

Bill's Trip to Oregon, July 2015

Day 1, Saturday, July 5, 2025 – Warrensburg to Hill City

Note: For the first few days, I tried dictating my notes into a transcription app. It appears that I'm not very good at that. I had hoped that using an app could help me avoid my typos, but it actually made things worse, both in time spent and in readability. I finally gave up on it.

I left at 0635 this morning, heading out on my usual roads to US-50, heading towards Kansas City. My first tidbit was just west of Pittsville, a skeleton driving a Jeep. I got to the state line okay, without much problem. Traffic wasn't bad at all. I picked up K-10 on the west side of town.

K-10 was pretty. It was green and somewhat hilly, and part of it seemed to be a Kaw River Scenic Byway, or possibly the Kaw River national waterway trail nearby. As I passed Eudora, the rain started sprinkling. Later on, it picked up quite a bit. Lawrence has a water ski club that uses one of those borrow pit lakes that you see along the roads.

I'm now on US-40 west of Lawrence; it's still active in this area. Along the way I saw an 1880s Township Hall, and it started raining, and it started raining and it started raining. I got off to go to Lecompton. Took a picture of the sign with my cell phone because I discovered that my camera was dead. Well, couldn't use that, so I pressed on & picked up US-24 to Manhattan.

First, I passed Topeka, where I saw the Dog Day Afternoon pet care. This area along US-24 is flat because it's part of the Kaw Valley, the wide valley with hills to our to the north. St Mary's, Kansas, has a farmer market, and they have a St Mary's University. That's before Manhattan, still on the California & Oregon Trails.

Now I'm getting into the Flint Hills as I leave this area. This area is four lane, and I passed a place called Central Rose fireworks. The bypasses around Topeka were pretty good. Some of it was 2-lane. It wasn't hilly. All this area is green. The only brown I saw was the harvested wheat fields.

There was a lot of construction around Manhattan, with a major bypass. Since then, it's all been pretty good roads, and I stopped at Clay Center for gas. Clay Center is a pretty town. The Republican River is right on the west side and it was running at bank full. I started looking for a place to eat. In the next few towns I went through, I didn't find a Mexican place that was open, either. Finally, I stopped someplace and picked up a chicken sandwich at the Casey's. Well, it was chicken.

There's a silo tree approximately 10 miles east of Beloit, where all the buildings in towns seem to be made of yellow stone. Further on, at Glen Elder, I passed Wauconda lake. Further on, near Miltonvale, I passed a wind farm. This area is hilly. Land use alternates between corn and beans, and then it's grasslands, depending on the nature of the ground & how close to a river it is, I suppose this is the Solomon River in this area.

The road in this area is straight as straight can be. Actually it's a pretty darn lonely road most of the way after Clay Center. I got to Cawker city looked for the "World's Largest Ball of Sisal Twine." I can't

find it. There's no big signs for it. I think it's right close to downtown, but I didn't see the right spot, so I pressed on.

I stopped at Nicodemus about two o'clock. This is a National Historic Site, and it's a historic Black settlement. They took up and moved from the South and bought their own land and formed their own town. Unfortunately, the railroad bypassed it, so the town kind of died on the vine a bit. People still live there, and now it's a National Historic Site, which just happened to be open today. I managed to tour a couple of the areas, but it was just brutally hot.

I left there about 2:30 and about 20 minutes later, I got to Hill City, checked into my nice motel, the Hilltopper motel. It's a single story, older motel but it's very nice. It has all the amenities, lots of power outlets, A/C, etc. The room is just a little small, but they've done a really nice job of update and keeping it current.

Supper at Jalapeno's - chicken enchilada & chile relleno, very good. Tomorrow, on to Scott's Bluff, NE.

For the day and the trip: 385 miles. Gas mileage about 38.6 mpg, thanks to a brutal headwind.

Day 2, Sunday, July 6, 2025 – Hill City to Scott's Bluff

I left Hill City at 0655 this morning, heading north on US-283 towards Norton. In Norton, I took a little side track in town, where this restored gas station is.

I crossed the north to the Solomon River. There's cotton woods there and junipers. It looks like there might be some oil in the area. Roads are good. The exposed rock is kind of white. Going into Norton, I saw the Prairie Dog golf course. I wonder if they have trouble with extra holes. I turned off onto US-36 heading west towards Oberlin. A lot more of the same. The right away was wide, so I wonder if that was a potential four lane on highway or if it was just the old road was over there. The highway cuts showed a thick B soil horizon, with of kind of a yellowish soil with a smaller black layer on top. Oberlin is the site of the last Indian raid into Kansas - they have a museum for that. I turn north on US-83 and pass a feed lot, and the odor stuck with me for a while.

I cross into Nebraska at the 80 miles point for the day and head for McCook, Nebraska. Once I hit Nebraska, I see more curves in the first 10 miles than I did in 200 miles in Kansas. At McCook, I cross the Republican River again. The traffic lights in McCook, which is a decent sized town, are synced so I sailed right on through.

Now on US-6, which has quite a bit of traffic compared to what I was used to the first day. Now I'm driving through the Frenchman Creek bottoms. At the little hamlet of Hamlet, I see the Coyote Machine shop. Just north of that there's a 1940s car on top of an oil tank, both rusting away.

Now the time zones changed and I've gained an hour. This area is hilly. It has lots of sunflowers, lots of shelter breaks on both sides of the houses. At Imperial I turn north west on NE-61. I believe this is the divide between the Republican River and the Platte River. I make a short stop at Grant for a comfort break and to record this.

I continued north on Nebraska, 61 to Ogallala, where I stop for gas. The first station I went to didn't look like it was going to sell at the prices advertised, so I gassed up at Walmart. Now I'm on US-26 and I'm going to be seeing a lot of that the rest of the trip. Ahead of me, I see what looks some clouds, and I can't tell if there's rain shafts coming out of them. I can't tell if it's virga or rain. Eventually I got a couple of drops, so maybe it was some of both.

