

2008 Trip West Blog Text

We posted enroute comments on our B&B blog. I've extracted them and placed them in order in this document in case the blog disappears.

Tuesday, September 02, 2008

Travel Day 1

While the neighbors are haying our meadows, we decided to take a little jaunt. Today, we drove to Lawrence KS to see some of the museums at KU. At KU's Natural History Museum, we got a private tour of the fossil prep areas and the fossil storage area - helps to take good care of guests, as our guide, a recent guest, is a PhD student in paleontology.

Next stop was the Spencer Museum of Art. The special exhibit was a display of mostly-antique quilts. They were marked by extremely fine (small) hand-stitching - what a lot of work that must have been. The art collection covered late medieval to modern, but not a lot of examples of each. Top picture was a Thomas Hart Benton.

Had lunch at Milton's downtown on Massachusetts St (Lawrence's main drag) and had a really interesting chicken tortilla soup. Bill had a calzone & Sandra had a Mediterranean salad.

Then, it was on to Topeka & the Kansas Historical Society. Very well-done museum, with a special exhibit on weather to go with a great survey of KS history. While the history of the war was what you would expect from KS, it did note that the redlegs were pretty nasty and even mentioned Osceola & Harrisonville. They had a display where one could decide if John Brown was a hero or a terrorist (I lean to the latter).

Rained heavily for a while, thanks to Gustav & a cold front. Staying at the Holiday Inn Express in Topeka; ate at a yuppie-Mexican restaurant & can't wait for the good stuff in NM!

Total travel - 120 miles.

Tomorrow - Council Grove, Tallgrass Nat'l Preserve, Pawnee Rock, Lyon, Ft. Larned & Garden City.

Wednesday, September 03, 2008

Travel Day 2, 9/3/08

September 3rd was essentially gloomy, with periods of rain & little sun until the last 20 miles or so. Not the best lighting for photography. We left Topeka on the KS turnpike, cut west on US-56 to Council Grove (an interesting town), then south to Tallgrass National Prairie Preserve. Cold and windy, but the grass was taller & better than on our first visit a couple of years ago. We'll see how the pictures come out after a bit of photoshopping.

Next, we visited Cottonwood Falls (of *Prairie Earth* fame) - neat brick streets and a classic old courthouse. From there, it was highway for quite a while. We visited Pawnee Rock, which is overgrown with trees so the view isn't what it was when the Santa Fe Trail was active. Next stops were in the Larned area: the Santa Fe Trail Museum and Ft. Larned Nat'l Historic Site.

Finally got to Garden City about 5:30 - 337 miles plus about 9 more running around Garden City. Our mileage is up to 20.8, as we drove about 64 MPH and had a quartering tailwind.

Tomorrow - US-50 to La Junta CO, cross country to Walsenburg, through the mountains to Great Sand Dunes and finally Alamosa.

Thursday, September 04, 2008

Day 3, 9/4/08

From Alamosa CO - We had a good day today. The prime stop was Great Sand Dunes Nat'l Monument, but the trip here was interesting. We followed the US-50 paralleling the Santa Fe Trail from Garden City to La Junta (CO), stopping at the CO welcome center at the La Junta depot. They have a Madonna Of the Trail statue, like Council Grove KS & Lexington MO. Took CO-10, a little-traveled road, to Walsenburg; saw quite a few antelope along the road. Had lunch in Walsenburg - strangest chile relleno I've ever had, essentially an omelet folded around some green chile. Odd, but good.

Spent several hours hiking and shooting pictures at Great Sand Dunes, the biggest dune field in North America. Hiked only into the footdunes (my word coinage - think foothills of the dunes) as my knee is sore.

Dinner at Alamosa was at Mrs Rivera's Kitchen, we had chimichangas with green sauce. mmm!

Today's trip was 350 miles, averaged better than 21 mpg. Tomorrow is the [Cumbres & Toltec Scenic railroad!](#) I'm taking 3GB of memory cards & 3 batteries!

Friday, September 05, 2008

Day 4, 9/5/08 - train ride

Today was our trip on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic RR. Wow! Great mountain scenery, the feel of a train, and lots of coal smoke. Definitely needed a shower when we got back to the hotel. We highly recommend this ride - North America's longest (68 mi) & highest (10,000 ft +) excursion train. It's a narrow gauge train. For more details, go to their website (posted yesterday) or wait for the posting at www.missouridaytrips.com - it'll be a while.

