

# Deep Creek Hot Springs Nov 7-9, 2008



Deep Creek Hot Springs had intrigued me for a couple years now. I have a friend who had been there a few years ago on a backpacking trip and he enjoyed it a lot. Even though I didn't have time to organize a 3-day backpacking trip, I found it was an easy car-camping trip from the Bowen Ranch down near Apple Valley south of Barstow. As a kid, I always enjoyed going to our cabin at Deep Creek Lake in western Maryland - I think that is part of what gave me my love for the outdoors, canoeing on the lake, hiking in the woods, fishing, and skiing in the winter. I was curious now to find out what this Deep Creek in southern CA was going to be like.

We met up at our usual Stanford Outing club meeting site - the Stanford P&TS center - the other 2 guys were there right on cue - Daniel and Steven. They actually got there first (I got distracted by all the cranes and construction on the Stanford campus and missed the turn!). After meeting up on email and coordinating plans for the last week or so, we were finally meeting up in person. I'm always surprised to see what people actually look like when you meet them in person for the first time (you get a very different impression of someone through email!) But these guys were cool - I was looking for a good weekend outing.

It worked out just as well that my scheduled training for that day was cancelled - it was supposed to go until 5:00. It made things a lot easier for meeting up - otherwise we would probably have been stuck in rush hour traffic for a while. Actually traffic ended up not being too bad as we headed south on 101 and made our way to 152 east. Since the construction crews

finally finished the overpass of 156 over 152 (after several years it seemed!), the traffic could finally flow freely (instead of causing an hour delay for 1 stop sign!)

We decided to check out the water level at the San Luis reservoir - after a couple pretty dry years, we could see how low the water was - it was a bit worrisome to see so many new islands in the lake that hadn't been there even just a couple months ago. It was a beautiful and serene setting with the bright orange and yellow hues of the sunset reflected in the still waters of the reservoir. A series of bathtub rings lined the shore from the falling water levels over the last months producing an eerie pattern as the drought deepened through the summer.



Once on highway 5, it is a pretty boring drive through endless farms and orchards and dry fields and state prisons pretty much until you get to Bakersfield. It was interesting to note how dry the ground was in do many places - if the central valley wasn't irrigated with millions of gallons of water, it would be pretty much desert. Most fields were lush green and well watered, but occasionally we'd pass an area that had been left fallow for a while, so the contrast was striking.

We did our usual stop in Kettleman City for fast food - there is an In N Out there - a trademark California fast food joint (and pretty cheap too). But probably a hundred other folks were making their "usual stop" as well at the In N Out in Kettleman City (there isn't much else on I-5) - and the line was going out the door with rowdy high schoolers - I remember those days from a while ago. But we opted for the much quieter place next door - McDonalds (it seemed a bit sacrilegious to pick McDonalds over In N Out, but it saved us probably a 30 minute wait in a sea of rowdy people)!

Looking at the directions to our Best Western in Bakersfield, I recognized the street it was on - Truxton Avenue. I remember that part of Bakersfield from a recent barbershop singing convention 3 week ago! At the beginning of this year I had just taken up barbershop singing with a group called Voices in Harmony, and we have been doing very well. In fact, I was invited

to sing at an international convention in Nashville with the group, and we ended up placing 3rd out of 28 choruses!

We performed at a regional competition in Bakersfield as well (one step below the international), and placed first! This qualified us to perform at the international competition in Anaheim for next year. This year, we performed at the Rabobank center, which ended up being right across the street from our Best Western hotel! During the convention, we were lucky to get a hotel 5 miles away (there were thousands of singers in town that weekend), but this weekend the place was deserted, and we had no trouble finding hotel rooms! It was kind of surreal to walk through a place that was bustling with activity and anticipation where thousands of singers were competing just a few weeks ago. But now it was quiet. It would be like going to Disneyland on the 4th of July with thousands of people, then going back the next week when they were closed and all the rides and everything were still there but all the people were gone...

