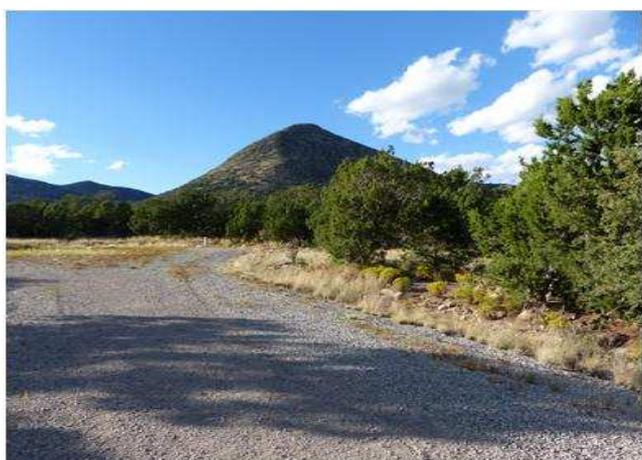


TRAVELS OF A TENDERFOOT
The Dude goes west
By Bill Darbon

It was my privilege and pleasure to visit Woody & Kathy Minnich at their home on the outskirts of Edgewood, New Mexico in September, they're having moved to this idyllic location after their retirement from teaching. The house, built in a Spanish style, is set in over 3 acres within a new development in the Estancia Valley and east of the Sandia and Manzano mountains.



View from Woody's house: front garden and drive



The Family Woody, Kathy, Sarah & dogs.

I travelled out on 15th September from Heathrow, the first time I had done long haul; the plane was late leaving Heathrow and despite the pilot trying to catch up it was late arriving at Dallas (Fort Worth). I had a further connection booked to Albuquerque, but due to a baggage hiccup missed the connecting flight; fortunately there was a later plane available. Then I must try and

contact Woody - Mobile not working in US, trusty payphone Ah! No change and phone box which only took a pre-paid card did not seem to work either. Then a nice American gentleman saw I was having problems and came to my rescue and called Woody's number on his phone so that I was able to advise him of the rebooked connection and my new arrival time. After a long day it was good to see them waiting at the Airport, and 45 minutes drive later I arrived at their home, in the dark and exhausted.

Wednesday morning was spent browsing Woody's collection of plants, a mix of both Cacti & Succulents, and outside two areas of plants under shade cloth (propagations and sales) and meeting the many animals Tortoises, Skinks, Fish and the two family dogs. In the afternoon we took a walk around the property for me to adjust to the altitude as they live at 6,500 feet. I saw a few of the plants that were growing around the homestead amongst the Juniper trees and brush, *Yucca baileyi*, *Cylindriopuntia imbricata*, *Mammillaria wightii* and *Echinocereus viridiflorus*. There was lots of evidence of local wild life from tracks in the soil on the walk around and Kathy told me that they had some deer that came to feed at the house in the mornings. We spent a pleasant evening chatting over dinner and planning trips out. Woody tried to introduce me to the finer points of Baseball, as he is an avid Angels fan (I don't think I really got it even after more intense instructions); nothing like rounders at school.



Echinocereus viridiflorus



Female Mule Deer

Thursday began with a disaster in the greenhouse overnight. The watering hose had split and of all places it could have sprayed managed to fill up three of Woody's terrariums of skinks and tortoises who could not escape. Despite emergency treatment draining them out they sadly perished, much to Woody's disappointment as he had raised them all from small hatchlings.

We had arranged to visit Steven Brack at Mesa Gardens, Belen in the afternoon. This was an eagerly awaited visit as I had heard of much before and was keen to see the source of the seed that he sends for the Society. I was quite amazed to see 14 greenhouses mostly covered in shade cloth and lots and lots of plants, but not in any particular order (I had expected a more regimented regime) but Steven explained that he did not like to keep the same genera/species close together in case of cross contamination. He now has two new full time employees to help him and although they all work from dawn till dusk, the vastness of the task is enormous. We left after a pleasant two hours browsing, but nothing was for sale.



With Steven Brack, outside one of the Mesemb. houses

We continued on to Albuquerque Botanical Garden to meet Dave Ferguson (an *Opuntia* enthusiast - someone has got to be!) as Woody needed to talk to him about a potential presentation to a forthcoming Interstate conference. The gardens were well laid out; they even had an old fashion Train to run you around. However the Cacti and Succulent House display was a little disappointing considering the availability of natural flora.



Albuquerque Botanical Garden

Friday we had decided to get up early to visit Bandelier National Monument, which is set in over 33,000 acres of rugged and beautiful canyon in mesa country. It preserves the homes and territory of the ancestral Pueblo people, and most of the structures date back 11,000 years. The site is one of the designated National Monuments and conserves the Petroglyphs and dwellings carved into the soft volcanic rock cliffs. The standing masonry walls pay tribute to the early days of a culture that still survives in the

surrounding communities. The Kiva at the Alcove house was a spectacular view and worth the climb up the wooden ladders (I am not sure that Health & Safety regulations applied here).



