

This journey should be called the 5-10-20-30 trip. Our winter-spring trip started mid-December 2021, expecting to be home late May, 5 months later, traveling some 10 thousand miles through 20+ states and 30+ campgrounds. Aside from our traditional annual month of January relaxation in the Florida Keys, our starting point on the Atlantic Ocean, our focus this journey was on revisiting the desert southwest and coastal California. Once there, we look forward to spending time with our son Benjamin in Berkeley while based in the Napa and Sonoma valleys.

In keeping with our goal to try to confine our travels within the 60° to 80° temperature isotherms, our journey begins as far south as possible in mid-winter moving swiftly to the west coast. Then north through the mid months until late spring in the Rockies. We barely used air conditioning the entire trip however we did have to resort to overnight propane and electric heat for at least two weeks in February as we swiftly transited from Florida to Arizona. We had to adjust timing and alter our route to a more southerly course in Texas and New Mexico to avoid significantly freezing weather that potentially could damage our Flying Cloud.

This narrative focuses on four locations that remain close to our wanderlust hearts after previous memorable trips west.



*Camping in the Florida Keys amongst the mangroves is the Atlantic Ocean eastern starting point for our coast to coast adventure. January in the Keys has a reliable climate hardly requiring any air conditioning.*



*Sunsets in Arizona are photogenic especially if you get a Saguaro cactus reflection in an Airstream window.*

### **Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument**

**Park** in southern Arizona lies five miles from the Mexican border in the inhospitable Sonoran desert. Twin Peaks campground has over 200 sites with no hookups. Managing our resources and power is key to a successful camping experience! During our week-long stay we needed no generator and kept our electrical system adequately topped up from our 400-watt solar panels. We easily managed our gray and black water tanks (30 gallons each), however we had to replenish our fresh water with a 5-gallon Jerry can for refills, with a total consumption of about 40 gallons for the week.



*Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Park has a dense population of its namesake cacti and also scattered throughout are the equally iconic Saguaro*

Sunrises and sunsets define the beauty of this location emphasized by a campground densely landscaped with its namesake organ pipe cactus and the iconic saguaro cacti. The stark beauty of this remote wilderness makes for a lasting memory. Leading out from the campsite multiple hiking trails take you into the backcountry including abandoned mines. We have taken several environmental and historical ranger tours including one at the border fence. Here the border has a single steel rail to prevent vehicles crossing over with little else to stop a walk-in migrant. However, the most



*Organ Pipe Cactus Park's Arizona border with Mexico is only designed to prevent vehicles driving through!*

daunting and forbidding aspect is 60 miles of merciless desert until one reaches civilization! The single highway is patrolled by the customs and border protection enforcement with mandatory inspection stops and vehicle searches on all routes in the area.

The campsite has adequate 5G cellular coverage and when coupled with our Weboost directional antenna could handle excellent broadband delivery for Netflix streaming and allowed us to continue working a few hours a day and staying abreast of life in the big world... right in the middle of the desert wilderness!



*Borrego Springs is famous for the original Californian palm trees identified by their grass fan skirt.*

Since Covid, reservations are now de facto for Organ Pipe campground, a maximum of one year ahead on [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov). Using your Golden Age pass the daily rate is \$8. What a deal! Sites 35 through 112 tend to be more spacious and 113 to 208 are no-generator sites.

**Anza-Borrego Desert State Park** is a huge 1,000 square mile wilderness in Southern California famous for its Bighorn Borrego sheep. It provides varying recreational venues, hiking and cycling trails, slot canyon exploration, dispersed camping, thousands of acres of ATV or OHV playgrounds, palm oases, driving trails and more. One of the claims to fame events is the annual desert flower bloom which some years, depending on winter rainfall, becomes a wildflower super bloom that attracts huge weekend crowds from the cities. Watching the barren mountainsides turn yellow overnight is quite a scene. Since this is our third visit, we have been lucky to witness this unique wildflower bloom!