Tomorrow - Back to Chama by car, then to the Jicarilla Apache museum in Dulce, on to Aztec ruins, then Shiprock & Cortez, to get ready for our trip to Mesa Verde.

Saturday, September 06, 2008

Day 5, 9/6/08

We left Alamosa early & drove through a couple of 10,000' passes - La Manga & Cumbres, much of it parallel to the railroad we took yesterday. Didn't get to see the train running, since we were too early. Both trains had 3 more cars on Saturday than on Friday - plan accordingly.

From Chama, we took US-64 across to Bloomfield thru a part of NM we'd never before visited. Spectacular scenery - of course (ho hum, that's New Mexico). Stopped at Salmon Ruins, where we'd never before stopped, visited the Aztec NM museum and said "hi" to the cat who'd given us a tour four years ago - now she's fat and sassy and demands attention.

The Farmington area is very grown-up - way too much traffic for my taste. We'll stay there tomorrow night after our long visit to Mesa Verde; may take one of the tours that requires going up and down ladders. Other possibilities include the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores.

Cortez is having a beer fest tonight & we didn't go. Isn't that terrible? Too disgusted with our visit to the Ute Mountain casino - took 40 minutes to hand-pay Sandra when a machine wouldn't print out her cash-out ticket. Had Mexican food twice more today, but it wasn't as good as either of the two nights in Alamosa.

Miles today - 282, total to date - 1,212 (68 more than our original plan - didn't leave enough slack in it).

Sunday, September 07, 2008

Day 6, 9/7/08 - Mesa Verde

Sandra is now an official Junior Ranger, with her own badge. We hiked about 2.5 miles on a pretty primitive trail to Petroglyph Point. That was after taking the tour to Cliff Palace, not the easiest climb up and down, either. We're two tired puppies. At least we allowed enough time this visit, and did different things from what we did in [our 2004 trip](#).

We took a back road into Farmington, where the Holiday Inn Express upgraded us to a 2-room suite, no charge. Dinner was Mexican (again). And good (again).

Tomorrow is Abiuiu (Ghost Ranch - Georgia O'Keeffe country) and on to Santa Fe.

Today's mileage - 138. Trip to date - 1350.

Monday, September 08, 2008

Day 7, 9/8/08

Today was our day to visit Ghost Ranch at Abiquiu. Semi-oops, there's not a lot for a day-tripper to do. We enjoyed the visit, but we couldn't get into the back country without some serious hiking. We did see enough to get a feel for what inspired Georgia O'Keeffe. We'd allowed more time than we used, so from Espanola we took a side trip to Chimayo, supposedly a hotbed of studios & galleries. Didn't see many, but had a nice drive down toward Santa Fe on the High Road to (from) Taos.

Santa Fe - traffic was bad (I hate traffic!). We'll drive into the city in the AM from where we are at a HIE. Since no attractions open until 10, we'll stop at a Salvation Army store en route, sit on the Plaza, and hit some favorite shops. Then, we'll get our culture pass, visit the Palace of the Governors & the Art Museum, plus the Georgia O'Keeffe museum, then go to museum hill & hit a few other ones. Lunch will be at The Shed, a cafe where I took a prize-winning picture a couple of years ago. Then, it's on to Albuquerque, meeting Madge & Larry Harrah for dinner, and maybe a visit to the Sandia casino. We'll be staying at Bernalillo.

Miles today - 254, total to date - 1604.

Tuesday, September 09, 2008

Day 8 - 9/9/08

Santa Fe today. Had to fight traffic going downtown, where we arrived about 9 AM. Museums didn't open until 10, so we sat on the plaza and did some souvenir shopping. First disappointment - the Georgia O'Keeffe museum galleries were closed as the old exhibit was being shipped out in preparation for a new one. However, a private gallery next door had an exhibit of Ansel Adams photos, so we toured it (& several other galleries). 2nd disappointment - the Art Museum was changing exhibits as well, so we had very little new stuff to tour, just one of fancy glass.

However, the Palace of the Governors (ca 1610) had a fascinating exhibit on the Old Spanish Trail from NM to CA, lasting until the US took over in the 1840s. Then we visited the Museum of Contemporary Indian Art, with a special exhibit on Indian history in the area & relationship to the land. The International Folk Art Museum is really wild - I can't explain it.

