early.

Continental Breakfast at the hotel is from 7 to 9. So, I pack my stuff and go for a quick breakfast. Nothing special, but at least they have some cereals and yogurt.

Next stop will be Salvation Mountain, roughly one hour away. In the beginning the landscape is as dull as possible. There are some farms, but no animals are visible at all. The only thing you can do here is driving a quad (or ATV as they are called here). The nearer you come to the

Salton Sea (a huge lake) the greener it gets and I'm driving now in the middle of huge fields.

Salvation Mountain is an art installation



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs

by Leonard Knight. The small mountain is covered with paintings, murals and mosaics. Some cars and trucks have been treat-

ed in the same way. The only topic is God, Jesus and the Bible. If this is really art you have to answer on your own. Worth a visit it is for sure.



Galleta Meadows - Borrego Springs



Salvation Mountain - Niland

Now the longest drive to come from A to B has to start. I'm going all the way to Tucson with just a short stop to see the

Old Plank Road in the Imperial Sand Dunes. This is a historic „street“ from the beginning of the last century. Nothing spectacular, but as I'm here anyhow ...

I reach Tucson by 3pm. Two Days ago, in LA the daily high was in the 60s (slightly above 20°C), now it's high in the 90's (34–35°C). I bring my belongings to the room and check what I'm going to do next. After some „homework“ I leave for shopping. My favorite brand for ties is Garcia. He's an old Rock Musician and the ties are pretty colorful. You can't find them in Germany, but here they are distributed i.e. by Kohls and I saw a shop on the way, so that's where I want to go. Luckily, they have quite some of them. I ended up with two, but I'm sure I'll find some more the other days 😊.

Monday, 2018-04-30 – Museum Day in Tucson

Today is museum day. As the first one, the desert museum, is opening already at 7:30 I'm getting up early again. The Best Western I'm staying at is offering a selection of warm breakfast menus at the restaurant next door. I'm there at 6:20

on their tiny nests), a mountain lion, many blooming cacti and, and, and. It's definitely a good idea to be here early, not only because of the temperature (just 70°F, 21°C this morning), but also because the museum is so popular. In the beginning very, very few visitors were walking along, but latest at 9:30 the families with their kids and the school classes pop up.

So finally, I'm leaving and drive to the next museum. It's the Pima Air and Space Museum. This is a huge complex as well. They have 300 aircrafts in several buildings and on a huge outdoor area. They cover everything from World War II and earlier to a Boeing Dreamliner, from small one-person aircrafts to fighters, from helicopters to a Mars Explorer. But even if some

plane lovers might now shake the heads in disbelief: Most photogenic are the planes that had been painted by artists.

Even if you just want to get a brief overview you will need here at least two hours. If you want to go into details or listen to the staff who is always happy to tell a story, you will obviously need (much)



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson

and even it takes longer than the usual buffet it's worthwhile the time to wait.

I've been in the Desert Museum 18 years ago and in my memories it was so nice that it was a kind of „must have“ on this year's agenda. The museum is a mixture of garden and zoo and there is so much to see that I'm here for nearly 4 hours. They have hummingbirds (including two sitting



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson

more time.

You can also book a tour to the airplane boneyard on the airbase nearby. This is a kind of parking lot for military planes which are not in use anymore, but may be of help in case of a war. There is another place for non-military planes that you can see on the way from Phoenix to Tucson.

I've read that you have to stay in the bus with all windows closed. So, I skip the tour. Instead I just drive along the border of that base. Of course, I did not even try to take pictures, but you would have been able to walk between the planes anyhow to get an interesting perspective.

Last topic of today's agenda is Mission San Xavier del Bac. We visited this Basilica

when we had been in Tucson 18 years ago, but at that time it was under renovation. So, as I'm in the south of Tucson anyhow I will take a look. I'm lucky, no tour buses around and very few people who want to visit the church. So, I get some nice pictures and leave for the hotel. Ready to get a shower.