The road is busy. It's part of the Oregon Trail, and that part of it has lots of up and downs. From the high ground, you can see to the right down into the North Platte valley, and you can see the erosion that occurs along there. This is part of Kansas' Western Trails Scenic Byway. I passed something called Windlass Hill. I guess I guess I should have stopped there, but I think that's one of the places where they had to winch the wagons up or down a hill that was too steep for the animals to hold them.

Little further on, I saw a sign for the Chubby Rhino bar in Oshkosh. There wasn't much in Oshkosh. Now I'm going down into the valley and a good but busy road. I'm running parallel to the Union Pacific. This is a coal train route. There are big coal trains, full ones headed east and empty ones headed west. I was able to count the engines on one that had two pullers, three helpers in the middle and one pusher at the end. That's a long, heavy train of coal cars.

I went to Chimney Rock National Historic Site. Also saw the ones called Courthouse and Jail rock, but didn't stop at those. I don't think you could anyway. I had a late lunch, chicken enchiladas, at a local restaurant in Gering.

Finally got to Scotts Bluff National Monument about 1:30 and spent quite a bit of time walking around that, getting overheated while enjoying photography.

Now I'm firmly set at my Holiday Inn Express, and and now I'm deciding what to do so next step is working on pictures.

For the day 338.1 miles, for the trip 722.9 miles. Better mpg today, trip total up to 39.7
Tomorrow: Lander, WY via Fort Laramie and other scenic spots.

Day 3, Monday, July 7, 2025 – Scott's Bluff to Lander

I left my motel at 0630 local time and headed west on US-26, a four lane road. It was a pretty day. Just outside of town, I saw old farm equipment and old military equipment near the road. I got through Morrill before hitting road work. Finally, I got to Torrington, when they were starting to work on the road for the day.

This whole area is part of the North Platte Valley, with irrigated center pivot fields with corn, alfalfa and feed yards (sniff, sniff. It's also part of the California. Pony Express, and Oregon Trails, as well as the Mormon historic routel. I got to the town of Fort Laramie at about 0730 in the morning and headed out to the fort itself. I took lots of pictures and talked with a lady in the visitor center.

I left there little after nine o'clock, to head west again on US-26, when I ran into construction. I had a little bit of wait, but it wasn't too bad.

I stopped at Guernsey, Wyoming to take a look at the register cliffs area, and I took quite a few pictures there.

I got there about 9:30 and left a little after 10:00. Soon as I left I ran into a lot of construction, where I had to sit there waiting for the them to let us through. When that finally happened, I continued on driving and following the Laramie River, which is running full. I reached I-25 at the 91 mile marker at about 1030. I took I-25 north towards Casper. This is going to be about a 100 mile drive. It's hilly. Speed limit is 80 and I started off a little bit less, running it at 73.

This area is green. The ponds are all full - really kind of scenic throughout that area. I-25 here is new to me; it crosses a number of creeks: there was Cottonwood Creek, Horseshoe Creek, Elk Horn Creek, LaPrele Creek, Box Elder Creek and Deer Creek. At Glendo, I passed a BNSF train that was hauling quite a bit of military equipment southbound, no tanks though.

I cross the North Platte River (again) around exit 126 and shortly after that again at Douglas. When I get to Casper, I stop for gas at a Sinclair, probably the best price I've had on the trip so far (and the best price I may have) and asked for some directions on how to find the WY-220 highway.

Well, I did find it. It's called Sand Creek Massacre Trail in certain areas. It starts off being four lane and it's a really pretty good, well traveled road. Then it after I'd been on it for quite a while, I saw the first layer of red rocks that I've seen so far on this trip. I expect I'll see a lot more before I'm done. This is also the North Platte River valley. I went through a pass and then got into a wide valley where there was corn and alfalfa, all irrigated, growing. Then, another little range, another basin with has a lake. Can't tell if the lake was man made or natural, but I suspect it could have been either. It was a good road, with frequent passing lanes as a two lane road, with a 70 mile speed limit.

I reach Independence Rock about 1:10pm and stop to take a couple of pictures. Successful emigrant parties that reached this point by early July were likely to reach their destination before winter. It's on the Sweetwater River, so they could continue to follow Sweetwater Valley for quite a while.

When I reach Muddy Gap junction about 75 miles out of Casper, I turn north on US-287, towards Lander. This is going to be another 80 Mile Run. Along that stretch I stop and take a picture of Split Rock, a National Historic Place.

I see my first antelope at some tanks around 276 miles in, and my first snow cap peaks in the distance from Jeffrey City. I think that they're probably in the Wind River Range. Finally, I reach Sweetwater Junction, where I think the trails turn south towards South Pass. It's about 6500 feet above sea level.

This is now the Chief Washakie Trail. He was a famous chief of the of the Arapaho. I get into Lander, then at almost three o'clock and check into my room. It's a real nice room on the end of the hallway on the first floor. That'll make it real easy to clear out and load the car tomorrow without having to use a cart or use stairs. I gave a big thumbs up for that.

For supper, I went over to the neighboring Safeway and got some carry out and brought it back here. More chicken, of course.

For the day, 341.6 miles, for the trip, 1,064.4 miles.

Tomorrow, I'm heading west on US-26 to the Grand Tetons and then across the state line to spend the night at Idaho Falls.

Day 4, Tuesday, July 8 - Lander to Idaho Falls

The theme for the day is "surpassing." I passed through 3 mountain passes today. The other theme is photographic disaster - I'll get into that later.

I left Lander at 0645 local time with a temperature of 58 degrees chilly. US-287 North took me past the Shoshone Rose Casino. This is part of the Wind River Reservation, for the Shoshone and Arapaho. I passed eroded mountains from a previous uplift. These were the synclines and anticlines, where one side is tilted, kind of a flatiron on one side. At seven o'clock in the morning, the road was pretty lonely, although that would not last.

