

MY TRIP TO AMERICA by Peter Wood

On 4th November 2003 I left home at 4.00 am to be driven by my nephew to Heathrow Airport. My destination was Phoenix Arizona. Can you imagine my concern at that time, considering I had never flown before? Now, I was going on an 11-hour flight, so I had a few butterflies, to say the least.

Once I had said goodbye and gone through the check in desk, I suddenly felt as cool as could be and actually enjoyed the flight. We had a blanket of cloud for almost the whole journey but miraculously the cloud started to disperse as we flew over Salt Lake City. The pilot then came over the loud speaker and said we would soon be flying over the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and then Sedona, the Red Rock country of the old cowboy films. What a view the Grand Canyon is from the air and I was lucky enough to see it from the ground a few days later!

I was met at the airport by my host (and member of WBCS) Judy, and we later picked up her husband Alan, from his workplace. They live in Phoenix, so it was only a short drive from the airport to their lovely home. Imagine the hedge around your back garden actually bearing oranges!

I met the dogs, in order of seniority, Casey, Brodie, CJ and Cela, who were all Beardies and soon made friends with them all. After a few days settling in, so to speak, I started to work Alan's dogs a bit and then started to hold training sessions for people who were interested to see how I work with dogs. I do not want to write much more about the dogs or it will seem that I am blowing my own trumpet, so we will leave the dogs here.

What I did notice when meeting a lot of the dog handlers, was that they were so wanting to find out more about the job that they sometimes listen to anything that they are told and think that is the only way to do it. A lot of them handle dogs as a hobby and therefore do not have natural stock sense. They tend to concentrate on one aspect of the job only to lose sight of the whole picture, so to speak. I told a group of handlers to watch a certain handler at a herding trial I attended. To start with they did not seem to understand what I wanted them to see. I said 'study this man and the way he is working his dog, his attitude, in fact his whole manner. He was so relaxed because he has the utmost confidence in his dog, and his own ability to handle the dog. You could learn a lot from this man. Well done Gary. I will keep to first names so as not to embarrass him should he read this. I saw some handlers who actually hold training clinics and are in serious need of training themselves. With such people teaching others, no wonder it leaves a lot to be desired.

I visited Tombstone, the old cowboy town of Wyatt Earp fame and Kartchner Caverns, a short drive away. They are underground caves full of stalactites and stalagmites and have only been open to the public for a few years. They were magnificent sights.

I met 2 real life cowboys, one of whom was actually (the cowboy on the Marlborough cigarette adverts of some years ago). and could he handle a dog? Well done, Jim, I'm pleased to have spent some precious time with you. I also met a real Red Indian by the name of Tony Redhouse of the Navaho tribe, which made me feel very humble and honoured as I personally feel possibly the biggest atrocity in our history, was what the white man did to the Native Americans, namely the Indians.

Another man I was extremely pleased to have spent some time with was a chap by the name of Joe Escobar. He is a man of great faith and I think would humble most dog handlers; the reason being Joe is quadriplegic and works his dogs from a wheelchair. It is almost beyond understanding the amount of dedication Joe must have and the understanding and reliance he has in his dogs. Many thanks Joe. it was a pleasure.

All too soon it was time to come home. Judy and Alan took me to the airport and after a meal we said our good-byes and I headed to the plane with Judy still watching after me like a mother hen.

I would like to mention a few other people I got to know whilst I was there. June and Linda who virtually handed their ranch over to me to work the dogs at my pleasure; Debbie, a mutual friend of Judy, June and Linda, who works Corgis, and very well at that. Also Kristan who let us use her ranch for training sessions. Many thanks to you all for your hospitality, and I hope to see you again someday.