

A MINI TRIP IN THE WEST -- MAY 1990

Wasn't going to write a "real" trip letter, but started to write a regular letter and fell back into the old pattern. So the occasion this time was that I had a meeting in Boulder, Colorado and it was adjacent to the Memorial Day Weekend and we decided to play a bit.

PRIOR WEEK

After Mother's Day Weekend in Santa Rosa I caught a Monday plane to Amsterdam for a week long meeting. Actually, rather than fly all the way home to SFO at the end of the meeting I stopped in New York City for a Saturday night dinner with Sabina so arrived home on Sunday and left (by plane) about Monday noon for Boulder.

Meanwhile, Dawna left (by car) on Wednesday, stayed a ways into Nevada that evening. Bummed her way on across Nevada on HiWay 50 checking out a couple of camping areas, seeing some petrographs, and seeing a bit of Lehman Caves (they were booked up with a large group so she couldn't do the main tour). She arrived Salt Lake City in time to take her folks out to dinner. Spent Friday doing things such as buying plants; and had dinner at the house. Saturday was spent doing general things as well and that evening both sets of Smarts and Dawna went to dinner. And Sunday she was on the road again went to Dinosaur National Monument and also went off on a 3 hour drive up a canyon named Echo Canyon on the advice of a ranger. Excellent scenery. Spent the evening in Craig, Colorado. On to Boulder taking a few pretty offshots and beating me there; I arrived about 6 PM. Dawna had had a fine lunch at a German restaurant in Central City and had purchased some home-made sausages there so we (the two of us and a couple of cohorts) went to a local park and cooked sausage for dinner. A good night sleep for us both.

TUESDAY

I had meetings and Dawna bummed around Boulder buying some local made items for eventual Xmas presents. A group of us had dinner that evening at a "real western" place that specialized in BBQ ribs and things like that.

WEDNESDAY

I had meetings. Dawna went into Denver and chatted with the folks at the South American Explorer's Clubs this being their home office and they being the folks we had coordinated with a bunch before going to Peru about 6 weeks earlier. She then came back to Boulder and spent the afternoon riding local buses to see lots of the area; getting much useful information from friendly bus drivers; a real difference in people from those on the East (and even West) coast. That evening a bunch of us went to a Mexican restaurant.

THURSDAY

I had meetings. Dawna checked us out of the motel and then did some more shopping of local items; also some sightseeing of places pointed out to her by the bus drivers the prior day. Then about 2 PM we met and headed "toward California the slow way." Initially this meant taking a local road out of Boulder down to Golden and then generally taking more local

roads Southward. Nice scenery. Went to Florissant Fossil Beds Nat'l Monument/Petrified Forest that is not far from Pike's Peak, but got there just as the Visitor Center was closing at 4:30 PM. Could still walk around, however, and saw the largest/best preserved petrified tree stumps we've ever seen -- they are actually coastal redwoods which shows you how different the climate was a few centuries ago! Continued on to Canon City for the evening, bought some chicken, and cooked dinner in the city park. Yes we had our nice BBQ black box with us!!

FRIDAY

Played full-fledged tourist at the Royal Gorge, just out of town. That is, drove across the bridge, walked across the bridge, and took the tram down to the bottom of the gorge and back. Still as spectacular as when I was there as a highschooler -- although more tourist attractions/distractions at the top. Then headed generally West. Stopped in Gunnison and chatted with an old fellow at the Tourist Information office, headed down the road looking at the nice scenery, and then tried to take a back road over the mountains into the Ouray area. After climbing for about 20 miles came to where too much snow plus a tree across the road meant we could go no further; so backtracked and continued on the main road to Montrose and then south to Ridgway. At this point we went off on hard surfaced roads on a portion of the San Juan Skyway that goes around the backside of the mountains, near Telluride, etc. Lots of fine country. Stopped at a very local place for dinner; we had steaks and everyone else in the place was there for a Wedding Rehearsal dinner - Mexican food. Headed west some more, sorta hoping to get to Monticello, Utah but it was getting late so stopped at Dove Creek's only motel and chatted with a nice lady who said she had a couple of "not the best" rooms left and she'd heard all the motels in Montecillo were full - it was Memorial Day weekend and the canyon country is popular this time of year because the snow has left and it is not real hot yet (part of the reason we were heading there, of course). So we slept in Dove Creek. This town, by the way, I'd heard of for 20+ years since a fellow I work with grew up there in fact when I asked the motel lady about him she certainly did know him and his family and then really felt bad she only had her poorer rooms left for us.

