

Bringing In 2008

Smith Family Newsletter
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We hope everyone had a great start to 2008!! Well, many people spend New Years at great parties, or going to 42nd street in NYC, or staying home with a loved one, perhaps in front of a nice warm fire place. In New Years gone by, we too have done some of the above. So you may ask, what ever possessed us to celebrate the entrance of 2008 in the middle of the cold Arizona Desert, coaches circled around a campfire like the pioneer wagons of old, and nothing around except saguaro cactus, rocks, an occasional coyote, and 30 of our HR friends. We even managed to pick the coldest January in years in Arizona. But you know what, we had a great time!!! Ed aj& Laura and Walt & Judy picked out the site for the gathering and instructed all of us to bring a couple of cords of wood for the camp fire and some canned vegetables for the hobo stew. That big pot was used to make the stew and the next day some great hot apple cider! We all divided up the cooking of biscuits, etc to make it easier. Much time was spent around the camp fire keeping warm and socializing. Our coach generators got a good work out. The game players managed to have their fun by taking turns playing in one coach or the other. We even managed to celebrate David's birthday out there. This is the Quartzite area, know for thousands of boon-dockers each Winter as well as great shopping with hundreds of vendors selling anything you may want. It is also the location for the largest stone and gem show. Most are all in tents. Well, this marks the end of our Christmas \ New Years Celebrations. Some people are continuing to remain in the area, as we are, which will mean we will be able to continue getting together from time to time. We are already looking at our trip back east starting in February. We were here in Arizona for the Super Bowl and we are floating on a cloud with the results of the Giant's game even if we didn't have tickets ! The year 2008



Well, all together, I think we have spent about a little better than three months in Mesa and Apache Junction areas. We have done some local touring around the greater Phoenix area and I have to tell you that this place really 'grows on you'! We certainly got more rain than is usual, and it has been colder than usual, but it really didn't matter. The rain has changed the desert floor into a green carpet, which I have never seen before and I personally like it on the cool side. It really is a great place to spend the Winter. There are lots of things to do and see. We went to the movies, theater presentations, museums, tours, great choices of restaurants, shopping, and all the city type of things to do. In addition, it is easy to get around, with great roads and highway system. The city park system is what surprised me the most. There are good size parks throughout the whole area that are well used for walking and bird watching along the water ways. Their water system is well thought out, using recycled water for the wild life to use in the parks. One can also walk the trails along side the canals as well. You only have to go a short distance to South Mountain Park, the largest urban park in the US. All at once you find yourself over 1,000 feet in elevation, with a magnificent view of downtown Phoenix and The Greater Phoenix Area with the mountains as a back drop! The city has grown in leaps and bounds and when driving around, you will see a real mix of types of residential settings, large tracks of desert lots, productive farming, and small horse and cattle ranches. A couple of times a week, when you open your door, the morning breeze will have a distinct 'farm smell'. The area has grown quite rapidly and the growth of the infrastructure has had some difficulty keeping up. I have selected some pictures of the parks for you to get a flavor of what we see. Starting at the top left, a picture taken of the greater Phoenix area including downtown Phoenix. Next is a picture of the green desert floor at South Mt. Park. The bottom left is the view of Four Peaks taken from Ironwood RV Park, where we stayed in Apache Junction. Bottom right is Fountain Hills Park in Scottsdale, with our jeep parked in front of fountain.



2007 Highlights!!!

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Looking back at 2007, I really think it was more fun' in a lot of ways' than any of the previous years. We were able to combine socializing with family, friends and some extraordinary adventures. For starters, I will give some final figures. We traveled a total of 10,863 miles, visited 18 states, and moved the coach to 57 destinations (campgrounds). Since we have been on the road, our total mileage to date is 61,858 miles in the motor home, crossing this country from coast to coast four times.

Sometimes we have to pinch ourselves as we wonder if we are just dreaming about all this! Over the months we had some maintenance issues and health care issues, but we weaved solutions into the schedule and they did not ruin our fun. If you have been following my earlier newsletters, you know what I am talking about. Have you seen the movie, "The Bucket List" starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman? Well fortunately our health is holding up better than theirs was, but we have our own bucket list. This year we really put a dent in that list. In addition, we revisited some favorite places, and found new and unexpected adventures. Even though there were no weddings, or graduations this year, we took every opportunity to visit friends and family when the opportunity presented itself. In addition, Bob & I hosted the 400 Chapter Fall Rally in Elephant Butte, NM along with our 400 friends, Bart & Debby Day. This experience was outstanding and so much fun! The New Mexico experience provided plenty of fuel for unexpected adventures, and the bucket list as well.

