

Stories of Time

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High among the arid, windswept peaks of Nevada's Great Basin National Park, earth's oldest living inhabitants grow—the Bristlecone pine. Built for the long haul, these trees manage to thrive in a harsh environment above 11,000 feet with a 45-day growing season. Gnarled and twisted by the elements, these strange and beautiful trees develop into individual shapes, each with a unique character. Some live to be over 4,000 years old. Even when all life ceases, the snag may stand for an additional 1000 years or more. The stories they could tell.

Every hill and valley, mountain and canyon has a story. The north rim of the Grand Canyon, a remote land of contrasts with diverse geographical features, has stories to tell of survival under the harshest conditions. Ghost towns like the ones scattered about under brilliant blue southern Arizona skies, towns that sprung up because of mining and lasted until the mines closed have stories to tell. Bisbee, Arizona, where I'm soaking up the sun in the canyons of the southeastern Arizona mountains, has a rich history and a one-word answer for why it came to be—copper.

Surrounded by these stories of time, I'm on the trail for the human stories as well. What brings people to a place and what makes them stay? Take tiny Baker, Nevada, for example, a place where we stayed en-route. To get there we had to travel 300 miles across Nevada on Highway 50, “the loneliest highway in the world.” The road is so straight you can see where you'll be a week from now. It's one of those roads where you can see if your car really will go 120 miles per hour. Baker is the jumping off spot for the Great Basin where we were lucky enough to be the last folks to hike a snowy trail to the Bristlecone grove before they closed the road for winter. Baker's a place where hanging out by a campfire is considered nightlife, and a traffic jam is too many cows crossing the road in open range country. Our motel was run by one man who provided our towels and key, cooked our dinner, ran a lending library, offered his own photography for sale in his gallery, showed movies with free popcorn and ran a take-out pizza service. As a transplant from San Francisco, this jack-of-all-trades seemed perfectly happy settled in a tiny town of 50 people. He said his reason for moving to Baker was to run a place that welcomed all visitors and honored diversity.

In Bisbee, our home away from home is a former minor's cabin perched 100 steps up on the side of the Mule Mountains overlooking Brewery Gulch, a rusty red canyon dotted with oak and juniper. There are only two directions here--up and down. Bisbee is known for its' annual staircase climb, the “Bisbee 1000.” This year, almost 2,000 people came from all over to this little town in the desert to walk/run nine sets of stairs at mile-high altitude.

At a local hangout, the owner tells me the reason he moved to Bisbee. “Diversity,” he says. “You can be anyone from anywhere and if you want to open a business and work hard, the community will support you in your efforts.” He applauded the encouragement members of the community receive for their creative endeavors. “It's a great place to raise a family,” he added. A few days later, a woman I met echoed his comments. “All kinds of people live here,” she said “and we all get along. It's a true community.”

Stories of community, diversity, survival, the land—they're everywhere. On the Kaibab Plateau of the Grand Canyon, 9,000 feet above sea level, the view stays hidden until you're almost on the very edge.

Suddenly with no warning, no time to prepare, there it is—a splendorous glimpse of the vastness and grandeur of time. Like life, with no warning and no time to prepare, moments of splendor are all around us. So are the stories. Something to be grateful for this Thanksgiving.