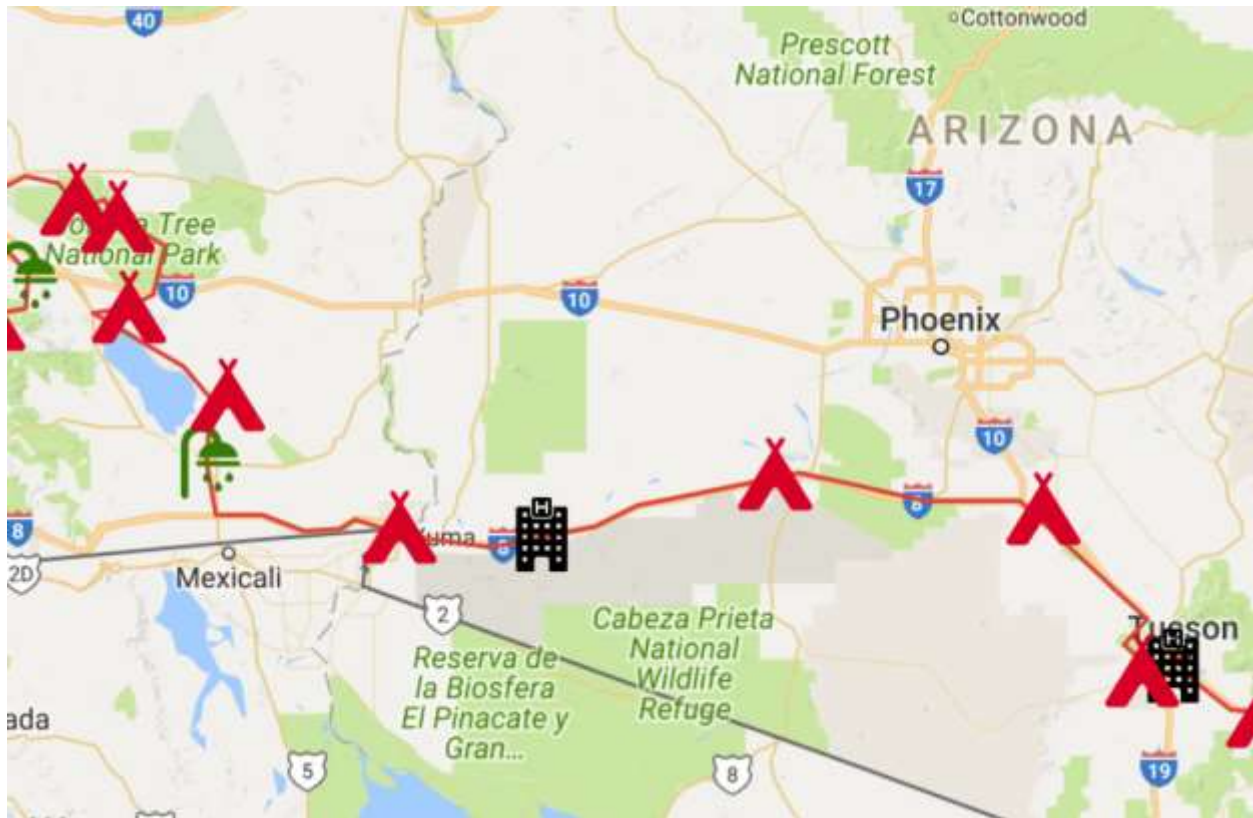


Season 4 – Part 2. From Tucson to Yuma and into California.



Th 26.11.2015, day 136. THANKSGIVING In Tucson

We got up quite early (as usual for stealth camp nights), had breakfast and started worrying about the problem of getting through the construction. Traffic was quite light, but this also meant that the cars and trucks were driving quite fast. But there was nothing for it, so we waited for a break in the traffic, I let Siria go ahead and off she went, faster than I have ever seen her peddling! It turned out to be no problem at all. The cars slowed down and overtook us, sheepishly looking out of the window wondering what the heck we were doing, but unfortunately there really is no alternative whatsoever to the interstate here in this car centered country!