We enjoyed the overnight stay at the hotel - and splitting the room over 3 people is pretty reasonable. Gas was pretty cheap - just \$2.29 a gallon (it's amazing that it was about \$4.50 just a couple months ago - this is probably the biggest drop in oil and gas prices this nation has ever seen) - we didn't feel too guilty about making a road trip now with these gas prices. Plus the oil pumps all around us in the southern central valley were working overtime, making oil seem like an easy commodity.

### **Saturday**

The alarm beeped around 6:30 - Steven was already getting up (he has to be at the office early during the week, so he's used to it). It seemed way too early for me though! But if we wanted to get to the springs and enjoy the rest of the day there, we didn't want to waste too much time... We showered, enjoyed the all-you-can-eat fresh Belgian waffles (that you cook yourself) and continental breakfast (I think that's a Best Western signature tradition), double-checked the maps, and got on our way.

Heading east on 58 up toward Tehachapi, the highway climbed out of the bowl of haze and pollution stacked up from the central valley - the dry grass started being scattered with oak trees. We were a bit over-anxious to get out of the smog when we saw a cop make a quick U-turn right after we zoomed by - oops... here came the flashing lights in the rear-view mirror - bummer...

I made my way to the right lane like a good boy and to my amazement, the cop zoomed by me (thank goodness - I was off the hook!) and I saw him pull a guy over a few cars ahead of me! A freight train was starting its cross country journey across the desert, climbing the hill with us. Around 3000 feet, the air had cleared and the deep blue of the sky had returned - the distinct line of haze was visible in the rear view mirror. The pass is the southernmost of the Sierra passes at just around 4000 feet - where the landscape rapidly changes into desert.

It was classic Mojave Desert scenery on the east side, ridges of mountains with flat, dry lake beds in between - a stark and barren beauty. The sky gleamed a crystal blue - the air was very dry with very little haze (it was all backed against the other side of the mountains). The

directions to Bowen ranch were pretty simple on pretty straight barren roads, 58 east until 395 south, then a couple zigzags on Bear Valley road, Central, Ocotillo, and Bowen ranch road. It was like drive 80 miles straight east, 40 miles straight south, 15 miles east, 3 miles south, and then 12 more miles.

We reached Bowen Ranch around 10:30 - we made good time across the desert. Fortunately there was a decent amount of information online about Deep Creek hot springs - otherwise it would have seemed pretty brave to come so far to an unknown place. I guess it's a blessing and a curse - it was great for me to find a treasure like the hot springs, but at the same time, part of the "treasure" is finding a secret that not too many people know about that we could have for ourselves. At least people have generally respected the honor system of not trashing the place too much and leaving it for others to enjoy.

We reached the entrance of the ranch - a cute little house in the middle of nowhere. The lady was really nice (it must be pretty lonely out there, so she enjoyed visitors). We paid our \$10 for our campsite, and we were treated to a nice "treasure map" outlining the directions to the springs. It was like one of those old-time pirate treasure maps with X marks the spot - further adding to our anticipation of finding the treasure we came so far in the desert.

I'm glad the map was detailed - especially knowing we'd probably be coming back after dark. The path was quite well traveled, and in fact we were next to a group of about a dozen folks with coolers and a couple dogs - I wondered how busy the place was going to be! At least with its remoteness (especially for us - but it's probably only 2-3 hours from the LA area, still long enough to filter out many of the riff-raff - people had to be somewhat intentional about coming).



It turned out to be pretty family friendly - the hike is about 2 miles on a well traveled trail. Passing some Joshua trees and juniper bushes down a desert wash, the scenery was classic high desert at around 4000 ft. This was definitely a lot different from the "Deep Creek" I knew growing up - in a log cabin next to a large lake in the mountains and pine and maple and oak trees of western Maryland! It was beautiful as well, in a very different way.