Tuesday, 2018-05-01 – Butterflies and other animals

For today and tomorrow a significant drop in temperature is announced, even some rain is possible (highly appreciated by the locals I assume, as all fire warnings are on high risk). When I reach Madera Canyon, south of Tucson, it's in the lower 60's (~17°C) and pretty windy. I wasn't

sure if I should go for a hike anyhow, so I drive directly to the Santa Rita lodge.

This is a hot spot for hummingbirds as they have placed some feeding stations for them and other animals as well. The birds like the sugar water but obviously some of the flowers around as well.

I stay for some 20 minutes and decide that I'm

not in the mood to dress up for the cold. Instead I go for the next Walmart to fill up our stock of medicine against flu and others. Freya wants to have antiallergic pills and as expected you don't find them on the shelf.

So, I go the pharmacist: Yes, they have them – a different brand, but with the same ingredients. „Just go to the lady on the counter and show her your ID“.

You can get a lot of medicine here without a prescription, but for some of them you will be registered as they are considered to be a drug.

Ok, here is my ID – well, nothing the lady saw before.

„Do you have a passport“.

Ok, here is my passport.

„Don't you have an American one?“ „No, I'm not an American citizen“

With some help she finally found the right menus to enter my name, but then she failed with the address. „Do, you have the address of your hotel here?“ That finally



Pima Air and Space Museum - Tucson



Pima Air and Space Museum - Tucson



Pima Air and Space Museum - Tucson



Santa Rita Lodge -
Madera Canyon - Tucson

worked out, but it took me some 20 minutes for sure ...

After leaving the Walmart, I start my drive to the North. Today it's just a short



Butterfly Wonderland - Scottsdale



Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Tucson

one till Phoenix. As it's still too early for check-in I go directly to my next destination: Butterfly Wonderland in Scottsdale. They claim to be the biggest conservato-

ry with more than 3000 butterflies. The space is not huge, but this means that you are surrounded by butterflies wherever you go. If you love butterflies this is definitely a place to go. I spend here more than two hours (plus a coffee break). Next to Butterfly Wonderland is an aquarium, a mirror maze and some other locations. You can get some combi-tickets if you like but I was fine with the butterflies.



Goldfield Ghost Town - Apache Junction

Wednesday, 2018-05-02 – Snow in Arizona

Yesterday evening when I returned to the hotel it started to rain. A little bit earlier than expected, but I was hoping that the rain front passes by during the night. Now it's 7:30 and I finished the first good breakfast during this vacation. The sun is shining and in that direction the sky is blue while in the opposite direction the sky is totally covered. Originally, I wanted to go for some landscape photography at Watson lake, roughly an hour north from here. But with a grey sky that makes no sense.

So, I go for plan B and visit Goldfield. This is a ghost town near Apache Junction, I visited with Freya already some years ago. They open only at 10am, but you can access the area any time and when I arrive at 8am nobody is there. This is the best time to take pictures especially as the light is nice, too. If you come later, you can

wash some gold, take a tour into the mine or go for a train ride.

The light was good for some 30 minutes, then some dark clouds moved in. I briefly



Goldfield Ghost Town - Apache Junction



Goldfield Ghost Town - Apache Junction

thought about going for the detour to Watson Lake anyhow, but the way to Page is long and the sky is not brightening up.

I started with temperatures in the lower 60s this morning, but when I stop to refuel the car it has dropped to 50°F (10°C). Only a few miles later it declines further and the rain changes to snow, we are now at 32°F (0°C) and it's getting slippery. May in Arizona and it's snowing – what the hell is going on?

Ok, so I drive with 50 mph on an interstate while some others think they can do it better. At least two of them payed the price and „parked“ their cars in the woods. Police is already there and it seemed that nothing serious happened.

When I reach the I-40 the snow changed to rain again, but the temperature increases only slowly and even in Page we're still in the 50's (10°C). I think this is the first time in the Southwest that I use the AC as a heater.

It seems that Page doesn't like me anymore. Already last time I skipped the tour to Antelope Canyon as a thunderstorm was approaching. And as it shall continue to rain until tomorrow morning I don't think that Canyon X is a good idea as well. Even more: With all that rain, any off-road tour on this red soil is a no-go, too. So, I will have to

think about alternatives.

