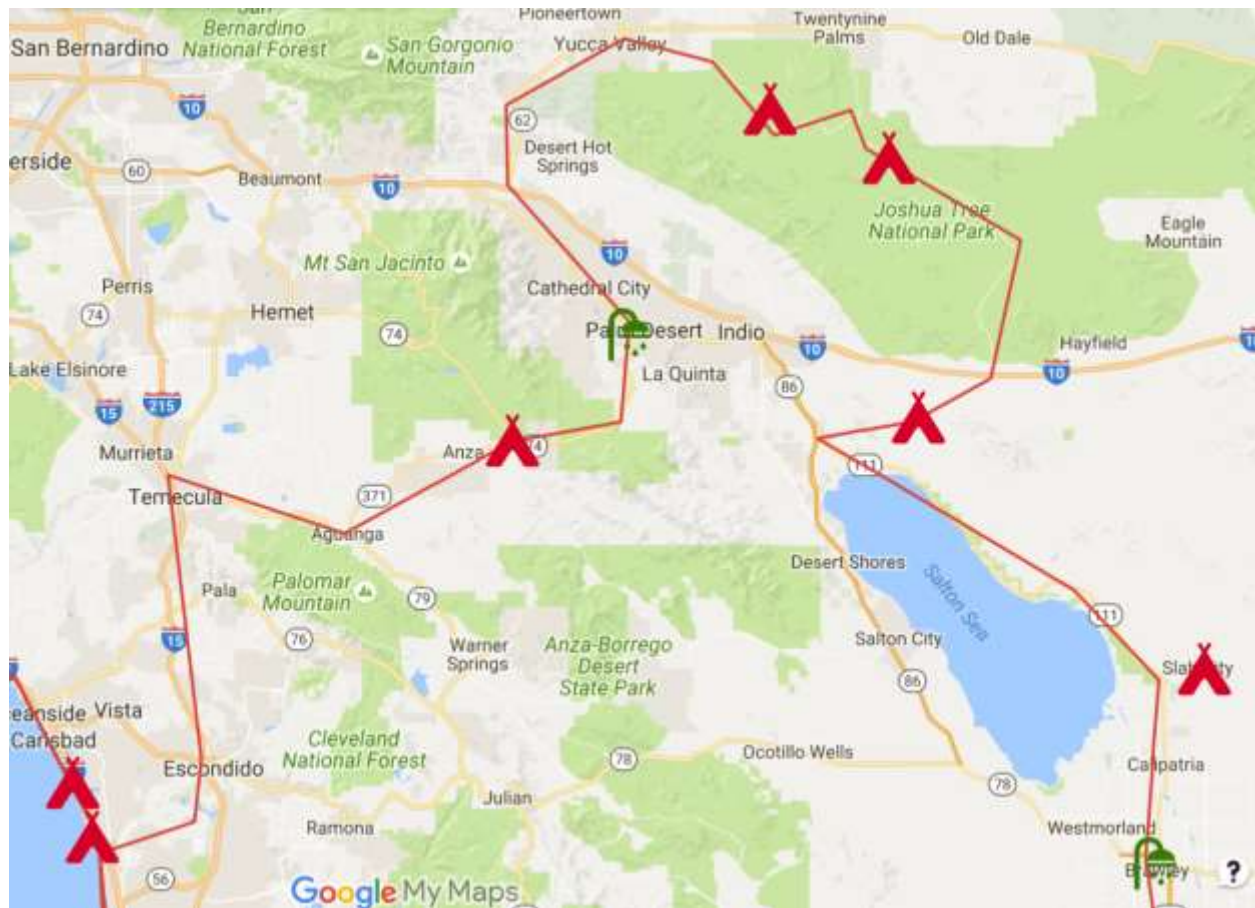


Season 4 – Part 3. To the West Coast over Salton Sea, Joshua Tree and Palm Desert.



Fr 4.12.2015, day 144. Fantastic Salvation Mountain and even more fantastic Slab City!

After some very nice Burritos we said good bye to our hosts and once again I thought that we spent far too little time there. This is the only problem with WarmShowers I think. You experience so much generosity and have such a good time and then after just one evening and one morning together –zap!- you are gone again.