Rounding the last hill, we were coming to the river - Deep Creek. It definitely got pretty high during floods - the rugged rocks in the riverbed were polished a gleaming light grey. Debris high up in the branches of the cottonwoods lining the creek attested to the high water marks - we didn't want to be around during a flood! But today it was a calm and easy crossing (though a bit chilly!) to the springs on the other side. We followed the voices to the deep pools nestled in the rocks around us.

It wasn't too crowded - maybe about 10 people were there. There was probably room for at least 50 people - hope it wouldn't get that crowded later, but for now, we had an entire large pool to ourselves! The pools were all different temperatures - multiple springs cascaded down from the rocks filling the pools at different rates. Generally the pools higher up were warmer and those lower down were cooler. It was cool to be at a hot springs where the pools were big enough to actually dive into! Many hot springs just have a shallow pool you can lay in, but some of the pools here were deep enough you couldn't touch the bottom.



One of my favorite spots was under the "shower" - someone had put a pipe draining one of the other pools out over the river, so you could stand in the cold river being showered by the hot spring water from above. It was paradise! You could also lay in the river by the outlet of one of the other pools and let the hot water run over your back. Of course if you got too hot, just take a plunge in the river and go back to the springs! It was like a Russian spa - soak until you start to sweat, jump in the cold river, feel your muscles tingle with the cold water and go aah, then jump back in the hot spring and feel your muscles tingle again and go aah...

I wished we could camp at the springs, but they say it's a "day use area only". I'm sure people camp anyway (illegally - the fine is just \$35, but I guess it's the principle of the matter...). We were buzzed by a patrol chopper around 4 in the afternoon - he swooped down the canyon at probably around 80 mph, banked a 45 degree turn while looking out the window to check on us, then just as quickly as he came in, he flew away. I felt a bit violated - the experience of being in a remote natural setting away from civilization was immediately shattered. Big Brother had come to spy on us.

We wondered if the helicopter was looking for tents of illegal campers or to check if anyone was hurt and waving for help or if they had gotten a call that someone was hurt (it was very easy to slip on the slippery rocks around the springs, and in fact I saw several people fall and scrape themselves up a bit when we were there).



This hot springs was definitely a special place, as evidenced by the multitude of types of people there - you definitely see an interesting cross-section of society, from guys with long beards smoking who knows what, to scruffy looking guys clad in army fatigues, to a young Japanese bunch, to a group of cute Filipino girls who looked about 13, to guys playing earthy rhythms on drums, to a guy singing at the top of his lungs, to us engineers from the Silicon Valley! The locals tended to be naked. One of the small girls had a little too much to drink and had to be carried on someone's shoulders across the river. It was surely a "don't ask, don't tell" sort of environment - just enjoy the hot springs but don't ask any personal questions... I wondered what the place would be like at night when nobody was supposed to be there...

After enjoying the hot baths for a few hours and our skin was all wrinkly from the mineral water, we decided it was time to start heading back up the hill back to camp. We could see some folks with tents set up along the river a little ways from the springs - not sure if that were legal... I heard you had to be at least 1 mile away. Many of the people had to drive back (but if you're a local or even from LA, you'd easily be home by about 9). But we knew we could enjoy camping under the stars in the desert tonight. A couple with their German Shepherd cross Rottweiler was about to head back up the trail as well. It was starting to get dark - a few high clouds were lit up in a coral pink under a blue desert sky. A near-full moon was just coming over the hills behind us - turned out none of us would be needing headlights for the hike out - wonderful!

It was nice that we already had camp set up and firewood collected - no setting up tents in the dark... I went to get my stuff and start cooking dinner - we had pasta, wine, and chocolate for dessert. Only problem - I went to the trunk to grab my large pot and found it missing - after about 15 minutes of looking I couldn't find it... I must have left it on the kitchen table when I was packing the night before... bummer.

Fortunately, Steven had his small jet-boil pot, but that meant we had to cook the spaghetti in 2 batches and coax the small flame and pot a bit. But it was only about 6:30 so we had plenty of time (after the time change last week, it got pitch-dark around 6:00 - I wasn't used to that... it felt around 9:00 by the time the food was ready!).