In the evening I briefly thought to go for sunset shots of Horseshoe Bend, but it's raining hard. So, I go for an early dinner at the Fiesta Cantina. This restaurant is an institution here in Page and still as good as it had been years ago. Expect to wait



bei Kanab



in Fredonia

for a free table and don't miss their margarita (but only if you don't need to drive back to your hotel).

Thursday, 2018-05-03 – Nothing to do in Page

Weather this morning: Sunny sky with some nice clouds, temperature in the upper 50's (~14°C) – nice weather. Unfortunately, this does not help as everything that is not paved is out of reach. Even with a



in Fredonia

4WD SUV you don't have a chance as this red dirt sticks to your tires and within a very short distance it's like driving on ice

with slicks.

So there are not many options left. One of them is a flight with a small plane across the area. At Page airport you have 3 companies offering such tours, but one desk is closed and the other two don't have sightseeing flights this morning. Now I'm running out of ideas. A boat trip would be an alternative, but that's what I did last time. It was nice but nothing to be repeated. In the end I decide to take a look at Horseshoe Bend and then leave for my next destination early.

I was prepared that Horseshoe Bend would be crowded and so it is. Lots of Chinese as already in the hotel. I find a parking lot and walk up that little sandy hill that is the start of the trail. At the moment they are building a paved trail with some shelters. In future it will be even easier to reach the viewpoint what means even more people will come. Talking about the viewpoint: They already finished an area from where people should take a look and this one now has a barrier so

that people can avoid the risk of falling. I'm afraid they will declare the rest of the plateau off limits. So most probably this is the

last time that I will stop here.

I'm leaving Page, being a little bit frustrated to drive across this beautiful landscape, having perfect weather for a hike, but no realistic option I'm interested in. But this frustration does not stay long. On the way I find nice murals and old cars in different states of decay. Especially this fire engine with different colors from red to yellow and rusty looks great.

For the next two days I'm in Utah and that means that it's one hour later than I'm used to. The good thing about that is, that the hotel room is already prepared and I can bring my stuff upstairs. After a brief stop to write these notes etc. I decide not to spend the rest of the day at the pool. Instead I drive to St. George to see if I can spend some of the money I saved by doing nothing in Page 😊.

Friday, 2018-05-04 – Zion NP

Today I want to spend the day in Zion. Quite unusual for me this will be the only stay at a National Park for the whole trip. I know that the parking at the visitor center will fill up quickly. So, I go for an early start, even if that means that I have to get up even earlier than the other days due to



Zion NP

the different time zone. I have my breakfast shortly after the hotel opens the area and manage to be at the gates of Zion NP at 7:30 Utah time.

I don't have a problem to find a parking lot, but already that early it seems to be half full. You must not drive your car in the park during summer times (except for the road that is passing the park from south to north-east, but that offers next to no

options for a hike). So, I take the shuttle bus to Weeping Rocks and start the hike to Observation Point shortly after 8am. It's an 8 miles round trip, strenuous but not difficult. The path goes straight up most of the time, only the last 500 ft or so are flat, but sandy and without shade. It takes me two hours to reach the top. There are not so many people at the observation point at that time, but a lot are



Observation Point - Zion NP

coming when I'm on the way downwards. To be honest: I have no idea why to start one of the most strenuous hikes of the park around noon, when it's not only hot but also next to no shade is available, too.

Back to the car I change gear. I want to go to the narrows now. Many people are in the river and differently to the times I've been here before, most of them don't turn around after the first or second corner.

This time people are prepared pretty well, a lot of them even wear water-resistant trousers. There are too many people to make decent pictures. I walk until I reach the place where I took pictures quite some years ago and take a few shots with bright green trees in front of the red canyon walls. But I have to cut the lower part of the tree and all the water to get rid of the people. In the end I will delete them right after the first import to Lightroom. As many people keep on walking upstream, I call it a day and return with the shuttle bus to my car.