We stocked up at Walmart and made the short ride out to Slab City. The last town you pass on the way is Nieland, and this is a really terrible place. Most of the houses are abandoned and the rest look really shabby as do the few people that are trying to carve an existence out of this place. I was starting to get worried about Slab City! Then soon we arrived at Salvation Hill and Slab City. Words really can't describe this place. Salvation Hill is a big mound of a fantasy world made out of adobe, hay and acrylic paint, featuring a yellow brick road, igloo like huts full of trees made out of rubber tires and all sorts of funny stuff. The whole thing was made by one single guy over the course of 30 years and by the looks of it he seems to have been a real Jesus fanatic. Slab City is basically the ruins of a WW2 army installation and now it is a place that seems to be completely detached from society and is a collection of people, all living their own lives by their own rules. Two trailers with a tarpaulin between them turn into a bar or

into an internet café or indeed a hostel, everyone decorates their dilapidated trailer with some sort of artwork, mostly made out of some bits of collected junk or scrap and round the back at a place called East Jesus which is just opposite of West Satan there is an absolutely fantastic collection of art made out of junk.

We pitched our tent and cooked while watching an incredible sunset. We then went off looking for some night-life, but to our surprise everything was very dark and quiet. Or most probably we simply didn't know where the big party was that particular night. So at 8pm we were already fast asleep.







Sa 5.12.2015, day 145. Ride along Salton Sea

We got up quite early and almost made an early start as well, when we started talking to this guy who was on his morning walk and saw the bikes. Turns out he was a very bit touring bicyclist himself and biked all the way through Asia during three years. He knew all about our bikes and the Rohloff and he explained that Siria's tires are armored, apparently the toughest tires Schwalbe makes. So finally it is now clear why I had about 10 punctures and Siria zero! And I thought it was just my bad luck...

We then headed off. The ride along Salton Sea turned out to be wonderful! There was only sometimes a slight smell of fish and the water looked glistening, blue and clean. Also there were plenty of birds along the shore. Also the road was excellent, smooth and with a wide shoulder. We stopped at the sea shore for lunch and headed on into Mecca, where we found a Starbucks to have a quick coffee and do some internetting to organize a WarmShower and load maps for the next couple of days riding. We also met a guy who was bike touring in a very relaxed sophisticated way: he had a reclining bike that looked very comfortable and almost no baggage whatsoever. Turns out his wife is driving in a car ahead of him and organizing all the motels and hotels. I can learn something from this guy! The other good thing was that he gave us his pass for Joshua Tree National Park, saving us 10\$.

We then continued up into Box Canyon. I stole a Grapefruit off one of the trees of the plantations along the road. Box Canyon was absolutely wonderful with plenty of nice spots to pitch the tent. And so we camped just beside a huge rock and cooked instant rice while watching the setting sun color the hills around us all sorts of colours.

















Su 6.12.2015, day 146. A huge day's ride into Joshua Tree National Park.

The sun rise was just as beautiful as the sunrise. We simply had to sit facing the other way to enjoy the spectacle while knocking back granola and instant milk. We knew we had a tough uphill ride ahead of us and so we headed off quite early. We climbed about 500m up Box Canyon and crossed Highway 10. There we met to very funny bicyclists, Jane and Jerry. They were both in their 70ties and true Snowbirds, down from Illinois. Apparently they both were world record holders for the distance covered in one day. Jerry rode something over 400 miles in 24h when he was 60! They rode for a while with us, gave us some power bars and we said good bye. After a further 400m climb we reached the Cotton Wood entrance of the park where we cooked Spaghetti and filled our water bottles. We then had a fantastic ride through the park and finally arrived at White Tank Campsite just after sunset. That day we did 85km and climbed 1600m. Not bad considering all the baggage we are schlepping along with us!



















Mo 7.12.2015, day 147. A beautiful day in Joshua Tree National Park.

I know I am always using superlatives like wonderful, beautiful, fantastic or incredible. But that is simply how things are going, so today was one more wonderful day in beautiful Joshua Tree National park with fantastic views and admiring incredible Joshua Trees.

We got off quite early, did a bit of an uphill ride to Sheep Pass and from there hikes 300 m up to the top of Ryan Mountain, enjoyed some spectacular views and then biked to Hidden Valley Campground and were incredibly lucky to snatch one of the very last spots available. It turns out that this campsite is a huge rock climbing mecca and everywhere cool longhaired dudes wearing the obligatory climbing attire were scrambling up and down the huge Monzogranite boulders that were scattered all around. We had a nice 6-course meal of apples, quinoa, tabbouleh, instant noodles, crackers with peanut butter and honey and a granola bar for dessert. After that a small little walk round the hidden valley nature trail. Then I raced up the road towards Keys View in hope of getting there before sunset. I was quite amazed how quickly I was able to climb the hill without all the weight I am usually lugging along. I am certainly top fit and it feels really good!

































Tu 8.12.2015, day 148. A relaxed laundry and internet day.