The wind was starting to kick up a little as we got our campfire going - but not too bad. We just wanted to be a little extra careful... there had been so many fires this year, and southern CA had been especially dry for the last couple years. In fact, there was a fire burning just south of 58 as we headed toward Apple Valley - I was mentally trying to triangulate where it was and how close we would be (I was coming back from a trip to the Eastern Sierra in August when the highway was blocked by fire crews) - it would be a bummer to come so far and have a spoiler like that... It would have taken just a couple sparks to light a bunch of bushes on fire tonight.

The wood in the fire pit started almost immediately with one click of the lighter, and minutes later we had a rip-roaring campfire. We only forgot the marshmallows... but at least wine and chocolate hit the spot. We talked about everything from other camping adventures to Daniel's impressions of CA (he's from Germany and just in the states for a year on an internship at Stanford), to what we wanted to do tomorrow, then to satellites in the sky and eventually to CERN and the LHC and if they're going to find the Higgs boson - as soon as they get the LHC fixed again after the quench in one of the superconducting magnets a few months ago - I wondered how expensive that was going to be...

It was only about 9:30 when we decided to hit the sack - the wind had kicked up a bit more... a south and east wind coming through the desert was very dry. We made sure all the sparks were out in the fireplace. A fire had burned through the Bowen Ranch area about 10 years ago, scorching many of the junipers and desert brush nearby - much of our firewood was from the dead wood left behind from that fire.

Daniel decided to sleep in the car and me and Steven got in our tents. The moon shone brightly against the fabric of the tent and the wind started thrashing the flaps of the tent around... it was hard to sleep. Plus my normal bedtime was around midnight, so there were a couple hours yet to go. And of course all the activity from the day was still rolling through my mind as well.

I guess I managed to get to sleep in an hour or so. I woke up a couple times and the wind was still blowing pretty fierce against the tent - I know they have the "sundowner" or "Santa Ana" winds (depending on if you're from Santa Barbara or LA), but those are normally NE winds. It seemed like there was a storm coming in - they had predicted rain in the Bay area... maybe this was the fringe of that storm.

I was awakened in the middle of the night when the wind was still blowing, but now it seemed like from the other direction - now the door of the tent was blowing a bit in my face - hmmm. I lay awake for a few minutes and heard a slight pitter-patter among the rustling of the fabric. The pitter-patter got louder and even louder... I saw Steven's headlight as he came out to put the fly on his tent. I was too lazy and still in a bit of fog in my mind to think about going out in the pouring rain to put my fly on. And plus, it couldn't rain that much in the desert anyway, could it?



I heard a quote a while back about how it seems to always rain on tents... rainstorms may travel thousands of miles to find a tent. And here we were in the middle of the desert getting rained on! We need this rain back in the Bay Area - I wondered if they got much back home...

The rain must have changed to sleet and hail and maybe even snow at one point as it got colder on the back side of the passing front. I lay awake for a while longer and soon it becomes all quiet and calm. The wind was gone (thank goodness!) and I could see stars gleaming through the mesh of my tent. By now the moon had set, and I looked outside to witness the most spectacular desert stars I had seen in years - Orion was standing high now, Sirius to its left was bright as could be, and the Big Dipper was hanging low in the other direction. The Milky Way sparkled across the entire sky. A ways off in several directions, I could make out the outlines of thick clouds. Then suddenly, and a bit disturbingly, just to the west, an entire cloud lit up intensely in a bright white flash! Just when I thought the storm was over, here came the next wave - this one with lightning!

The rumble was low and far-off, the lightning looked much closer than it actually was - thank goodness. A few minutes later, another bright flash! But again the rumble was barely audible. I guess the lightning never actually got that close, but I wondered for a bit if it was going to pass overhead at one point - we didn't have much protection! But at least we were in a bit of a valley between the mountains, so it was doubtful it would strike us... but then again with the metal poles of our tents acting as lightning rods...