The Kiva at the Alcove house (old settlements in the rocks)

The afternoon took us to Los Alamos, the site of the National Laboratory that in 1942 was formed and known as "the Hill", or the town that never was - the site of the Manhattan Project. A visit to the fascinating Bradbury Science Museum occupied us for some time learning the history of the project and subsequent work being done on the development of nuclear technology, in all fields of research.

The following day we stayed at home, I helped Woody in the greenhouse doing some weeding, while Kathy retired to the garage to do some pottery. She makes pots which she sells at some of the Cactus events. In the evening we met up with Woody's daughter and boyfriend at one of their favourite restaurants for a pleasant meal.

Sunday we ventured to the Indian Salt Missions, the Salinas Pueblo visitors' centre is based in Mountainair and there are three different sites to visit at Abo, Quari and Grand Quivera which reflect the history of the effects of religion on the people of 1600s who were living there before the Spanish swept through that part of New Mexico. On the drive back Woody took me to a new site for him that was known for Echinomastus

intertextus, which was off the road and meant climbing a barbed wire fence. This was my first introduction to the natural habitat and it was tricky at first to find the plants, but despite the scrub we managed to find quite a few small plants. Also around were clumps of *Echinocereus engelmannii* and *Echinocactus polycephalus*. On the way back I had a slight argument with the fence - new pair of shorts needed - no damage to me thankfully (*Woody said that I was now fully initiated in the perils of field work*).



Indian Salt Mission, Quari - but mind where you walk!

A quote on one of the signs in the area said it all - respect what is there for others to enjoy.

"Leave only footprints and take only memories"

Monday morning Woody had some visitors from Texas so we spent time chatting and then we set off on our 4 day excursion to the Grand Canyon and Little Colorado. Our first stop was to be at Flagstaff, so off on the I 40 a stop near Holbrook saw another short trip into the hills at a site known to Woody, of *Pediocactus peeblesianus* which he had been monitoring. There were not many plants to find as they had pulled themselves down in the dry weather, but it was good to see some. On the journey I was amazed at the vastness of everything, the long empty roads, apart from the large trucks there was very little other traffic.

I did not know which way to look first - large expanses of brush reaching to the hills and mountains which were all such wonderful

colours, and different shapes and type of rock, anyway eventually we pulled into Flagstaff and found our motel for a meal and a night's rest.

The following day we were off to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. We stopped at the main visitor's centre and wandered around for about an hour or so. It was sadly a bit misty but the views and colours were still amazing (I should say at this point that I ran out of superlatives) there are only so many amazing, wonderful, marvellous, magnificent etc. that you can use to describe what you are seeing. The colours changed with the



South Rim, Grand Canyon

differing light and slowly clearing mist. We travelled back along our original route and went north on the 89. On the drive Woody stopped at a number of places for us to explore and take in the scenery, our second overnight stay was to be at Page. We pulled into town after a long drive and found the motel and after a quick meal retired to recharge the batteries for the next day's adventure.

The following day the objective was the North Rim, but you never go straight to anywhere with Woody as your guide, diversions via the Navaho Bridge, Lees Ferry, Jacob Lake (we had hoped to stay there in one of the cabins in the woods instead of Page but they were full). A pleasant walk around the North Rim visitor's centre.

Although the scenery was still quite wonderful, I felt it was not quite as dramatic as the South Rim, but I would not have missed it. On the journey back Woody was off road again to a site of *Pediocactus paradinei* that he knew. We drove past the

Vermilion Cliffs and eventually stopped in Cameron at the Cameron Trading Post, a most comfortable and pleasing location with a good restaurant and attached shop, for our last night's stay.

The following day we had a hearty breakfast and set off back home. We stopped at the Little Colorado overview and I was tempted by the local Indian (Navajo) stalls selling jewellery etc. but onward, a short while later Woody was off road again to a site for *Pediocactus bradyii* that was well documented with numbered tags, no problem finding the plants here.

Back on the road via the Petrified Forest where we stopped at a couple of the viewing points to take in the breath-taking views of the Painted Desert, but time was against us to tarry too long so onward, on the journey home. On the way back we took a short diversion to a site for *Neobessya navajoensis*: these were the most difficult of all the plants to find. We arrived home after a long day tied and weary.



Petrified Forest



Painted Desert

Friday we had decided to try and catch our breath and not venture too far, for me it was time to reflect on an incredible 4 days of over 1750 miles with incredible views, adventures into natural habitat, a real surreal experience and it was wonderful to be able to share it with such terrific people.

Saturday was my last day and Kathy thought we should not do too much, so we decided to

visit Santa Fe and wander around through the open market and Town Square and visit the church dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi and to have lunch at Pasqual's (another favourite watering hole). The weather was pleasantly warm and it made a relaxing day at the end of a wonderful visit, the sights and scenery of which will stay with me for a very long time.

Sunday it felt like I had only just arrived as the time had passed so quickly, where had the last 12 days gone? I suppose that's what happens when you are in good company and experiencing delightful things, a great memory of a brilliant time. With grateful thanks to mine hosts for a wonderful introduction to their homeland *Adiós Amigos* a fond farewell with lots of marvellous memories.

B. D.