The temperature is back to normal, being in the high 80's (~30°C) in the evening. My app on the phone claims that I walked 12 miles (19,4 km) and climbed the equivalent of 165 floors.

Saturday, 2018-05-05 – Kanarra Creek and Downtown LV

Today my short stop in Utah ends. But before I drive to Las Vegas, I go for a last detour to the North. I'm going to hike Kanarra Creek. This is on my bucket list for quite a while, but it never fit in.

In the meantime, they introduced a ticket system. For the time being there is no limitation on the number of visitors, but they phrase it in a „let's see what will happen“ manner. The situation was quite confusing over the last weeks. The city announced early that they want to introduce a fee, but not when. Beginning of April, I wrote a mail and got the information that it will start on May 1st and that I should check kanarrafalls.com

for news. Shortly before I left they posted there what I already knew. Unfortunately the online-shop was still offline. But they announced as well that there will be an option to buy the ticket at site (credit card only).

That's what I'm going to do now. As another surprise parking at the upper parking lot is free (the announcement

was, that it still costs 10\$ and that only the lower lot is for free).

Even I start before 8am I'm not the first. But it's nothing compared to yesterday. Most of the time I'm on my own. The way is longer than I thought and it's much easier to stay in the water then to try to walk on the river bank. So today I get what I missed so much in the Narrows yesterday.



Kanarra Creek -
Kanarraville

The idea is to walk straight to the waterfall to get some pictures without people running around. But then I find this small waterfall and I cannot resist. In an hour or so, when I'm on my way back, it will be at least partly in the sun and then you can forget about the picture. The same thing happens a few minutes later when the river passes a small canyon. Here I'm afraid that later too many people will be in the river to get an undisturbed view.

Just around another corner and I'm standing in front of the lower waterfall. Another photographer that passed me when I took pictures of that small fall is just leaving. For the moment I'm alone. People come and go, but for at least 30 minutes I find undisturbed moments long enough for long time exposures.

Unfortunately, the first direct sunlight has

already reached the top of the falls. Even using multiple exposure shots are not helpful enough to get rid of that annoying spot right across the water. So it seems that I have to return 😊.

The water by the way is much colder than yesterday and even I'm wearing neoprene socks I hardly feel my feet anymore.

After a while, more and more people appear and I grab my tripod and leave. It's around 10am local time and now all the families or „group of friends“ visitors are coming. On the way back, I find only one more spot worthwhile to take a picture of. All the rest is getting already now quite harsh sunlight.

Back to the car I change shoes and start my drive back to the south, what also means that I will get back the hour I lost when I entered Utah.

Two days ago, in Page I thought that I'm now done with „my red rocks“ as Freya

always names it. But after these two days in the Zion area I changed my mind 😊. I might skip Page (at least until I'm lucky enough to get a wave permit), but the rest will see me again.

In Las Vegas I stay at the Main Street Station in downtown as I want to visit the Freemont Street. The check-in is unusual fast for Vegas and my request to get a quiet room (not facing the highway) is fulfilled without any hesitation. I even get a room on the top floor.

The temperature here is back to normal: 99°F (37°C) and it shall stay like that for the upcoming days.



Freemont Street - Las Vegas



Freemont Street - Las Vegas

I time my visit to the Fremont Street Experience in a way that I'm there early enough for the 8pm show and still have some time to find a decent spot to place my tripod. Indeed, it's not as complicated as I was afraid. Given that it's Saturday evening the street is not too crowded.

The show is kind of nice. They play three different songs and animations are

shown on the huge screen above. Nothing to talk about. Maybe they should send the responsible guy to China, so he understands how it could look like.



Rhyolite Ghost Town

Anyhow: The Fremont Street is more annoying than anything else. They have two places where cover bands are playing. But



Rhyolite Ghost Town

aside of that street-musicians are allowed to play as well. In the end it's a cacophony of everything and nothing. Most probably you can enjoy that only with several drinks from one of the many open-air bars you can find at the side of the street. I walk the street from one end to the other and back again. That's more than enough and as there is not a lot to see in this area aside of that, I return to my hotel room soon.