I made my way back to sleep when probably a half hour later, the rain came down even harder than ever! It was pounding against the tent, matting it down and compressing the dome with downdrafts. I should have put on the fly when I was looking at the stars! A little moisture came in through the mesh, but not too bad. But there must have been a river flowing under my tent since I could feel wetness coming up from the ground - I should have brought my tarp. And worst of all, it just occurred to me I had left my shoes outside the tent (I normally don't think of bringing my smelly shoes inside) - now of course they were going to be soaking wet...bummer. No point to go out now and get them. The sound of the rain was soothing when I relaxed and didn't worry about it anymore - I soon drifted off back to sleep...

## **Sunday**

I awoke probably around 6:30 to a brightening sky all around - the dark clouds had mostly passed to the south and bright sky was illuminating the hills to the north. It looked like the storm was over now. I'm just glad it all passed in the night and we were never out caught in it. I got out of the tent to find nice clumps of snow and ice up against our tents and the bushes around us. Must have been an interesting night...



Daniel said it was interesting sleeping in the car as it rocked back and forth a bit in the wind. Steven and I were a bit groggy as well, but happy for it to be morning and clearing up. It was a nice sunrise, clouds glistening golden with bright blue sky behind. I wondered how the people camping by the stream fared for the night - if the stream flooded, waking up some unfortunate campers with very soggy sleeping bags, they would not be happy campers...

After a quick breakfast of pastries and fruit, we got our gear packed up and on our way. There was a Starbucks in town just a few miles away, so we opted for the lazy way out - instead of making our own coffee at camp... Plus who knows - another wave of storm clouds could blow over...

The slightly rutted dirt road was still in decent shape on our way back to town (whew - no worries of getting stuck), and we enjoyed the high desert view as the sun peeked through the clouds. The aroma was wonderful - the sage bushes came alive again with a bit of moisture. We headed west on Bear Valley Road toward 395 and a ways north. The desert winds blew fierce near Kramer Junction but the sky was clear blue around us and some of the mountain peaks far away poked above the clouds. It was serene and beautiful.

A song was playing over the satellite radio – “Blessed be Your Name” - one of my favorites. It starts out:

*Blessed Be Your Name  
In the land that is plentiful  
Where Your streams of abundance flow  
Blessed be Your name*

*Blessed Be Your name  
When I'm found in the desert place  
Though I walk through the wilderness  
Blessed Be Your name*

I felt we were walking through the desert, but yet seeing the streams of abundance all around. Another song playing a little later was "Mighty One of Israel" – one of the verses goes:

*The Lord shall cause His glorious beauty to be seen  
The desert shall bloom and rejoice  
Say to them that are fearful of heart  
Be strong and listen to His voice*

It was wonderful to see the desert in bloom. Seeing a storm through the desert is one of my favorite experiences – and a wonderful way to see God's glory. We had experienced all kinds of weather over the last couple days – hot sun, cool nights, wind, rain, hail, lightning, thunder, snow and sun again! But I felt like I could bless the name of the Lord through all those things.

Since we had the whole day just to get back, we decided to take some of the scenic routes - by Red Rock State Park and Lake Isabella. 395 gets pretty lonely in the desert north of Kramer Junction - several old mines littered the hills around us. But interestingly, some of the mines seemed to be occupied after long periods of abandonment - it seemed like with the downturn of the economy and gold prices spiking, it has become profitable once again to re-examine some of the old mine shafts and take another pass through the tailings that had long been ignored.

We were looking for a left turn on an unnamed road (according to the map) taking us through Randsburg (I saw it on some postcards off in a corner in a gas station in Kramer Junction), and eventually over to Red Rock state park. Sure - it was a nice day, let's take the scenic route. Soon after making our left turn, unbeknownst to us, we were looping around to who knows where... but just up a ways on our left was another old abandoned mine. The old rusty No Trespassing sign and chain in the driveway had seemed to have lost their threat... it was clear nobody had been there probably for 20-30 years. And the "Beware of Dog" sign a few yards away did little to scare us beyond the No Trespassing sign. The dog probably ran away 20 years ago. And "Kep Out" spray-painted on a rusty tank piqued the curiosity only more – they must have left so fast they didn't even think about checking their spelling...

