



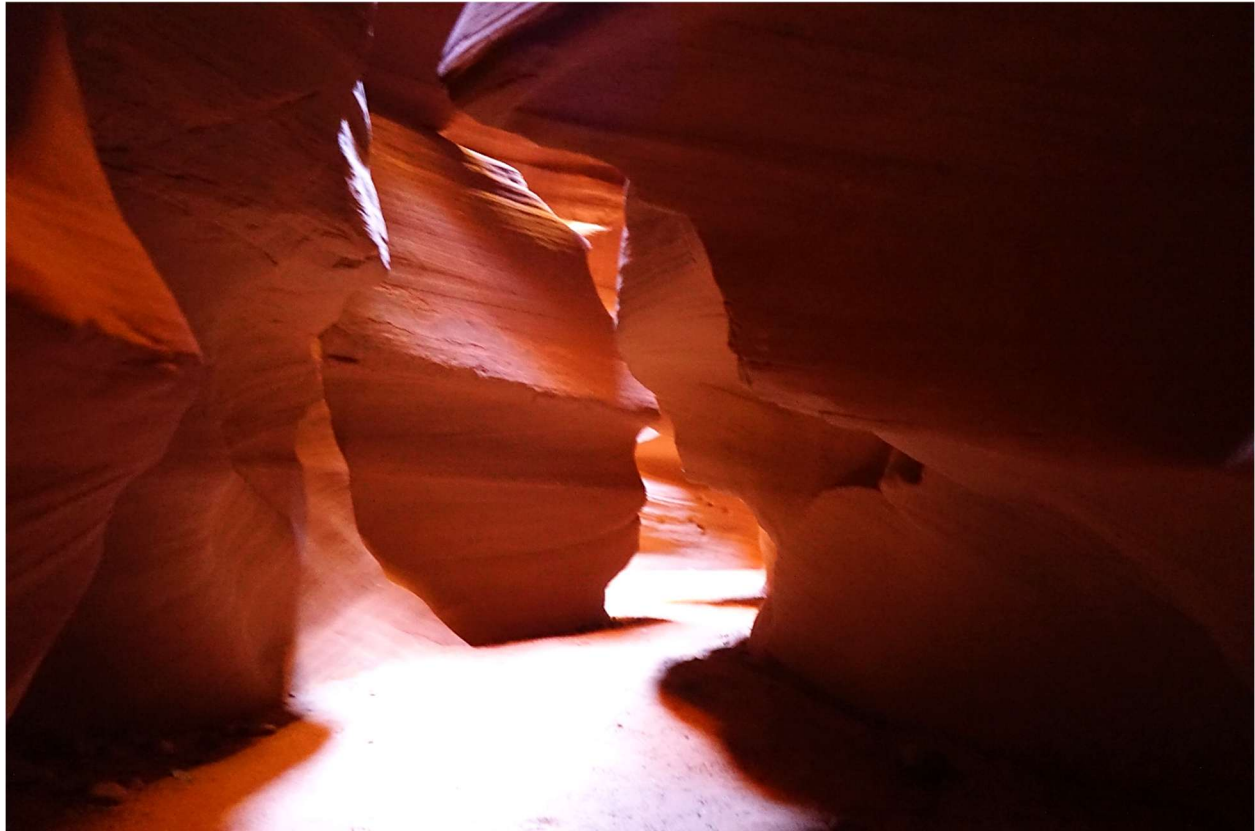
The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2022.09.23
Upper Antelope Canyon



When I first found this amazing place in 2003, it went by the nickname Corkscrew Canyon. I had stopped in Page to find a post office and I saw some beautiful posters in a shop window and went in to have a look.

I had been seeking the famous southwest “slot canyons”, had had very limited success finding any, and the one depicted in the posters grabbed me.

I was told that I had just missed the 10:00 tour, but I could sign up for the 11:30. The cost was \$35. I signed up.

An hour or so later, I was sitting in the back of the pick-up truck shuttle with the rest of the tour group – two women from New York named Nancy and Nice-To-Meet-You. (Long story.)