Rhyolite Ghost Town

Sunday, 2018-05-06 – Roadtrips around LV part 1

Today is the first of two roadtrip days. I want to visit some places north of Las Vegas I missed until now. But especially today is more about the drive and the lonely landscape than the places to visit. Unfortunately, it's totally clouded until noon. After that more and more blue patches are visible.

First stop after quite a while is Rhyolite, a ghost town just outside Death Valley. Here you can find an outdoor museum with different sculptures. Some ye-

ars ago, it seemed that no-one cares and that the pieces will fall apart, but now they look as if they have been renovated. Even new sculptures are added over time.

Second stop and main reason to drive this



in Goldfield

way is Goldfield. Originally, I wanted also to stop in Gold Point. But the address I've entered into my GPS belongs to Goldfield itself and as I check the coordinates, my Garmin wants to send me back for some 30 minutes – next time 😊.



in Goldfield



in Goldfield

Goldfield itself is an old town that seems to get too much attention to die, but not enough to really make something out of it. Some old houses are in decay, in front of others you can find old cars, machines or utilities. Nice for taking pictures, but nothing they can live on.

The key attraction, even if it's a little bit hard to find, is the „First international car forest of the last church“. It is at the southern end of Goldfield on the right-hand side if you come from Las Vegas / Death Valley.

To avoid driving back the same route I decide to use the US-6 and the NA-375 to go back to Las Vegas. These are now really lonely roads. You can drive 70 mph most of the time, but no one to pass and only once and a while a car will come from

the opposite direction. I make a short stop at the „Little A'Le'Inn“ in Rachel, but next to nothing has changed since nearly 10 years ago.

Monday, 2018-05-07 – Roadtrips around LV part 2

Today it's road trip day 2 and I'm going south-east. It will be a pretty touristic trip; most places are mainstream nowadays.



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield

Some years ago, we've been at Cadillac Ranch in Texas. This is a little bit alike, but while the cars there are all aligned, they are placed here in a way that at least I do not see any concept. But it is fun to walk around and the paintings on the cars are not as chaotic as at Cadillac Ranch, where it is the idea that everyone should spray. Except for one other couple I'm here on my own. It's not a secret tip anymore, but obviously not known to most of the people who just stop in Goldfield for the obvious things.



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield



Nelson



First international car forest of the last church - Goldfield



Nelson



in Oatman



Hackberry General Store



in Truxton

I start with Nelson and as I'm here at 8:30am I'm still on my own. Shortly after me a small tourbus arrives, but they seem to go for a mining tour. I have the impression the owners are adding more and more stuff on a daily basis. In the meantime, the place is at least twice as big as I remember. I spend much more time here than planned. After a

good hour I finally leave.

A brief stop at the mural in Searchlight and I continue my drive towards Oatman. Due to the longer stay in Nelson and some traffic in Bullhead City it's already noon when I arrive. Of course, all the donkeys are there and I can only avoid the official high noon shooting by escaping into

one of the tourist shops 😊.

Yes, Oatman is mainstream at its best. But somehow it has a nice, relaxed atmosphere. Cool Spring Station on the way down to Kingman is closed and it seems not only for the day.

I grab a burger in Kingman and on it goes to the next mainstream destination:

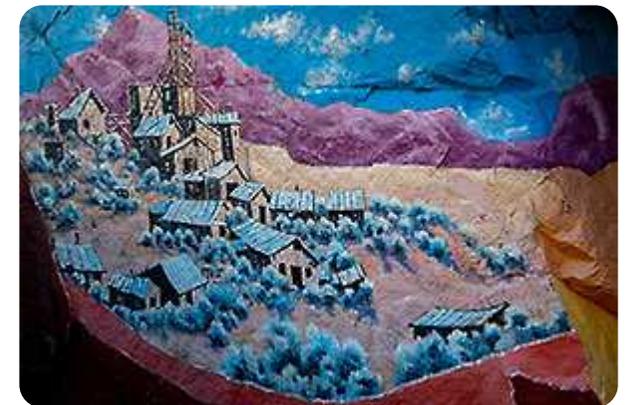
Hackberry. Here everything is more or less as it used to be, except one important detail: The red Corvette in front of the entrance is gone. I take some pictures, stroll through the shop and decide that I will not go all the way to Seligman. Still I continue a bit to Truxton. There is not a lot to see, but some nice old cars (in this case restored) are standing around. After a few mi-



in Kingman



in Kingman



Roy Purcells Rock Murals - Chloride

nutes I turn around and drive back to Kingman.

