

**September 4,2023: The poison rises from the goonads to the throat and seeps down to various muscles.**

Reportedly, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer's last words were: "Custer's luck! The biggest Indian Village on the Continent! Hurrah Boys! Let's get these last few reds then head on back to camp. Hurrah!" It seems to me that, at best, those words, if accurate, were Custer's penultimate words. I have to think his last words were something along the lines of "We are so fu\*ked."

Here's the deal about the Battle of the Little Bighorn: On June 25, 1876, Custer and his entire command of 242 members of the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were killed by a superior combined force of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Indians near the Little Bighorn River in what is now Southeast Montana. That's it. We will never know the true story beyond what I just wrote.

Over 8,000 books have been written about the Battle of the Little Bighorn. It is the most written about battle in U.S. history (Gettysburg is the runner-up in case you were wondering). There are books written by historians, books written by other soldiers, books written by scholars, books written by Indians who were there, and on and on ad infinitum. It is my opinion that most, if not all of these books, advance some particular agenda of their respective authors – apologist, critical, heroic, mythologizing, self-aggrandizing, self-exonerating, vengeful, obsequiousness, etc. You name it, there's a point of view to fit your particular bias. Why?

Custer is one of the big American myths. It's said that America loves a winner but, it seems to me we're more fascinated with losers and work very hard to elevate those losers to heroic stature so we can feel better about ourselves. In my opinion, that largely explains the cult of Trump. If Custer really lost, then America isn't invincible, and we can't live with that as a national psychology.

That said, I found myself fighting back tears today because the whole fiasco was just such a waste. And a fiasco it was. But I also found myself having a little more empathy for Custer than I used to have.

Being as objective as I can, here is what I think happened in simplest terms:

The Plains Indian Wars had a threefold purpose: 1. To protect miners looking for gold in the Black Hills because America was in the middle of a financial panic and we needed gold to shore up the economy; 2. To protect railroad workers who were building spurs off of the continental railroad to entice settlers to the territories of Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas until there was sufficient population in each to petition for statehood; and 3. To either kill off the native peoples or pacify them by putting them on reservations in order to make room for settlement in those territories. In order to achieve this, the Army sent three columns out west. Custer was the cavalry commander attached to General Terry's column, based in the east at Ft. Abraham Lincoln in Bismarck. General Gibbon was in the West, and General Crook was in the South, based at Ft. Fetterman in Wyoming. A couple of weeks before the Custer debacle, Crook fought a battle at the Powder River, thirty miles southwest of the Little Bighorn. The Indians dispersed after that battle and Crook wanted to find them, so he wired Terry to send out his column from Bismarck to help.

Custer had thirty Apsaalooke Scouts with him. The word “Apsaalooke” means “children of the bird with the large beak” and are known to us as the Crow. The Little Bighorn is on Crow land, ceded to them by the second Treaty of Ft. Laramie in 1868. The Crow scouts reconnoitered to the valley of the Little Bighorn and saw a village of tipis stretching a mile and half along its banks. The estimate is that the village contained 7,000 souls – 2,000 of which, as it turned out, were warriors. The Crow were pissed because their enemy, the Sioux, were on their land, and they duly reported same to Custer.

Custer marched his men 15 straight hours and arrived in the vicinity at 3 a.m. Fearing that the Indians would disperse once they knew the Army was there, and based on the scouting reports from the Crow, he employed the same military tactics that had worked for him in the Civil War – he split his force, with orders to Major Reno to attack the village from one end, while he took his group to attack the other end. At this point, you military folks will say that a cardinal rule is never to split your force. However, it almost worked for Lee at Gettysburg, and it had worked for Custer in the past, both at Yellow Tavern during the Civil War, and, more importantly, at the Washita River in 1868 as I will explain below.

Conventional wisdom and prior experience said that if a bunch of Indians see the Army show up, they won’t fight. That’s because eight years earlier at the Washita River in what is now present-day Oklahoma, Custer attacked a Cheyenne village from both ends, slaughtered a bunch of women, children, and elders, and decimated the morale of the few braves who were there. What he didn’t know at the Little Bighorn was that there were 2,000 warriors present, and ready for a fight. In addition, his Civil War success was based on conventional tactics being employed by opposing conventional armies. Not so on the Plains, which was a guerilla war fought on the guerilla’s home turf. Gee. What war does that remind you of?

So far, so good. Then things got weird. Reno was trying to get information from one of his scouts when the scout was shot in the head and his brains were spattered all over Reno (echoes of George Washington in the French-Indian War). Reno was understandably upset and reportedly began issuing contradictory orders - mount, dismount, retreat, advance. Stuff like that. Whatever the truth is, Reno’s bunch got pinned down by the Indians and couldn’t move for two days.

Reno has taken a bum rap in history. The majority of the historical literature excoriates Reno for not coming to Custer’s aid, but the fact is that Reno was five miles away over rugged terrain and he would have had to fight his way through Crazy Horse’s group who had flanked Custer. There was no way Reno could have gotten to Custer in time to save him as Custer’s little party only lasted as long “as it takes for a hungry man to wolf down his meal” – about 20 minutes.

In the meantime, Custer headed for the village, saw that there was a shitload of Indians, and tried to retreat up a hill. One group of Indians chased him up the hill, killing his troops as they went. On his left flank, Crazy Horse’s group was attacking across the ridge line that separated Custer from Reno, and from behind, Indians were crouched in the “greasy grass” (the name by which the native peoples call the battle) and were attacking Custer’s group from behind. At that point, Custer reportedly gave the order for his men to kill their horses and use them as breastworks.

When the boss says destroy your only means of escape, you know you ain't escaping. It didn't last very long.

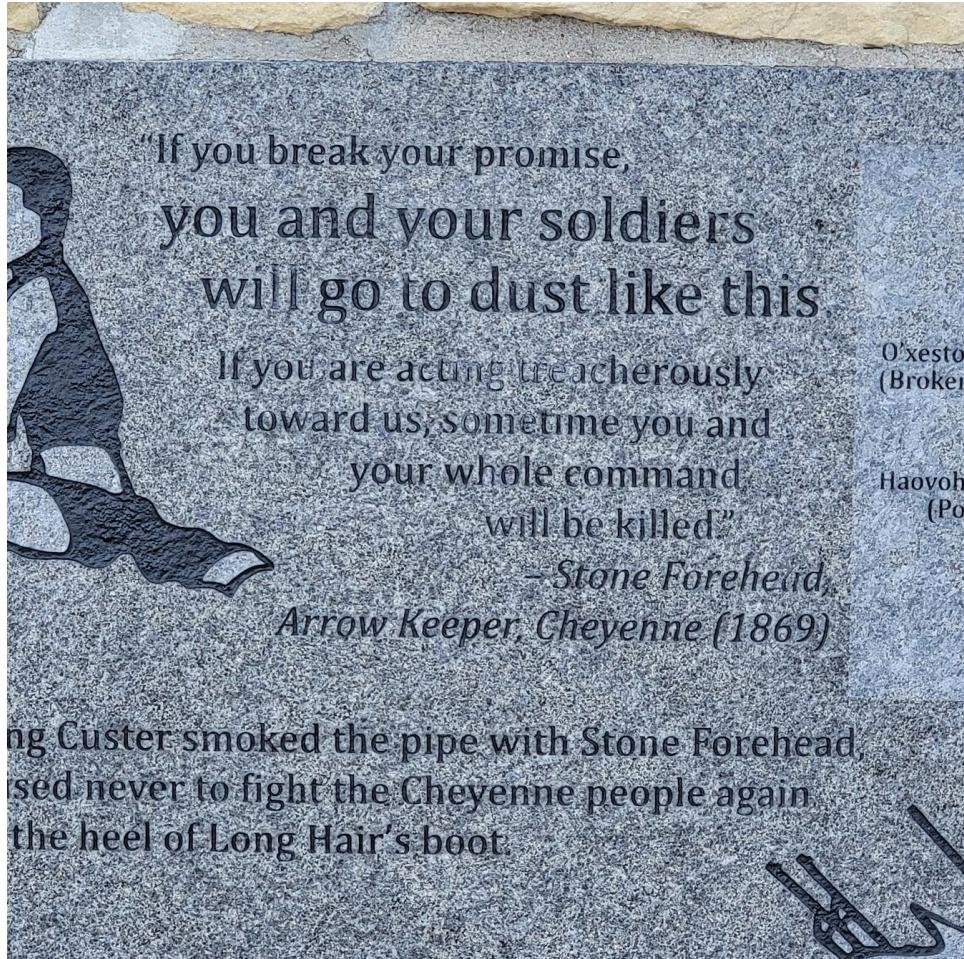
Here's where the last of them fell, sort of:





The tree line that is visible in the first picture is at the bank of the Little Bighorn River. The village was located there.

The soldiers' bodies were mutilated by the victors. Their inner thighs were sliced open so they wouldn't be able to ride a horse in the next life. They were emasculated. The soles of their feet were mutilated so they wouldn't be able to walk in the next world. The women smashed the heads in with rocks. The Cheyenne women stuck beading needles in Custer's ears so he would hear better in the next life. Why? Because after the Washita River, Custer told the Cheyenne Chief that he would never raise his gun at a Cheyenne again. Most likely because he had a Cheyenne woman as his other wife, and with whom he had a son. Here is the Chief's reply to Custer's promise:



ng Custer smoked the pipe with Stone Forehead, he had promised never to fight the Cheyenne people again. He stepped over the heel of Long Hair's boot.

No one from the army made it to the site for three days. By that time, the critters had done their thing, so I would think it would be very hard to tell whose body was whose (although they were able to identify Tom Custer's body because of his tattoo). Nonetheless, the burial party marked them in the spots where they fell. That's why you see white markers all over the battlefield. Red markers show where Indians fell, but there aren't very many as their relatives removed their bodies for ceremonial burial shortly after the battle ended. The Little Bighorn was the first battlefield in the world that made a concerted effort to mark the sites where the combatants fell. They also buried the cavalry horses in a common grave near the site of the Last Stand.



I'm glad they did that.

Since the markers were placed, many of the relatives of the fallen have had their bones disinterred and re-buried elsewhere. For example, Custer's white wife, Libbie, had his bones disinterred and re-buried at West Point – assuming they were his bones, which I doubt. I have no idea why, since Custer graduated at the rock bottom of his class (failing his final examination in cavalry tactics by the by), but Libbie was a nut job in the mold of Kathleen Scott, who was determined to be the widow of a hero and, by god, nothing was going to stop her. She lived as the Great One's widow until 1933 and tirelessly worked to promote his legend as a hero for the remainder of her days until she was buried next to what she thought was Boy George at West Point.