Soon afterwards we got off the highway and onto a very nice backroad through the desert into Tucson. We soon stopped at a Dunkin Donuts to plan our night's stay and we booked two beds in the Roadrunner Hostel down town. Soon we also got talking to everyone in the place and so it turned out to be quite a long sit-in. And when we finally left we got talking to a very nice and interesting lady called Nicole from Montréal. There was a Walmart right next to the Dunkin Donuts, so we decided to use the opportunity to stock up our pantry, and there again, while Siria was inside shopping I started chatting with one guy who was very interested indeed in our project. Really quite amazing how many people we get talking to!

We then headed to the hostel. When we arrived there was a big Thanks Giving party going on with lots of food. I had a hard time figuring out who was guest at the hostel and who was a friend dropping in or

who worked at the place. As time went by, I realized that hostels in the USA host a somewhat different crowd than what I am used to in Europe and other parts of the world, where one meets predominantly young travelers with a specific travel project. Here the crowd at the hostel was older and I got the feeling that many of them were here not because they wanted to be, but more out of necessity. The USA is certainly a very egocentric society, where people's first priority seems to be to amass as much wealth and property for themselves, grudgingly paying as little tax as possible to finance a massive army, but a minimal infrastructure of crumbling roads, rusty bridges, spaghetti like mess of power lines, no public transport to speak of and –very sadly- no support or welfare whatsoever for a large number of members of their society that for one reason or the other cannot or don't want to fit into the straight jacket of this "free" society where you are supposed to

- 1) Get born into an affluent white family in a good neighborhood
- 2) Get Papa to pay for private education.
- 3) Get Papa to buy you a car for your 16th birthday. So who needs public transport anyway?!
- 3) Go to college and misbehave during Spring Break.
- 4) Get a well-paid job due to your connections and not due to merit.
- 5) Get married and buy a house in a good predominantly white neighborhood.
- 6) Make sure your kids follow steps 1 to 6.

Anyway, I met some very nice and interesting characters there and it was fantastic listening to their stories and their projects and I certainly wish them the very best of luck for their future!

For the evening we had arranged to meet up with Ramon and Vera, a Swiss couple who are travelling round the USA and South and Central America for 10 months. We went to a Hara Krishna temple where there was a Vegan buffet and the interesting conversations continued. I am certainly looking forward to meeting up with them again in their Mongolian Yurt Hut that they have built back home in Köniz, Switzerland to exchange our travel experiences, whenever we get back home!







Fr 27.11.2015, day 137. Tucson and some Moondocking.

In the morning I replaced my back tire that lasted close to 7000 km but now was looking very chewed up. Then we had some last chats with the Hostel crowd where I learned some fascinating things about Camels and what happens if you cross a Camel with a Lamas, but also about Ostriches, Emus, Alpacas, etc... Then we said good-bye and we spent a quiet day enjoying Tucson that is really a very nice and easy-going city. We headed out to a well-known Moon Docking campsite just outside of the Saguaro National Park where we enjoyed a sunset, a full bottle of wine and a nice chicken, avocado, cucumber and tomato salad and a whole pecan pie for dessert. By 8pm we were both fast asleep.







Sa 28.11.2015, day 138. Desert museum and a 120 km ride.

We got started not quite as early as we would have liked and biked through the Saguaro National Park marveling at the quite incredible and gigantic Saguaro Cactuses (Cacti?). We also spent a couple of hours in the Desert Museum watching some bird shows (Horned Owl, Raven, Falcon, the Hawk quickly saw a mouse or something in the distance and disappeared ignoring the titbits and waves of the park wardens. Good for him!) and trying to remember the names of all the different types of plants and animals. There was also quite a nice exhibition on the formation and evolution of the Earth, quite a subversive exhibition –I guess- in this country of Creationists.

The rest of the day was basically all biking with a short stop in McDonalds for McFlurries and internet. It was there that we started talking to the first true bike tourer we have met in all the 4 months of our trip: Naki from Japan, who started off in Anchorage on first of July and is heading for Argentina. He is retired and now –after surviving Cancer- is taking two years to fulfill his life's dream. He was a great chap and also gave us a contact (his brother) close to Tokyo. You never know where we will end up!

We were planning to spend the night at the Arizona SkyDive center in Eloy, just south of Phoenix. We got there in the dark, easily found the camp spot that is actually only for Sky Divers, but apparently no-one checks. We had a delicious hot shower and then went off the Bent Prop Saloon, where there was a huge party going on with live music and all.















Su 29.11.2015, day 139. An easy day at the Sky Dive center.

