



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

The sun sets near Sedona, Arizona, silhouetting the jagged rimrock against fiery orange sky. The city of Sedona, known as a prime stargazer’s destination, controls light pollution by regulating the brightness of outdoor lighting fixtures. The city’s McDonald’s has teal-colored arches instead of gold.

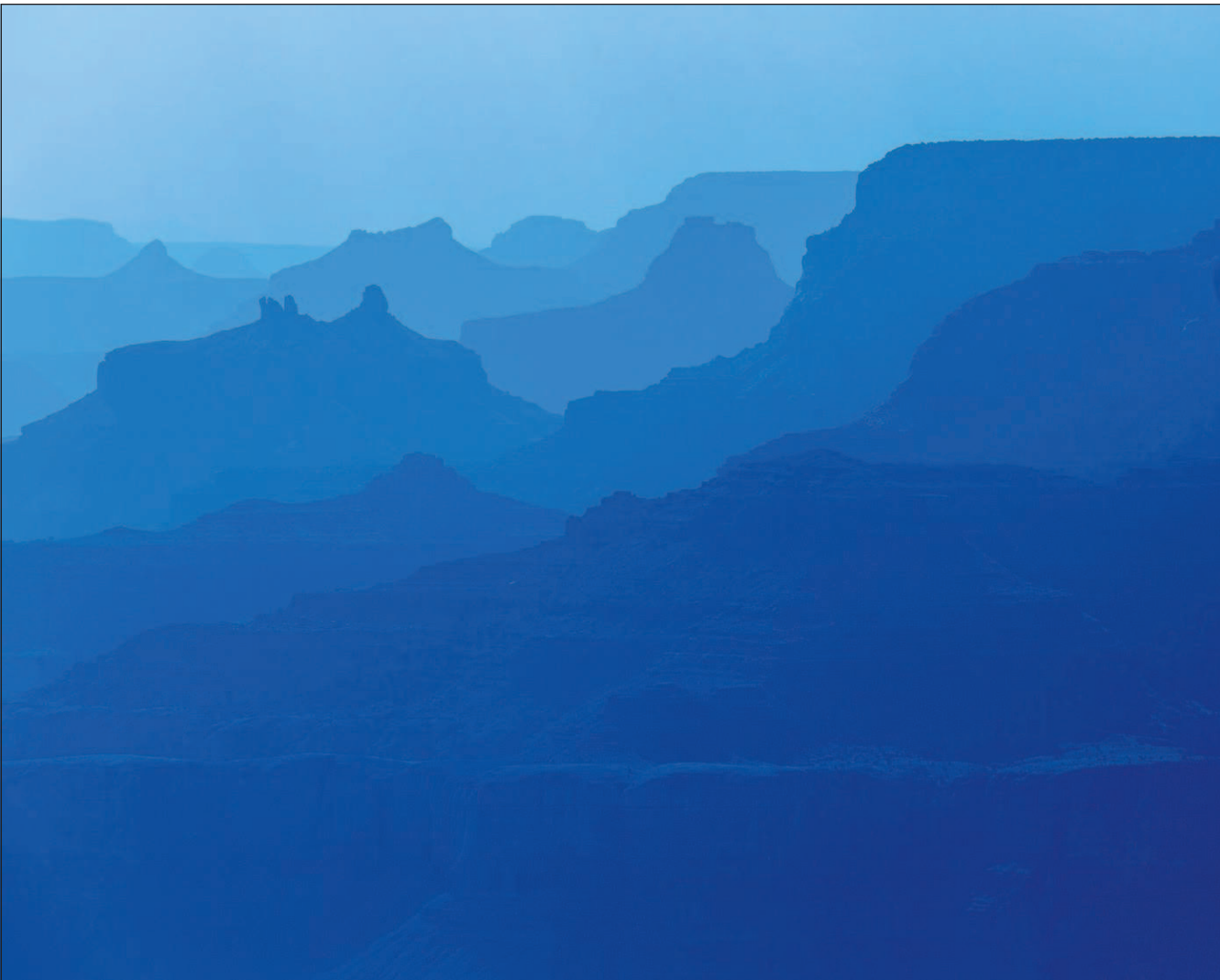
TRIP: Temperatures reached 115 degrees the day we arrived

Continued from 1C

to prepare for extreme heat and a steep climb out. “He’s our prevention search-and-rescue ambas-sador,” Ceja-Cervantes said of the man on the sign. “It’s a harsh environment and visitors need to be prepared.” The mercury hit 115 degrees the day we arrived. We got up the next morning before sunrise to beat the heat and hiked a mile below the rim on the Kaibob Trail. We drank plenty of water. Victor would have been proud. We left after two days with plans to return someday to finish exploring this harsh but beautiful terrain, maybe hiking to the canyon bottom or rafting the Colorado River.

My husband Bill had suggested this two-week road trip to the Southwest

a few months before over dinner. We would take the long way to visit our son and daughter-in-law in Southern California, by way of Utah and Arizona. The idea percolated and took hold. We put in a massive first day driving from Pendleton to Springville, Utah. Before arriving at Grand Canyon, we explored Utah’s Capitol Reef National Park. Later, we visited the red rock formations of Sedona, Arizona, before swinging up through California, stopping in Loma Linda for a grandson fix, and heading home via the redwoods. While the Grand Canyon stole the show, Capitol Reef and Sedona held their own beauty. We had ignored Capitol Reef during an earlier trip to Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks. At about 787,000 visitors a year, this park gets only half as many people as Bryce



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The Grand Canyon turns blue in the deepening twilight.



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A slow shutter speed captures the taillights of a car driving through the red rock country near Capital Reef National Park in Utah just after sunset.

Canyon and a quarter of what Zion gets, but the fewer tourists was part of the appeal for us. Once there, we gawked at and hiked through canyons, gulches, domes, arches and soaring cliffs without fighting the crowds. After soaking in the sights of Capitol Reef and the Grand Canyon, we headed to Sedona to stay with friends. We figured we were sated and probably would now be jaded to whatever Sedona had to offer. We were wrong. The red sandstone formations surrounding the town of 10,000 provide a striking view. We stood atop a hill by the town airport and watched the sun set behind the red rock. Later, stars appeared en masse in a velvety black sky. The area is a mecca for stargazers and night sky photographers. The city, which restricts the brightness of outdoor lighting to minimize light pollution, is certified as a “Dark Sky Community.” The local McDonald’s, for example, has more subdued teal-colored arches, instead of the traditional golden ones. As we headed to California, I reflected that I cherish my life in Oregon and wouldn’t choose to live in the Southwest, but I love knowing this rugged red world exists. It will pull me back.

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Visitors stand on a viewpoint where they can see the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon from the south edge.



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Visitors to the Grand Canyon sometimes misjudge their own fitness and the effects of hot weather when hiking below the rim. This warning sign sits along the Kaibob Trail.