
Stop 33. Lake Tahoe

Arrival datetime: Thursday, June 6, 5:30PM
Sites visited: Death Valley National Park, Lake Tahoe
Accommodations: The Shore House
States traveled: Nevada, California

We headed north on our way out of the Death Valley, as we had not yet seen the Ubehebe Crater or Scotty's Castle. The Crater was impressive. Its name means "basket" in the Shoshone Indian language. It does have the shape of a basket. Apparently, it had been formed by rocks heating water trapped in the earth's crust until the pressure from the steam caused and explosion. Black soot and other volcanic looking rock surrounded the crater, and apparently similar explosions had caused the soot on the mountains we had been on at Father Crowley's point two days earlier. The wind was fierce. Standing on the edge of the crater was like having someone point a giant blow dryer directly at you, set on high.

Scotty's Castle was also impressive, but we were not sure for what reason the Park Service thought we should be impressed. It was a grand Spanish-Colonial style mansion, with high ceilings, indoor fountains, antiques and innovations, self sufficiently operating with hydroelectricity that had been designed in the early 1900s.



Scotty's Castle



Ubehebe Crater.

A Chicago banker named Johnson who had been swindled out of money he had thought he had invested in a gold mine built it. The swindler was named Scotty. He had swindled many others, but Johnson seemed to be the only one who actually came into the desert in search of the mine. Of course, it did not exist, but Johnson had asthma and found that the trip improved his health, so he built a second home out there. Scotty used the castle to promote himself, telling everyone it was his and getting them to invest in his nonexistent mine. Johnson let this happen, we know not why. Eventually the Park service acquired the property and now we are treated to the story of a common stock swindler as part of a National Park tour. We saw a coyote in the parking lot on the way out.

Once outside the park, we were looking for a gas station and place to have lunch, but after fifteen miles of driving, the only building we saw was a genuine brothel. We stopped in Goldfield, a town without a gas station, at a rock shop run by Big Bob Plock. Jennifer chose a few interesting samples of Nevada rock for our rock garden. Bob was chatting with a visitor who was running for the US senate. The candidate was asking Big Bob's opinion on his chances.

When Big Bob finally turned his attention to us, he found us looking at what he described as glacier formed composites. He told us that it was his opinion that the ice ages had descended into this continent much further south than prevailing theory would allow. He asserted that they went all the way into Mexico, and that rock specimens he had found could easily prove this. He then asked Jennifer if she was a geologist. He

said that he suspected so because she had chosen specimens that were all particularly geologically interesting. But after he found out that she was not a geologist, he stopped talking about the glaciers and did not elaborate on why the rock was interesting.

On Bob's recommendation, we had lunch in a casino in the town next door. Though it looked fully functional, the casino was not operating. Several would-be gamblers were pacing about as if it would open any minute. The town was Tonopah, and it gave us our second example of high school teams being named after blue-collar workers. Tonopah's team was called the "Muckers." The accompanying symbol was a miner's axe crossed with a shovel.

We drove on through a painted desert, once being buffeted by cross winds that pushed the Cadillac over the yellow line and back to the curb. There had been a sign warning of cross winds, but we were nevertheless unprepared for the impact. Soon after, we came across hundreds, maybe thousands of little buildings set into the topsoil as if to camouflage them from the air. They were surrounding a beautiful clear blue lake, Lake Walker. It was as large as Mono Lake but had been completely unadvertised. We figured the military presence had something to do with it, especially after we saw a sign advertising the Naval Undersea Warfare Unit. What a perfect place for the Navy to hide. No one would ever think to look for them in the desert.

All of a sudden, the hills had trees. At first, they were set far enough apart to see individual trunks and branches. But soon, the hills were covered in green.

We had reached the Toiyabe National Forest. We were rounding the shores at Lake Tahoe in time to see the sunset from the overlooks on the east shore. We had dinner at a perfect French restaurant and let ourselves into our room at the Shore House, as it was only staffed for arrivals until 6:00PM.

And it did not serve breakfast until 8:30AM. We thought that strange for an enterprise that has breakfast as part of their industry identification, but we decided to make the best of it and sleep late. Our room was a bungalow separated from the main house, very quiet. It was tastefully decorated with artistic wood furnishings and nature prints. Below a print on one wall was a quote from William Blake. "To see a world of in a grain of sand and heaven in a wildflower. Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour."

The bungalow was right on the water, and we walked outside a bit before breakfast. We had thought we would be doing the beach thing at Lake Tahoe, but we had driven into sixty-degree temperatures that seemed frigid after Death Valley. At breakfast, we threw ourselves on the mercy of our host for ideas. Marty, though Michael called him George, discussed various activities and we settled on kayaking in the morning and a ferry cruise in the afternoon.

Kayaking must be done in the morning, it was emphasized, because the wind came up too strongly in the afternoon. However, the kayak rental place our host referred us to did not open until 10:00AM. We were there at 9:50 and did not get on the water till 10:20. We took a good long look at the shore so we could recognize it

on the way back, a sandy white beach with tall trees lining the edge. We paddled on a smooth blue surface with edges of snow covered mountains. Our destination was Crystal Bay, a point five miles or so away with smooth rocks that were supposed to be fun to kayak among. We could see the bottom of the lake clearly for the entire trip. Boulders the size of cars were 30 feet below us and we could see patterns on the rock surfaces. Were it not so cold, we would have jumped in and stayed all day. We did work up enough of a sweat to take off our long sleeved windbreakers, but cooled down again quickly after climbing on top of one of the boulders for a rest.



Michael docking the kayak.

With determined paddling, we had reached our intended destination and gotten back by 12:15PM so had time to shower and still make our 2:00PM boat tour. Or so we thought. Traffic reduced the major throughway to one lane on the way to the ferry docks. We called ahead on the cell phone to try to get directions so we would not waste precious minutes driving in circles or parking. But the teenager on the other side of the phone had probably never driven to the place herself. There were no signs where she said they would be and the only way we



Lake Tahoe

recognized the place was by a chance glimpse of the boat on the water, 500 yards off the road. We pulled into the parking lot next door, drove as close as we could to the dock, got out and ran for the pier. They held the boat a few extra minutes for us as we had just called. They still asked us to pause and have our picture taken before getting on so they could try to sell it to us as we disembarked.

The cruise was worth the rush. It was a bit cold, but we had a nice lunch of fish and chips indoors next to large windows before venturing on deck. We cruised to Emerald Bay and back, listening to prerecorded legends and stories about the geography, the buildings and the characters that used to live there. The

sound system was the best we had ever heard on a similar cruise, and we easily picked out all the sights to which it referred. The lake was crystal clear and beautiful reflecting the azure blue sky, then turning Caribbean blue green as we approached the bay. Mountains, some snow covered and some tree covered, some long and low, some towering and dominating the landscape framed the Lake.

We got back to our B&B before six on purpose for their appetizer hour. We thought since Marty had been bragging about his wife's skill as a chef that it would be a shame to miss. But we should not have bothered. She exercised no skill on us. There were chicken wings and cheese and crackers. We attempted

one highly acclaimed Italian restaurant, but finding their menu filled with things like lamb and curry, without so much as one vegetarian pasta, we opted for a lower class Italian classic. We were happy with

our unpretentious baked penne and fettuccini alfredo.

Saturday we were up and out as soon as we could after waiting till 8:30AM to start breakfast.

Miles traveled: 489
Departure datetime: Saturday, June 8, 9:10AM
Departure weather: 58° Sunny