Upper Antelope Canyon, as it is officially known, is on Navajo land and they protect it zealously. You cannot come here on your own. You can't even come within walking distance of it. You can only come to UAC as part of an authorized tour group.

On that day in 2003, just before the summer solstice, the midday tour attracted just three people. At \$35 a whack, the gross barely cracked \$100. There were a couple of small groups already there when we arrived, but, except for a brief, photographer-induced logjam, we felt like we had the canyon to ourselves.

Now, 19 years later, when I finally came back for more, the midday tours were sold out, and the 2:30-3:00 shuttles were full, with a dozen people in each of the four trucks ... at \$165 each. A cool \$7,920 gross income, and we were the sixth sold-out time



slot of the day. We're talking more than \$47K. (Seems like we could get a bit more comfy ride from the check-in post to the canyon for that kind of money.)

There was no feeling of solitude, but that was OK; I was there for the rocks and the photos I could get of them.

Our Navajo guide went by the name Ty. He was a good guide: very friendly, knowledgeable about the history of Upper Antelope Canyon, and eager to help us all get good photos.

No matter what kind of camera any of us had – mostly phones, of course – he knew what the primo angles were and how to quickly adjust the settings for the low light. He took a lot of pics of us as we posed in admiration of the canyon walls.

Our group was a kick. It was, mostly, nine Indian (i.e., from India) guys on a “bachelor bash,” all well over 50 and all dressed in black shirts and beige shorts, on a reunion party for a guy who was “marrying the same woman a second time.” Turns out it was his 25th anniversary and he was doing a renewal of vows in Las Vegas and his eight college buddies were joining him.

Also, there were two Asian women, one about 42, a very outdoorsy type with similar photo vibes as my own, and her 78-year-old mom. Both were from western NY (Corning and Rochester). They were on a nine-day southwest vaykay and had just come from Zion.

I asked if they had done The Narrows and the younger woman said yes, then added, with proper pride, “We did Angel’s Landing, too!”. She claimed it was all mom’s idea, and that she did it only because she had to accompany



mom. And it turns out that the two of them did Machu Pichu a few years ago too. Bravo, ladies, bravo!



Upper Antelope Canyon is neither long nor wide. It’s only about a quarter-mile from entrance to exit, with plenty of places where the walls are less than an arm span apart. The largest chambers are maybe only about 15 paces across. At the few places where you can see the sky, it is just a few feet wide.

And when the sun shines through that gap, it illuminates the walls and brings the colors to vivid life. If you get lucky and catch a puff of fine pink sand blown down into the canyon, the sunlight reflecting off the dust lights up the whole chamber.

However, the course of the sun across the sky in June (as in 2003) and in

September (2022) is quite different. East-to-west still, yeah, but the north-south drift is large. Summer Solstice vs. Autumnal Equinox, go figure.

There were no sunbeams penetrating through the crack this time. Sunbeam shots were my primary goal here today, but there were none for the snapping. Ty said that they get no more than two such beams at this time of year, even at midday, as opposed to seven or so in June.

UAC has no artificial lighting. It's a canyon, not a cave, though it does seem enclosed in some sections. Sunlight is the only light in here.

The semi-darkness often looked intimidating as I lined up my photos, but once the camera settled in on the target, the shots were crisp and bright enough.