Drove down to Bernalillo & checked in to the HIE, then drove on to visit Madge & Larry Harrah. Had dinner at Garcia's & visited for a couple of hours. On the way back to the motel, stopped at the fancy Sandia (Pueblo) Casino. I won \$5 & Sandra lost about the same, so we're even with the Indian casinos overall on the trip.

Tomorrow - NM State Fair, a couple of museums, Old Town and even more good food!

Miles today - 85, trip thus far - 1700.

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

Day 9, 9/10/08

Albuquerque day, and a full one at that! First stop was the New Mexico State Fair. It's quite different from Missouri's, more compact, with shaded streets. It has 5 different arts venues - fantastic! Sandra will write a book on them, I'm sure.

We then had lunch at the Frontier cafe, across the street from UNM - good, and we sat right next to a picture of Tony Hillerman & Wes Studi. After lunch we visited the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology on the UNM campus, then on to the Museum of Natural History, the Albuquerque Art Museum, Old Town, and the Pueblo Cultural Center. Whew! Finally, we took a back road down the Rio Grande valley to Belen. Great SW-style restaurant there - Pete's Cafe. It's also notable for the decor, lots of Navajo rugs and RC Gorman prints, plus some assorted oils.

Tomorrow we take back roads to visit Abo & Quarai ruins, then on to Tucumcari & the Mesalands dinosaur museum. That's on the way home.

Day's travel - 81 miles. To date - 1781.

Thursday, September 11, 2008

Day 10, 9/11/08

Our siteseeing today was appropriate to the date. We visited the ruins of two pueblo missions, where religious & secular demands on the natives led to eventual abandonment & destruction. The two are part of what's called the Salinas Missions - Abo & Quarai. Both show the remains of fancy churches built of stone, while the pueblos where the Indians lived have deteriorated into rubble piles.

After that, it was mostly driving below the speed limit. We took US-60 for many miles, then US-54 east to Santa Rosa, & finally I-40 to Tucumcari. US-60 & US-54 both traverse Missouri, so it's interesting to see other parts of these highways. Tucumcari is home of the Mesalands Dinosaur Museum - really neat, see our 2006 trip postings/pictures at www.missouridaytrips.com.

Total miles - 242, for the trip - 2023.

Gas used to date - 94.7 gal, 21.3 mpg.

Friday, September 12, 2008

Day 11, 9/12/08

A damp day, so no pictures. Two neat museums and a side trip highlighted today's travel. First one was the Panhandle Plains Museum in Canyon TX. Plenty of: natural history, paleontology, oil industry, cars, and ART. Then, it was back to Amarillo and the Kwahadi Dancers building - this is a scouting-related

place with an excellent small museum which is well-interpreted. Everything done by volunteers. It's also the venue for their dance group which does both powwow and traditional Indian dances. Side trip was to Alibates Flint Quarries NM. We got there too late to get a tour, but it was scenic.

Spending the night at Pampa TX in an HIE; ate BBQ brisket for supper. It was good but it's not KC! Tomorrow's plans are flexible because of the flooding going on due to a cold front, the remains of a Pacific storm and whatever happens from Hurricane Ike.

Miles today - 250, to date 2273
Gas - 106.3 gal/ 21.3 mpg

Saturday, September 13, 2008

Day 12, 9/13/08

Change of plans: We decided to skip Ponca City and spend the night outside of Wichita instead. We went through a lot of areas that showed heavy flooding overnight, and we wouldn't be surprised if there was some further east. We'll take US-54 out of Andover in the AM all the way to Eldorado Springs, then to Clinton & lunch/groceries. Should be home by 2.

Today we left Pampa in fog & mist and had mist off and on much of the day. Our only sightseeing stop was Alabaster Caverns State Park - not the most scenic since it had no flow formations, but interesting. Took pictures. Tonight we're at a HIE instead of the Comfort Inn originally planned.

Day miles - 320, to date 2593.7.
Gas used: 121.4 gal/21.3 MPG

Monday, September 15, 2008

Home at last

We got in about 2 PM yesterday (Sunday), in time to watch the final disgusting minutes of the Chiefs game. We took US-54 the rest of the way across Kansas to Eldorado Springs, MO, stopped at Clinton for dinner & groceries, and worked hard getting unpacked and working. Turning on hot water, stuff like that.

It was a great trip, can't wait to go again.

Miles: day - 266, total 2859.9
Gas used - 133.5 gallons, 21.4 mpg