Hit the junction with US-26 at 30 miles in as expected, and pressed on towards Moran junction. The road passes mountains of multiple shapes, as well as multiple colors. The Crowheart area was a very nicely watered Valley. They do hay and alfalfa, and it's grazed and irrigated. I passed thick layers of red sandstones, some mixed with layers of other colors; I wonder if one of some of these multi-colored sandstones might be part of the Morrison Formation, which is home of dinosaur fossils. I passed Dubois (Dubois or Dubwa depending on how you pronounce the name) – either way, it's on the Gateway Scenic Byway. I'm not sure which mountain range I'm going through right now, but I'm peaking at the top of the Teton Pass; the Continental Divide here is at 9858 feet of altitude.

That was a good pass. I headed on down the road towards the Tetons, taking multiple pictures on my way down. Once I got down to the Tetons, I did some exploring, spending several hours taking the back roads and looking for reflection pictures. Little did I know that when I got back to the motel room and checked the pictures that only about a dozen from my primary camera took. Even worse, I didn't take one of everything with my pocket camera. That is a lesson that I will not forget the rest of the trip.

I had lunch at a Mexican restaurant called El Abuelito on the outside of Jackson, and headed on Wyoming 22 up into Teton Pass. That's another great pass; it's even steeper, hence slower going, than the other passes.

I came out finally on the Idaho side into at the wide valley. Then ID-33 took me through Pine Creek Pass, elevation 6564. It's also part of the Targhee National Forest. Now I'm in a verdant valley with wheat and alfalfa growing. Finally, I pick up US-26 following the Snake River. I reach Idaho Falls about 4:15. I find my motel room. Everything's wonderful in the motel room,

Setting up to process the pictures is when I discovered that the disc failed on my primary camera. A trip to a nearby Walmart to buy a new one (and the back-up that I thought I already had) to get ready for tomorrow.

For the day, 297.4 miles. 1,361.8, for the trip.

Tomorrow I'll be taking US-20 to Craters of the Moon National Park and eventually ending up on an interstate highway, going through Boise, Idaho, and spending the night at Ontario, Oregon.

Day 5, Wednesday, July 9th - Idaho Falls to Ontario

I left Idaho Falls on US-20, about quarter after six, local time, headed to Craters of the Moon National Monument. Along US-20, I passed the Idaho Falls Raceway. I kind of thought that the highway was a raceway, the way people were driving on it bumper-to-bumper and treating the 70 mph limit as the floor.

I saw the usual center pivot wheat and alfalfa, plus one other crop that I couldn't readily identify. I then realized, this is Idaho. It's potatoes. This area is a long, relatively flat area. I passed a sign saying, elephant dinners. Okay, what's that about?

Why are all those people in such a hurry? I pass an energy plant, and most of the traffic turns off there, leaving the road almost empty. At the US-26 junction, another energy complex siphons off what remained of the traffic.

This is part of the Oregon Trail, called Goodale's Cut Off. Apparently this cutoff avoided a little bit of hostility that was going on further south with the Shoshone. Arco, the only town on the road, bills itself as the world's first town powered completely by nuclear power. The town park actually has the 'sail' from a nuclear submarine, at an elevation of 5300 feet.

The next stop was the Monument, at about 0754 - six minutes before the visitor center opened. I went into the visitor center, got my maps, then spent the next almost two hours driving around, taking a couple of short hikes, and taking pictures.

I left the Monument about 10 o'clock, local time, I headed on US-20 West, continuing towards Cary. I pass a little town called Picabo, as in Picabo Street, the skier. I cross the road headed for Sun Valley, Idaho, which is a major ski area not too far from Picabo.

The road enters a really straight section, a flat and long, long valley. There are mountains to the left and right, but basically the road is straight and fast. The speed limit is 65 and everybody was doing pretty much over 70, although I tried to hold it back to 69.

Finally, I enter a pass to get out of this flat area. It was followed by a long, long series of passes until before finally get back in the flats and stop at Mountain Home. I pull into a truck stop figuring they would have a cafe because I hadn't had any breakfast or lunch yet. The only thing that they had at that truck stop was Arby's, and their chicken sandwich is not to be recommended.

Now I'm on I-84, headed eventually towards Ontario, Oregon. I-84 is a long road, 80 mile per hour speed limit, which most people seem to take as a minimum. The traffic inside Boise was pretty heavy. It had four lanes each way most of the time, but I finally got through it without incident.

Once I crossed the Snake River, I stopped at a Welcome Center just outside Ontario, Oregon. I was able to check in early at my Holiday Inn Express. Supper was at a fancy restaurant about a block away, with the best (& most expensive) chicken of the trip.

For the day: 316.2 miles, for the trip 1678.1 miles.

Tomorrow is the John Day Fossil beds via a route with 7 more passes to navigate.

Day 6, July 10, 2025 - Ontario to Fossil

I leave Ontario at 0700 MDT and head west for John Day and the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, but first I have to buy gas. When I pulled in at the Cenex station, somebody came running out and asked if he could fill my tank for me Not needed - but reminder, this is Oregon,

I pass through a long flat area growing wheat, corn, potatoes, onions (for a change), and alfalfa. I expect to see a mixture of these in all the flat areas throughout the day's trip.

Here's a tidbit for you. The Butte Baptist Church has a drive-in Sunday service. Somewhere a little bit west of Vale. I saw a big muley with a really nice rack out in the middle of a field. Now I'm coming to the town of Brogan, I thought that was kind of funny name as a brogan is a shoe.

Soon I'm climbing into my first pass of the day. It's called Brogan Hill; the elevation is 3981. It takes me into somewhat higher valley. In this valley, I notice there are no fences; they've been taken out and the rusty barbed and woven wires rolled up here and there. Past little town of Ironside, ahead I see a cloud bank building up through a pass in the mountains. I think I'm going to be heading that way.

Now I'm coming to my second pass of the day, El Dorado Pass. it's at 4623 foot altitude, and the time zone has changed. it was 0818, MDT, and now it's 0718 Pacific Time. I pass a little place called Burnt River; it wasn't much of a town, but it does have a football field, sans stands.

