**Five trips to the desert – Winter 2016**

Los Angeles is on the coast, and away from the coast, there is mostly a very dry desert. The desert was not always this way, but it has been for the last hundred years. There are many interesting areas to visit there.

** Palm Springs**

 This is the classic Hollywood resort city with golf courses and warm weather during the winter. Recently, it has been the winter sojourn for snowbirds from Canada, who have their own newspaper. We played board games, visited the Patton Museum, the Palm Desert Art Museum Annex, and the Living Desert natural park, zoo, museum, and exhibits. There is also the Aerial Tram to the snow on Mt. San Jacinto, the Air Museum, Palm Canyon botanical gardens and many art galleries and exhibits.

** Death Valley National Park**

 We scheduled this for the three-day President’s Day weekend with Paul Yuenger. Everything that could be booked was full. The first night we drove up to a Ridgecrest motel. We then opted for two campgrounds that were first-come available. Stovepipe Wells only had a small vacant piece of dry lake bed, but the campground host generously offered us his picnic table and fire ring. The next day, Texas Spring actually had someone who checked out and we were fortunate to get that last site with table, fire-pit, and view. We hiked several spectacular slot canyons: Mosaic, Golden, Natural Bridge. We drove to the Badwater salt flats (-282 feet), Artist’s Palette, and the fields of yellow flowers. There was road damage from recent rains so the east exit was taken over to the Amargosa river which actually had water.

** Las Vegas**

 A special offer came in the mail for a two day stay at the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas for $139/night. It included a free lunch buffet ($40) and La Reve show tickets ($130) for two people and guests. Why not? The room was on the 36th floor overlooking the golf course. The hotel décor was colorful and florally interesting. The pools were nicely heated, but there were not many people there. We also taxied to the Cirque d’ Soleil Zumanity show at the New York hotel and had some interesting high-cost meals.

** Anza-Borrego Desert State Park**

* Larry Gordon and family live in Encinitas and wanted to visit Borrego with their two children, ages 6 and 4. They brought bicycles and so did I. We wandered off-road to see the Galleta Meadows rusted iron sculptures, hiked into Palm Canyon during twilight (the rattlesnakes come out when the sun sets), and rode bike trails around the campground. The desert flowers were just coming into bloom, and the ocotillos were looking very green with red on top. I never met a fruit stand that I did not like, so at the end of the trip, there were 20 bags of ruby grapefruit, five jars of honey, two boxes of dates, tangelos, navels, Golden Nugget tangerines, and one very large multi-color ceramic pot that is at house entry.

** Lancaster**

* I got tired driving out to the desert and took the Metrolink commuter train to the farthest spot which was the city of Lancaster. There were hundreds of people on each train. The train line travels through a 1876 hand-dug tunnel (at the time, the longest tunnel in the world) from the San Fernando Valley and through Soledad Canyon. There are many interesting rock formations along the way. The suburbs of Los Angeles are taking over any flat land along the route. The desert there has mesquite bushes and many Joshua trees. Several large airport facilities (Palmdale, Armstrong, Mojave) are located in the area. Lancaster is famous for large fields of orange California poppies that blossom in the early spring.

** Why you have to be there in person!**

* The desert is a subtle place with colors that change with the lighting and the seasons.
* Many of the features/animals are small and require a closer look.
* Vegetation changes with the season. The blossoms after rain are varied and delicate.
* The air is clear and visibility extends for miles in all directions.
* During the winter, there are snow-capped mountains in the distance.
* The sky is quite dark at night; the many star constellations are much more visually defined.