

Conservation Corner

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Last week we traveled with the Hubbell girls from Pocahontas to Phoenix, driving through several National Park areas in Colorado including the Garden of the Gods and the Rio Grande and San Juan National Forests. Today we'll accompany them, along with Jessica and Jesse, on a day trip to the Grand Canyon and Sedona in Arizona.

Each year over 5 million visitors travel to the Grand Canyon. Perhaps you've also sat on a bench or stood on the rim and looked out over the Grand Canyon in awe and wonderment. Or perhaps you've been on a cross country flight as the pilot banked the plane to allow passengers a grand view from 30,000 feet. Even when viewed from low earth orbit, the Grand Canyon is still an impressive sight.

The Grand Canyon, established as a National Park in 1919, is also a World Heritage Site. As one of the finest examples of arid-land erosion in the world, the 2 billion years of geologic history exposed by the Colorado River is also one of most studied landscapes in the world. There's something here for everyone – rock types and formations for the geologists, a rich and diverse fossil record for the paleontologists, paleo and archaic Indian artifacts for the archaeologists, and an overflowing of flora and fauna for the biologists.

Just how big is the Grand Canyon? The canyon is 277 river miles long, 18 miles wide, over 1 mile deep, and covers over 1.2 million acres. Elevation changes of over 8,000 feet result in a wide range of life zones from the Lower Sonoran, Upper Sonoran, Transition, Canadian, to the Hudsonian. In other words, you can travel from Mexico to Canada without leaving Arizona! Habitats range from boreal forests to deserts that are home to over 1,500 plant, 355 bird, 89 mammal, 47 reptile, 9 amphibian, and 17 fish species!

On the drive back to Phoenix, they took a side trip to Sedona's Red Rock Country. According to Jill, the scenery was like nothing she'd ever seen before and the one place in the Southwest you must stop and see! Many people agree as Sedona tops the USA Weekend's Most Beautiful Places in America list.

They traveled along the 7.5 mile Red Rock Scenic Byway Road that runs through the Coconino National Forest. Described as a museum without walls, each rock formation, bridge, and canyon is a work of natural art. Castle Rock contains the same iron ore that colors the red rocks of Mars, Cathedral Rock is a sacred site for Native Americans and the most photographed formation in Red Rock Country, while Bell Rock is known for its "earth energy" forces.

The Hubbells' week in the sun quickly came to an end with another day of R & R around the Koenig pool on Thursday and a swap meet in Mesa on Friday before flying back home on Saturday. Jill has set the bar high – how many national parks will you visit in 2016?