Our Ranger's presentation about the battle was excellent. He was the best National Park Ranger I've been around in a long time, so thank you Michael Hasch.



As he was finishing up, the storm blew in and the rain started as if on cue.

We finished the day by going to the Custer County Museum, where this ancient artifact is on display:



While I was at the museum, I was thinking about crazy Libbie Custer and Kathleen Scott (who I talk about in my Antarctica blog. Remember when I told you in my Antarctica blog that I'd talk about Libbie Custer in a few months?). That made me think of Robert Falcon Scott who, like Custer, was a victim of his era and collateral damage of the job of empire building, and who, depending on your point of view, was either fortunate enough or cursed to have a wife who wanted a myth and not a husband. It gets Antarctica cold and Antarctica windy on the Great Plains. If the U.S. Army (originator of the oxymoron "Military Intelligence") was smart enough to figure out that using bison fur and hides was good for keeping warm in the excruciatingly cold and severe winters, wouldn't you think Scott might have explored that option when he was outfitting his little stroll to the South Pole instead of freezing to death in canvas clothing? I asked Cockeyed Caravan Member Peter "Laurie" Zivanovich why this was. His reply was "because we're British and we know better."

So, there it is. Better writers than me can undoubtedly explain the Battle of the Little Bighorn better than I can but my big takeaway today was that Custer wasn't as much of an idiot as I once supposed him to be. He just didn't have enough information and felt compelled to attack before getting the information he needed to make a better informed decision. Ain't that always the way? We 'Muricans think we can do anything, no matter the odds. Sometimes, it works. On June 25, 1876, it didn't.



### September 5, 2023: Sioux Me, Sioux Me, Shoot Bullets Through Me

We awoke to the Smoke of a Distant Fire this morning. Unfortunately, it wasn't the Sanford and Townsend song of that name, but the smoky haze cast by the Canadian wildfires, less than 300 miles to our north.

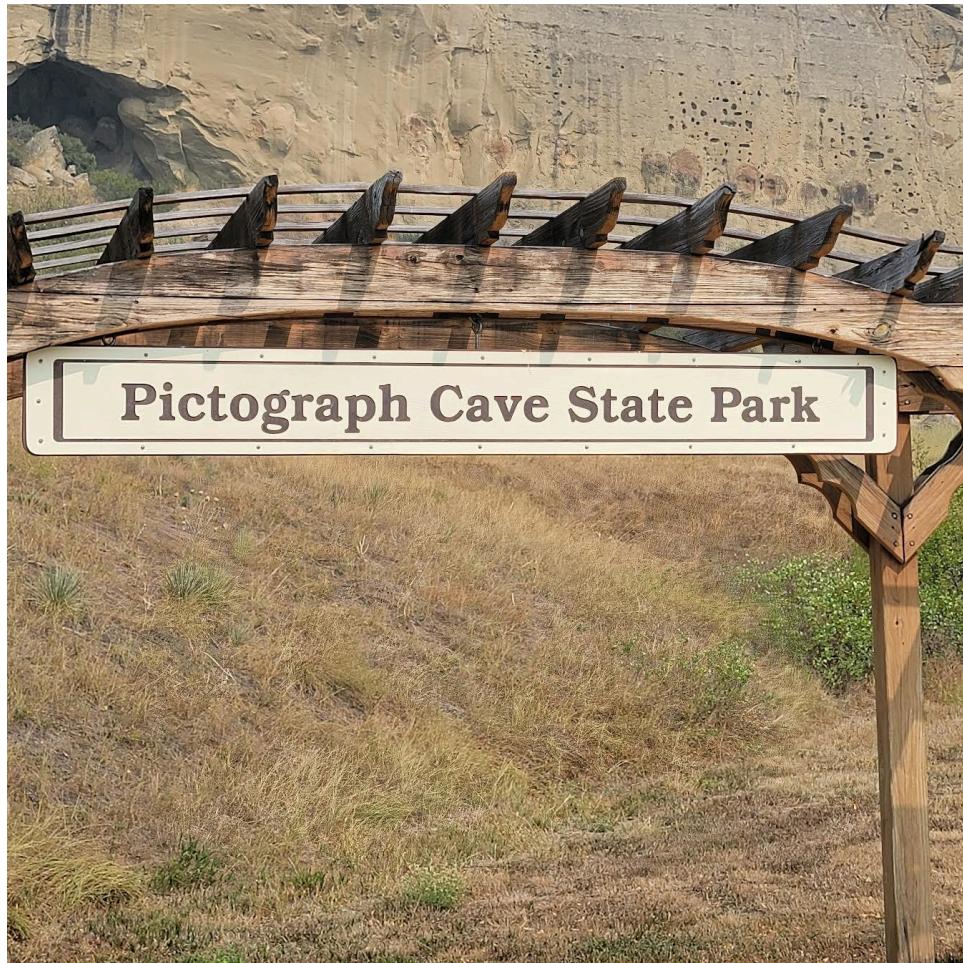




Mmmm. Mmmm. Char-broiled Big Sky. Yum.

The plan was to go back to the Little Bighorn Battlefield this morning, but my sister, brother-in-law, and I decided to wait a bit and see if the sky cleared up. It didn't.

My sister loves archaeology, so we went to Pictograph Cave State Park, outside of Billings.



The surrounding area was beautiful.



The caves containing the pictographs were..... how shall I say.....

Lame.

Here is the one pictograph that is still visible enough to make out what it is, I guess:



Rifles, maybe? If so, they're not that old. Beats me.

Here's the only other visible pictograph, but I'm deuced if I can tell what it is.



So, that's the pictograph cave. Fifty miles through the smoky haze for the above. It would have been nice if we had been told beforehand.

To be sure, there's pictures of pictographs that used to be visible. In fact, there are lots of artifacts that have been carbon dated to 9,000 B.P. (Apparently, B.P. is an archaeological dating term that uses 1950 as the baseline. Hence, 9,000 B.P. is 7050 B.C.). But those pictures were taken in 1937. Various geological and man-made forces have rendered what used to be visible invisible – erosion, water runoff, Billings industrial pollution, human touching, etc. Frankly, I would have settled for a little midnight ranger paint touch ups at the Pictograph Cave. I mean, who's really going to know?

I have to say I've felt swizzed at most of the Montana state parks. I don't mind paying a little something to support the counties' museum works, but I do think they should be up front about what one is paying to see. I'm talking to you, Anita!

All I can say is thank God for the Flintstones. At least I can see what's in their caves.



And speaking of caves, if any alert reader can tell me what these are, I'll give them a memento of my choosing from my travels:



Deborah Steed, I'm counting on you.

That's enough about the cave of the faded pictograph thingies. On the way back to the site of the Battle of the Greasy Grass, we stopped for lunch. I had a Buffalo Burger. It was tasty good. Apparently, we also saw the Merry Pranksters.



I was glad to go back to the Little Bighorn. I didn't feel like I had enough time there yesterday and I wanted to escape the wah wah and just wander. It was fairly deserted today. And peaceful. While it was easy to imagine the battle yesterday, which was clear and hot, like it was on that long ago June 25<sup>th</sup>, today was a good day to listen to spirits in the wind.



Today, I paid more attention to the monuments. Almost all of them look like this:



Remember how I told you yesterday about the mutilations of the bodies? That's why most of the markers look like that.

While I was walking, these guys just appeared out of nowhere near Deep Coulee – the last ridge before the hill on which the Last Stand took place. I know what I think about that. What do you think?



I spent a lot of time today thinking about Major Reno. This picture shows the Little Bighorn River from Reno's vantage point after his retreat from the aborted attack on the Indians' village.



Reno really got screwed. Apparently, the military needed to scapegoat someone for Custer's demise and Reno was elected. He was court martialed and, although acquitted of cowardice in the face of fire, he was dishonorably discharged from the Army he had served with distinction for many years (he was a brevet Brigadier General in the Civil War). His wife left him, his family shunned him, and he became an alcoholic. June 25-26, 1876 ruined his life.

When Major Reno died, his family wouldn't claim the remains, so he was buried in the Veterans cemetery at The Little Bighorn. Ironically, he is the only officer from the Battle who is actually buried there, and he is the highest ranking officer from any war who is buried in the cemetery. If I were he, I'm not sure I'd want to spend eternity in the worst place I ever went to, but I guess he really didn't have much say in the matter.



Let's all give a silent salute to Major Marcus Reno and thank him for his service. He had a bad couple of days at The Little Bighorn, but he didn't lose his entire command, which is more than can be said for Boy George.

### September 6, 2023: A River Runs Through It

Before we begin, we have a tie for the correct identification of the hive-like structures adhering to yesterday's Pictograph Cave. Huzzahs to my cousin Jennifer Clark and to the always alert Deborah Steed for correctly identifying them as swallow nests. Special gifts from the Cockeyed Caravan will be coming your way upon my return.

We said goodbye to Montana today and moved into Wyoming. After hitching our wagon at the KOA in Cody, we spent the afternoon at the Bighorn Canyon, where we saw.....

Bighorn sheep! Mere minutes after I read the placard about their recolonization and remarked how much I would love to see one.



They were almost gone from the Bighorn Canyon area 50 years ago. There were only twelve in 1975. But the National Park Service implemented a gradual recolonization program and today there are 160. Yay for the National Park Service. The National Park System really is America's best idea.