I'm still on us 26 and I'm coming to another pass. This one's called Blue Mountain Pass. Its altitude is 5109 it's pretty and wooded for a change. Then I come to Austin Summit at 4566 and finally, to Austin Junction. On the other side of that, there's Dixie Pass, elevation 5277. The John Day River valley below is very enticing:

This carries me down towards Prairie City. I'm looking a little bit for a place to eat, but don't see any. Neither do I find a place worth stopping at in John Day. So I head on, continuing west, of course, towards Dayville and eventually the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. But before I get to them, US-26 enters a big gorge. The river cuts through thick, thick, thick lava beds.

I turn north on OR-19 and headed up to the Sheep Rock unit of the John Day Fossil Beds. It has several sections to it, so I do a little hiking at one of them and take some pictures.

I return to the visitor center, now open for the day. From there, I pick up US-26 again and continue west to the town of Mitchell. I stop there for some lunch at a little cafe on the edge of town called the Bridge Creek Cafe. There's only one other customer in there at the time, and she runs a local hostelry of sorts, so she was busy telling guest horror stories. I commiserate with her.

It was time for a two and a half hour round trip to the Painted Rocks section of the fossil beds. and, of course, I took some pictures there - a lot of pictures.

I ended up hiking over half a mile total; it's a little warm, and it's hilly, too. It has really interesting colors. Just take a look at the pictures I shared above.

Back into the gorge, I pick up OR-207, heading north. This road is mountainous with very few open areas. I finally crossed Butte Creek Pass, elevation 3789 - it was a very nasty one. I turn west on OR-19 to the town of Fossil without too much of a problem. I stop, find my motel room. It's a cute little one, and with real friendly management. The town has no cafes, but I do find establishments that provide salads and snacks. I bring them back to the room for my supper..

For the day, 285.3 miles, for the trip. 1,963.5

Tomorrow, it's on to Maupin via the Clarno unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

Day 7, Friday, July 11, 2025 - Fossil to Maupin

Day 7 starts out at 52 degrees – chilly! I was rolling slightly before 0600 local, headed for the Clarno unit, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. To get there, I had to navigate another pass with tight 10 mph curves – it took half an hour to go 17 miles. The real attraction for this unit is the palisade cliffs, more than the rocks with leaf impressions.

A second, similar pass takes me to the town of Clarno; traffic has fortunately been very light. I cross the John Day River (again) there. Clarno to Shaniko – more passes. I come out of one pass to see a beautiful valley in the morning light.

Another pass gives me a panorama view of 7 Cascade volcanoes, and no place to stop for a picture. After Shaniko, I head for Maupin on Bakeoven Road. A huge, industrial-sized solar farm takes up a lot of desert-like acreage. I did find a place to try some shots of the distant mountains.

I arrived at Maupin at 0845 and meet cousins Margaret & Dixie for the first time. They're descended from my great-grandfather's youngest brother, Joseph Truman – he came to Oregon sometime after the CW and married a lumber baron's daughter.

We tour some sites related to their branch of the family and sites in the area where they grew up. They show me white-water rafting on the Deschutes River, an interesting waterfall, petroglyphs, and canyons and flat areas still in the family.

For the day: 71.0 mile, for the trip 2034.5
Tomorrow: TBD

Day 8, Saturday, July 12, 2025 - Side trip to Pendleton

Today was family day. My Truman cousin, Margaret, drove me to Pendleton, OR, to meet another relative, Gary. En route, we stopped at a Stonehenge reproduction, the Klickitat County (WA) World War I memorial. From it, one can see Mt. Hood in the distance.

We got to Pendleton about 1100 and spent the next several hours going thru pictures and records – including 5 letters written by my great grandfather in Louisiana to his brother & nephew in Oregon. I took pictures of the letters and will get them transcribed.

We got back to Maupin about 1830 and talked about what we learned. I saw a new-to-me portion of the Columbia River, and didn't have to drive.

For the day, 0 miles driven.
Tomorrow: visit an Indian flea market and meet more relatives in the evening.

Day 9, Sunday, July 13, 2025 - Around Maupin

Today included a visit to the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, where I took a couple of mountain shots and a couple of shots of an abandoned church and house on the rez.

We had a long visit with an old friend of my hosts' family, a friend who happens to be an elder on the reservation. We even had some fry bread for lunch. Afterwards I finished my laundry and set up my suitcases for an early departure tomorrow.

For the evening, I met and dined with a couple of other cousins. Afterwards, we were joined by the Native elder, who is a noted storyteller – it's been a valuable time.

For the day: 0 miles driven
Tomorrow: Start my return trip: Klamath Falls via Newberry Volcanic NM and Crater Lake

Day R-1 (R for return), Monday, July 14, 2025 - Maupin to Klamath Falls

Today was Half-Way Day – not in distance, but in time. It's the 10th day of a 19-day trip!

I left my Maupin cousins at 0713 local to head south on US-197. The climb-out of the Deschutes River valley is curvy; where I saw wheat fields in 2011, I see nothing but sage and juniper. A pull out at Criterion Summit provides a panorama of Cascade volcanic mountains and identifies them – I don't stop.

I pick up US-97 about 20 mile out. I could see smoke from the Cram fire, now grown to 10,000 acres. It had earlier reached the hiway at mile marker 76, but that area is now clear. I stop in Madras for

breakfast at the Black Bear Diner; the waffle is good but the service is bad enough that I leave no tip – wait staff needs to at least ask if you need anything and to drop off the check!

I top off the tank in Madras, as well, adding 10 gallons after a 400-mile run. \$3.69/ is a deal around here! The road enters a broad valley, with a great view of the Three Sisters, Broken Top, Mt. Jefferson, etc. I continue south through busy towns of Redmond and Bend to visit Newberry National Volcanic Monument. It contains a large caldera with multiple lave flows and even a bus-ride to the top of a cinder cone – a lot more relaxing than driving up Capulin Volcano in New Mexico. I enjoy a great view from the top.

