

HAPPY EASTER



Hi folks, Happy Easter! It has been a pretty frustrating week on a lot of the fronts we follow here. There are far too many such weeks. Even the one piece of positive news, the reinstating of the charges against the Blackwater Nisour Square shooters, was based on a somewhat suspect decision by the DC Circuit Court and still very well may lead to another dismissal of the charges in the District Court because, quite frankly, it is probably appropriate that they be dismissed due to the monkeywrenching by the State Department and their demand for *Garrity* statements from the individuals involved in the shooting.



But that was the week that was, now it is Easter Sunday and it is time to relax, eat and have some fun, whether it is a religious holiday for you or just a good chance to chill. Marcy and Mr. Wheel have been enjoying the last few days by moving. You know how much fun moving is! As for myself, after an extremely busy week, the bmaz family went driveabout in Southern Arizona. Thought, just for grins, I would share a little of our trip. One of the places we went to was San Xavier del Bac Mission, which is just due south of Tucson.

A National Historic Landmark, San Xavier Mission was founded as a Catholic mission by Father Eusebio Kino in 1692. Construction of the current church began in 1783 and was completed in 1797.

The oldest intact European structure in Arizona, the church's interior is filled with marvelous original statuary and mural paintings. It is a place where visitors can truly step back in time and enter an authentic 18th Century space.

The church retains its original purpose of ministering to the religious needs of

its parishioners.



The current church dates from the late 1700's, when Southern Arizona was part of New Spain. In 1783, Franciscan missionary Fr. Juan Bautista Velderrain was able to begin construction on the present structure using money borrowed from a Sonoran rancher. He hired an architect, Ignacio Gaona, and a large workforce of O'odham to create the present church.

Following Mexican independence in 1821, San Xavier became part of Mexico. The last resident Franciscan of the 19th Century departed in 1837. With the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, the Mission joined the United States. In 1859 San Xavier became part of the Diocese of Santa Fe. In 1866 Tucson became an incipient diocese and regular services were held at the Mission once again. Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet opened a school at the Mission in 1872. Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity now teach at the school and reside in the convent.

Clicking on any of the images will give a full size view. The upper is obviously the outside of the mission, the middle one a view of the inside of the church portion and the final view more of a closeup of the altar area, which is simply ornate beyond description and beautiful. It is guarded by two huge golden lions on each side, although they are a bit hard to see well in the picture. San Xavier is pretty cool and just about the only place like it still standing this completely in what was referred to in the 1600s and 1700s as New Spain.

The other completely awesome place we went was Kartchner Caverns. Kartchner Caverns State Park

is about 50 miles southeast of Tucson, is only about ten miles off of Interstate 10 and is easily accessible. It is one of the most beautiful state park facilities you can imagine. Here is a wonderful history of how the cave came to be a jewel in the state park system in Arizona. One of the key players you will read about is Ken Travous, who was along with us on the tour the bmaz family took Saturday; it was really a special occasion.

In November 1974 two young cavers, Gary Tenen and Randy Tufts, were exploring the limestone hills at the base of the Whetstone Mountains. In the bottom of a sinkhole they found a narrow crack leading into the hillside. Warm, moist air flowed out, signaling the existence of a cave. After several hours of crawling, they entered a pristine cavern.

The formations that decorate caves are called "speleothems." Usually formations are composed of layers of calcite called travertine deposited by water. The form a speleothem takes is determined by whether the water drips, flows, seeps, condenses, or pools.

Kartchner Caverns is home to:

one of the world's longest soda straw stalactites: 21 feet 3 inches (Throne Room)

the tallest and most massive column in Arizona, Kubla Khan: 58 feet tall (Throne Room)

the world's most extensive formation of brushite moonmilk (Big Room)

the first reported occurrence of "turnip" shields (Big Room)

the first cave occurrence of "birdsnest" needle quartz formations

many other unusual formations such as shields, totems, helictites, and rimstone dams.

The complex at Kartchner Caverns features a Discovery Center with museum exhibits, a large gift shop, regional displays, a gorgeous theater, and extensive educational information about the caverns and surrounding landscape. There are also campgrounds, hiking trails, lockers, shaded picnic areas, a deli, an amphitheater, and a hummingbird garden. It is simply an incredible experience, and I highly recommend it for anyone visiting the Southern Arizona area. Seriously cool.

So, the members of the bmaz family are back home now, the Wheels are semi-unpacked in their groovy new digs, and all are ready to eat and have happy hour. The best from all of us to all of you, the greatest readers and commenters in the blogosphere. Enjoy!