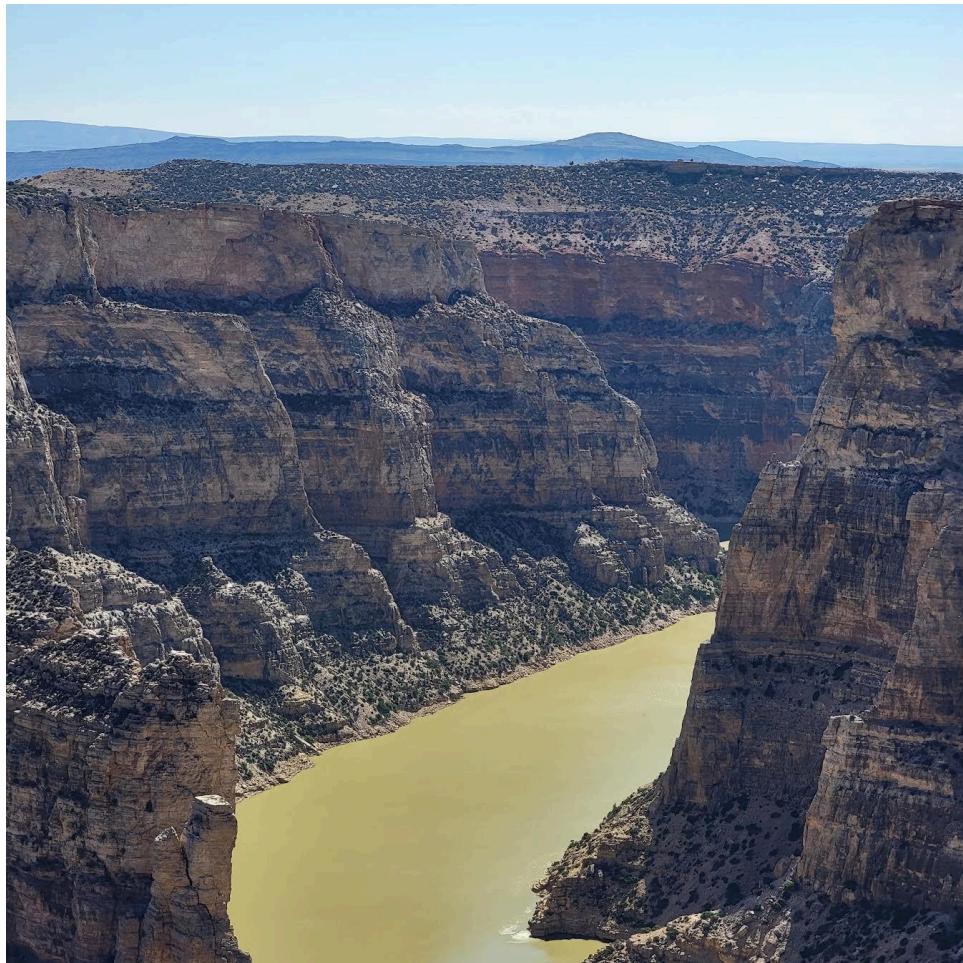
We didn't see any babies, but the bunch you see in the picture are young ones to be sure. When babies are born, their hooves are not hard. They are more like rubber, so they are able to bop around the rocks within three hours of being born.

The Bighorn Canyon is the first jaw dropper of what will be the next phase of the Cockeyed Caravan, when we are sure to see many more jaw dropping sights. Here are a few to whet your appetite.









The river in the pictures is the Bighorn River, into which the Little Bighorn flows.

Bighorn Canyon is about 40 million years behind the Grand Canyon, but by the time Keith Richards dies, it should look like the G.C. looks now.

Since we are in the land of Donald Trump – and boy hidey is this Trump Country to be sure – and since we are with Balazs, the Hungarian Bear Killer and European Champion Donald Trump impersonator, we felt we must hike. And hike we did, with the HBK leading the way.





## Sullivan's Knob Trail

**Difficulty: Moderate**

**Distance: 1 mile**

*Enjoy this trail and leave no trace.*



Pets Must Be  
On A Leash      Wildlife  
Viewing      Beware of  
Rattlesnakes



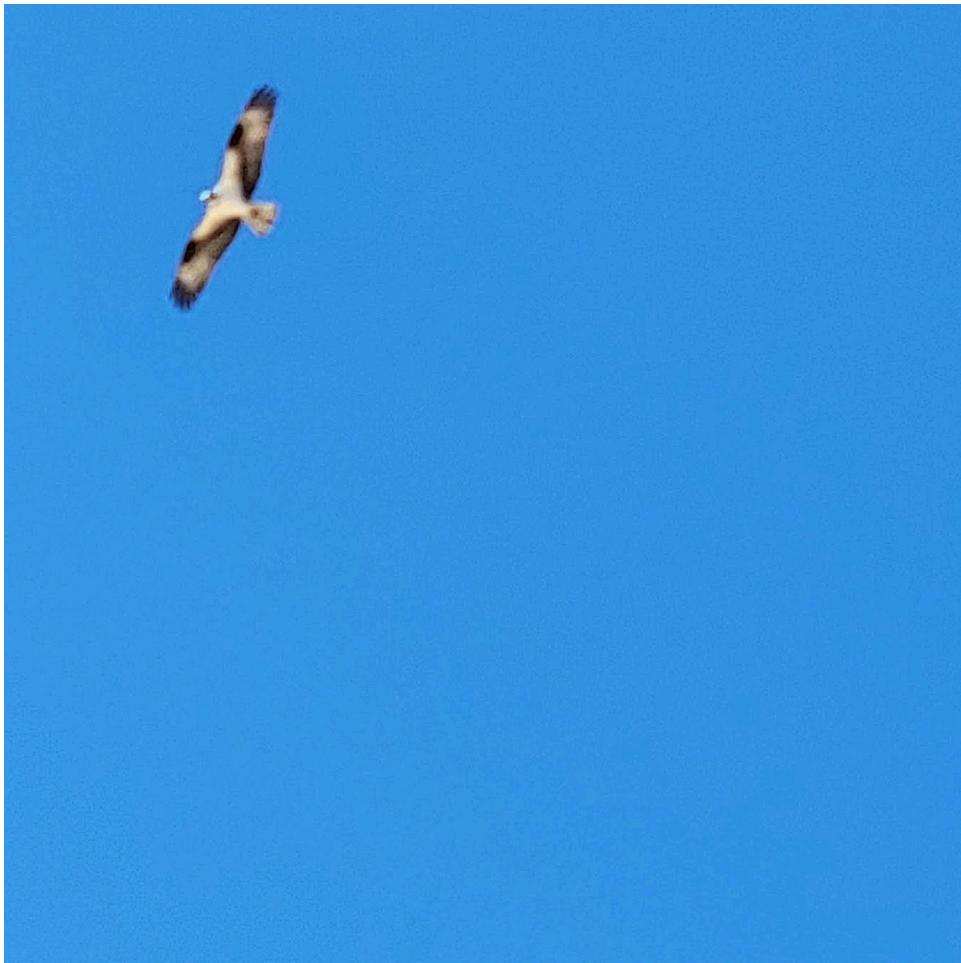
No Bikes



After a moderate amount of trudging, we got to the end of the trail.



All of a sudden, the White Bird appeared out of the blue.



White Bird. It's a Beautiful Day (see what I did there?).

After re-provisioning at the Wally World Trading Post, we had a lovely dinner prepared by the U.K. Champion Grillmeister, Peter Z. Early snoozing tonight, I think, as tomorrow bodes busy for all of us as we split into small bands to explore just what the heck this high country is all about. See you in the a.m. podners.

**September 7, 2023: “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.”**

The day started off well, with this little guy saying hello as we entered Old Trail Town.



## Old Trail Town

On this site in 1895, Western scout and showman William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody laid out the original townsite of Cody, Wyoming, which was named in his honor. Today Old Trail Town preserves the lifestyle and history of the Frontier West through a rare collection of authentic structures and furnishings. From remote locations in Wyoming and Montana these historic buildings were carefully disassembled, moved and reassembled here at Old Trail Town by Western historian Bob Edgar and friends.

Located here also are thousands of historic artifacts from the Old West and gravesites of several notable Western figures. Among them is the grave of mountain man John Johnson, who was portrayed by the actor Robert Redford in the 1972 motion picture "Jeremiah Johnson".

Here too are original cabins used by Old West outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and a Wyoming saloon frequented by Cassidy's "Hole-in-the-Wall Gang". Also on this site is the log cabin home of "Curley"-a Crow Indian army scout who helped guide Lt Col. George A. Custer and the U.S. 7th Cavalry to the battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. Old Trail Town exists today as a memorial to the uniquely American experience known throughout the world as "the Old West".



Bob Edgar was the mastermind behind Old Trail Town. An archaeologist by training and an artist by temperament, Mr. Bob spent his entire life tracking down the buildings, artifacts, and arcana that is Old Trail Town - right here, smack dab in the middle of Cody, Wyoming, just a mile down the road from Walmart. While Mr. Bob is gone now, the docent at the site told us a fascinating story about him and how he would just hang out, talking to whoever happened to mosey by. It took him many, many years to track down everything and move it to the site, but it was clearly a labor of love.



Among the highlights were:

The reinterment of the bones of Jim “Liver-Eating” Johnston, the real-life model for Robert Redford’s Jeremiah Johnson, all 6’5” and 250 lbs, of him. Robert Redford was a pall bearer at the re-interment.



Johnston pallbearers

Mountain men and Buffalo skin on June 8 at Old Trail down the boardwalk on way Sagebrush and Buffalo

Spoiler alert: If you know the movie, you know Jeremiah's wife and son were killed and Jeremiah spends the rest of the movie as an avenging angel. That part actually happened and, apparently, Jim would eat the liver of his vanquished foes, which just goes to show you that it's best if you don't fu\*k with a mountain man. Although, mountain men didn't seem to ply that trade for very long. Most of them were only mountain men for a year or two. Old liver eater became a Union Scout in the Civil War, got remarried, and died at the old soldiers' home in Santa Monica in 1900 at the age of 76, which was pretty good for a guy who lived that kind of life.

Then there was Curley's cabin.



No, not that Curley.

Curley was a Crow scout for Custer and actually witnessed the Battle of the Greasy Grass. Being a member of the “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” club, Curley became Chief of the Crows until he died in 1913.



There was also a cabin that was occupied by Butch, Sundance, and the Hole in the Wall Gang, a saloon that the Gang frequented, and a cabin occupied by Sundance and Kid Curry. I didn't post

the pictures because I no longer think it's a good idea to romanticize outlaws. They killed people and they stole people's money. No need for me to further mythologize them. Besides, they only ended up where we all end up.



Winters are really cold in Cody. Like 26 below cold. Most of the town closes up and goes south. In fact, most everything around here will be closed by the end of September. Our docent goes to Arizona each winter. But for those who stay:



Hello! Robert Falcon Scott!

And for those old timers who stayed in the winter, here's how they could go over the river and through the woods:



When I was very little, I sometimes went to my great aunt and great uncle's "farm" in Crosby, Texas. They had rabbits, a few nice dogs, a broken-down old horse, and some chickens. I learned to love animals there. I suspect the rabbits were not actually pets, but they had the good sense not to tell 4 year me that because they knew how much I loved them.