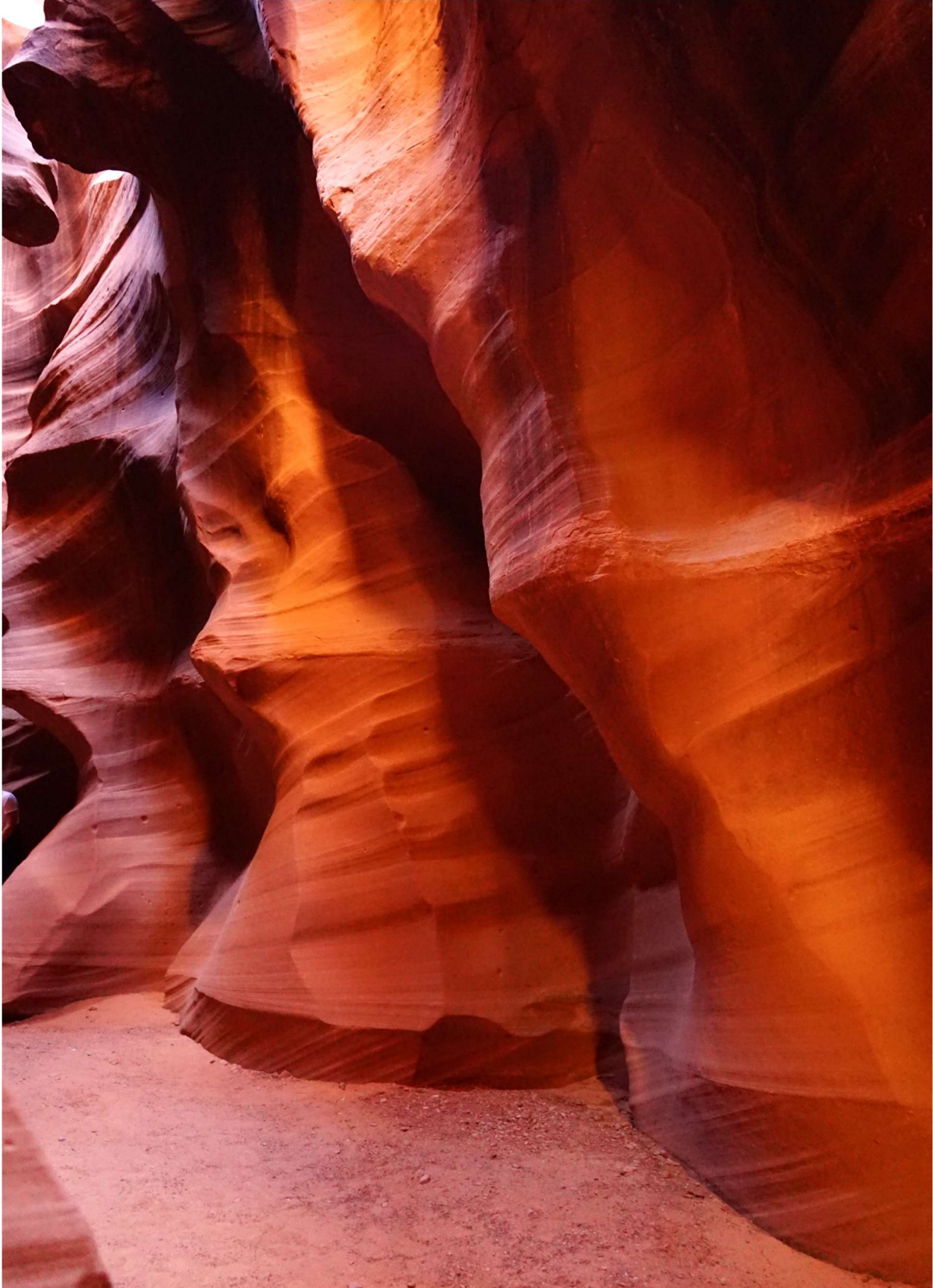
I would LOVE to get permission to spend a full night in here. And light a few small fires – or torches! -- and watch the flickers of light dance with the rippled sandstone. Alone, that would be scary, but thrilling. I'd be a changed man by morning.

Our tour lasted about 45 minutes. When we exited the far end, we had to climb a long metal stairway and walk overland back to the parking area to our shuttle truck.

