

Season 4 – Part 1. From Albuquerque through Cowboy country to Tucson



Su 15.11.2015, day 125. Albuquerque.

Siria was up at the crack of dawn to have a Skype session from our motel room in Albuquerque with her family back home. I was still $\frac{3}{4}$ asleep so didn't contribute much. After a very unhealthy breakfast of waffles, muffins and coffee we went back to the room for some more skyping. We then headed out into the cold drizzle to do our laundry and had some bagels and internet while waiting for the tumbler to finish.

The plan for the afternoon was to go downtown, look at the sights and to stock up on groceries. Just as we had reached the historic center of Albuquerque, about 7 km away from the hotel, I had a puncture caused by a glass shard. Not again! And why always me?! I was really pissed off, especially as I hadn't brought the repair kit along with me. So I pushed my bike through the historic center in a bad mood. We

decided that Siria would ride back to get the repair kit and we'd meet up again on the road. So this is what we did, and while Siria did the shopping I fixed puncture #5.

Back in the motel we started discussing on what route to take direction L. A. We thought everything was clear, that we would head south. We also already had a warm shower rigged up on that route. But then we started looking at the route directly westwards and saw that this route would take us pass by all the sights, Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, etc... and we were soon in a knot not knowing what to do, started writing down pros and cons, checking options and places to stay, and got really confused.

I was really feeling like going to the movies to watch the new James Bond, Spectre. Siria didn't feel like coming, so off I went. The theater was right by the railway station in a dodgy sort of place. When I sat down in the theater, I was surprised that I was alone, it being Sunday evening. Maybe more people would turn up when the film actually started? But no one did. This was the first time ever that I have watched a film completely alone in a huge movie theater! It was actually quite disconcerting.

I got back to the hotel and the first thing Siria said was: "We are heading South!". Decision made. Absolutely fantastic!









Mo16.11.2015, day 126. Yet another great Warm Shower experience!

The ride out of Albuquerque wasn't much to write home about. It started off not bad following a bicycle path, but then we had quite a bad ride with heavy traffic along suburban commercial lots and we soon had a pretty severe head wind that slowed us down. Lowlight was yet another puncture. This time it was caused by one of the notorious Goat Heads, a plant that makes really spiny hard seed-like balls that go right through bike tires. I was starting to run out of patches and I also noticed that my spare tubes were not quite the right size and rather flimsy. This might spell trouble! Finally just as we stopped at a Post Office to send off some cards, a hefty sleet storm hit us. The day really wasn't going well!

However things got significantly better, the sky brightened up, the wind turned becoming a side, then even a tail wind and we arrived at our Warm Shower hosts, Pat and Tom at about 2 pm. We had somehow forgotten or not had the opportunity to have lunch, so we were quite hungry when we arrived. Very soon we were sitting in front of some nice sandwiches, a delicious hot coffee that was followed by an even more delicious bread pudding. And soon after that we were sitting in a divine hot tub looking out over the arid planes of New Mexico, while a cold wind and sleet whistled round our ears. This definitely reminded us of Iceland. It was absolute luxury and I felt how my back was slowly easing up and the vertebrae sliding back to where they belong.

In the evening we piled into their pickup with two of their friends, went for dinner (we both had burgers, burgers here are definitively something else than back home!) and then to a classic concert on the campus of the NM Tech.









Tu 17.11.2015, day 127. Wonderful ride through the desert.

Breakfast was porridge, by far the best thing for us to start the day and some English muffins, not really the most sensible thing, but too good to turn down. Then Tom equipped us with something that was to prove very valuable in the days to come: a dog repellent. This was simply a plastic squirt bottle filled with ammonium. We found that in New Mexico there are a lot of dogs that sometimes are not tied up and come running at us and try to bite our ankles. Squirted this potion (later improved by me by mixing in some hot chili sauce, I call it "Dog Potion #9") into their face distracts them and they back off, if it gets into their eyes it hopefully also teaches them a lesson! Tom also gave Siria a present of a beautiful polished shell. They were truly two wonderful and generous people and once again we had such a nice experience thanks to Warm Showers!