They also had a blockhouse "museum" on their property – under the billboard they rented out to Stuckey's. The museum contained curiosities – some fire coral, glow in the dark rocks, that sort of thing. It also had a two-headed snake. The image of that snake has always stuck with me. Well sir, today I saw a two-headed calf at Old Trail Town.



I may never be the same.

After a lunch served by a surly waitress who has clearly had enough of tourists for one season, we went to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.





The Center is actually a five-museum complex – one solely devoted to Buffalo Bill (for whom Cody, WY is named), a history of firearms museum, a Plains Indians museum, a Natural History Museum, and a Western Art Museum. The complex is first rate, and I cannot urge you strongly enough to visit it if you're ever in the area. In fact, it's really a two-day visit to do it justice. They know that and your ticket will let you in on two consecutive days for one admission fee.

I did four out of the five. After seeing a bunch of people walking around with guns on their hips (one guy was in our lunch place with a .45 strapped to his thigh and 2 extra clips. What is he so scared of? It's unlikely the Taliban is going to invade a diner in Cody, Wyoming), I gave the firearms museum a pass. I didn't get enough time in the Plains Indians Museum or the Western Art museum, but I heartily recommend the Remington exhibit in the latter. Isn't it funny how so many mythologizers of the Old West didn't live anywhere near the places they wrote, drew, sculpted, or painted about? Remington lived in New Rochelle, NY. Zane Gray lived in Altadena, Louis L'Amour lived in Los Angeles, Matt Dillon lived in the CBS back lot. Which leads me to William F. Cody.

William F. Cody was born in Iowa, rode for the Pony Express (maybe), became a scout, a freight-hauler, a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, and a resident of Nebraska.

“Buffalo Bill” was born in William F. Cody’s brain. He made P.T Barnum look like a Carthusian Monk. Who knows what’s true? The guy was pure bunkum. More than anyone else, he created the myth of the Old West with his Wild West show that toured something like 40 countries of the world during the period 1880 – 1902. He met Queen Victoria, and the Kaiser loved him. He made millions of dollars with his extravaganzas. And you know what? There is not one creditable biography about him that I can find. Oh, he wrote an autobiography in 1895 with the help of a purple proser, but it is laughable. In short, Buffalo Bill makes our former Panty Boy in Chief look like a shrinking violet. Since the Center houses the major research library of the West (and it’s a very nice facility, indeed), I look forward to someone writing something approaching an objective truth about what surely has to be the most fascinating personage to come out of that period.

Buffalo Bill is the stuff of legend. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (directed by John Ford, no slouch himself in the legend making department), James Stewart is being interviewed by a newspaperman about his political career that was built on his supposed killing of the notorious outlaw Liberty Valance (only the second guy I’ve ever heard of named Liberty, the first being Billy Joel’s longtime drummer Liberty DeVitto). In flashback, John Wayne appears and tells Jimmy that it was actually he who shot Liberty Valance at the same time Jimmy fired, knowing that Jimmy couldn’t hit a mud fence. Jimmy relates the story to the newspaperman, who tears up his notes and walks away, saying he’ll never print the story. When Jimmy asks why not, the newspaperman responds, “when the legend becomes fact, print the legend.”

Thanks for the legend, Mr. Cody.



**September 8, 2023: "Don't Leave Me. Out in the Forest Where. I Might. Get Eaten by a Bear."**

Hey, hey, hey, hey Booboo! I made it to Jellystone Park today but no bear stole my pickanick basket.



Apparently, bears are a big deal in these parts. Everywhere one turns there are signs about bears. Don't leave food out, take bear spray, don't touch the bears, don't go near the bears, don't hand your children to bears for a picture, etc.



I have yet to see a bear. The HBK showed me a footprint he insists is a bear, but it only looked like a footprint to me. Nonetheless, I shall not tempt the bear fates and I shall steer clear of them. If I ever see any. Which I don't plan on doing without being with someone I can outrun. Oh, Peter! How about a hike?

The day started off ominously.



Right after I snapped that picture, a monstrous bolt of lightning shot out from the clouds. But that's as bad as it got. It was sunny for the most part and cool, seeing as how Yellowstone sits at about 6800 feet.

Our first stop was the Buffalo Bill Dam, which feeds the Buffalo Bill reservoir. Near the Buffalo Bill Highway. In Buffalo Bill County. Near the Buffalo Bill Dairy Queen, which is located near the Buffalo Bill....



When it was completed in 1910 (at 15 below on the day they finished it), the Buffalo Bill Dam was the tallest dam in America, only surpassed by the Hoover Dam in the 1930s. The Buffalo Bill Dam manages the Shoshone River Watershed and provides water for this part of Wyoming, not only for irrigation, but for electricity and human consumption as well. Damn! I have to remember to tell my grand dame about the damn dam.

The Shoshone River meets the dam like this:



It comes out of the dam like this:



Sometimes the state does something with the wooden detritus that tumbles into the Shoshone during the spring melt. Sometimes it doesn't. There wasn't much snow this past winter, so the state just left the debris and will supposedly clean it up next year.

The word "Shoshone" means "Snake Nation", hence, the Snake River which starts in Yellowstone. The Shoshone people call themselves "people", which reminds me of a line in 5<sup>th</sup> of July by Lanford Wilson where Ken tells Weston that every Indian tribe calls themselves "the people."

Sacagawea....Sakakawea.....Sacajawea....aw, dang. She was a Shoshone. Her name means "boat launcher." That must have been helpful as she surely had to launch L&C's canoes on more than a few occasions during their little sojourn.

Yellowstone is pretty amazing. Not even the \$30 lunch served by the grouchest park employee I've ever encountered in the midst of vastly overpriced tourist garbage could spoil it. Here's a spot I liked in particular:



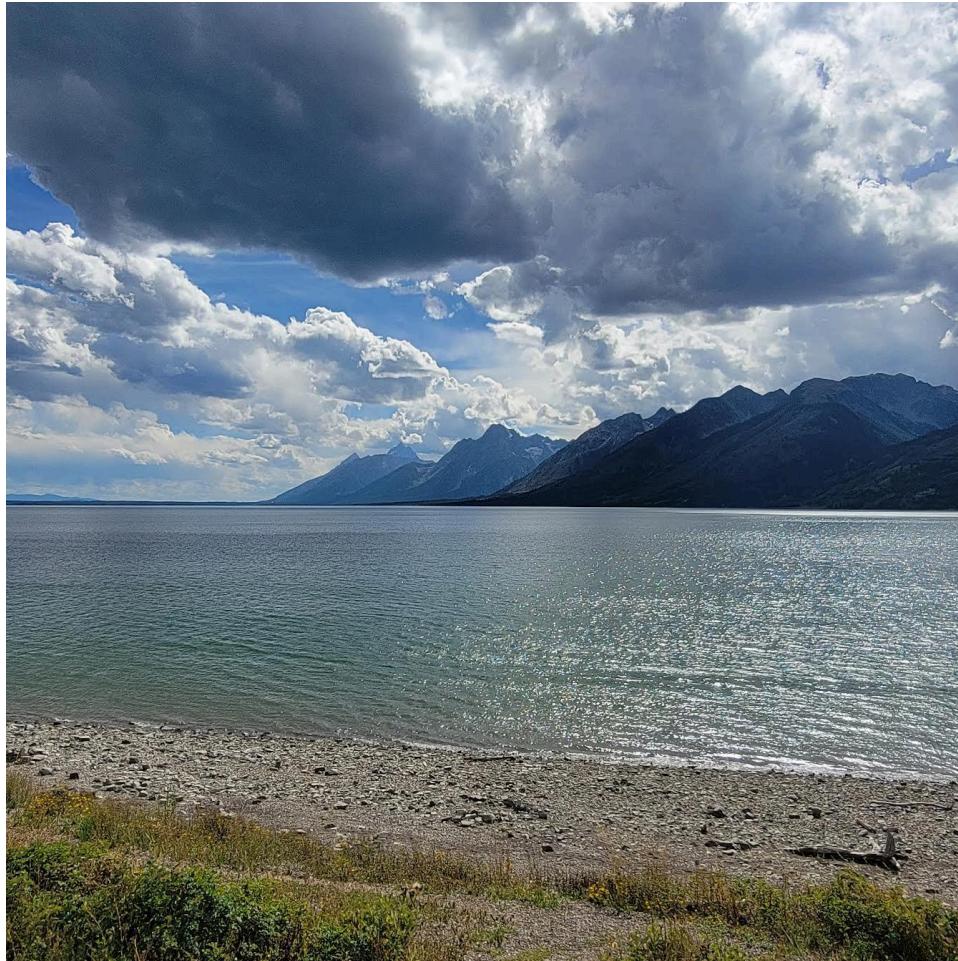
I liked it so much, I scattered some of my mother's ashes there. Afterwards, Peter told me the river is the Lewis River. Yes, that Lewis. There are no accidents.

After one leaves Yellowstone, he or she almost immediately enters the Tetons.



As we don't officially explore Yellowstone until Sunday and the Tetons until Monday, I'll leave you with a couple of images to whet your appetite. I'm sure I'll gather some more tasty tidbits of information by then. Have a great weekend.





**September 9, 2023: “No thanks, Andy. I’m just going to wash out a few things and write some letters.”**

Today was my Otis Campbell day. I had a couple of theatre-related things and work-related things I needed to catch up with, so I hung around the RV camp today. I felt like Otis Campbell on a Sunday.



Doing so made me realize you may not know what life is like in an RV camp – unless you’re a Grapes of Wrath Fan.



Not really. It's not that bad. For the most part. Unless it's Wibaux, Montana.

Here's our little Joad-mobile:



It has many of the comforts of home. Like running water, a microwave oven, and about 436 televisions. Which we have watched all of 3 times. However, in order to be a successful RVer, you have to know some of the ins and outs, as follows:

1. Get a water filter. RV campsite water is nasty nasty and you really don't want to drink it without it first having been filtered.

