

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Grand Canyon

Elisa Leonelli · Tuesday, August 6th, 2024



Grand Canyon South Rim

An incredible bonus added to my [Road Scholar tour of Sedona](#) was a day trip to the [Grand Canyon](#) on Thursday May 9. I had been there before, in April 1999, but it was a grey cloudy day followed by a snowfall, while this time it was sunny with blue skies and white puffy clouds, a delight to my photographer's heart.



Grand Canyon. Desert View Watchtower

We first visited the East Entrance at [Desert View](#) with the watchtower built by architect [Mary Colter](#) in 1932. It was exciting for me to finally get a glimpse of the [Colorado River](#) way down at the bottom of the canyon and see its aqua green water. Colorado means red or rust-colored in Spanish, but that refers to the rock formations that the river cuts through.



Grand Canyon. Trail of Time

Then we drove to the more popular South Rim where we had some free time. I decided to walk the [Trail of Time](#) and see samplings of the various layers of sedimentary rock that date back two billion years. We were prepared the previous day with a talk by [Lisa Kearsly](#) on the [geology](#) of the Colorado Plateau and the Grand Canyon. This complex history is difficult for me to grasp, so I won't attempt to explain it, but basically it's the oxidation of iron oxide that makes the sandstone and limestone rocks rust colored.



Grand Canyon South Rim

When I periodically sat down to rest and meditate during my walk, I realized that mankind may perish due to climate crisis, a viral pandemic, or a nuclear war, but the earth will survive.



Grand Canyon East Entrance

The landscape of Sedona and the Grand Canyon reminded me of the red sandstone pillars of [Monument Valley](#), that I first visited in 1975 while working on the set of an Italian western starring [Terence Hill](#). I was there again in 1985 during a photography trip exploring the life of the legendary people that we Italians then called American Indians. Please read my article: [Indigenous People in the US](#).



Navajo rug. Cameron Trading Post

I wrote a chapter on Native Americans as part of my 2007 book *Robert Redford and the American West*, where I examined *The Dark Wind* (1991) directed by Errol Morris from the novel by [Tony Hillerman](#), and noted that these “Navajo-themed mystery novels are often used as textbooks to get Hopi and Navajo children interested in their own culture.” I recently watched the TV series *Dark Winds*.



Hopi House. Alabaster statues.

I also studied the documentary *Incident at Oglala* (1992) directed by Michael Apted and narrated by Redford. Sadly [Leonard Peltier](#) was not granted parole on July 2, after spending nearly 50 years in prison, unjustly convicted in 1977 of murdering two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The [only hope](#) at this point is that President Joe Biden will grant him clemency



Exodus Monument

At the beginning of our morning drive to the Grand Canyon we stopped at the Apache Cultural Center in Camp Verde to see the [Exodus Monument](#), commemorating the 1875 forced relocation of the Yavapai and Apache tribes from their lands in the Verde Valley to the San Carlos Reservation. It was a moment of reflection for our group and for our leader about the countless injustices that the indigenous people were subjected to and continue to be.



Painting of Grand Canyon. Cameron Trading Post

On a lighter note we later stopped at [Cameron's Trading Post](#), where, while others shopped, I admired the Navajo rugs hanging on the wood paneled walls and the late 19th century paintings of the Grand Canyon. I enjoyed the guilty pleasure of eating [Navajo fry bread](#). I had never forgotten when I first tasted it at a rodeo during my 1975 trip to Monument Valley. It reminded me of [gnocco](#), a traditional fried bread of my hometown of Modena.



Hopi House. Grand Canyon

At Grand Canyon's South Rim I visited [Hopi House](#), also built by Mary Colter, that now serves as a shop of Indian art. I saw alabaster statues, pottery and [Katsina dolls](#), that, as Ken Zoll had explained, are used to instruct young girls and brides-to-be about Hopi spiritual beings.



Hopi House. Kachinas by John Poleahla

Road Scholar offers other tours to learn about Hopi and Navajo/Diné life and culture today in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico, such as [Hopi Mesas & Navajo Lands of Canyon de Chelly & Monument Valley](#). Check out their catalogue of [Adventures in the Great Southwest](#).



Hopi House. Pottery

Kindly read my article [Sedona, Red Rock Country](#), and click on underlined words for links to background info.

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