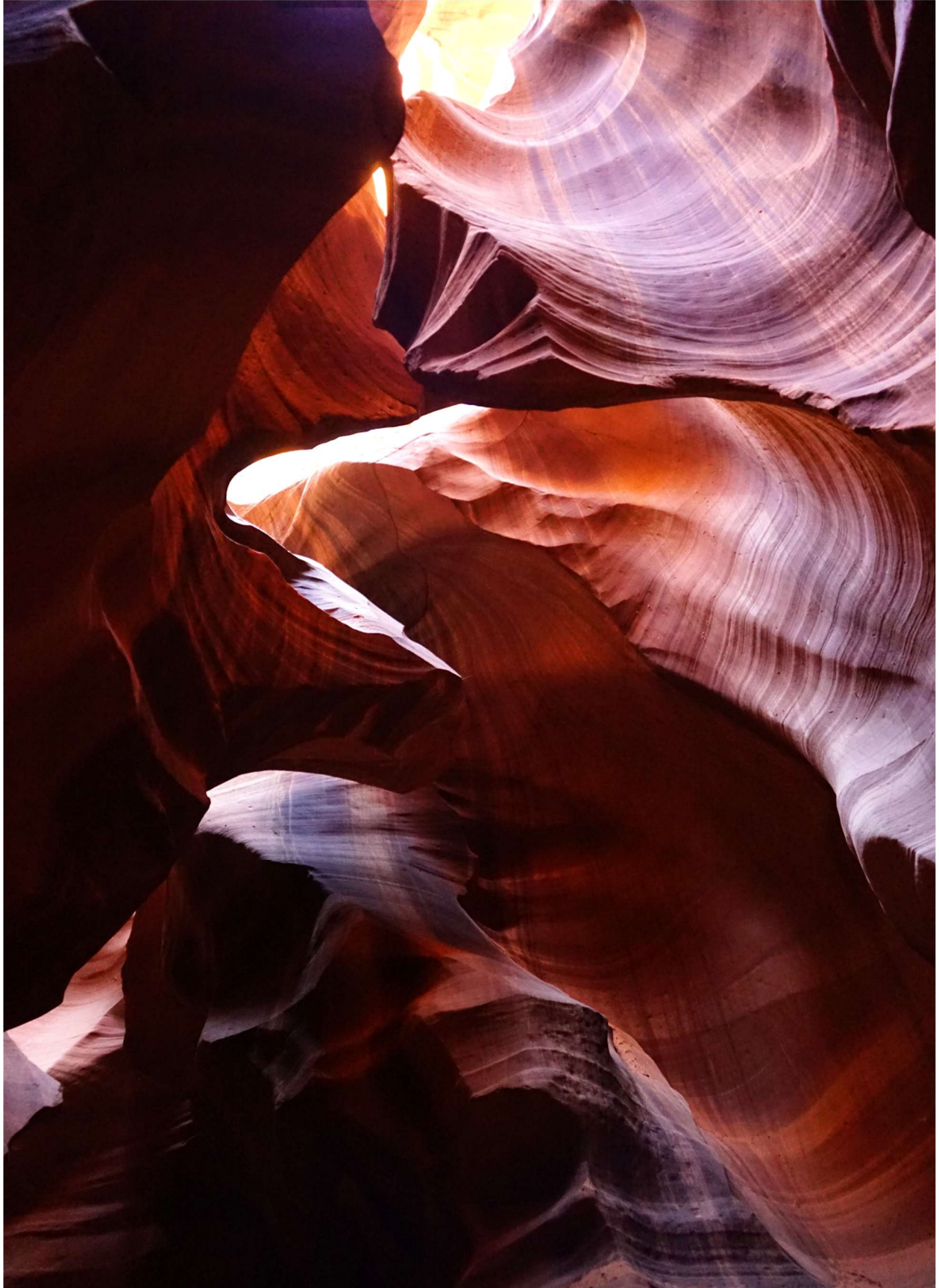
I took many, many photos in Corkscrew. Here are some of the best:

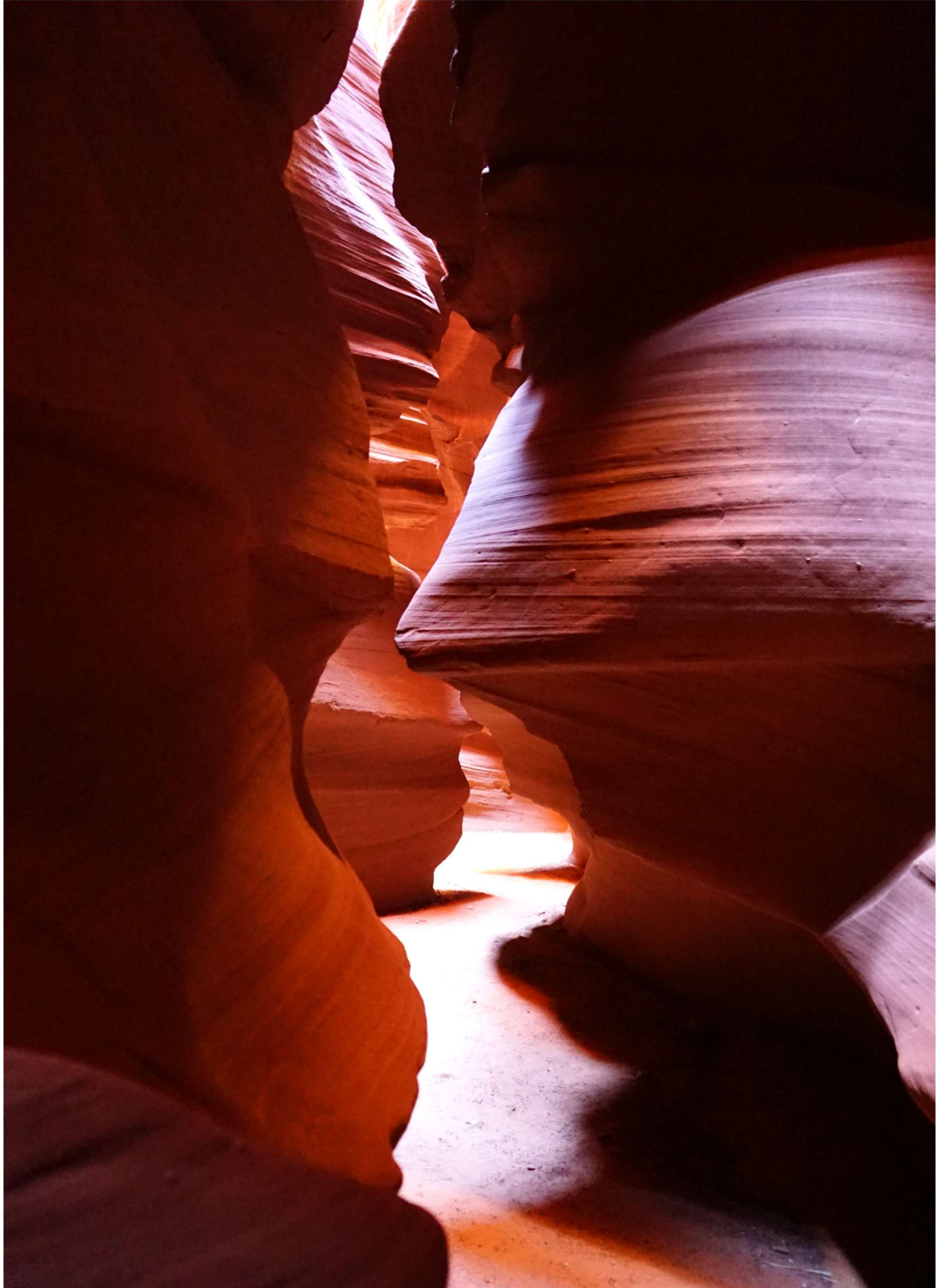














So, then it was off to the Grand Canyon! Arizona's strange approach to time – the state does not do Daylight Saving Time, but the Indian Territories do -- made it hard to know what time it actually was, but, judging by the sun's position, it looked like my two-and-a-half-hour ride would get me there just as the 6:23 sunset time hit.