2. There is no insulation, so you're either going to be cold or hot. Use the HVAC. If the weather is hot, turn the AC on when you leave in the morning, so it will be nice and cool when you return.
3. Discipline your bowels. Yes, you can poo poo in the RV's "bathroom," but if you're a Homer-sized kind of guy or gal, it may not be enough. All of the RV sites we have stayed at (even the one in Wibeaux) have a shower and restroom building (although I wouldn't shower in Wibeaux because it was too janky). You will invariably be allotted a space as far away from the bathroom/shower building as it is possible to get, so you may have a quarter mile hike or more before you can ascend the throne of blessed relief. Plan accordingly.
4. Make sure your camp shoes have firm soles. All of the roads at the sites are gravel, not paved, and you'll walk more than you think. Crocs and flip flops won't cut it as the rocks will dig into your tootsies.
5. You and your clothes will not be as clean as you're used to. Remember those carefree days of young adulthood when you had to use a laundromat? That's what RV sites are like. Bring lots of quarters (none that we have come across take credit cards) and bring clothes that dry quickly. Another drying tip: Bring a clothes rack for your towels and wash cloths. Put them out in the morning after your shower, but bring them in at night, lest the dew from the cooler night air render your daytime drying efforts futile.

As for showers, some places are good, some (like Wibeaux) not so good. The site we are at this weekend is the best I've been to. Real live toilets with doors (not partitions) that shut. Real live showers with proper shower curtains and doors that close so you can have some privacy as you wash your bits. Again, you can shower in the RV (and I've done it on this trip), but it's kind of like the game with the grapefruit Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn play in Charade. Not very spacious. RV water never gets very hot nor very cold, so any type of washing activity is not very satisfying. All in all, if you weren't traumatized by Jr. High gym class showers, you'll be ok.

6. RV people. My take on RV people is that they fall into 4 broad categories. Really friendly old people who will engage you in conversation and assume you are as conservative as they are, outlaw motorcycle wannabes who are sulking their way across the country, Woodstock holdovers who sleep on the ground, and outdoor bros who party all night in Jackson Hole, then climb Mt. Kilamanjaro the next morning barefoot.

Those are my big takeaways about RV life as I've experienced it the last four weeks. Some cons, but mostly pros. After all, when I get up in the morning, I get to see sights like these:





We are currently staying in Buffalo Valley, just outside of the Tetons. When we drove into Jackson last night for supplies, I understood why it's called Buffalo Valley.



And the sunset wasn't bad either.





Tomorrow, we'll be up at the skrake for a guided tour through the highlights of Yellowstone. I wonder if we'll see a geezer. Uh, geyser. See you tomorrow.

**September 10, 2022: "I got (clang) (clang) s-s-s-steam heat."**

In essence, tens of thousands of people go to Yellowstone National Park every year to watch steam. I now belong to the ranks of the Yellowstone steam watchers, and I now know more about geysers, hot springs, fumaroles, and mudpots than I ever wanted to know.

Yellowstone has approximately 3000 earthquakes a year. You can't feel them topside, but, like the classic song by America, "the ocean is a desert with its life underground" and, as Chris Berman used to say, there is a lot of "runmblin', bumblin', stumblin'" going on underground.

Fifty percent of the world's geothermal activity takes place in Yellowstone – an area that comprises 2.5 million acres.



Twenty percent takes place in Iceland. I don't know where the other thirty percent is located.

Coincidentally, the word "geyser" is Icelandic, and it means "gusher."

Old Faithful is a geyser – which occurs when the earth's internal plumbing gets a kink in it, causing a leak which, under pressure, causes hot water to shoot up out of the ground.





It was six minutes early today.

Scientists are starting to worry that Old Faithful may not be so faithful in the future as there are apparently signs that it's starting to lose its oomph. Please say it ain't so, or Steve Perry will have nothing more to sing about.

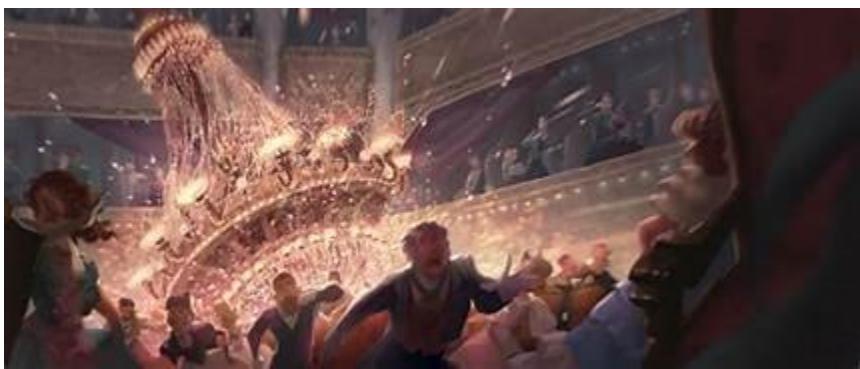
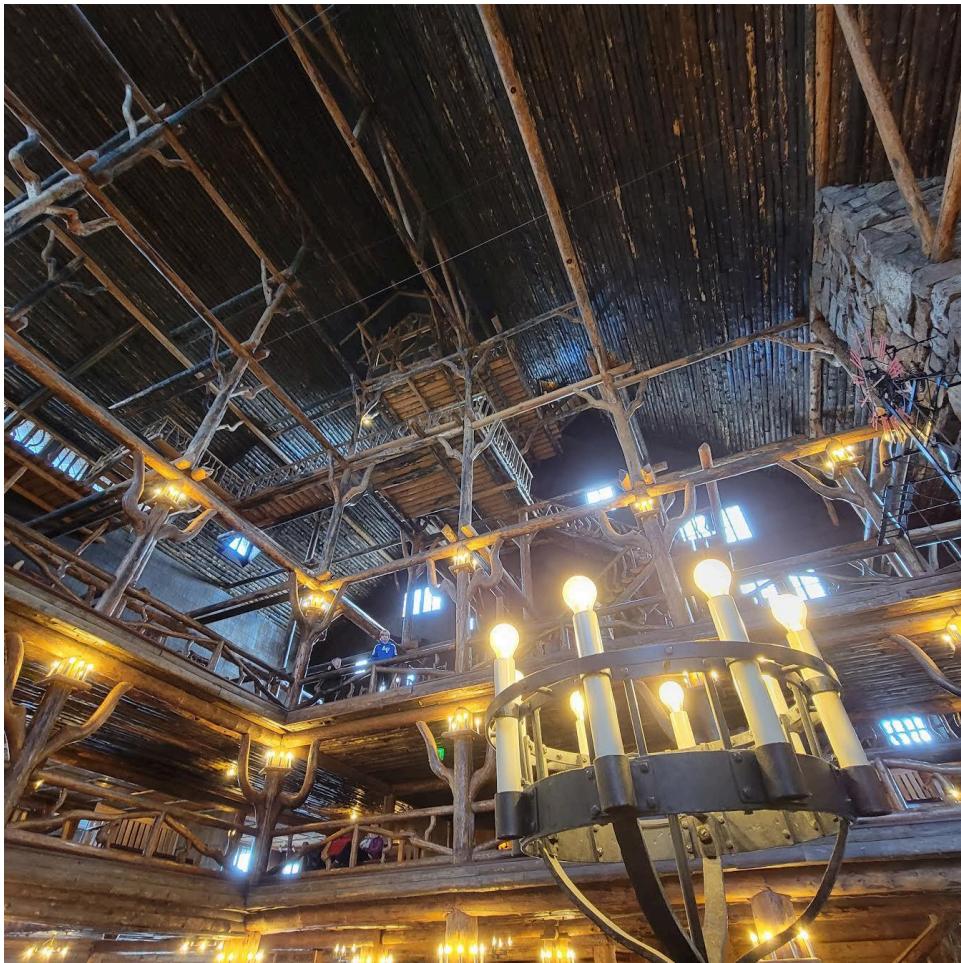


Old Faithful is near the Old Faithful Inn. Whoa, dude. Like what a coincidence.



The Old Faithful Inn was constructed in 1902 out of the pine trees that are native to Yellowstone, and it remains the largest original wooden structure in the United States.

Its interior looks like something out of Phantom of the Opera.



Hot springs seep up from hell through the earth and pool above ground in a sulphureous pond that smells like the worst public restroom I have ever been in (Hong Kong, 2017).



The water temperature ranges between 155-230 degrees. If you fall into it, you will look like one of the exhibits constructed by the Abominable Dr. Phibes.



Apparently, some dumb ass parent let his or her dumb ass kid fall into a hot spring one day and the dumb ass kid died, resulting in a proliferation of what has become my favorite National Park sign of all time.



These signs are all over Yellowstone.

Fumaroles are like the radiator in my apartment in New York. They put out steam all the time, without any pooling liquid.



And then there are mudpots, which are pretty self-explanatory.



If you see this near a geothermal feature, it means the water is not hot enough to kill weird stuff - like minerals and bacteria. Only kids who fall in.





If you see emerald blue like this, it means the water is too hot to have any weird stuff.



That's the one you want to make sure your kid falls into.

Bison like to hang out by geothermal features because the ground around them is warm in the winter and because the grass around them is chock full of minerals and other weird stuff – like silica. That's the yin. The yang is that the silica rots the bison's teeth, so their teeth eventually fall out and they die of starvation. Ain't nature grand?

Another grand thing about nature is that the silica is slowly petrifying the wood on the trees that grow near geothermal features. The Yellowstomers call such trees "Bobbysoxers."



I don't think moose hang out at geothermal features. At least the moose we saw at the skrake today wasn't near one.