We basically rode 90 km non-stop that day without eating, only stopping briefly a first time for me to fix yet another puncture and a second time at a bike shop in Socorro (www.anelectrichorse.com) run by a very nice and also quite a funny character, where I bought a set of Kevlar tire protectors. The ride after Socorro was absolutely wonderful. There is a road that probably follows the historic Camino Real and has absolutely no traffic as it runs parallel to the highway. We were riding through the desert with mountains to the left and right of us. We were starving when we finally arrived in San Antonio, home of the famous Owl Café, where apparently they serve the best green chilly burgers in the world. They certainly were delicious, but maybe this also had to do with our hunger level. We spent the night at an RV park just down the road run by a very nice Mexican guy.

I noticed that my cooker was not working when I wanted to fire it up to cook up some noodles. I had the same problem when I arrived in Canada, my solution back then was to buy a new pump, but this time I took everything apart and found that it was a simply case of a dislodged ball valve. I am certainly getting better at fixing stuff! I was quite proud of myself actually and also cursed myself for having thrown away the old fuel pump back in Canada that I thought then was beyond repair. I'm sure I could have fixed that one as well...













We 18.11.2015, day 128. 110 km ride through the desert.

We wanted to set off early, as we had planned to ride over 100 km that day. However –as usual- we had trouble getting up and it was after 8 when we were finally ready to head off. And then I noticed that I had another puncture in my front tire. It seemed the patch I had put on the day before was leaking. Usually this can't be fixed, so I changed the tube. And that was the last tube I was carrying. So if any one of our tubes got damaged beyond repair we would be stuck. Definitely not a good situation and I had to urgently do something about these flat tires!

We had breakfast at the bird reserve at Bosque del Apache. The festival of the Cranes had just started and there were busloads of ornithologists all over the place armed with camera lenses as big as missile launchers. We had a look round the exposition, got a coffee and took a quick detour through the park on leaving. Apart from some quite impressive cranes and a roadrunner (a very funny bird, really quite like the comic character!) the highlight was a lake that was completely white with thousands of snow geese. We then headed off for some more riding through the dessert. We stopped for lunch at a truck stop in the middle of nowhere. It had quite a cool desert feel to it and it was the only place there was within about 50 km. We cooked some instant noodles. After we had started cooking, we noticed, that the funny thing in the sand right next to us was a dead rattle snake. Luckily it was November and the weather far too cold for them to be really active. The place we wanted to spend the night had a very funny name: Truth or Consequences. Who would think of naming a town Truth or Consequences? We arrived there just before the sun set and as I owed Siria an ice cream and she owed me one, for lost bets, we headed straight for a convenience store and enjoyed ice cream while watching the sun

disappear. We got to the state park camping in the dark. The place was huge and had beautiful camp spots each with its own little hut looking out over Elephant Butte Lake.











Th 19.11.2015, day 129. A very short relaxing day.

We had pretty much decided to take the mountain road over Silver City for our onward journey. This would mean about 3 days probably without shops for food or water, so getting properly stocked was high on the list of priorities as was the need to get new tubes for my bike in case of more flat tires. Walmart proved to be excellent in both respects, in fact it turned out they had quite a good bike section where I got 2 good tubes and also one super heavy duty tube with a sort of liquid inside, that supposedly plugs holes as long as they are not too big. So now with the Kevlar liners and the heavy duty tubes I very much hope this is the end of my flat tire ordeals! After over 1h of shopping we headed downtown for a place to sit and relax. Downtown was quite nice and had a good Wild West feel to it. We found a very nice café serving excellent scones, macaroons, muffins and other stuff, so we had a good long sit in there and finally biked 30 km to an RV park in Caballo. When we got there we paid, dumped our stuff on our camp spot and rode down the gravel path to the lake. Just when we got onto the path we saw a sign saying that we could have camped right by the lake shore for 8\$ as it was part of the state park. What a pity we didn't see the sign sooner!