I know you want to find out about this bucket list as well as the unexpected adventures! Lets talk about some of the 'unexpected adventures' first and that brings us to White Sulphur Springs, MT. It is in the middle of 'no where' and makes Elephant Butte, NM look like a metropolis. It is an area of great sunsets, very friendly people, and a great camp ground! We spent the Fourth of July here - Western style. Then the 'bucket list' included returning to our favorite National Park, Glacier, in July. This time we did it justice by riding the 'Road to the Sun' in both directions and loved every minute of it. Another 'bucket list' item was the Olympic Peninsula, including the Olympic National Park and the Rain Forest. What a beautiful area and the absolute opposite of the hectic, high traffic area of nearby Seattle. Back to the unexpected, my brother-in-law, Bob Watt has since retired from Boeing, but he and my sister Juanita and her daughter in law, Rhonda provided unexpected and unmatched tours any time, any where. We got a day long ride on the VIP Ship, the USS Bunker Hill, during the Seattle Seafare Celebration. What a ride! Then as if that was not enough, we were given a great tour of a Trident Submarine! Unbelievable. We are not done yet, as we also were given a tour of the Everett Boeing Plant and attended a game at the Safeco Stadium. All this is in the August Newsletter. On our way back to New Mexico, we stopped in Bakersfield to see the Buck Owens Museum and Hall of Fame, which was on Bob's List. Kingman, AZ was next which lead us into the Ghost Town of Oatman, an unplanned surprise adventure. This is the 'Donkey Town' right on the historic route 66. See the September Newsletter. Also in Arizona we stopped to see the 'Meteor Creator', with it's mysteries.

Two other very interesting tours we found on route by chance were, the *Smoke Jumpers in Missoula, MT and the Steamboat Arabia in Kansas City, MO*. You can read about the Smoke Jumpers in the July Newsletter and the Steamship in May Newsletter. Both tours were outstanding and we highly recommend you visit them. With the Smoke Jumpers, we got to see them in action as an alarm went off while we were there. The Steamboat Arabia is a salvage operation in progress involving a cargo ship that sank in the Mississippi in 1856. This is really fascinating.

Thinking back on our visit to New Mexico the thoughts that come to mind are the Albuquerque Balloon Festival, the land of ancient civilizations, the cross roads of cultures, Apache country, Ghost towns, green chili, sopapillas, all of which sum up 'The Land of Enchantment'. The October newsletter describes these terms. It is largely rural and a bit on the wild side, the way we think of the west. It really invites you to sit back and enjoy the surprises it offers. As much as I enjoy the Phoenix area in Arizona for it's choices in entertainment, restaurants, shopping, and city parks, I really enjoyed what New Mexico had to offer too. I would go back in a heart beat and we probably will do so before we leave the west. New Mexico also includes my most favorite city! This is Santa Fe, which was such a surprise. I definitely want to go back some day. Santa Fe is actually the Capital of New Mexico and we did tour the Capital when there. This brings up another observation for 2007. Since we have been on the road beginning in 2002, we have visited 19 state capitals. In 2007 we visited 8 of those state capitals. That tells you how busy we were.

Another check for the bucket list was to visit one of the age old Pueblos. When we left Albuquerque and headed for Mesa, AZ we stopped in Gallup, NM. From there we road about 45 miles south to the Zuni Pueblo. This is a fully functioning Pueblo Community well known for their craftsmanship in fine jewelry. They are best know for their stone inlay work. Of course, I bought a couple of pair of earrings. This Pueblo is the largest and dates back to 1540. You can read about it in the October Newsletter. The picture to the left below is the Mission Church in the Zuni Pueblo. The picture to the right below is of a brick oven at the Bakery where we bought some delicious bread!

Well, you can clearly see that the January and February newsletters are quite late getting out, but don't blame Bob! Besides having fun with our 400 family, and moving about, the flu got the best of me for a while and I could not get moving to get these things done. Better late than not at all though, right?