Before lunch I saw some nice murals, but skipped them for later. My first stop is directly a hit. The El Trovatore motel claims to have the biggest map of the world. Well, this obviously depends on your understanding of a map. But they decorated all walls with murals – Nice! They also named their rooms after various stars. So, you can spend a night i.e. in the Clark Gable room.

Two or three more stops and I leave Kingman for my last destination of the day. This one is now the clear opposite to the others. It's totally off the beaten tracks. Or do you know the Roy Purcell's Rock Murals or have even heard about the town of Chloride? If so, you're a real insider.

The murals are easy to find. I just follow the street that is leaving the highway, pass the town and continue when the road becomes unpaved. It's not in a bad

condition today, but definitely nothing for passenger cars. You might go for a short distance, but as soon as you feel uncomfortable you better park and walk. The road will not get better.

In the end I do the same when I climb a hill and see the sandy descent. As I have high clearance but no 4WD I'm not sure that I would come up again. So, I roll back the hill I just climbed, park the car at the side of the road and start

to walk. As it turns out the descend is not as sandy as I thought, but I anyhow have reached my destination. Right behind that hill are the murals.

The murals are originally from 1966, but have been restored in 2006. So, the colors are brighter compared to a lot of other murals. The area is not huge, but worthwhile to see.

In Chloride itself I find some piece of art just when the street becomes paved again. A brief stop at the cemetery and then I call it a day.

It's around 6:30 pm now and all the animals are approaching the road between the highway and Chloride. From rabbits to road runners and from deer to cow (with nice longhorns by the way), everyone thinks that the other side of the road is much nicer than the one where they are.

Finally, I reach the highway and then Las Vegas. After bringing my stuff to the room I even have the mood for a walk along the strip.

Tuesday, 2018-05-08 – Museum Day in Las Vegas

After two days of driving this will be a quiet day. I get up later than usual and finish my notes from yesterday. Before



Bellagio - Las Vegas



Carroll Shelby Museum - Las Vegas



Carroll Shelby Museum - Las Vegas

going for breakfast, I walk over to Mandalay Bay to see what kind of decoration they have this time. Most of the umbrellas

are gone and have been replaced by some banners. The motto of the flower garden is Japan. Quite nice as usual.

I take a brief look at the animals of the Flamingo Casino (my favorites, the cranes are gone) and decide to take breakfast here at the garden restaurant.



Pinball Hall Of Fame - Las Vegas

who decided in the early 60's to build cars. Their production site or better their workshop is here in Las Vegas. They attached a small museum where you can see

some of the famous cars, but some of their newer builds that are for sale, too. I arrive as the free tour just started and listen to the guide for quite a while, taking pictures in parallel.

a low wall from the production), but as the guide is telling stories about nearly every single car on exhibition this takes too long for me and I leave early.

Museum number two is also a special one: The Pinball Museum. Here an enthusiastic guy collects pinball machines, but also old arcade and other games. Some of them are more than 50 years old, some are quite new. All of them are standing in long lines right next to each other in a low, dark hall. It's like travelling back in time. The best is that nearly all machines are working and you can play them. Most of the machines ask for 50 cents per game, some of the older ones are at 25 cent and the most expensive ones are at 1\$. Of course, I cannot resist and 3\$ or so are „donated“ by playing some of the machines 😊.

Except for one visit later in the afternoon these have been the topics on today's agenda. So, I take a look at some of the outlets in the area.

