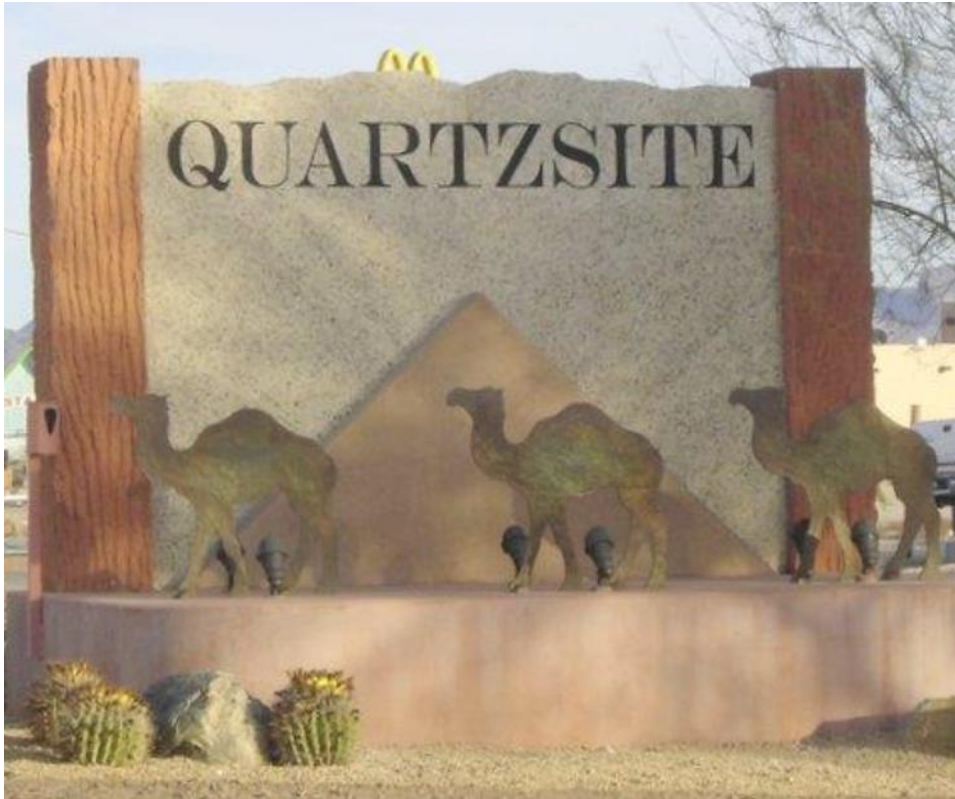


Arizona is the Place to Be (In January!)

By Dave Lines



On the weekend of January 23, 2016 when we were having a blizzard around here, a little voice in the back of my head reminded me that we were trapped by several feet of snow drifted across our driveway --- a half a mile from the paved road. No matter that we had reservations to leave on a flight from BWI on Tuesday two days away, we were not going anywhere until we dug out. Thus began our odyssey. On Sunday, I spent 9 straight hours on our tractor pushing snow to clear a path to the highway across our field. And because every parking space at or near BWI was covered with 29 inches of snow, we decided on Monday to drive to a motel and spend the night near BWI. Good decision. We departed BWI on time arriving in Phoenix that afternoon. What a change! A balmy 72 degrees and sunny. Very nice. I could take more of this.



We found our rental car and drove off --- reaching our room at the Bluewater Resort and Casino overlooking the Colorado River in Parker in time for supper. Wow --- what a difference 24 hours can make.

After a great night's sleep, Ann and I headed to an iconic little restaurant in Parker for breakfast. "Coffee Ern's" is where I had eaten many delicious breakfasts with my rockhound buddies from California before we spent the days

rock collecting in or around Quartzsite. We loved it. What's not to love about a

stack of thick pancakes with eggs and bacon? Then we went south about 25 miles for Ann's very first visit to Quartzsite --- a mecca in the middle of the Arizona desert for thousands of "snowbirds" living in RV's and trailers from every state as well as Canada.



I had suggested to Ann that she make a shopping list of whatever she wanted and try to buy the items from the thousands of vendors there. We first made a practice run with the vendors along the north side of I-10. You have never seen such a conglomeration of stuff for sale. Plus I saw plenty of rocks --- mostly junk.