So we decided to pull out in front of the driveway - there were no tracks of any sort - tire tracks, boot prints or dog paw prints... I would be making the first tracks probably in years as I went up to explore an old house. Stepping gingerly on the half-rotten stairs and peeking in the broken window revealed a very worn-out piano with half its keys warped due to neglect. Bookcases still stacked with books and boxes littered the floor. It reminded me a bit of the ghost town of Bodie a ways north past Mono Lake (but that is a major tourist place - it seemed far more interesting to experience a real ghost town that hadn't been modified for tourists). The wind whistling through the wires strung overhead and the broken windows gave a creepy feeling, even though the

biggest thing to be afraid of was cutting your feet on the broken glass scattered around. It is strange though to imagine a place once bustling with activity like Bodie and this place could have been abandoned with people leaving their books and other seemingly valuables behind - I wonder if they had left in a hurry.



Just past the house was the millhouse - where the rocks were crushed in the stamp mill and the tailings sorted and the flakes of gold extracted. Both ranks of 5 stamps were still in place - if the wood wasn't quite as deteriorated, it looked like they could re-start the operation at any time (who knows, with the economy tanking so bad, this mine could be reactivated again!)

Heading back west along the lonely road, we passed a sign saying beware of flooding for the next 20 miles... this must be the right road to even go 20 miles! I had wondered if there might have been any flooding with the storm last night, but everything was bone-dry. This was classic Mojave scenery - the windswept dry lake bed surrounded by desert mountains. But according to the map, the geologic wonder of Red Rock state park was only 2 miles away. hmmm - were we still on the right road?

I figured if we got lost and had to pick up gas, we could swing by California City – there were plenty of signs to it. Unbeknownst to me (and thankfully we didn't take this option), the city was planned, all the streets were named, but they were never paved and no houses were ever built

– California City had become a ghost town even before a single brick was laid. You can verify this for yourself by looking at the Google satellite image by searching for “California City, CA”

We finally reached the turn-off, saying highway 14... then just to our right there suddenly appeared the classic red and white layered sandstones of Red Rock canyon. Yay - we made it. Harder red layers of rock had protected softer white layers underneath, and where the harder caprock had started eroding, the softer rock was fluted in columns probably 80 feet high. From a distance it looks like a great organ with pipes playing music of the earth to the heavens. I had been to this place with my friend Ray Harwood over new years - one of his hobbies is working with pipe organs, and my joke to him was that the Eb was out of tune... well I was back to check on it again!

Steven really enjoyed seeing the Joshua trees dotting the landscape surrounding the red rocks. It was a photographer's paradise - brilliant blue sky laced with wispy white clouds, and the strange prickly shapes of the Joshua were silhouetted in front of the majestic columns of the red and white rocks. You could go in between the columns and find all sorts of abstract shapes in the rocks - we could spend hours exploring!



Just across the street was another picturesque setting - the view you see on all the postcards - like a wedding cake of multiple layers of red and white sandstone. We probably spent an hour just enjoying being in a bit of paradise - it was such a wild and exotic place out in the middle of nowhere, and so lonely...

Interesting that most of the scenery of Red Rock canyon is actually outside the park entrance - so you could save the \$5 or \$6 or maybe \$10 or whatever Arnold raised it to now... I kind of felt a bit guilty afterward... I just hope they don't have to close the 48 or so parks that had talked about earlier with the downfall of the CA economy and budget shortfalls. That just seems like a crappy way for the state to pinch a few pennies...