Now for a long drive south to the Crater Lake National Park turnoff. I endure the wait to get through the entry, as most folks had to stop & pay the fee. I have a lifetime Senior Pass I purchased at Ft. Larned back in 2006. Since we drove the west rim drive in 2011, I decide to take the east rim – it has some great views, as far as I geot before finding the road closed for construction, I backtrack, then take the west rim drive until I leave the park. Yes, I took lots of photos. Here's a sample:

I finally get back to US-97 at 1500. It runs along the edge of Klamath Lake, making for some sporty driving. Found the HIE, grabbed supper at a next-door Chipotle, and retired to my room to write the blog.

For the day: 280.2 miles, for the trip 2314.7.

Tomorrow: Visit Lassen Volcanic National Park en route to Sparks, NV

Day R-2, Tuesday, July 15, 2025 - Klamath Falls to Sparks.

I left my HIE at 0613, trying to find my way to US-97. I only had to double back twice, so I guess the signage was OK. I sailed along on US-97 for 20 miles with Mt. Shasta in my window, then crossed the California border. Initially, the terrain was flat, with sage growing where it wasn't irrigated. The mountains were partially shrouded in smoke from a major fire.

Shortly after passing Mt. Hebron Summit (elev 5202) came the first of about an hour's worth of delays for construction. This one, of about 25 minutes, was for an animal overpass. The next one, much shorter, at least provided a view of Mt. Shasta.

I got to Weed about 0800 and switched to I-5 for 10 miles to the town of Mt. Shasta, where I picked up CA-89. I was surprised at how quickly the traffic moved, as I didn't expect a modern mountain road. It passed through a lot of wooded areas, some logged and some not. The mainstay of the sparse traffic was logging trucks. One clear-cut corridor followed power lines. As I approached Lassen I started to note burnt areas (more on that to come).

I reached the Park about 1000 and stopped at the visitor center. The Loomis Museum wasn't open, but I did buy an overpriced T-shirt at the store. My first photo stop was at a field of shattered rocks from an avalanche.

The Dixie fire in 2021 did considerable damage throughout the park, turning trees into crisp tombstones. While the most devastating view lacked a pull off, here's a couple of samples – note the hillside in the distance.

I passed many piles of logs from salvage logging operations. The best mountain views are from a major parking area at about 8500' altitude.

I passed an area with some fumaroles – sulphurous fumes! Finally got out of the park about noon. I knew civilization was nigh when Lake Almanor had a DG. Just past it, more road work – this one is getting totally rebuilt from the base course on up. More road constriction followed.

Finally, I crossed into Nevada, with a nice playa to the left. Traffic into Reno was fast and congested for 3 PM. I missed my side road and managed the I-80 junction. I-80 took me about 20 miles to my hotel, a Courtyard by Marriott. The room is nice but I don't think I'll stay at another.

For the day: 269.6 miles, for the trip 2684.3.

Tomorrow: Ely, NV, via US-50, "the loneliest road"

Day R-3, Wednesday, July 16, 2025 - Sparks to Ely

I don't like driving in the dark, but that's what I did, leaving at 0500. Why? I awakened early and could not return to sleep because of the noise made by the many trucks pulling out of a truck stop across the way, and these fancy Marriotts don't provide breakfast. The road leads through the Truckee River canyon, the route of the Pony Express and the California Trail. I gassed up at Fernley, where the price were lowest in the area (thanks, Gasbuddy.com), then on to Fallon for a real breakfast.

I'm now on US-50, known here as the "loneliest road in America," a claim I plan to test. Immediately after leaving casino-filled Fallon, I see an "open range" sign – here, it sports a fighting bull instead of the usual cow. A side road leads to the Rattlesnake Raceway Trap Club. It's flat, with irrigated spots growing alfalfa and maybe a little corn. There's a green playa; it must have had some rain sometime, but it's bone-dry now. Nearby are sand dunes, now the Sand Mountain rec area.

Sand Springs Pass, at 4644', leads to the Dixie Valley. Since most of these basins have no outlet, the lowest point is often a playa, to which water runs, pools, and evaporates. An irony: the US Navy has facilities in this arid land. Another summit, this one about 4600'. In the next valley, a little settlement called Middlesgate obviously gets some water. In one area, the eroded rock forms badlands.

The New Pass Butterfield stage station lies just below New Pass summit (6942'). I notice that mile markers are by county, not from the state line. Mt. Airy summit is at 6679'. Next is the Reese River valley, with a farmer organization – no farms visible, but it is greener than most. Austin has an Old West atmosphere; a C-Store there sells "I survived the loneliest road" pins. A couple of high summits ensue.

Just east of Dickinson Summit (6566'), there's a turn-off to the Dickinson petroglyphs. It's a bit of a hike at altitude, but I manage to shoot a couple of examples.

The old mining town of Eureka (6481') has historic buildings and a road to Windfall Canyon. I climb out to Pinto Summit (7376'), Pancake Summit (6516') and Little Antelope Summit (7428'). Down in the basin I see my first dust devil of the trip. Finally, I go through Robinson Pass (7607') and drop down into the valley past multi-colored vertical stripes from the old Robinson mines – this was Kennecott copper country. White Pine has the county museums and historical buildings, Ely has the Nevada Northern Railway Museum – it runs scenic trains but all the steam engines are awaiting parts.

Clouds over the next range of mountains look promising – or is it threatening? I check into my motel about 1300, have lunch/supper at a casino restaurant next door, and will crash early.

For the day: 302.5 miles, for the trip 2987.0

Tomorrow: Visit Great Basin National Park and the Parowan petroglyphs. RON in Cedar City.

Day R-4, Thursday, July 17, 2025 - Ely to Cedar City

I left Ely at 0635 local, after a hotel breakfast and topping off the tank at a Shell dealer. I head south on US-50/6/93, one of which is the Grand Army of the Republic Highway; I presume likely US-6 since US-50 is the Lincoln Highway, at least in some places. The road starts out flat. I see what appears to be a herd of bison – it turns out to be a bunch of stubby scrubby junipers. Then, it's my first pass of the day, Connors Pass (7722').

