April 8-12, 2016 Gary and Diane Flannery and Bob and Maxine Tinney enjoy a fun camping adventure to the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, and Sycamore Canyon in Coronado National Forest.

Cacti of the Southern Arizona Desert

All Cacti photos are taken on our trip to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Titan Missile Museum, and Sycamore Canyon in the Coronado National Forest.

(By holding your mouse over the photo, the location of the Cacti will be shown.)

The Saguaro Cactus (above, Carnegiea gigantea) is one of the defining plants of the Sonoran Desert and may grow to heights of 40-60 feet. These plants are large, tree-like columnar cacti that develop their flowers (below left) in the age range of 35-65 years, may grow their first side arms (branches, below center right) any time from 75–100 years of age and die at about 150-200 years old, and then begin to deteriorate (right, below).
The **Organ Pipe Cactus** (above, *Stenocereus thurberi*) has several narrow stems that rise vertically and may reach a height of 23-26 feet. The Organ Pipe Cactus (below, left center) has an abnormal growth on an arm called a "crest" or "cristates". The Organ Pipe Cactus may live 150 years, and dies (wood support below right).

Much like the Organ Pipe Cactus, the **Senita Cactus** (above, *Pachycereus schottii*) has several narrow stems that rise vertically and generally grows 10 to 13 feet in height. Its top is densely covered with long, bristly, gray-brown spines (center above) and has stems with only 5 to 7 (rarely up to 10) ribs and very short spines (right above).
Barrel Cactus and Fruit (above left) and Beavertail Cactus and Blooms (above right)

Chain Fruit Cholla Cactus (left and center) and Teddy Bear Cholla Cactus (right)

Buckhorn Cholla (left), Staghorn Cholla (center) and Whipple Cholla (right) Cacti

Englemanns (left) and Purple Prickly Pear (left center), Claret Cup (right center), and Strawberry Hedgehog Cacti (right)
The Ajo Mountain Drive provides a glimpse into canyon life of the ancient Hohokam and the Tohono O’odham cultures.

Archeologists have discovered agave-roasting pits in the high country and artifacts (left, mano/metate, Visitors Center). Rock shelters and caves (right center) are now roosting places for the Lesser Long-nosed Bats (right).

The Puerto Blanco Drive provides a hiking opportunity up the mountain to Dripping Springs, an area filled with bees.

The old Bonita well, windmill, fences and corrals provide a picturesque respite.

The 1930's Golden Bell Mine provides a preview of the sample rocks and diggings of Charlie Bell.
Just before the Mexico border the **Quitobaquito (QBQ) Springs** and **Oasis** is explored. Some of the artifacts found by archeologists at QBQ date back approximately 16,000 years and was a homeland of American Indians and later Hia C-ed O’odham. In 1698 Father Eusebio Francisco Kino established missions and wrote about the QBQ Springs.

The QBQ Springs attracts many species of birds, the **Zebra-tailed Lizard** (above) and rare **Pupfish** (below) and waterbug.

**Border Security** signs (left), communications towers (center) and mountain border wall (right), monitoring towers (below), constant border patrol cars and helicopters (below) help deter and prevent the illegal entry of aliens.
On April 10th, a new bird is added to the Tinney's Life Bird List at Sycamore Canyon . . . the **Gray Hawk** (*Astrina nitida*) is a tropical species that barely crosses the border into Arizona and Texas, and is a raincloud-gray raptor with under barring.

**Bluebirds, Phainopeplas, Dusky-capped Flycatchers, Lucy's Warbler** and **White-winged Dove** visit our campsites.

**Coots, Neotropic Cormorants**, and **Ruddy Ducks** reside on the Pena Blanca Lake along Ruby Road in the Coronado NF.

Several juvenile, 1st year, female, and male **Vermillion Flycatchers** are seen in Sycamore Canyon in the Coronado NF.
On the Organ Pipe Cactus Twin Peaks’ Camping Trail a few **Hummingbirds** are observed with one on her nest.

Shrikes, Western Kingbirds, Merlin, and several **Red-tailed Hawks** are enjoyed along the wayside.

**Black and Say’s Phoebes** are seen in abundance along with **Gambel’s Quail** and **Mexican Jays**.

A variety of **Sparrows** forage in the various National Monuments, Wildlife Refuges, and Forests.

A few **Curved-billed Thrashers** invade our campsite looking for treats.
Tree and Violet-Green Swallows, Verdin, Wilson's Warbler and Acorn Woodpecker enjoy their environs.

Gila Woodpeckers and Cactus Wrens feed on Cacti Blooms (and unknown wren) and Turkey Vultures pass overhead.

On April 10 we drive to the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge and then, to avoid rainy weather, make a side visit to the Titan II Missile Museum in Green Valley, Arizona.

The Titan II was a guided ballistic missile that was also the largest, most powerful nuclear weapons system ever deployed in the US. It served one purpose: deterrence at the height of the Cold War. On this tour, we stand on top of the launch duct and later observe the Titan II missile from within the launch duct.

We descend 35 feet into the underground missile complex past old telephones with required security codes, a 6000 lb. security door, and visit the launch control center (below) where a simulated launch of the missile is experienced.

Bob previews the ignition sequencing books. Major Diane Flannery is designate as Launch Commander by guide, Hans.
April 11 and 12 the **Ruby Road** takes us to **Sycamore Canyon** in the **Coronado National Forest**.

**Sycamore Canyon** contains one of the few perennial streams (above left) in extreme southern Arizona. It supports such a diverse plant and animal community (grasses above right) that part of it has been designated the Goodding Research Natural Area. Over **130 species** (some shown in the bird section earlier) have been identified as frequent visitors here.

**Sycamore Canyon’s animal life is extremely diverse including webbings and butterflies. (Move mouse for names)**

**Sycamore Canyon** has over **625 species of plants** (including Fleabane, Verbena, Salvia, Thornbushes, Bladderpod, and Primrose) have been identified, some of which are rare and/or endangered.

**Rainbows always appear, afternoons turn into evenings, and into starlight nights, and fun times around the campfire.**