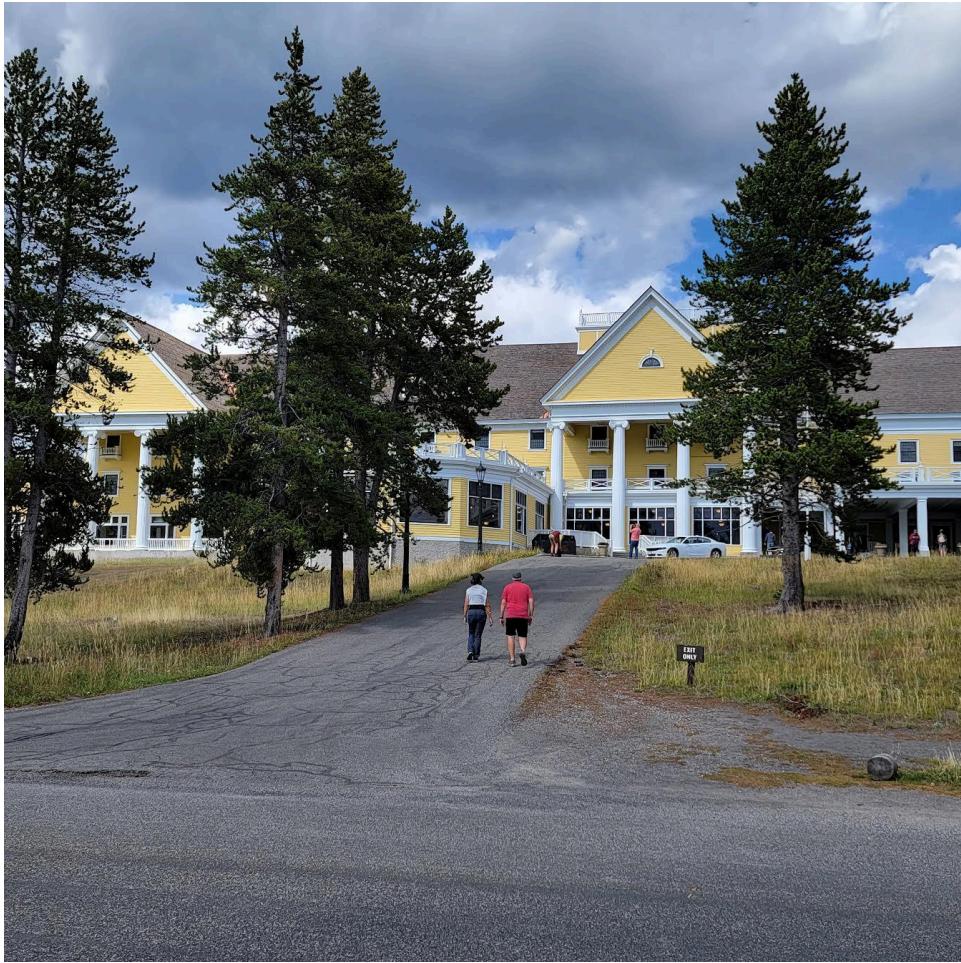
John Colter, a member of the Corps of Discovery, was the first guy to explore Yellowstone. When he returned to civilization after spending 1807 in Yellowstone, he told everyone about the wonders he had seen. No one took him seriously and he died in ridicule. After the Civil War, other guys, including one Mr. Moran, explored the Yellowstone area. Mr. Moran was a photographer and his plates proved that John Colter wasn't telling fibs. Today, John Colter is laughing in his grave at the tens of thousands of people who come to Yellowstone each year to view steam.

There are other nice things to see in Yellowstone, besides steam. There's a big lake. The Yellowstone Lake. 142 miles of shoreline and the largest alpine lake in the U.S. (i.e. above 7000 feet).



On the shore of Yellowstone Lake is another hotel. It was designed by the same guy who designed the Old Faithful Inn. Guess what color the Yellowstone Lake Hotel is?

I knew you'd guess right! It's Yellow! Yellow! Get it?



Yellowstone also has a very pretty waterfall.



There is nothing geothermal about the waterfall.

So there you have it. A lovely day in Yellowstone.

The end.

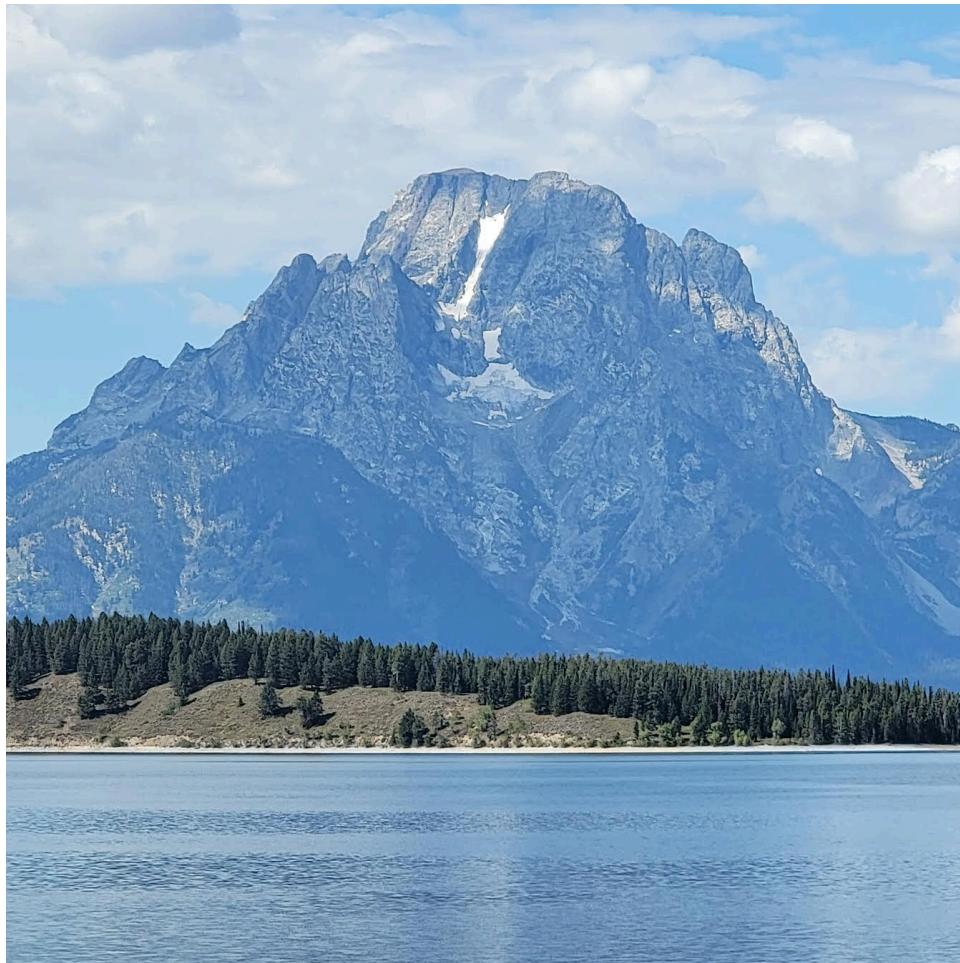
#### **September 11 and 12, 2023: “Up a Lazy River”**

Yesterday was a great way to say goodbye to the Grand Tetons and Wyoming. I couldn't post because the internet at our campsite sucked. As in non-existent.

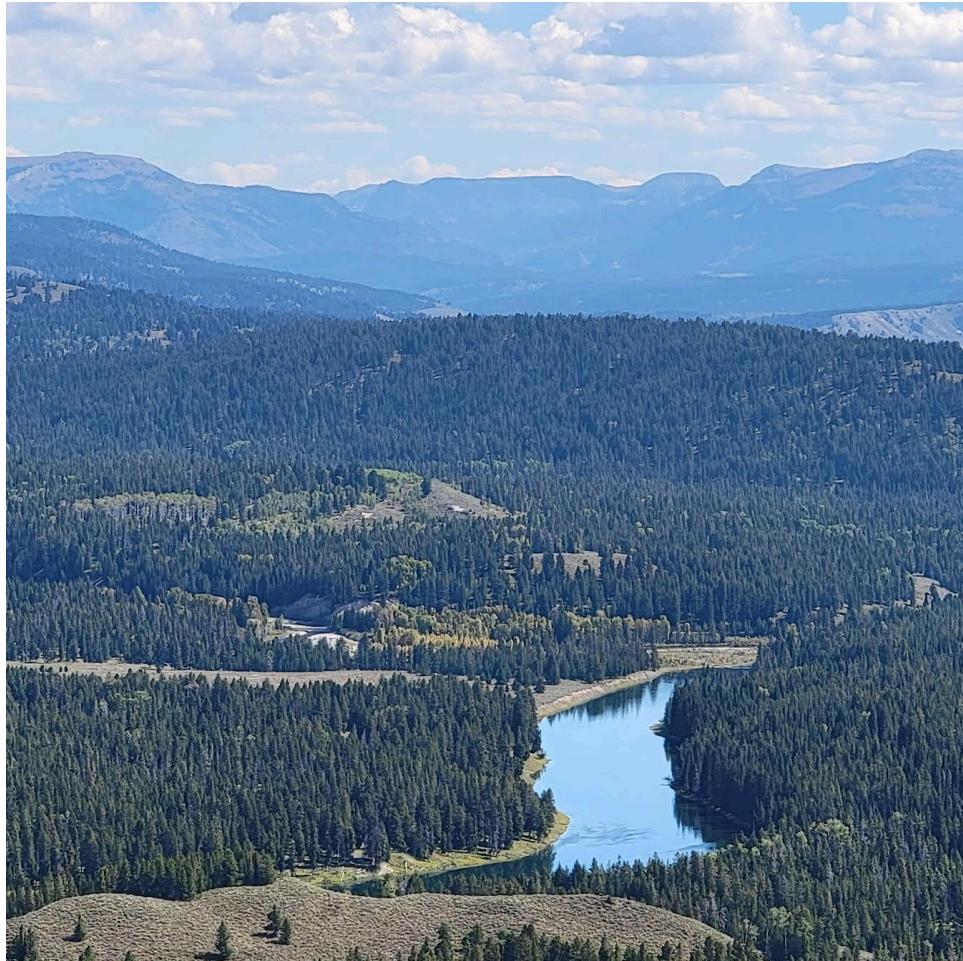
Yellowstone or the Grand Tetons? Ellington or Basie? It's a matter of personal taste. For me, it's the Tetons, from the Shoshone word “Teewinot,” meaning “many pinnacles.”



Here are the stats: 42 miles long. Part of the Rockies. Grand Teton is the largest peak in the chain at close to 14,000 feet.