The next valley has its own wind farm. I wonder, "Does the topography here create wind tunnels?" I start up the next pass, passing a farm gate encrusted with shed elk antlers. This is Sacramento Summit (7154'), leading into Snake Valley. Snakes are not obvious; I see none. I arrive at the Great Basin National Park main visitor center at 0742, 20 minutes before it opens. The brochure is available so I read that after cleaning my windshield of accumulated gnats. The ranger on duty at the info desk was a newbie, only 6 weeks out of New Jersey.

The park has two major attractions, the Lehman Caves and the Wheeler Peak drive. I check on the cave tour – the next 30 minute one available for walk-ups doesn't start until 10. I'm already short of breath hiking in from the close-in parking at 7000', so I settle for a tour of their cave museum, then head up the Wheeler Peak drive.

It takes a while to wind up the mountainside to just short of the tree line, at over 10,000 feet (the peak is a 13er). Definitely a white-knuckler for a somewhat acrophobic flat lander. Still, you have to go where the pictures are:

I survived the round trip and left the park at a somewhat more comfortable 5300'. The Utah line and Mountain Time is just ahead; the sign on UT-21 says "next services 75 miles." The purple flowers along the roadside are the only color as not even sagebrush is present to add some green. I climb into and drop down from Halfway Summit (6253') to a valley with a large white playa. The next summit, unnamed, (6460') leads to a valley with one green (irrigated) area.

Another unnamed summit (6460') shows signs of an old railroad road bed; a sign says there were silver mines in the area. I can see mines as I enter the ensuing valley; I also see clouds building to the east. The valley holds a town, Milford, a little oasis. Rodeo rough stock fans may recognize it as the home of

the multi-champion Wright family. The valley appears to grow enough grain to have its own elevator & RR spur.

A short hop over some low hills takes me to Minersville. I stop at a gas station/c-store for a comfort break 5 hours after leaving Ely. I'm now on UT-130 heading southward. The road passes through another unnamed summit (6570'), then continues on relatively flat ground. I find the Parowan Gap road.

Gap Road continues to Parowan, passing Little Salt Lake (yes, it's a playa, too). A couple of big rain drops hit my windshield. I pick up I-15 and its traffic to Cedar City and my HIE at 2:30 local, just ahead of a nice thunderstorm. This place hasn't just grown since last visited in 2012, it's exploded. Supper at a Golden Corral, possibly my first since Sedalia's one closed.

For the day: 250.7 miles, for the trip 3237.8

Tomorrow: Torrey & Capitol Reef via Cedar Breaks National Monument.

Day R-5, Friday, July 18, 2025 - Cedar City to Torrey

What a day! Left a bit later than usual because the visitor center at Cedar Breaks National Monument doesn't open until 0900. UT-14 immediately enters a very scenic canyon, so I stopped multiple times to take pictures. At Red Hollow Trailhead I watched the movement of the sun change the color of the rock from bright pink to dull red.

I'm entering the Dixie National Forest and stop now and then to take pictures when the light is right.

Cedar Breaks is like Bryce, only higher (at 10,500') and with much less traffic. Plenty of hoodoos, perhaps a bit less colorful since Bryce's display a slightly lower geological layer. Lots and lots of pictures!

I left at about 1000, heading down to lower altitudes. Imagine my surprise finding a lava flow next to the road, when all else has been sedimentary. Panguitch Lake is a busy man-made one on the Sevier River. Panguitch itself has wide streets, lots of motels, and a wide valley with plenty of irrigated fields. The river has a kind of milky surface, thanks to overnight rains.

I pass a tourism attraction – Butch Cassidy's boyhood home, an outlaw who achieved immortality thanks to a movie with big-name stars, Circleville has some architecturally interesting houses. Kingston Canyon has some weird rock formations and no place to pull over for pictures. A bit farther along, I see 4 parallel contrails – a perfect clef, just needs some clouds for notes.

I have lunch in Koosharem, cross Wayne Summit (8400'), a finally drop down into the Fremont River valley, home of several towns and Capitol Reef National Park. I explore a bit and take lots more pictures.

Did you know that Capitol Reef has a Chimney Rock? This is #2 of 3 Chimney Rocks I will have seen before the end of the trip (as I explained to an Aussie tourist I met there).

And Capitol Reef also has some petroglyphs – of course I took pictures:

Finally got to the motel in Torrey (elev 7000') at 1600 and started to recover from a strenuous day at altitude.

For the day: 199.8 miles, for the trip 3437.6

Tomorrow: more exploration of Capitol Reef area, a scenic drive to Natural Bridges, and RON at Blanding.

Day R-6, Saturday, July 19, 2025 - Torrey to Blanding

I'm on the road at 0637 local, heading east on UT-24, through Capitol Reef NP and out the other side. I pass a real, live skunk by the roadside near the petroglyph pull-out – good thing took I visited them yesterday. Took a few pictures going through, to show.

20 miles in, I turn south on Notom Road, down the east side of the fold. After about 20 miles of pavement, the road turns to packed dirt, still passable but at a lower speed. I did take a few pictures to document the landscape. After 30 miles, I say “enough” and return to the main highway. I finally get to Hanksville at 0915 and have breakfast. The music in the cafe was appropriate – classic Hank Williams songs. I top off the tank and grab a soda at a C-store built into a rock.

UT-95 runs through a lot of desert. To the right, I see the same sandstone layers I've been seeing for two days, but these are topped by the outer flows of a large volcanic mountain. I stop at a recreation spot and take a picture.

More canyons, all leading down toward the Colorado River. The Hite overlook shows upper reaches of Lake Powell; the remains of the mining town of Hite are not visible.

UT-95 takes me to the east side of the Colorado and back up to higher ground. The cap rock in this area is lighter colored and the canyon/slick rock is white; the middle is a thick dark red layer. One point of interest is this formation known as Jacob's Chair.