SATURDAY

Up early, drove awhile and entered Canyonlands near Newspaper Rock State Park. Stopped there and looked at the most extensive petroglyphs I've seen. Onward into the Park. Fantastic big/red countryside. Bummed around the Park a bit, seeing nice countryside and also some fun looking camp sites for future reference. Into 4-wheel drive and drove up infamous Elephant Hill whew, sorta like driving/crawling up a rocky mountainside. Got to the top but it took quite awhile. Had been considering going into the backcountry this way and then taking some jeep roads through the backcountry to finally get to Natural Bridge Nat'l Monument. Decided that if there was going to be much more as tough going as this had been it would take us forever to do it and since we didn't really know the score, we turned around and went back down with Dawna walking in front of the car guiding me over the rocks. Really is amazing what the car can do in 4 wheel drive and the lowest gear. So, drove out of the Park the way we had come in, then back through Monticello, through Blanding, and into Natural Bridges the more traditional way. Part of the reason for going to NB was that earlier in the week I had learned that Liz and David would be in the Canyonland area over the long weekend and we had agreed we just might cross paths at NB at about noon on Saturday.... We arrived at 12:45, didn't see them. left a note on the bulletin board at the visitors center and went

exploring the general area (loop road, many viewpoints, several short hikes, ate some lunch, that sort of thing). Got back to the visitor's center 2-3 hours later and they had just shown up a few minutes earlier. So, fun got to meet David and generally chat. They (John's brother and wife were with them as well) then headed out - fourwheeling through the backcountry exactly the inverse of how we had considered coming into NB. However, they expected it to take more than 6 hours and would be camping part way along. Onward we went pretty drive through the Glen Canyon Dam area crossing the Colorado at Hite, then down to Bullfrog Basin Marina where we got some food and gas and then headed north on a gravel (very bumpy/washboardy) road. Fantastic countryside. Stopped at a nice looking spot, pitched our two man tent, cooked some chicken as the sun went down, and got a very quiet night's sleep. Like no cars on this road!!!

SUNDAY

Up quite early and continue on the road northward, then westward on what is called the Burr Trail. Still awfully bumpy/washboardy but also very good scenery part of which was driving down a canyon with giant red cliffs on both sides --- have never driven on a more spectacular road. Eventually came out of all this at Boulder, Utah and it was nice to be on a smooth road. Next town was Escalante and we had a slow (but friendly) large breakfast. Continued on through some more outstanding countryside. At about noon we got to Tropic which is about 10 miles before the entrance to Bryce Canyon Nat'l Park. Motel had vacancies and we figured we were wise to take one for might be full up as we got over to the more normal approach to Bryce. Checked in and then headed to Bryce Canyon. Spent the afternoon there - absolutely fantastic views. Did some hiking. Very enjoyable, although huge tourists crowds. Cooked hamburgers for dinner, and then back to our motel/bed.

MONDAY

Up early, headed across Utah a bit aiming for Cedar Breaks Nat'l Monument, was raining and as we climbed in elevation it became snow. Also foggy, so by the time we got near the entrance to CB it wasn't worth going in, so on over the mountain and off into Nevada we went. Rain, rain, rain. Tried to locate some "action" in a couple of towns (Caliente and Tonopah) for which the AAA book said special activities took place on Memorial Weekend but came up with little of interest so other than having lunch in Tonopah we just kept rolling (and having rain). Asked at gas stations about whether the passes into California were blocked with snow and got conflicting answers so headed North such that we could cross at Reno if need be; but then talked to a patrolman and he said no sweat so we dropped back down a bit and ended up crossing at Ebbets Pass. Slow and curvy and beautiful it is easy to see why Californians tend to not go to other states to find scenery! And a bit more rain. Fairly heavy traffic considering it was 10 PM, but kept rolling and arrived home about midnight. Learned that the entire West had received 1-3 inches of rain - very unusual for the end of May.