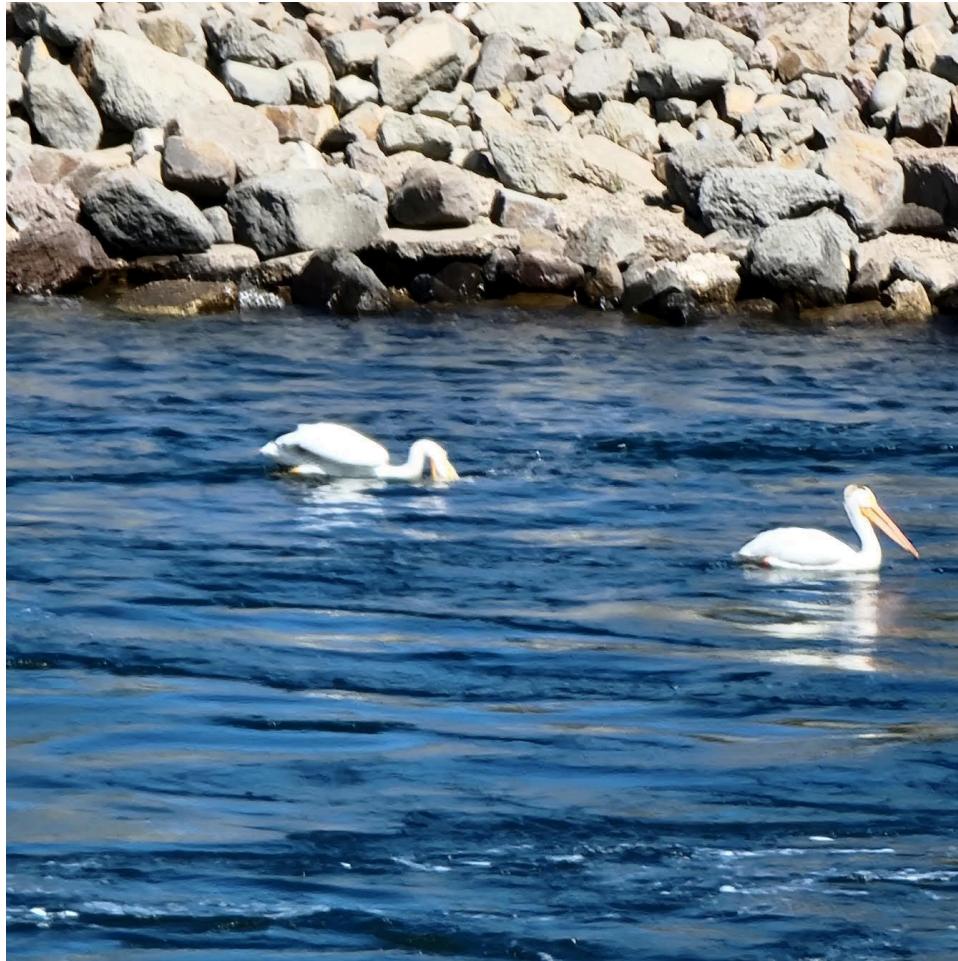
All of the mountains can be climbed non-technically. You can drive to the top of Summit Peak, which is above the tree line, making it an Alpine summit, and where you can get a nice view of the Snake River.



You can also have lunch on the banks of the Snake River and take a hike.

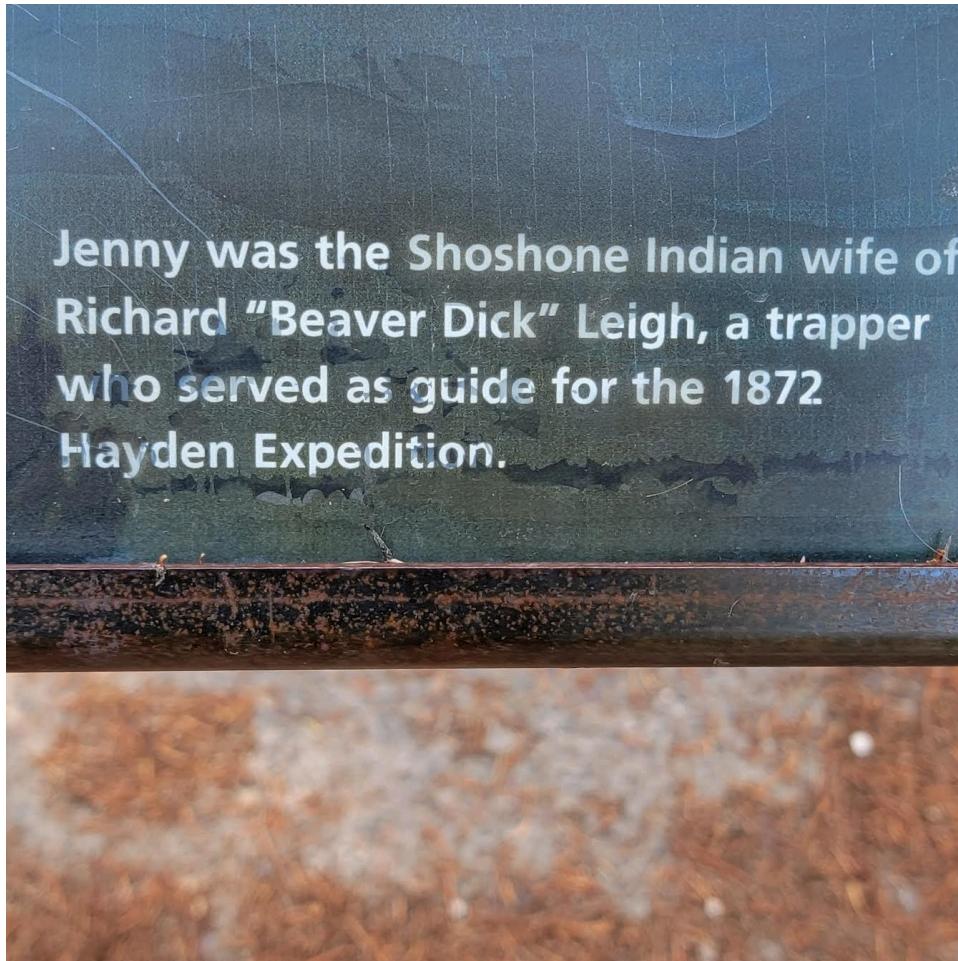


Or, if you prefer, you can visit the reservoir and see the pelicans. If they really are pelicans, which I am not at all sure about. Adriana?



The Tetons sit where two tectonic plates meet. The force of the lower plate pushes the upper plate ever higher. In the last fifty years, the Tetons have grown by six feet. That's a lot in geological terms. It also means the surrounding valley on the Wyoming side (Idaho is on the other side of the Teton range) is sinking. In 250,000 years or so, there won't be a valley. Rather Jenny Lake and the Snake River will abut the Tetons.

Jenny Lake. You can see it in the above picture. It was named after a fur trapper's Shoshone wife, whose Shoshone name he couldn't pronounce. Here's the story.



I know what you're thinking. You are very naughty.

Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone are next door to each other. So why are they two parks, instead of one?

Yellowstone is the oldest National Park in the U.S. created by another U.S. U.S. Grant, our 18<sup>th</sup> President (BTW, the S. in Grant's name doesn't stand for anything. His middle name was actually "Ulysses", "Hiram" was his actual first name. He only got the "S." as a result of his victories in the Civil War. U.S. United States, U.S. Grant. Get it?). At the time of its creation, nobody lived in Yellowstone. However, a lot of people lived in the Tetons – homesteaders, Indians, trappers, entrepreneurs, etc. The government didn't feel like they could kick all of those people off their land for the sake of a National Park, so it didn't.

Fast forward to post-WWI America. Who was the richest family in America? The Rockefellers. John Jr. quietly bought up a lot of land in the Tetons, allowing the owners a life estate (Rockefeller became the owner when he bought the land, but the seller got to stay on the land until he or she died.). You know what happened in 1929. Yes, of course Connie Mack's Philadelphia A's won the World Series, but I was referring to the Stock Market Crash. Rockefeller had to dump the land he bought. So, he wrangled President Herbert Hoover to make the Tetons a National Park as National Parks can only be created by Executive Order. The caveat was that those families who already lived in the Tetons had to be guaranteed homestead rights as

long as the land stayed in the family. Sold American! Johnny got his tax break, America got another National Park, and Herb got the pink staminga in 1932.

There are still families who live in the Tetons.

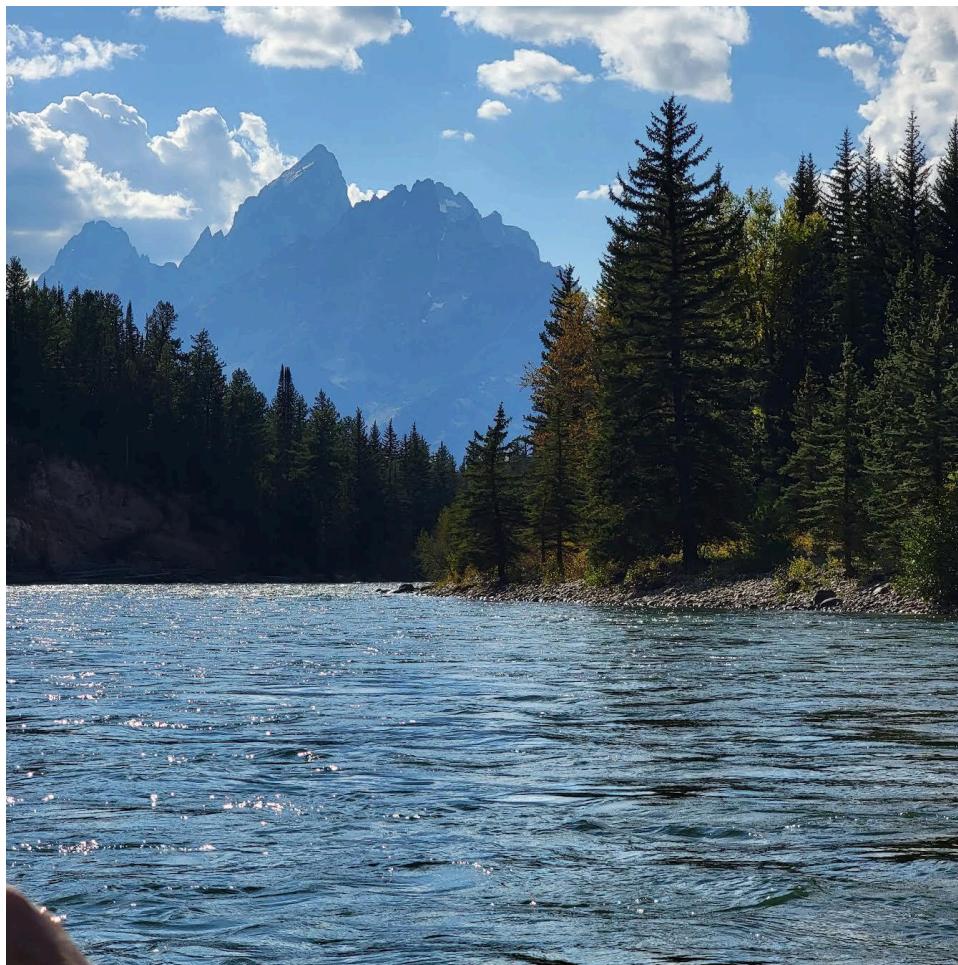
Now might be a good time to talk about our National Park System. A National Park can only be created by the President. National Parks are run by the Department of the Interior and the mandate is to leave the land in a state of nature. No interference from humans. No homesteading, no hunting, no economic exploitation of the minerals (sorry, Panty Boy), no firefighting.

