

Date: 10/29/2012 7:02:45 PM

Subject: Postcard

Way More Than You Ever Wanted to Know About Phantom Ranch

Silver Bridge is a grated walkway with swirling currents visible through the grids. A few boats slid beneath us with tourists in front, bundled in orange life jackets and ponchos, and grizzled looking river men steering in the back. (Or aft. But it's really hard to say *aft* in Arizona).

The ranch is a half mile north of the river over another small bridge that crosses Bright Angel Creek. This bridge is guarded by Phantom the Phox who let us pass and then was gone.



Bright Angel Creek flows into the Colorado from the North Rim as does Garden Creek from the South. Following it up from the river we paralleled the campground until we reached Phantom Ranch.



The ranch is a collection of twenty or so small, pre-depression era buildings made with stones hauled up from the river and lumber hauled down from the rim. There is electricity and cold running water. A few of the buildings are dorms for visitors, others are bunk houses for the employees, muleskinners and grizzled river men, and some are individual visitors' cabins. There is a communal shower and a shed for the mule duffel.



The hub of Phantom Ranch is the Canteen, where you check in, eat, buy t-shirts, send postcards, and stuff like that. The guy who checked us in looked vaguely like Tony Perkins in Psycho. Fortunately he was pretty cheery and the place doesn't look anything like Bates Motel. Bates Motel maybe looks better.

PHANTOM RANCH WELCOMES YOU!

BEVERAGES	SNACKS	SOUVENIRS	ROOMS
LEMONADE 2.50	BAGEL 2.25	3/5 SHIRT 22.99	DERMS 44.17
ICE TEA 2.50	APPLE .90	1/5 SHIRT 27.99	CABINS 112.00
COFFEE 2.10	Summer Storage 1.50	HAT 19.99	(END RECOMMENDED 12)
POY TEA 2.10	5lb Bag + ICE 3.00	BANDANA 7.99	MEALS
HOT COCOA 2.00	ASSORTED SNACKS	PATCH 4.99	BREAKFAST 21.13
BEER 4.75	TRUCKS AVAILABLE	STEAK 2.99	SACK LUNCH 12.39
WINE ~	DUFFEL	ASSORTED TOILETRIES AVAILABLE	DINNER ~
GLASS 6.25	4PR 30.00		STEAK 42.54
1/2 LITER 12.00	6PR 64.00		STEW 27.61
LITER 21.00			POSTCARDS
ASSORTED HIKING AIDS			.75 + POSTAGE
WASHING STRIPS	FLASHLIGHT		DOMESTIC & FOREIGN POSTAGE AVAILABLE
WATER BOTTLE	TRENCH COAT		
HEAD LAMP	100 CLOYS		
	DRIP CANSOLA		

WEATHER FORECAST

	S. Rim	P.R.	N. Rim
Hi	62	71	58
Low	38	62	40

SUNRISE: 6:21 AM
SUNSET: 5:52 PM

Place Mail Here
MAIL HERE

Outbound Mail



We had our own little cabin with picnic table and prickly pear garden. We could hear the creek but couldn't see it. Caution: Don't eat prickly pears.



The cabins have almost enough space to turn around.



We polished off the lunch we had carted down and told the camera to take our picture. It complied. After eating I

picked up our wrappers and plastic bags to dump them in the trash but couldn't find a trash can anywhere. When I inquired, I was primly advised that if we brought it down with us, we could take it out with us. OK, says I, then the mule can bring it out. No way, says he. Ha! We had a duffel bag brought down by mule so I put it in there for the return trip.

The mules will haul up to 30 lbs. of stuff for you (for a fee, naturally) that you can use to supplement what's in your packs. Good thing. Our packs barely hold a day's food, water and peeled off duds. So we had toiletries, a clean set of clothes, and food for the trip up.

The folks who staff the ranch have 10 day work shifts followed by 4 days off. During their shifts they rotate duties from clerk to cook to maid to meal host. If they choose to spend their days off "up there", they hike out and back in. Some actually have no address other than "down here".

At 4:00 everyone is kicked out of the Canteen to get ready for supper. At 5:00 the folks who reserved steak dinners are served, kicked out, and at 6:30 – to the accompanying clang of a dinner bell – picture Gabby Hayes – the next group is seated. These folks, ourselves included, have "hiker's stew" or "veggie chili" accompanied by rock hard cornbread, a mostly-lettuce salad and a sort-of chocolate cake. It was actually pretty good.

