

Record of Road Trip 2006 – American Southwest

Bilo Hak

Departed Prescott, AZ Monday, 1/16 – Took rt 17 thru Phoenix, thru Tucson enroute to Deming, NM. Stopped for lunch in Wilcox.

Deming is a long strip of a town. I hear there is a good BMW motorcycle dealership in Deming but I was unable to find.

From Deming, drove south to Columbus, NM...arrived about dark...so went on to El Paso, TX. Spent the night in Camino Real, downtown El Paso.

Wife Lynne & I spent a year in El Paso during first year of marriage. The outside of town looks like every town with housing developments, shopping malls, etc. There is a big casino on West side of town in New Mexico...Sunland Park.

Downtown El Paso is in poor shape. The only hotel I could find that was open was Camino Real. There were two or three other significant buildings housing hotels, but two were definitely not operating and the third, I'm not sure. The landmark hotel...built as the symbol of the city's prosperity located next to the Camino Real was closed.

Most of the shopping was "dollar" store variety; and obviously geared to Mexicans. Store names and signage were in Spanish. Not many Anglos on the streets during my walk around town Tuesday morning.

Later Tuesday, 1/17, I drove back to Columbus, NM via route 9. I'll call this the southern route as rt 10 also goes to Columbus via Deming. Route 9 passes a border entry point, but for the most part is a very straight, high desert, two-lane road connecting Sunland Park to Columbus.

Columbus, NM is, as I expected, very small, border town with population estimated 2,000. Elevation is 4050 feet above sea level. Not much to speak of: small downtown area (see photos) including nice library, one grocery store, one service station, one health clinic, one park downtown, Poncho Villa state park, one a couple of RV parks, one B&B owned by the mayor. It appears most residents live in trailers, or small one-story homes.

I visited The City of the Sun and met several people. Picked up some information about the Foundation and took photos.

Took a walk into Palomas, Mexico. The main shopping street downtown is right inside the border crossing. I've been to several border towns and Palomas is the smallest I've visited. There is basically one store for tourists – The Pink Store – and there was a tour bus parked outside (see photo) when I visited.

From what I saw, Palomas is not much. It's been very dry in this part of the country this winter, so it was typical high desert cold and dusty. I walked a block from the main drag to the park and found mostly adult men hanging out. An Anglo might not feel comfortable walking among them. I kept my distance. See photos of Palomas.

From Columbus, I drove west on rt 9. Again, a good, straight, two lane, paved highway.

Stopped in the border town of Douglas, NM. This obviously was a very prosperous town at one time – with the Grand Theatre (closed) and large, still operating hotel on main street. The hotel was worn, but had a large, beautiful lobby, with restaurant and bar. Most of the retail business space on main street downtown was not occupied. I found a new coffee show owned and

operated by a woman from Santa Fe, NM who moved there from Alaska. I believe she and her family lived upstairs. Internet reference reports this town had a population of 14,000 in AD 2000.

I learned subsequent to the trip, ore was shipped from Bisbee, AZ to Douglas, AZ, then smelted before being shipped north.

I went on to Bisbee, AZ and spent the night in the Silver Star Hotel...originally named the Bisbee Hotel in the heyday of the mining operation. The major features of this town are two, huge open pit mines that are no longer in operation. See photos. While there are some suburban areas, the old downtown is squeezed in a ravine...the largest of which is called Brewery Gulch.

Bisbee likes to bill itself as an artist colony but Raj Helweg describes it as a "hippie" town. I smelled pot burning three times and saw references to "grass" during my perambulations. The main hotel downtown is called the Copper Queen. I had dinner at that hotel. There are a number of hotels and B&B's...and a notable RV park that has old airstreams for overnight visitors.

From Bisbee, AZ I drove to Sierra Vista, AZ, which is a very prosperous town serving the U. S. Army post Ft. Huachuca. I was heading for Patagonia, AZ and saw on the map the direct route was through the fort. So I got a pass and drove through.

I discovered myself on primitive roads on the other side of the fort in the Coronado National Forest. I drove on the dirt roads for about 30 miles where I was dumped right out into Patagonia.

The location of Patagonia right on the edge of Coronado National Forest makes it an ideal mountain bike destination. But what I saw most were senior citizens "racing" with their walkers and oxygen bottles to the Sr. Citizen Center for lunch. In fact, I went to visit the only Real Estate office in town as the owner was heading out to the sr. citizen lunch. He indicated he had no listings, save one of 5 acres with a nice home for \$700k, but he had only one thing in mind...to make it to lunch. He wanted me to get out of his way. I think he drove his pick-up truck across the street to the Sr. Citizen's Center located in the only building in the park that separates the rt 82 from the main drag business district.

From Patagonia, I drove to Nogales...the outskirts of which I liked. Nogales is the last city in the US at the southern end of Rt 17...south of Tucson and Phoenix. Elevation approx 3500 feet. Lots of development along rt 17 north of Nogales.

From Tumacacori, I returned to Prescott in time for dinner and a movie with Gretel and Raj.

Put 1250+ miles on their little Honda car.