The lake and the red mountains on the far side were stunningly beautiful. As the sun set, flock after flock of birds flew by, all in V-formation. It really was a magic moment. I had a quick skinny dip in the lake to rinse off the sweat and mused over what a perfect kite spot this would be, if only there were wind!

That evening after a big bowl of spaghetti, while playing the guitar, I looked across the camp ground and was quite surprised to see a dog sized animal with a bushy tail looking straight back at me! I'm sure it was a coyote, even if I'd never seen one before. He quickly disappeared into the bushes. But I made sure

all the food was away from the tent and also kept my Dog Potion #9 close at hand, just in case someone came sniffing round the tent that night...

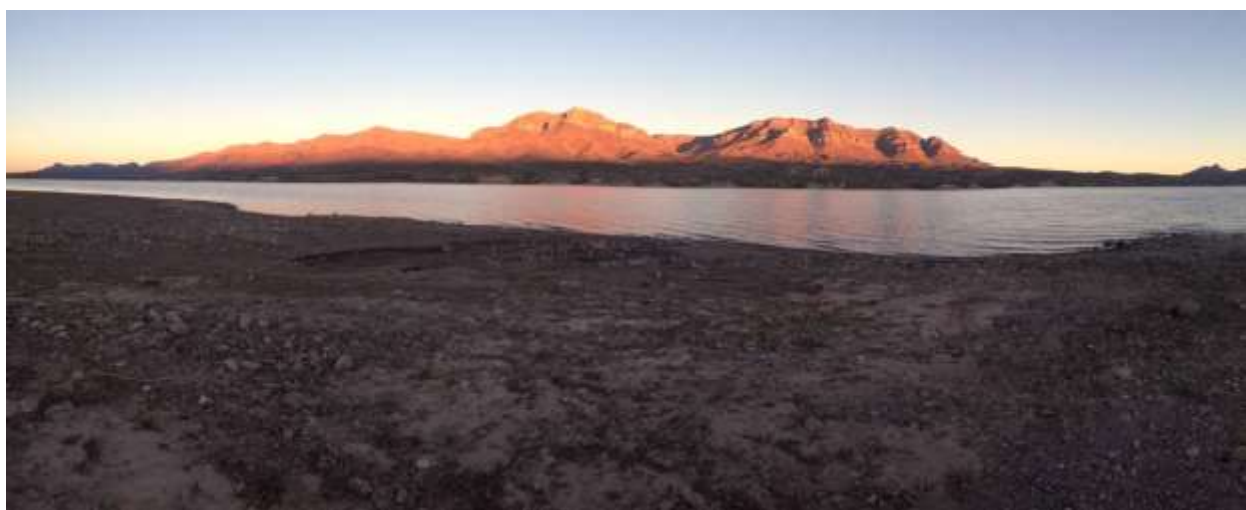












Fr 20.11.2015, day 130. Climb up to 2500 m high Emory Pass.

We were going to have a big day ahead of us as we were heading off towards Silver City having to cross the Gila National Forest and the 2500 m Emory Pass on the way there. The first part of the ride up to Hillsboro was not that hard, but a very nice ride across a lonely plane on a lonely road. In Hillsboro we stopped in a very nice little place (actually the only thing that was open) for a coffee and delicious muffin. We got talking to the owner, who had Austrian parents and spoke German and also to a very nice old lady, who had spent all her life in the town. After Hillsboro the road got steeper and soon the

desert gave way to a pine forest. It's funny how here trees grow at high altitudes and in the valleys there are none, exactly the opposite to what we are used to.

We were really feeling excited when we reached the top of the pass, the view was stunning and we were rightly feeling proud, having biked 60 km and having climbed from 1400 m right up to 2500 m. We camped quite close to the summit on the far side of the pass at Iron Creek Campground that was actually closed down for the season. It was very cold and the temperature was dropping rapidly, so we pitched tent, cooked spaghetti and disappeared into the sleeping bags for an early night.