Borrego Springs is a small but thriving community six winter months a year. Among the many quirky aspects, the town hosts a local metalwork artist "Sky Art Sculptures" and the desert around town contains a hundred or more larger than life size steel sculptures. Our favorite is the 350 ft dragon sea serpent in Galeta





*A steel sea serpent 350 ft long undulates impressively from one side of the desert highway to the other.*

Meadows that has a head and one hump on one side of the highway and the tail with four smaller humps stretching out into the desert on the opposite side of the highway.

Having launched and run a local farmers' market in our hometown in Virginia, we are fond of visiting the weekly Friday market in Borrego situated in the beautiful Christmas Circle in the center of town. Local produce and crafts are side by side with a French bakery and a Greek deli, along with jewelry artists and the astronomical dark sky coalition promoting



*Setting up in Texas Springs campground - first come first served reservations - however there is always plenty of solar power to be captured!*

the International Dark Sky Park! We max out the two weeks in the state park campground in the foothills of the San Ysidro Mountain range then skip across town to the RV Resort and get pampered in the hot tubs and heated swimming pools for a few days. A good balance of lifestyles!

Reservations on [reservecalifornia.com](http://reservecalifornia.com) may be made up to six months ahead. We make our reservation as soon as the window opens since this is a very popular location. We recommend sites 31 through 47 (odd numbers only) with the best views and extra space.

**Death Valley National Park** has a limited window of comfort with additional climatic challenges such as brutal high winds and heat extremes. Our preferred dry camping site is in the no generator Texas Springs campground at approx 20 ft below sea level. The solid salt rock floor of the valley at Badwater drops down to 282 ft below sea level.

As in Organ Pipe our solar panels collected enough energy to power our kitchen appliances, computers, and entertainment center virtually forever. The big issue was the lack of cellular coverage with access limited to an antiquated AT&T 3G network barely capable of supporting voice let alone data. Our only hope of any data was 4 am sessions when we were among the few night owls on the network! Death Valley is similarly at the end of the fuel supply chain as we discovered at the service station with the highest diesel fuel prices at



*Sand dunes as far as the eye can see at the Stovepipe Wells Death Valley Mesquite Flats Sand Dunes area. Hiking across sand dunes makes you realize how difficult and tiring it is to physically trek across deserts.*



\$9.99 I have ever seen anywhere!

Prior to becoming a national park, Death Valley was a hive of mining activities. Borax was mined and transported out with a 16-mule wagon train. Many locations show evidence of mining tailings as prospectors searched for gold, silver, and lead. We visited two ghost towns, Rhyolite in Nevada that had a 5-year short but productive silver mining operation and Leadfield, a 19th century mining investment scam, with a lifespan of less than a year. Going off highway was a real adventure as we took the Titus Canyon one way dirt road, crossed the NV-CA state line, over Red Pass, through magnificent deep canyons with mineral rich green, yellow, and red rock strata, through the lead mining ghost town and drove the last five miles through a deep twisting water scoured slot canyon only just wide enough for our RAM truck.

Mesquite Flats sand dunes on the western highway into Death Valley feature a large area of impressive sand dunes that resemble a scene from the Saharan desert. Three kinds of dunes, star, crescent, and linear sit on an octagon cracked clay lakebed with occasional mesquite trees for effect! We visited at sunset so that we could shoot photos with elongated shadows.

Texas Springs is not reservable and is first come first served. We reserve one night in the standard NPS campground at Furnace Creek and the next morning around 9 am we drive our truck up to Texas Springs and check out the sites of folks leaving, maybe even wait for them to leave! Basic procedure is to locate a vacated site and deposit your chairs and any equipment on the site staking your claim, then go down to the automated kiosk and pay for a ticket for your stay - max 2 weeks. Post the ticket on your site then go back to Furnace Creek campground and hitch up the Airstream and bring it back up



*The Pacific Ocean is our western end point for our transcontinental journey some 3,000 miles from the Keys*



*Montana de Oro hills are covered in gold poppies provide its distinctive namesake for the Mountain of Gold.*

the hill to your new \$8 a night camp site.