The sky dive center is a really great place to hang out, so we decided to stay put for the day. We had breakfast at the sky dive café and then sat in the sun watching the plane take off again and again with all the sky divers and then watch as they jumped out as tiny dots in the sky, then suddenly open their chutes with a loud noise and finally glide to earth gracefully coming in to land with as much speed as possible. We also went for a quick ride into town (Eloy) and found it to be an absolutely terrible place with nothing whatsoever, except a truck stop with a stinky Subway and a Dairy Queen.

In the evening Cole, a young touring cyclist from Canada arrived. He was on a fundraising ride for equipment for a school in Cambodia and had come down from Vancouver and was heading for Miami. It seemed to me the main reason for him doing the ride was to raise funds and not really to have a fun time, so he was travelling with very little weight and sticking to the interstate. We are definitely on a very different trip!





Mo 30.11.2015, day 140. A long 130 km day on long straight roads...

The story of the day is quickly told. We got up early, cooked porridge and headed off. It was quite cold and so we stopped after 20 km for a second breakfast (a delicious breakfast burrito!) after that we biked pretty much all the way on long straight roads, then got onto the interstate and arrived at a camping in Gila Bend shortly before sunset. The camping had a nice common area with tables, internet and a TV, so we had our Linguini with tomato sauce out of the cold and basically stayed there all evening doing a bit of planning for the next days and finishing a started jigsaw that was on one of the tables. A rather uneventful day really.





Tu 1.12.2015, day 141. And now a 150 km day on some more long straight roads...

There really isn't very much out here, so we knew it would be a rather similar day to the previous one. We got straight onto the Interstate 8 and simply rode through the desert. The only diversion we got was two US Air Force planes that came swooping over us at very low altitude and landed quite close in the desert, throwing up a large plume of dust. Apart from that we simply biked and only stopped after 85 km when we got to a place called Dateland. As the name suggests it is a place where they farm dates and there is a shop there that sells all sorts of things made out of dates, cookies, date squares, cakes and also the supposedly world famous date shakes. We had to of these after wolfing down a large pot of instant rice and spaghetti, and they were indeed very delicious. We were planning on spending a nice relaxing evening in the Motel in Tacna, but when we got there we found it was very much closed. So after a short discussion we decided to bike on to the next town in spite of the dark and there we checked in to a typical large chain hotel right off the highway and went for some really bad fast food...





We 2.12.2015, day 142. Some days are just bad days, but this one at least ended well!

We started the day rather lazily, had a lot of junk from the typical breakfast served in most motels in the US (nasty bagels, waffles, cereal, nasty coffee). We then were just somehow lounging around when Tim called and we started discussing our route. In our minds we had decided on heading north to have a look at Salton Sea and even further north into Joshua Tree national park and then looping round to cross the coastal range direction Carlsbad via Palm Springs. Tim started pointing out all the problems with this choice of route and Siria immediately agreed with him and so we started discussing our route from zero again. This whole story somehow got me down and I started asking myself really fundamental questions about travelling and what our trip is all about. According to my philosophy travelling is not about stringing the most worthwhile places to see together and visiting one after the other. For me travelling is about making my own adventure, seeing also the nasty places and maybe finding beauty in them, fighting my way through traffic and bad roads, getting into trouble, getting lost and finding a way out. Travelling is definitively about leaving my comfort zone. After you have battled through some hard times, you will feel elated about things that you otherwise wouldn't even notice. I also think that only if stray from the beaten path, will you find out how the world really is.

I know the Salton Sea will be a desolate place. It will be stinking, full of dead fish, dusty, run down, hot and sticky and yes, I know the pacific coast between San Diego and LA will be groomed and breezy, with lots of palm trees, white sandy beaches, cute little bistros and Starbucks at every corner. But I STILL want to go to the Salton Sea!

I was somehow also disappointed that Siria's reaction to hearing or reading anything negative about a place is to immediately not want to go there and to generate a lot of negative energy saying things like "if only we had done that and that", "we should really have gone there and there". For me this is again falling into the trap of always thinking the other way is better and always thinking that what other people do is better. But she soon apologized and said we should stick to our plan of going up along Salton Sea. So that is hopefully the end of the discussions...