Then we drove across I-10 to the Tyson Wells show and found a great place to park in front of Coleman's (Arkansas quartz crystals galore with prices from \$1 to \$35,000.) We spent the next 2 hours shopping --- Ann with her list and me just looking for rocks. I didn't find much that I wanted -- but Ann found a nice pocketbook that she needed at a good price.

After a lunch from one of the food vendors, we headed over to the Desert Gardens show about a mile away. It was deserted. 80% of the vendors had left town because most their customers were now headed for Tucson. While Ann elected to stay in the car and take a nap, I went straight to the first vendor I saw and asked if there was a vendor couple there named "Dave and Amy"? YES --- about 10 spots away on the left side behind the 55 gallon barrels of rocks. Whoa!! They had really expanded their operation since I had seen them in 2011. I walked straight to their trailer and --- seeing no one around -- knocked on the door. Out popped Amy who welcomed me with a big hug and a big smile. We spent the next few minutes catching up on the last 5 years. I had originally met David and Amy Walker in 2008 at the World Championship Quartz Crystal Dig in Mt. Ida Arkansas. Dave has been a perennial winner since the contest began 30 some years ago. Their latest news was that Dave was now helping to RUN the Desert Gardens Show. He was in charge of all the facilities --- water, electricity, showers, restrooms, etc. The place looked great --- very clean and organized. Dave and Amy had participated in the Championship Dig back in October 2014 and it seems that Bobby Fecho (featured in my 2008 RockTalk article) had remarried and opened his own mine called "Twin Creek" very near Fiddler's Ridge and he was doing well. Of course, we were invited to return to Mt. Ida for the 2016 Dig.

I spent about an hour checking out the rest of the vendors and buying a few rocks. Then we headed to Love's Truck Stop for gas and some postcards. Then back across I-10 to more rock shops and to a huge building called Gem World --- again for a few more treasures including some "zingers" -- those pairs of magnetic little balls that "buzz" (alternatively repelling and attracting) when you throw them up into the air.

We left Quartzsite by 5 p.m. and headed back to Parker where we enjoyed a delicious dinner at a nice local Mexican restaurant called “El Sarape”. We returned to our hotel and turned in early – very tired but happy.



The next morning we departed early and stopped by Safeway to pick up some snacks, bottled water and some wine and flowers for our future hosts in Sonoita about 300 miles to the southeast. After another great breakfast at Coffee Ern’s, we headed east admiring the desert scenery --- all so much different from Southern Maryland. After an hour or so, we pulled off on a random dirt road to stretch our legs and to show Ann some of the local plants and rocks while explaining things like “desert varnish” --- the shiny black coating on rocks which were exposed to years and years of harsh desert sun and wind.

We stopped again about 30 minutes later at an old copper prospect near I-10. The plants were totally different and included three different kinds of cactus --- ocotillo (oc-tee-o), saguaro (sa-war-ro) and cholla (choy-ya). Ann had fun taking lots of pictures while I scratched around the old dumps finding blue-green rocks.
I just love rock hounding out West! But we had to get on the road again.



We passed through Phoenix and when we reached Tucson, we called our son Jeff and rendezvoused at the “Carl Jr’s” restaurant adjacent to I-10. I did a quick walk through vendors at the nearby Howard Johnson’s Show and picked up a couple of different Tucson Show Guide books. Gosh --- the number of shows had really increased. When I first visited Tucson in 2002, there were 30 shows --- now there were 43 listed shows --- each with 200 to 500 vendors --- that’s probably over 15,000 vendors --- from all over the world! It is hard to comprehend. And even harder to take it all in. Impossible actually. Anyway, I started with a purchase of a couple of nice rose quartz spheres that had great 6 pointed stars in the sunlight. After Jeff arrived, we headed south for Sonoita to stay with dear old friends from La Plata. We arrived just in time for a great supper and spent the evening catching up. After supper, we capped off the day with several serious games of Rummikub --- an every night ritual with our hosts. We love it! Believe me, the bed felt great when we crashed sometime after 10 p.m.