**Montana de Oro State Park** we reconnoitered briefly on a previous trip, but this year we reserved a week in this Californian coastal campground about mid way between Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo and near Paso Robles wine country. As the name indicates, mountain of gold refers to mass of blooming wildflowers that Spanish explorers observed across the mountain. Finally we've reached the Pacific Ocean!

The park is well known for its rugged shoreline, several picturesque sandy beaches, canyons, hills, and streams. Ocean cliff walks are our favorite daily foray with trailheads at different locations accessible by dirt road. Buchon Point and Spooners Cove offer dramatic scenery.

Nearby San Luis Obispo has one of the best farmers' markets we have ever seen! Unbelievable variety, selection, and quality of products from small family farms abound. The street food is first class. This tightly run market starts off at 6 pm precisely with the ringing of a bell to indicate vendors may start trading.





*Showtime at the San Luis Obispo Farmers' Market as meat lovers queue for an hour before opening time to pick up barbecue orders.*

Reservations at Montana de Oro follow the same process as Borrego Springs. Make sure you select senior citizen rate if it applies! The Islay Creek campground is dry camping and coastal temperatures are significantly below those inland so be prepared for chilly weather in your planning. Our solar powers kitchen and electronics, but we rely on LPG Propane for heating and refrigeration, and the occasional festive fire pit bonfire.

Our travel philosophy has been to dine at restaurants with outside dining, source our groceries by curbside pickup and have minimal contact with crowds. One shopping habit we have fine tuned is quick visits to Costco stores to pick up high quality fresh meats, seafood, and vegetables. This is the backbone to our cooking repertoire and allows us to maintain a healthy and quality dining lifestyle on the road sometimes posted to our Gourmet Camping Facebook group which we created for fun at the start of Covid lockdown a couple of years ago.

Affiliating with other Airstream clubs is a great way to expand your travel experience. Although we did not make all the connections we had hoped to, we were able to join up with NORCAL for a rally in the California gold country. A rally with CCCAC in Pismo Beach was canceled and a proposed Valentine's weekend rally with 4-CU (Four Corners) was fully subscribed months ahead.

Throughout our five-month expedition we made time to connect with family and friends especially past Airstream caravan travel companions. We did some

mooch docking at friend's houses in Florida and our extended families houses in Utah, invited local Airstream friends to our campsites, had several visits from our son in California at various locations, connected with friends from Margaret's school world, met up with caravan friends at restaurants along the way and joined up with past travelers, our current circle and new Airstreamers.

Arriving at Montana de Oro is the culmination of our coast to coast journey. Next we spend a week in Paso Robles wine country then two weeks in Napa and two weeks in Sonoma, both are within easy reach of Berkeley where our son Ben lives. After Napa we head east to Salt Lake City to visit life long friends, then make haste across Colorado and Kansas till we reach southern Illinois and visit Margaret's brother. Virginia is then a relatively short ride home where we will be back for a month fixing all those things that inevitably need attention after 5 months away.



Margaret & David Broad (WBAC #2381) from Tappahannock, Virginia, traveling 8 months of the year since 2016 (but not 2020/21!) in their 2015 Flying Cloud 25 RB Nuage Volant. Our home unit is the Virginia Airstream Club #109 and we are affiliated with the Canadian Quebec Airstream Club, NORCAL & CCCAC on the West Coast and 4-Corners in Arizona. You can email questions or comments to [airstream@db26.net](mailto:airstream@db26.net) David also publishes an Airstream improvement page at [www.facebook.com/airstreamtweaks](https://www.facebook.com/airstreamtweaks) and for fun created a Gourmet Camping group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gourmetcamping>