At 5:30pm I go to a place called „Seven Magic Mountains“ some miles south of Las Vegas. It's an installation of Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone and shall become the new icon of Las Vegas. If you see the long

lines at the Las Vegas Welcome Sign, no matter what time of the day, there is a long way to go. But at least 10 cars join the parking lot with me. Unfortunately,



Paris - Las Vegas

most of the visitors are Asians of the „make a picture of me when I'm right in the middle of the rocks“ type. So, it's impossible to get an undisturbed photograph of the whole scene. But I manage to get some non-standard views of parts of the rocks.

Later I go to the Strip for some shots I've planned before, but I return after two hours (much earlier than planned) as it was still too hot and humid outside. Max today was 104°F (40°C) and the weather app claims that it's still in the 90's (~35°C).



Pinball Hall Of Fame - Las Vegas



Pinball Hall Of Fame - Las Vegas



Pinball Hall Of Fame - Las Vegas

Now I'm ready to go for two special museums. Number one is the Carroll Shelby Museum. Shelby was a famous race driver

Through a glass front you can watch the workers tuning the cars. The tour would also go behind the glass (still separated by

Wednesday, 2018-05-09 – On the way back to the Pacific

As I have several destinations on my list for today I leave Las Vegas early. By the way: There is a Tattoo Studio in the Linq Casino between the lifts to the hotel rooms and the way to the parking. Whenever I passed, no matter if early in the morning or in the evening, some customers were inside. Seems to be big business nowadays.

At 7:30 I'm back to the „Seven Magic Mountains“. But even at that time a family with kids are using the installation as their playground. I take some photos and as I'm going to leave the next family is arriving. The chances to have good light and no one is disturbing seems to be as high as a jackpot in the casino.

Directly behind the border to California you can find the "Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System". I thought to make a stop there, but you can see the system easily from the I-15 and taking a picture

would end up in a very bright spot on a pole 😊.

I will go half way to the Pacific today and as I have enough time the plan is to drive



Seven Magic Mountains - Las Vegas



Kelso Depot and Visitor Center

through the Mojave National Preserve instead of taking the Interstate. The area

is flat with some slight ups and downs and with forests of cactus-trees left and right. The first intended stop is Cima. What should be a ghost town are one or two buildings with a small area that is not ac-



Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch - Oro Grande



Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch - Oro Grande



Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch - Oro Grande

cessible. In the beginning I thought I've missed it, but no, address and coordinates

both are pointing to exactly this place. Ok, so let's go to Kelso where the old train station and the visitor center are. Unfortunately, they are closed today. I take a picture and leave again. The landscape is now boring with small bushes in a flat area. I pass the Kelso dunes and later some attractive rock formations. But you would need to be here at sunrise to make nice pictures. All in all, Mojave will not make it on my list of favorite parks.

I leave the preserve via the south exit, pass the Interstate and come to the National Trail Highway. I'm back to Route 66 now – first stop is Amboy. I take a picture of the famous motel but the tree covered with shoes is gone. Instead you find a pole with plastic bottles – not really attractive. Nearby is the Bristol Dry Lake, an area where salt is harvested. As it was to be expected the area is not accessible, just a small sewer is visible across the road.

So, I turn around and go back to Route 66. But I can't find anything worthwhile to explore. In Ludlow I even stay on the Route 66 instead of changing to the Interstate, but as it

strictly follows the route of the I-40 this was quite useless.

With all these “nothing to see” attractions I’m way ahead of my schedule. While driving I think about my plans for tomorrow. Originally, I wanted to go to the Joshua Tree NP and do some hikes. But it was around 100°F (38°C) already at 10am this morning. Not the weather for hiking, especially in a park like Joshua Tree where you’re so exposed to the sun.

Before I reach my destination in Victorville, I have one last stop on my agenda: Elmer’s Bottle Tree Ranch. This is really a weird place. Poles with bottles as branches and on top everything from a typewriter via guns to anything else you can imagine. The area is not huge, but you don’t know where to look first. Definitely



Pioneertown

my highlight of the day.

I reach the hotel early, but luckily the room is ready. The pool is lying in the full sun, so I start to rearrange my belongings for the flight back already today.