Sa 21.11.2015, day 131. Spontaneous invitation to spend the night in Silver City.

When we got up at around 8am it was actually warmer than we had expected. Nevertheless, we put on almost all the warm clothes we had, ready for a chilling downhill ride to San Lorenzo, where we were planning on having breakfast. So off we headed and we were quite surprised to find that it was not all downhill as we had expected! Soon we found ourselves panting up short climbs, so pretty soon we had to start peeling off layer after layer. We also found that it took us far longer than expected to reach San Lorenzo, and we were pretty starving when we got there. I was really feeling very much like a coffee, so I persuaded Siria to take the detour through the village in hope of finding a place to sit into. My hopes withered away as it turned out that San Lorenzo is pretty desolate place with nothing much going on at all. Just when I had almost given up we found Restaurante Del Sol, probably the only place open for miles around that was gas station, store and restaurant. And it was a great place, with elk heads staring out of the walls, booths between dark wooden beams, an Apache lady serving, a sheriff with a large cowboy hat and golden star on his shirt having bacon and eggs and a fat Mexican cowboy with black shirt, large hat and stirrups on his boots having his Huevos Rancheros. But the biggest surprise of all was that when we heard the owner of the place talking English, we were sure that he must be Swiss. Turns out he actually is and he quickly switched from English to a broad Bernese Swiss German! We had a long chat with him about how he ended up in this place and about good roads to take and places to see.

One highlight on the road for me was a huge open pit Copper mine. Apparently it is the largest open pit mine in the northern hemisphere. It is huge, over a mile across and the hole is more than 600 m deep.

As we were getting close to Silver City, a group of racing bicyclists caught up with us and they started chatting with us. When I asked if there were any campgrounds or similar in the City one of them offered to put us up for the night. What a fantastic offer, the bicycle God is still very much with us! So finally we ended up at Gary's place and once more we had a great experience, he invited us to beers and let us cook supper, while he headed off to a party, leaving us to relax at his place completely on our own. We spent much of the evening discussing our further route towards L. A. It looks as if the only reasonable way to go is south and then westwards through Arizona along the Mexican border. We briefly looked at heading north again towards Flagstaff hoping to get in the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas on our way westwards, but both the distances and also the hills along that route look prohibitive.















Su 22.11.2015, day 132. Into the Wild West.

The day started slowly with a great breakfast at Gary's place. We chatted for a while and then finally bade our good byes. We didn't really have a plan for the next days, so we headed into Silver City downtown, found a funky café and installed ourselves for planning. We didn't get very far as soon we started talking to a bike veteran with a huge beard. He had a good suggestion for a route direction San Diego taking us way south, we were actually planning to head further north. One more difficult decision for us! Then we met two Swiss travelers, Ramon and Vera. They are taking 10 months off and are travelling through the South West of the USA before heading for Central America.

Finally after a quick shop in the local Organic Store, we headed off. It was already almost 2pm, so it was not going to be a big day. Our route took us northwards towards Cliff. The ride was fantastic, through empty desert landscapes and most of the ride was downhill. All too soon it started to get dark. We simply chose a spot beside the road, somewhat hidden in a little dip, made some hot milk with honey that we had together with some crackers and peanut butter. It was very cold and by 7pm we were already half asleep.







Mo 23.11.2015, day 133. More Wild West.