The meal is run by the Dinner Warden. He takes no crap. Eating is strictly by reservation and you had better be there on time and you only get in the canteen if your name is on the list. Ranch visitors are mule riders, boaters and hikers. Visitors, and a lucky few from the campground who snagged recent cancellations, are served "family style". More like "Darwin style". We didn't see any refills and competed for the available food.

We sat across from two campers who had been eating dehydrated food for 6 days. They were barely under control as they grabbed at everything that was passed down the table. However, they were otherwise nice young ladies from Arizona. Next to us was a Boomer Sooner couple in their 70's who followed the OKC Thunder and, although it is very hard on them, are fans of Nick Collison and Cole Aldrich..



After the meal we got a little pep talk from The Warden. There are 5,000,000 visitors to the canyon every year who spend a statistical average of 15 minutes looking at it. You have seen some of them in our emails and we can believe it. Then hail to the mules. Mules bring in everything: food, drinks, other supplies. It's actually a logistical marvel. As part of the challenge, there is lots and lots of beer and wine consumed in the canteen. (Hopefully the boaters don't barf and the riders don't fall off their mules the next day. We think it must be mostly the campers, who can sleep it off in the morning). But that becomes a job for the staff – they break bottles and smash cans before loading that refuse on the mules.

We were asleep by 8:00 and woke up at 5. Was that bed comfortable? Haven't even a clue.



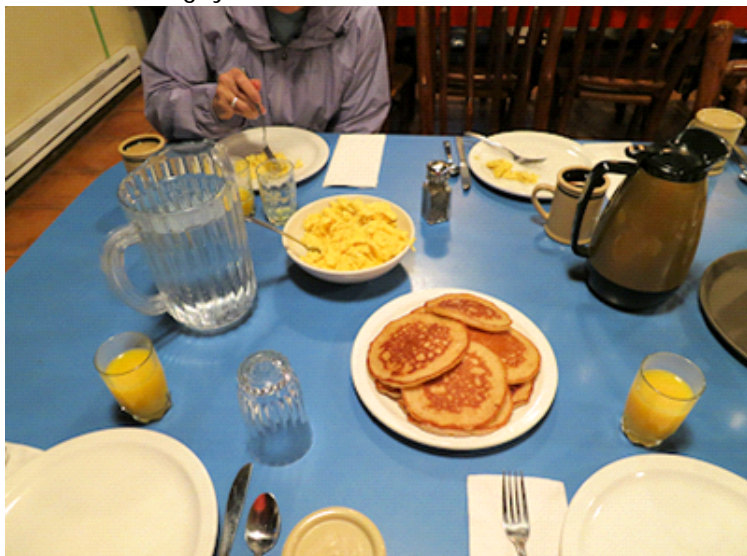
Only hit my head once on the upper bunk.

It was dark when we got up, the stars were out and the almost full moon had set.



We walked over to the Canteen and stood like a pack of Pavlov's dogs, waiting for (you guessed it) the 6:30 bell.

This meal was presided over by the Breakfast Warden, who takes even less crap than the Dinner Warden. Three guys tried to squeeze their buddy into the meal. The Warden told them "Three reservations. Three seats. One, two, three. Thank you." The third time he told them that, he was pretty fierce and the guys backed off.



Breakfast was eggs, pancakes, peaches (not shown), coffee and orange juice. Having learned from supper, we filled our plates the first pass of the food. We sat across from two mule ridin' Arizona women. One told us that riding a mule to the bottom of the canyon was a lifelong dream she had held ever since reading *Brighty of the Grand Canyon* as a kid. I read *Brighty* as a kid. I read *Brighty* a couple of years ago. Marguerite Henry.

Next to us was one the three late guys with the hungry pal. He seemed to have nothing to say.



After breakfast another pep talk, this time about the hike out. First, The Warden told us, we would be using different muscles today so we'd at least hurt in different places; next he reminded us to pick up any stray pieces of paper we found on the trail – every piece we passed would make our legs more tired and our packs heavier; his last words were saved for anyone starting up the trail that morning who had anxiety or trepidation. They were: "Rejoice, rejoice, you have no choice".



As it would turn out, he was right on all counts. We marched back across the bridge...

D&S