

Bandelier National Monument

Part 3 - Ghost Ranch

The Magic of Piedra Lumbre – the “Shining Rock”



None of us had prepared for what we saw inside the Ranch; towering rock walls shimmering with vivid colors of red, yellow, brown, and silver, a little spring murmuring euphoniously inside the Box Canyon, a young cottonwood with thousands of flickering emerald leaves abiding on a red hill, a still pool mirroring the bluest sky, and the Chimney Rock protruding above the surface of a barren land enduring the acrid desert wind and dazzling hot sun.

This majestic landscapes and dreamlike picturesque images seem unreal, but they are real!

**Photographed by Tom Eddie
Written by Chi Chan
June 2013**

Tom and I have to thank HY for suggesting this place for our last tour before heading home. After the Wheeler climb, we were looking for a place where we could relax and free to do what we each chose. Ghost Ranch was just a perfect place.



Since the 1930s, Ghost Ranch has been an inspirational mecca for artists, poets, painters and photographers, including Ansel Adams and Georgia O'Keefe.

The name "Ghost Ranch" or the local name "*El Rancho de los Brujos* – Ranch of the Witches" was derived from the many tales of ghosts and legends of hangings in the

Ranch's history. In 1955, the owner donated the ranch to the Presbyterian Church. Nowadays, the place welcomes visitors. It provides rustic, comfortable housing accommodations reflective of its origins as a working ranch. The rooms are basic but clean. There are no locks on guest room doors, no telephone, television, internet and alarm clock. Rooms are not air-conditioned either, but they have screened windows. At an altitude of 6,500 feet, evening and morning bring cool air. I found the place extremely delightful.

I stayed in a small cottage across from Tom and HY's. Their cabin had a spacious living room and two private rooms. The place could easily house six people. In front of our cabins, there were breathtaking vistas of colorful sandstone cliffs, cottonwoods, and distant mountains. Once we settled, Tom and I headed out to explore the Ranch while HY preferred to stay behind.



My cabin has no lock, but I felt safe the whole time



At the entrance of Box Canyon, Tom and I found this young cottonwood tree hoisting sentinel on a red hill. Its emerald leaves shimmering in the desert heat. When the wind blew, its leaves vibrated blissfully like thousands of silver coins.



It was late afternoon; the intense desert heat already slipped away unnoticed. The temperature was just right, a bit on a cool side. I took my light sweater and hiked into the Box Canyon with Tom. Inside the Ranch, there were three easy hiking trails. Box Canyon was the finest of all.

Not far from the trailhead, we saw three Indian Hogans. They had a round top and walls made of wood and packed mud. Like a traditional Indian dwelling, its door facing east to welcome the rising sun for good wealth and fortune.

Along the path, there were many religious quotes inscribed on rocks or plaques in memory of those who had made contributions to the Ranch. I particularly like the one that said “I walk in beauty”, which adequately and profoundly depicted my feeling when we approached to an irrigation pond.

Among the three hiking trails, Box Canyon trail is the only one that has a natural spring. Flowing through the entire canyon, the little spring provides source of life to this thirsty, high desert area. Long ago, the residents here already knew the importance of irrigating this precious water to sustain lives. They created many ditches. Occasionally when the water had to travel over an arroyo, the Indians built a trestle for a trough over the arroyo so the water could continue on its path. Today some of the wooden troughs remain but most are replaced with a permanent metal culvert. Tom patiently explained to me the structures each time when we crossed them. Tom is very knowledgeable about the area. He continued to give detail of a box canyon and a legend of this Ranch.

He said that a box canyon is a small ravine with steep walls on three sides, allowing access and egress only through the mouth of the canyon. Back in the late 1800's, there were lots of cattle rustlers here in North Central New Mexico, and they used to hide the stolen livestock here. If cattle rustlers were chased into a box canyon, there would be no way out for them. Finally the Ranch was "cleared out", but for many years, the locals continued to hear the rustlers/cattle echoes in the canyons, and Ghost Ranch was so named.