I go through a pass (7110'). a bit after noon, I enter Natural Bridges National Monument, last visited in 2009. A short chat with the rangers there, and its off to the scenic loop. I'll take pictures of the two bridges I can see without extensive walking.

The surrounding land is part of the Bear's Ears National Monument, named for this formation.

I get to Blanding about 2:30 and tour the Edge of the Cedars State Park. Its museum has an art gallery lots of pottery from the area and everything is well-interpreted. It has the partially excavated ruins of a “Chaco outlier” great house, with a kiva one can visit. I pass.

I find my non-chain motel, topped off the tank, and had supper.

For the day: 243.2 miles, for the trip 3680.9

Day R-7, Sunday, July 20, 2025 - Blanding to Cortez

Today will be hot, and I have some hiking on the schedule, so I leave Blanding at 0635 local. 14 miles on a good road, followed by 30 miles on variable, but paved, roads, takes me to Hovenweep National Monument. I arrive at 0735 and commence my hike on a nice, paved trail; this is followed by up-and-down over slickrock. Hovenweep features a concentrated group of ruins along the upper reached of a small canyon.

I leave after 2 hours, split between hiking and recuperating. The road to Aneth is good. It's also high – I can see Ship Rock in the distance. The shot-up roadside signs on the Rez show that sign-shooting folks out here don't mess with mere shotguns. As I approach Aneth I see that more families in this area still have hogans. Some hogans have windows and even a little cupola with skylights as well as the traditional chimney. I guess Changing Woman would approve, as long as the door opens to sunrise.

I see a couple of small groups of possibly-wild horses, each with a dominant stallion, his posture leaving no doubt who is in charge. NM-262 becomes CO-41 at the state line. I turn onto US-160 for a visit to the Four Corners Monument. This is a Navajo Tribal Park - \$8 per person entry fee, please. The marker itself is flanked on each state's side by vendor booths, presumably staffed by people from that state. People line up to have their pictures taken straddling the marker. Yes, it's a tourist trap, and I heartily approve of the Dine' peoples' entrepreneurship, bringing money to a rather desolate area.

US-160/491 heads toward Cortez, but I take a side road to collect a little known National Monument, Yucca House. There is little choice in parking; the boardwalk leading to the site is entered from a farmer's driveway. His sprinklers are going providing a cool shower to those who don't navigate the boardwalk quickly enough.

I eschew US-160/491 and use County Road 21 to reach the edge of Cortez. Like so many other towns in the area, it has exploded in tourism-related businesses. I'm way too early to attempt to check in, so I take a side trip to Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. Alas! The museum is closed today, but I had a nice chat with a couple staffing an information kiosk – the lady hailed originally from Springfield (MO).

Back in Cortez, I'm able to check into my HIE about 1330. A superb pollo verde at Margarita's and I'm finishing up well before 1700.

For the day: 164.8 miles, for the trip 3845.8.

Tomorrow: La Junta via Chimney Rock Nat'l Monument and Wolf Creek Pass.

Day R-8, Monday, July 21, 2025 - Cortez to La Junta

Another early morning departure. The HIE hotel breakfast wasn't supposed to start until 0630, so I had planned to grab something at the classic '50s style Denny's diner next door. When I started to haul my last load to the car, people were already eating – I think a special exception for a "Hot Shot" fire team -

so I grabbed something expecting to have a real breakfast in Durango. I rolled at 0614 under light showers.

The sun was rising on the other side of the next mountain, casting an unusual glow on the clouds and mist. Traffic wouldn't allow a set shot; this one through the windshield doesn't do it justice.

The first pass of the day, a long one, wasn't too bad leading to Durango. Durango traffic is very urban - it's all built up with fancy by-passes which limits my likelihood of finding a cafe.

I find the right exit to continue on US-160 and head for Chimney Rock National Monument. That takes me through more of the San Juan Mountains; there's even a wildlife overpass!. The time is 0819; the monument gates don't open until 0900. I take some pictures and press on, starving.

I finally find an easily accessible cafe in Pagosa Springs. It even has grits on the menu. I ordered eggs over easy & grits – big mistake.

Now for the adventure: Wolf Creek Pass! There's even a country song about it. I stop at a couple of pull-outs to take these shots, one of a mountain across the way and one down the valley.

There was plenty of construction along the highway, so it was both hands on the wheel all the way through. I couldn't even stop to take a picture of the Continental Divide sign at 10,865 feet. I've been over 10,000' twice already, at Lassen and Great Basin, but this pass tops each of those.

The long ride down to the San Luis Valley follows the West Fork of the Rio Grande. I look for my only real taste of real green chile sauce in Alamosa. My two favorite restaurants there are closed on Monday, but a lady at the tourism office in an old depot sent me to Nino's Del Sol – a fine choice.

As I leave the valley, I see the dunes of Great Sand Dunes National Park in the distance. Then it's time for my last pass of the trip. La Veta Pass (9413') goes through the Sangre de Cristo Range, home of many 14ers (including nearby Sierra Blanca at 14,345).

At Walsenburg, I leave US-160 and pick up CO-10 for 72 miles of nothing – just a few ranches in this high plains area. It has real grass (and a few cacti). I get to La Junta and my HIE at 1452, download the few photos I took, and call it a day.

For the day: 342.1 miles, for the trip 4187.9

Tomorrow: McPherson, KS, route TBD (too many options)

Day R-9, Tuesday, July 22, 2025 - La Junta to McPherson

I love it when the motel opens the breakfast doors at 0600. I was already loaded, so a quick couple of items and on the road at 0614 local. US-50 starts as a 4-lane highway parallel to the Arkansas River and the BNSF (& Amtrak) tracks. The highway narrows to 2 lanes, but the speed limit remains at 65 except when passing through towns like Las Animas (elev 3900') on the Santa Fe Trail.

I have a small problem: my cruise control suddenly stops working, and here I am in a nice, flat river valley, perfect for that function. Fortunately, I know that the forward radar in this Toyota is housed behind the logo in front. I pull over at Lamar and cleaned off the built-up bugs; when I start up again, it works!