Even though we were going to have an easy day, we still got up before sunrise and were on the road by 7:30. We had an easy 25km ride mostly downhill to Joshua Tree where we stopped for a delicious breakfast burrito and the first coffee I've had for 4 days. Outside a local guy –Cody- got chatting with us and suggested a place to stay that sounded great, where there was a campsite with Jacuzzi and swimming pool. Turns out it was a sort of esoteric meditation place, but yes, there was a great pool and Jacuzzi! We pitched our tent had the first shower in 4 days under freezing cold water and headed to Yucca Valley for Starbucks, laundry and to stock up at Walmarts. Much much later we finally headed back, cooked some rice and crawled off to bed.



We 9.12.2015, day 149. Mostly downhill ride to Palm Desert.

The day had a really good start. We were up by sunrise, got packed and went for a delicious 1h soak in the hot Jacuzzi. It was certainly hard getting the old circulation going and getting to ride afterwards. We prepared a huge and delicious bowl of Müsli for breakfast that we eat sitting outside Starbucks. Then we headed off. The ride to Palm Desert was about 80 km and most of this was downhill, so we were somehow minded for an easy day, but it turned out tougher than we thought as there was a stiff breeze in our faces. Also the road was not very nice to ride on with two lanes of traffic and no shoulder. We soon arrived in the valley, I had yet another puncture (the Kevlar protection I put in the tire had worn a hole in the tube. What a bummer!) and we admired the hundreds and hundreds of windmills. We stopped in Palm Springs, again in Starbucks for some coffee and bagels. Palm Springs seemed a bit like a fantasy world to me. Nice shops, nice houses, nice restaurants and cafes, nice lawns and trees and all this in the middle of the desert. Seemed somehow very strange. From there we went on through Cathedral City past Porsche, Maseratti, Aston Martin and Bentley dealers and into Palm Desert. Palm Desert is even more up-market than Palm Springs with super-expensive boutiques lining main street. We headed off towards our Warmshower host of the evening, Bruce, and were really quite impressed when we biked through the gate into the gated community where he lived. Once again it was an absolutely fantastic experience. Bruce prepared an incredible dinner for us of salmon, chicken, pulled pork, Brussel sprouts and an exquisite broccoli and apple salad. His sister also dropped by bringing even more treats. We had a feast of a meal and talked about all sorts of things, sounds like Bruce had a very interesting career taking him to Disney and Dream Works, working with people like Kevin Spacey and Steven



Spielberg. And he was an absolutely wonderful person. One more unforgettable Warmshower experience!











Th 10.12.2015, day 150. A steep hill and a night on the porch of Paradise Valley Café!

Breakfast at Bruce's place was just as delicious as dinner the night before: eggs and salsiccia, bagels with lemon curd, oatmeal and of course coffee. We then said our good-byes. The ride of the day was very simple. Uphill all the way on 74 to 1500m altitude and Paradise Valley Café. The road was quite narrow with a lot of switchbacks and also quite a bit of traffic, but I didn't think it was that bad. What made the ride quite tiring was not only the climbing, but also the wind that was again straight in our faces and that got stronger and stronger as we approached the top of the hill. So we were quite relieved when we reached the café. We headed straight in for some beers and huge burgers, followed by apple pie, tiramisu and coffee. The café is right on the Pacific Crest Trail and so we hoped we would be able to camp at the back of the café somewhere. Our camp spot turned out to be even better than that, as Neil, the half Indian half Italian owner of the place, let us camp right under the roof of the patio and even left the toilets unlocked for us.











Fr 11.12.2015, day 151. A trail angel saves the day!

The night turned out to be quite a restless one. First there was some strange guy who loitered round the parking lot starting and stopping his car, drinking, eating and I really had no idea what he was up to, so I couldn't sleep. Then again at 6am there were a lot of cars and people. So after a rather restless night we packed up, had coffee, pancakes and breakfast burritos and hit the road. We knew it would be an unpleasant day with strong wind in our face and there was even snow forecast. We didn't know where we were going to spend the night, and we also had all but given up on the idea that we might make it down to San Diego as the detour was just too far. After a couple of kilometers we reached the milestone of 8000 km and after that the weather deteriorated significantly. It started to rain, the wind got even stronger and also the road was really unpleasant with no shoulder and lots of traffic. But we had no choice, so we pushed on. And then, as so often on our tour, out of nowhere appears Brian with his pickup and Airstream caravan, asks us if we need a lift and 10 min later our bikes are in the back and we are in his truck with his dog Gravy. He was a great guy, a young IT specialist, who decided to hit the road and work while travelling. He dropped us off in Escondido, where we found internet in Starbucks to plan our night's stay (we are spending a lot of time in Starbucks, almost like Tim Hortons in Canada!) and watched the pouring rain outside. When the sun came out again, we hit the road and reached the Pacific Ocean and the Elijo State Park camping just in time for sunset! We made spaghetti in the shelter of our tent and had two glasses of wine to celebrate, while listening to the roar of the surf...