As always on a stealth camp day, we got up early. It was tough getting out of the sleeping bag, as it was very cold, my bike computer was showing -5°C. Also it was quite moist, meaning that everything was covered in a thick layer of hoar frost, also the outsides of our sleeping bags were quite damp due to condensation. We tried as best we could to scrape all the ice off the tent as we rolled it up, but with limited success. It got packed away quite wet. And so we put on all we had and started a cold ride direction Buckhorn. We were really not expecting to find any place to sit in and get warm, but to our surprise we passed a place in Buckhorn. It looked very closed, still we went and had a look and we found that it opened at 8am, which was in about 10 min. On the dot at 8am several trucks pulled up seemingly out of nowhere and real cowboys, all looking quite weather beaten and with teeth rotting, probably due to tobacco, got out and headed into the place. Inside the 2-toothed chef of the place fired up a wood stove and put on the coffee pot. Soon we were having coffee and he made us some biscuits (a biscuit here is a bun with sausage and egg inside) that were absolutely delicious! He was a funny character and joked around a bit with us. We stayed there for over 1 hour enjoying the atmosphere, then we bought some homemade beef jerky and hit the road again. The ride was absolutely beautiful, but also quite tough as the road was always either uphill or downhill, never flat. Also there was absolutely nothing by way of shops or similar for quite a long time.

We finally came to Three Way Junction. This was a very funny place with a tiny gas store and a small shop and nothing whatsoever else. We had cool drinks (I had a beer ☺) and chocolate and got talking to Michelle, a local lady, who told us about the mine that we were right next to. Apparently the largest copper mine in the northern hemisphere (and NOT the mine we saw a couple of days ago... got my mines mixed up!).

It was already getting dark and again we had no idea where to spend the night. So we headed up the hill on Route 191. Right at the top we found a wonderful bush with just enough space behind it to pitch our tent. But first we had to clear away all sorts of pointy rocks and prickly plants....













Tu 24.11.2015, day 134. Tough 130 km day with some nasty hills.

After the usual early start without breakfast, typical for stealth camp days, the road took us on a long downhill run towards Safford. And so we had already ridden 40 km by the time we had breakfast at 9 am. After breakfast we continued, half hoping a nice little place would materialize to have a break, but there was nothing. And so we continued biking southwards on Route 191. This was a really tough road. Dead straight and it just continued climbing for almost 50 km when it joined the highway. Now we were really hoping there would be some sort of a place to get ice cream or some cool drinks at the intersection, but again there was nothing. And so we continued on the highway that again continued to climb slightly and now there was also a nasty headwind slowing us down. Finally we arrived in Willcox where there was the usual collection of fast food places at the highway exit and the Cokes and McFlurries certainly tasted delicious!

That night we treated ourselves to an all-you-can-eat buffet at the adjacent truck stop, mainly because there was a great collection of salads, something we rarely get the chance to eat, while on the road. We also did a huge amount of laundry as we were both down to our last clean garments. We spent the night in a cheap motel, and it really felt great to be in out of the cold with a real bed and chairs for once.









We 25.11.2015, day 135. A day on Highway 10.

There is not much choice of roads between Willcox and Tucson, only the highway. So that's the road we took. We were not very motivated, as there were quite strong head winds forecast. So we only just made it to breakfast before it closed at 9am and it was already 10:30 when we finally left. The ride was then actually not so bad at all, there was a nice wide shoulder on the highway and the draught of all the traffic somewhat reduced the effect of the head wind. After about 25km and after having climbed the largest hill for the day, we stopped at a rest area for a Dairy Queen Banana Split. Then we continued on, briefly getting off the highway to go through Benson, which was quite a strange dead sort of town and quite soon the sun started setting in a beautiful red and pink sunset. In spite of the wind we made quite good progress and were thinking of spending the night at a campsite close to Tucson but then we arrived at a construction site. One lane of the highway was closed as they were reconstructing a bridge and there was no space for bikes whatsoever. Traffic was heavy and it was already quite dark, so we thought it would be prudent to stop and camp right there beside the highway and put off the problem of how to get through the construction site 'till the next day.

The camping spot was actually quite beautiful with a wonderful view out across the desert, also the temperatures were nice and warm. We cooked a nice pasta, tuna and corn salad, getting slightly wet due to some scattered showers that were passing by. I didn't sleep too well that night, as the highway was quite noisy, especially the trucks using their motor brakes were really loud.