Pioneertown

Thursday, 2018-05-10 – A living movie town

This is the last full day of my vacation. As I decided not to visit Joshua Tree NP, my agenda is slim today and so I go for a slow start and leave the motel at 8am.

Even if I skip Joshua Tree I still drive in that direction. This is for sure a detour but I want to visit Pioneertown near the border of the park. Pioneertown is an old movie set from the 40s, but the buildings are used for shops or the

post office today. On weekends they have the usual gunfighter shows and even a theatre. But today I’m, together with three other guys, the only one visiting. I park directly at the post-office, but it turns out that the official parking is a little bit further down the road. No problem, I’ll walk the sandy street anyhow and if I start here or there doesn’t matter. As the houses are

in use, everything is maintained, but in a nice way to not disturb the old appearance. Near the official parking they even have a motel. Would be nice to stay here for a night.

After the visit I start my way towards Laguna Beach. The traffic starts easy, but the nearer I come to the Pacific the worse it gets. Even it’s around noon, more than once it’s just stop-and-go.

I reach the hotel at 2pm and since a mile or so the sky is covered with thick clouds. Slowly, very slowly, you can see patches of blue in between, but it will take until 6pm before the sun comes through the clouds.

I check in, drink a coffee and decide to walk around a bit. Lots of art galleries are on the main street (in fact it’s the Coast



Pioneertown

Highway), but not a single customer in any of them. In exchange for the skipped walks this morning I now go to Victoria Beach. It's around 1,5 miles one-way, but I have to walk along this Highway. Unfortunately, there is no way walking along the beach, especially as the high tide is approaching. Finally, I turn into Victoria Drive and climb down the stairs to the beach. The place I want to go to is called Pirate Tower or sometimes Rapunzel Tower. I'm just in time to reach a spot from where I can take the pictures, a little bit later and the tide would have blocked the way.



Pirate Tower - Victoria Beach



Victoria Beach

chances to get a nice sunset are limited, but you never know. I take a brief look on the beach access near my hotel and think that I should give it a try.

So, I take a shower and go for an early dinner. Then back to the hotel, picking up tripod and camera and back to the beach. The tide is at its maximum and there is no chance to go to the beach without getting really wet. But at the end of the stairs down to the beach is a little plateau where I can place my tripod. The sunset is nothing to talk about, but the high tide is splashing the water nicely over some rocks and so I decide to go for some long expose shots instead.

On my way back, the clouds are slowly disappearing. On the horizon they are still dense, so the

Friday, 2018-05-11 – A last visit and back to Germany

As my flight back home is leaving only at 5:20 pm I have plenty of time to kill. There is a smaller car museum near the airport that I will visit, but that's it. I get up late, grab something for breakfast in the supermarket across the street and eat that in my room. The weather is like yesterday: Cloudy and just 56°F (13°C). I rearrange everything for the flight and leave around 10am.

The Automobile Driving Museum in Los Angeles is near the airport and the car return stations. This makes

it a nice destination for the last day as the impact of the traffic is predictable. The Museum is not huge, but it's packed with cars of different ages. I think they have 40–50 cars on exhibition. Not easy to take pictures as the cars are standing pretty close. So, I try my 12mm lens what on the other hand is a bit wide.

Returning the car is as easy as usual. For the first time the station manager himself

is at the car return and asks if everything was ok. The shuttle bus gets stuck in traffic just like everybody else, but I'm early anyhow.

Arriving at the check-in I realize that Lufthansa has a flight to Frankfurt that is leaving much earlier than my flight to Munich. That means that the counters are open and I can get rid of my luggage. Great! The time until boarding I spend in the lounge.

What I've never seen before is that you just have to pass security, no passport control. Only before boarding the plane

you go through a gate where a picture is taken. That's all, they don't even check the boarding pass.



Automobile Driving Museum - Los Angeles

The flight and the drive back home is standard for me, except that I don't pick up the car at the airport parking, but at the external parking lot. I arrive home in the afternoon and although I was able to get some sleep on the plane I postpone most of the unpacking to the next day.