I deviate from my planned route by turning north on a paved county road through a heavily agricultural area with little traffic, transitioning into the “Buffalo Plains.” I have seen many silo trees in my travels, but this road provides something new – a silo car!

I come out on CO-96 at the ghost town of Chivington. That’s where you turn off to the site of the Sand Creek massacre that Col. Chivington engineered. The site is now under the NPS; I was tempted to drive to it so I could take a picture of the infamous Trump-directed sign and ask how he’d interpret the site. I remembered the vicious biting flies, immune to 40% DEET, encountered on a previous visit, so move on.

Sheridan Lake (elev 4072’) is the highest I’ll be for at least the rest of this year. The eponymous lake is little more than another playa.

Crossing into Kansas, I’m now on K-97. I pass a small town with a big elevator every few miles – the railroad tracks here are shiny. The road is newly paved, as well. Oops, it’s time for nice, long wait; I’ve reached the paving in progress section. It seems to me that the existing pavement they’re replacing is better than that on many Missouri roads.

I cross White Woman Creek of ghostly legend and reenter Central Time. Leoti claims to be the Barn Quilt Capital of Kansas; I see no barns. Rush County has more than its share of scenic abandoned farm houses, with no place to stop for a picture.

As I approach Great Bend, I see my second truck accident of the day. The first one cut a corner leaving a dirt road and had deposited a crop sprayer rig in the ditch. This one hit the turn into a side road a tad too fast and jack-knifed across the side road.

The Ellinwood-McPherson area is oil country. I see a couple of new refineries, new pipelines all over the place. They have a first class museum, lots of space, art, etc. Oil money sure makes a difference! I’m check into my HIE and plan to crash early – 18 days on the road!

For the day: 254.1 miles, for the trip 4542.1

Tomorrow: 240 miles and home!

Day R-10, Wednesday, July 23, 2025 - McPherson to Warrensburg

LAST DAY! My HIE breakfast was ready early, so I ate my cinnamon roll and turkey sausage before rolling at 0604, CDT. I saw sunrise from US-56, then switched to one of my favorite short cuts, K-150, at a roundabout. This takes me into the Flint Hills and into Chase County. I read a lot about the area in William Least Heat-Moon’s book, “Prairie Earth.”

I’m now on good old US-50. The area is green as green can be, with plenty to eat for the cattle shipped up from Texas for backgrounding before their trip to the feed yard for finishing. There’s even a bit of mist rising from some of the puddles – I guess you can say this area has received copious amounts of rain – with more to come if the forecasts are correct.

At Emporia, I pick up I-35 north to Ottawa. K-68 takes me to my first and only break of the day at Louisburg. The Missouri line is only about 10 miles east, so it’s roads oft-traveled home and to work. I finish the laundry and the books, pay the card bills, and collapse. Mowing the grass nourished by at least 3.75” of rain and plenty of sunshine will wait its turn.

For the day: 235.3 miles, for the trip 4777.4
Soon to come: Trip wrap up.

The Wrap-Up

This was a long, strenuous and tiring trip, with a lot of ups and downs. It required frequent altitude adjustments. I've been canyonized and vulcanized and over passed, even when Parked. I'm glad I made it!

That's 19 days, 4,777.4 miles across 8 states west of Missouri. I visited 16 national parks, monuments, and historic sites (10 new-to-me), plus several state parks or historic sites (and one Navajo park). It cost about \$3,000, with lodging being the most expensive, at about \$80 per night for the 15 nights in motels. Cat boarding was next, \$19/night/per cat over 22 nights. Meals/snacks and gas were virtually equal – the hybrid RAV-4 saved me at least 10 miles per gallon vs my previous Forester. A couple of entry fees not covered by my NPS senior pass (\$10 in 2006) and some T-shirt souvenirs made up the rest.

I think the high points was meeting a bunch of my Truman relatives. My great-grandfather, W.L. Truman, never returned to Missouri after his Confederate service; he settled in Louisiana. His brother Joseph, too young to fight, went to Oregon with his sister and her husband after the war. They returned to Missouri; he stayed in Oregon where he married a lumber baron's daughter. I'd corresponded with one of Joseph's descendants, off and on, since 2011, and finally got to meet her, her 2 sisters, and 2 other cousins. I have some work to do on some letters I photoed!

Now for some ratings and analysis:

- Best roads: Kansas.
- Loneliest road: close between US-50 across Nevada and UT-21 (but K-4 across Kansas last year might beat them both). There were some pretty lonely ones in Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, and Oregon, as well.
- Best independent motel: Hilltopper in Hill City, KS. Two of the other 3 were good, as well.
- Best chain motel: All the Holiday Inn properties were good; most were able to honor my request for a first floor room. A special shout-out to the HIE in La Junta, CO – I've stayed there 5 times since 2002; it was a bit tired in 2019, but is completely updated now.
- Best food: I was quite restricted in my choices since I am likely allergic to red meat (Alpha Gal syndrome from a lone star tick). Tequila in Cortez and Nino's del Sol in Alamosa were the best – they were also closest to New Mexico – coincidence?

Now for the boring statistics:

- Miles driven, by state: Kansas – 814. Oregon – 689. Utah – 657. Colorado – 541. Wyoming 531. Nevada – 442. Idaho – 392. California – 314. Nebraska – 279. Missouri – 130. New Mexico – 2.
- Miles of 'virgin' roads driven (roads I'd never previously driven): 2298.
- Highest altitude: Wolf Creek Pass, 10,856'. Runners up: Lassen Volcanic and Great Basin, each over 10,500'. HM to Togwatee Pass, 9544' and La Veta Pass, 9413' – the dozens of 5,000' to 8,000' passes don't even get a mention – and most passes require driving up and/or down a canyon
- Volcanic features encountered: Craters of the Moon, Newberry Volcanic, Lassen Volcanic. John Day Fossil Beds, Great Basin, the whole skyline west of US-97, among others.

Future trip plans: A visit to Louisiana next year for my 65th year HS reunion, and maybe one last visit to the U.P.