A little ways up on 395, we found our turnoff west on 178 over Lake Isabella. This goes over the Walker pass (about 5000 ft) and an optional turn-off on 155 goes over the Greenhorn summit (about 6000 ft). They seemed about the same distance, so we opted for the latter over Greenhorn summit. I figured it'd be nice to try a little something different. It looked like there

might be a dusting of snow on some of the higher peaks - probably around 7000 ft, so maybe at 6000 ft we might get a better look.

It was classic high-desert scenery in the valley just east of Lake Isabella, bright yellow bushes were in bloom and scattered Joshua trees were sprinkled around the hills. Clouds billowed over the mountains, shrouding their summits in fog, but the valley was lit in brilliant sunlight. The desert is definitely a land of contrasts - dark / light, hot / cold, snow / hot sun, pine trees / Joshua trees. It was again a paradise for photographers - I'm glad digital cameras had been invented - I would have gone through many rolls of film by now! And Steven and Daniel had their cameras working overtime as well!



Steven was a bit worried about the weather - knowing we were going to be driving through the clouds and possibly rain over the mountains - I hadn't thought too much of it, but then again if we got into a wreck in this remote area, that would really be a bummer! I thought it would be cool if we had another day to camp around here and check out the area some more... dirt roads to various desert landmarks criss-crossed the mountains and canyons... we'd have to come back with a good 4WD and explore for a few days!

A bright rainbow lit up just as we were passing Lake Isabella - the bands seeming to touch the shore of the lake. By now the Joshua trees had given way to black oaks and alders that were still retaining some of their fall colors. Soon, we'd be climbing through the pine trees as we neared the pass. Just past the lake, we made our turn-off onto 155 and started climbing to the 6000 ft pass. It was definitely a winding country road - even though it was probably shorter distance than 178, it was a bit slower. But then again, it was only around 1:00 and we had plenty of time.

But just as we crossed the 5000 ft sign, a light dusting of snow covered the ground on both sides of the road and gave the pine trees a wintery look. Steven was getting a bit more worried with each curve as we climbed higher and the snow got thicker... hmmm - if the pass was still 1000 ft higher, what would the road be like there? Then came the biggest worry - a lovely sign indicating "Chains Required". hmmm - I should have thought about bringing chains on a sunny day in the desert, but forgot... bummer. Turns out we got a much better look at the snow than ever expected!



But there were cars coming the other way clearly without chains. Unless they got turned around by highway patrol since they didn't have chains. If we were turned around, it would probably be about a full hour detour to go back on 178. But the worries never materialized, thankfully, and soon we found ourselves cresting the pass and heading back down the mountain. It was an enjoyable drive now, through the wintery landscape, without the worries of the road being blocked with snow now. I looked forward to the holidays coming up now - I haven't been home in PA since the summer, and with our CA Indian summer, it hadn't really felt like mid-November yet!

The snow thinned and we dropped back below the cloud layer, revealing a panoramic view of the southern Sierra foothills and the endless flat central valley in the distance. I felt a bit saddened now that the adventure was over and started to think about what projects needed to be attended to at work again. It was a wonderful weekend in the mountains and desert - now we just had the drudgery of the last 4 hours of driving home.

We headed up 99 going back north instead of 5 - it seemed a bit faster and there were much fewer trucks, making a far more pleasant drive. A late lunch at one of the fast food joints and we

just put the pedal to the medal for the next several hours. Thanks Steven for taking the wheel for a couple shifts - it was nice to nap and not think about driving for a bit after kind of a rough night last night.

It was a beautiful sunset to cap off our trip as we headed back west on 152 - the remnants of the clouds from the system that passed through were lit in orange and coral pink hues. A brief visit to the Casa de Fruta for snacks and some fresh fruit and gifts for my folks for the holidays was nice to break up the drive a bit - plus I don't think I had been there. We made good time over the recently improved 152/156 interchange and back to Stanford. It was a wonderful time and trip to remember for a while - thanks everyone for coming and making it a good time to be had by all!

Pictures can be found online at

<http://picasaweb.google.com/mattblumshots/DeepCreekHotSpringsMojaveRoadTrip>