And then on top of all these thoughts the day's ride turned out to be quite a tiresome one. We started very late, only leaving at 11am, there was a lot of traffic on the interstate and a bit of head wind. Then the shoulder turned out to be very bumpy and finally, when we got to Yuma, instead of following Google we decided to go through the city to do some "sight-seeing". This turned out to be a very bad decision at the roads were very bad to cycle on with no shoulder whatsoever and lots and lots of traffic. We finally made it through Yuma to the Colorado River where we decided to stop and decide how to go on. Our plan was actually to camp outside of Yuma on some BLM land, but it was already quite late and we were worried about arriving in the dark. So in the end we let the Bicycle God (we flicked a coin) decide what we should do. And he told us to spend the night on a camping in Yuma.

So with this decided we cooked some noodles and then check out Main Street, where we hoped to find a nice café to sit down, have some nice cookies and just relax for a while. We found that Main Street in Yuma is a terrible place with nothing much going on at all! A group of young cheerleaders who were collecting funds to go to some competition in Phoenix convinced us to go to some bar that was sponsoring them. We sat down and this completely drunk half Native American, half Philippine bike rider starts talking and talking and talking to me. This was the very last thing I needed right at that moment. I was starting to feel very depressed indeed!

After ice cream and coffee we left and headed for Hidden Cove RV Park where finally our luck turned. We had a fantastic stay! The manager was a very nice guy indeed, in fact everyone at the camp was very nice and for only 10\$ they let us camp at a wonderful spot, right next to the Colorado River. There was a delicious hot shower and of course the absolute highlight was Siria taking part in the Bingo competition! Unfortunately she didn't win anything, but it was great fun!



Th 3.12.2015, day 143. Another long trying day on the highway.

We had a long day ahead of us. We had a warm shower organized in Brawley and we had to be there at 5pm as they were going to a concert at 6. And it was a 120 km ride to get there! We got off early enough, and crossed the Colorado getting into California and winning one hour thanks to crossing the time zone. From there Google gave us two options, a very long hilly one or a short and mainly downhill route along the highway. It seemed that there would have been a very good third option along a little road cutting straight through the desert, but I didn't dare taking it due to the bad experience of not following Google the day before. So we chose to use the highway. We stopped at a truck stop just outside Yuma to fill our water bottles and this scruffy guy starts talking to us, asking where we are going and he immediately went into a never ending monologue of how terrible and stinking Salton Sea was how stupid it is not to head directly for San Diego, and he just went on and on. I just thought "Not again!!". And so we headed off for another tough ride. It was not permitted to ride on the highway, instead bikes have to take a service road running parallel to the highway. This road was in a terrible state, bumpy like hell and again we started getting head winds that slowed us down to below 15 km/h. After painfully bumping along for a good while Siria finally agreed to take the highway and progress got better. Inevitably we got back to the question of what route to choose, should we go towards Salton Sea even if everyone recommended against this route? I was now at a point where I just wanted to get to the West Coast as quickly as possible and I finally gave up on the idea of going north. If I now stubbornly stick to my idea of going north along Salton Sea and it turns out to be as bad as everyone says I would be bombarded by a lot of "We should really have...", "Well everyone told us so...", "If only we would have listened..." and after all the discussions I felt I really couldn't handle it. The Adventurecycling route heads directly from Brawley to the West Coast. So finally finally, after two days of bad moods the decision was taken! I was now actually looking forward for some nice easy relaxing days along the coast.

We had a quick rice dinner in a little town park, where again some strange guy started talking to us, and pretty soon we were on the road again. We finally arrived at our Warmshower hosts and once again it was absolutely fantastic at their place! There were two other friends staying and it turns out that all of them work at the local high security state prison, where all the real heavy weight criminals are locked away. They worked as a nurse, a teacher, a guard and in administration. I never realized that in a prison you need all sorts of trades, it is actually like a whole small little town. It was very interesting indeed listening to their stories. The absolute highlight for me were their birds. They kept a number of Macaws, Cockatoos and Parrots. It was the first time I ever got to see such birds from up close and one of them was even able to speak! Quite incredible...

We also got back to the topic of choice of routes. And –who would have believed it!- we went back to the route north along Salton Sea. This decision was also helped by Bill mentioning some of the highlights on the way, such as Slab City that was featured in the film Into the Wild and is a community of Moon Dockers, hippies and artists and sounds very interesting indeed and Salvation Mountain that apparently is a huge colorful art installation. Bill also mentioned that, yes, sometimes there are lots of dead fish in Salton Sea, but on the whole it is not that bad at all.