We followed the trickling spring serpentine quietly deep into the canyon. Edging along the spring were black brushes with tiny golden flowers on attractive spiky branches, willows, sedges, prickly pear and rabbit brush. Cottonwoods unfolded young leaves, birds made sweet melodies, insect



eating lizards darted from shelter to shelter and desert squirrels played hide and seek behind junipers. Here and there, yellow dune prickly pear cactus flowered on dry sands. As we got closer to the head of the spring, it materialized and had grown to be a full stream. Its babbling sound became more audible. It resonated all around us and made our canyon walk such an enjoyable experience. Few times, Tom and I thought of turning back for neither one of us carried a flash light. But each time, we were pulled back by what we saw around the corner. When

finally the sunlight faded, we reluctantly retraced our steps back to the trail head.



On our way out, we observed something that we did not notice before. On the back side of the beautiful Stone Mountain stood a stature which resembled an ancient figure standing with her arms folded looking out over the canyon in admiration. Tom and I looked at the stature with awe, how mysterious nature is to continually surprise us with wonders.

When we left the trail, the evening sky turned reddish purple. I gazed back to the same canyon, the same red hill and the same high cliff, they appeared so differently now. Their shapes and colors kept on changing each time I looked at them. I could never get tired of looking at the view. I wish Claude Monet was here. Luckily, Tom is an excellent photographer, even with the iPhone, he skillfully captured the essence of those splendid landscapes.

In this land of shifting light, boundless skies and fused culture, there were timeless beauties, mystify tales, and undying legends, how fortunate we were to stumble upon this antique land and got acquainted with what it had to offer, even just a short visit. When we were back to our cabin, the night was upon us. In the dark, we did not even realize HY was sitting by the porch dosing off.

At night, I watched the bright starlight highlights the canyon walls. Dawn, I awakened to sunlight and crisp morning air. Noon, I sat under the shade of a monstrous cottonwood tree chattering in the wind. Ghost Range is indeed a magical location with pictures, romance and dream all in one place. I understand why Georgia O'Keefe loved and painted this place over and over.



Epilogue

The canyon country, as Edward Abbey once said, does not always inspire love. To many it appears barren, hostile, repellent, a fearsome mostly waterless land of rock and heat. They are unforgiving. Nonetheless, beneath that harshness lie beauties, solitude, and peace.

My relationship with the canyon country spans over five years. It all began in 2008 with the backpacking trip to Salt Creek Canyon. Although it was a short visit, Salt Creek Canyon opened up my eyes to a world of canyon. I fell madly in love with the sceneries inside a canyon. Loren Eiseley once said:

“If there is magic in this planet, it is contained in water”

And I would add this, *and the water does wonder to a canyon.*

After the Salt Creek Canyon, I visited Paria River Canyon, Buckskin Gulch, and the Rainbow Bridge in 2009. The trip deepened my desire to be with the canyon country every year. Returning from overseas in 2012, I organized a trip to the Coyote Gulch, discovered the hidden beauties in Sleepy Hollow and Black Lagoon. The images of these two secluded canyons haunted me many nights in my sleep. This year, after seeing the painted cave in Capulin Canyon and the Box Canyon in Ghost Range, I returned home becoming more restless. The infinite beauties concealed inside the canyon walls are too much to bear.

As Mr. Abbey said, to many people, the canyon country does not always inspire love. In order to fully enjoy the experience, one must come to the canyon with an open mind, have a sense of adventure and curiosity, sufficient imagination, and wisely courage, with the love of wilderness, content with solitude, isolation and peace, and above all, respect nature. Down in the canyon, there is so much to see, to explore and to experience. Nothing irritates me more than seeing people reading his/her electronic devise at the bottom of a canyon. Why come to the wilderness when you cannot leave the modern world behind.

As for next year, I shall visit the San Juan River, the place full of Ancestral Puebloan cliff ruins and rock art, or perhaps re-track to Rainbow Bridge, the canyons that troubled our group so much back in in 2009.



The wind bustles outside; I almost hear ancient voices in its low, soft murmuring. Within this overhang not a dead leaf flickers, not a grain of sand moves.....the sinuous curve of the sandstone walls, the loveliness of the canyon, the beauty of the day.....I am awash with a sense of well-being, of joy in living, of being here, at this time, this place.....”

Another secreted canyon, another adventure to be discovered...

THE END