Our National Park system was championed by three people: Theodore Roosevelt. Duh. Woodrow Wilson. Go figure. Crappy President, but at least he did one thing right. And Stephen Mather – a lobbyist who was a pal of Teddy and John Muir and the perfect person to oversee the organization of the System. Since he already knew everyone in Washington, he was able to transform our National Park System into the treasure it is today. He did a great job and he has never been given enough credit. Hats off to Stephen Mather.



On a side note, a National Forest is the creation of Congress and is administered by the Department of Agriculture, whose mandate is to figure out how to utilize the land to its fullest potential, be it mining, hunting, farming, whatever. The Department of Agriculture's motto is "There's more than one way to skin a cat."

With that, we spent a glorious three hours floating down the Snake River. It was one of the highlights of the trip. Our guide was a Wyoming native and has been leading float trips on the Snake for 25 years. It was great.



Two of our rafting companions were frightened.



However, Peter Zivanovic, our very own Admiral Nelson, kept a stiff upper lip.



With the stirring words “England expects that every man will do his duty,” we were off.



We saw an Osprey.



Ospreys are only one of three species of bird that have solid bones and oily feathers, allowing them to dive bomb rivers for fish at speeds up to 60 mph and up to a depth of three feet.

We also saw a bald eagle (my first one) but I was too much of a butterfingers to get a picture, so a picture of its nest will have to do.



We also supposedly saw a beaver, but since I couldn't locate it, I couldn't get a snap.

Our float trip really was marvelous, and a perfect way by which to remember the Tetons.

Today, all we did was drive – although we did have lunch at Evanston, Wyoming – the Oasis of the West – the brain-child of a former FBI agent who adorns the walls of the restaurant with pictures of the likes of Melvin Purvis, Benjamin Siegel, Alphonse Capone, George Kelly and other erstwhile Public Enemies. What more can I say?

We are now in Springville, Utah for the night, continuing on tomorrow to Moab and Arches National Park, where we will no doubt hear rock music.

Good night to all.

#### **September 13, 2023. “Rooms to let, fifty cents.”**

On the way to Moab today, I stopped in at Helper, Utah. What a cool little town. Peter and I went to the Mining and Railroading Museum to see what that world was like a hundred years ago.

The Helper Main Street is about five blocks long. My best impression was the old movie marquee with “Lock Him Up” on it. Yes, Utah is conservative, but it’s not Trump conservative. That’s why Mitt Romney is Utah’s Senator. At least he has some honor and decency. Utah thinks so too.



Apparently, Roger Miller stayed here.



Helper was the site of some serious UMWA union activity in the 1920s.



Stupid Miners. What's wrong with 8-year-olds going out an getting a job, instead of freeloading? Lousy Pinkos.



Dorothea Lange documented the appalling conditions to be found in Helper in 1936. A gallery of her work occupies a prominent space in the Museum.



In case you don't know who she was (besides being denounced by HUAC in the 1950s. Thank you, Ted Cruz... I mean, Joseph McCarthy), you probably have seen this picture somewhere along the line.



Representatives from 27 different countries once populated Helper. Most prominently, Greeks, Italians, Japanese, and Chinese. Why couldn't they have gotten some 'Muricans in there?



There were 27 saloons and 5 brothels. Sounds like a feller could have had a purty good time in Helper. They even had live theatre at one time.



I did that play in the late 1980s.

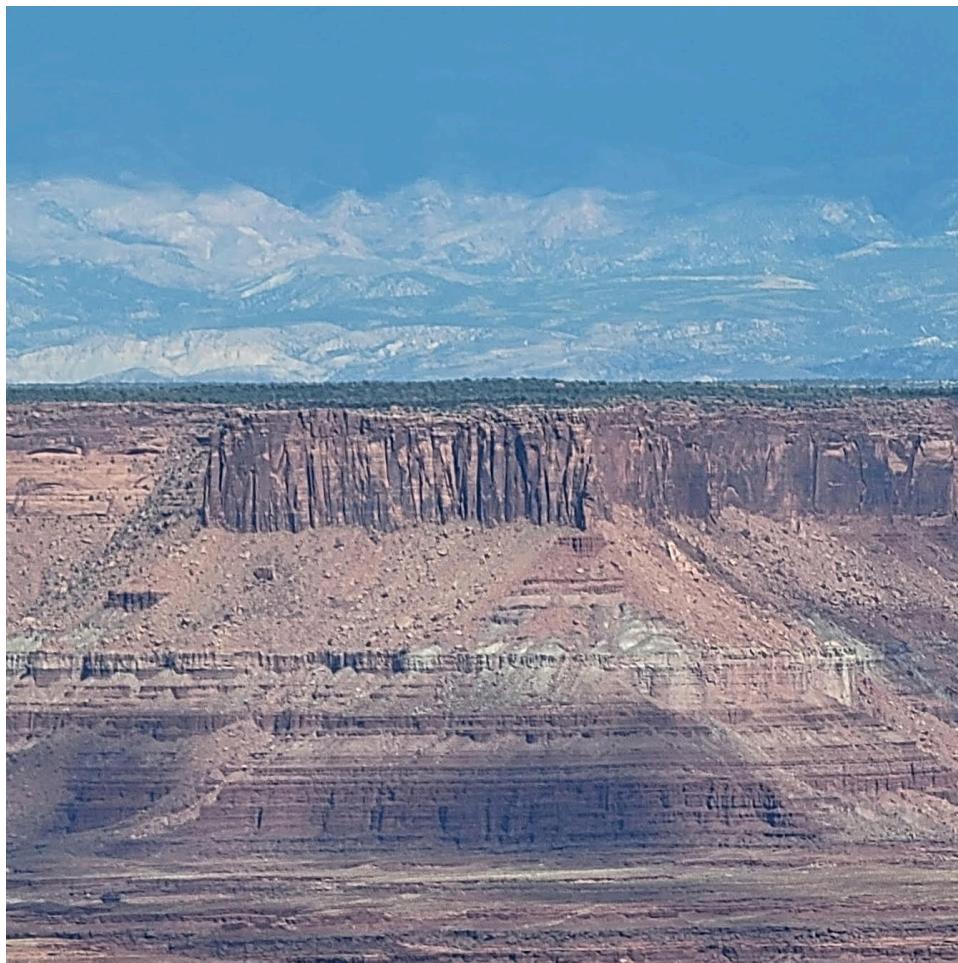
Now, Helper is just a curiosity along the Interstate. I'm glad I stopped, though. However, true to Cockeyed Caravan form, there was no way I was going to stop for a train.



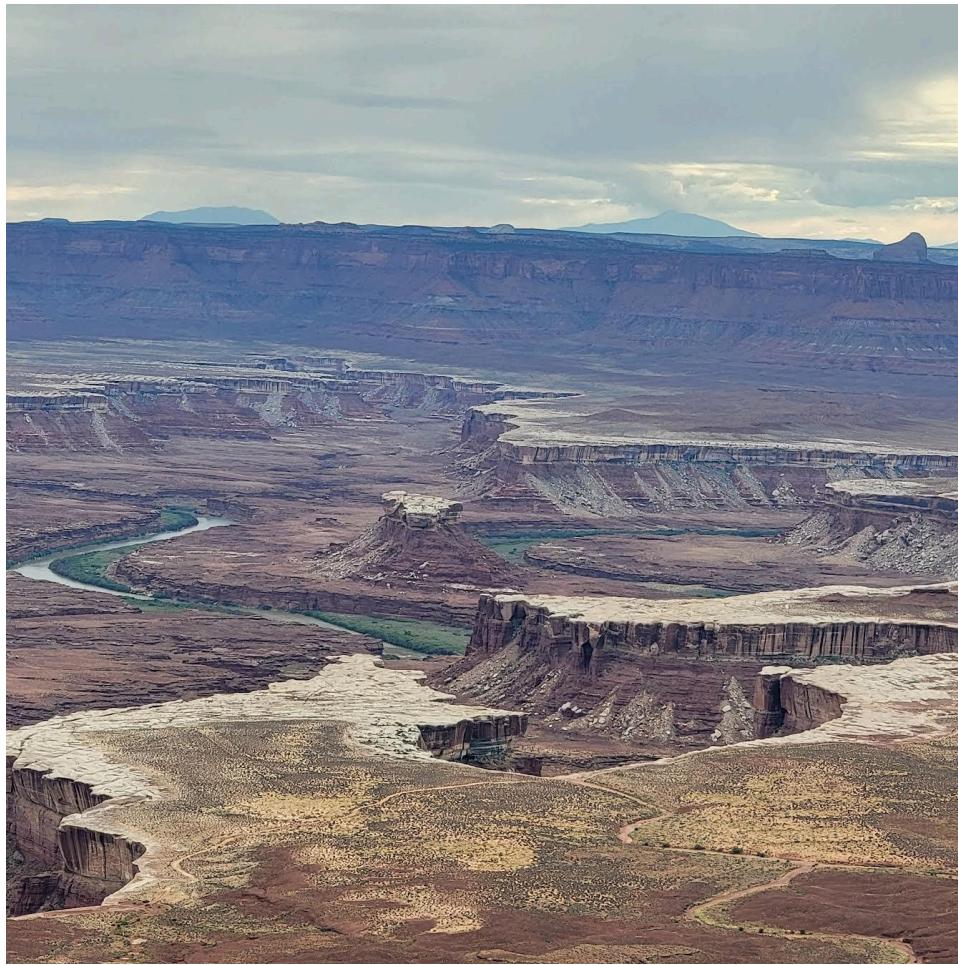
We're now in our campsite. I'm not feeling real swift, so I'm turning in early in hopes that tomorrow, I'll be able to take it on the Arches.

#### **September 14, 2023: Udall do well to thank Stewart**

I didn't make it to Arches today. I was still feeling poorly this morning, so I slept in. I felt better by midafternoon and, instead of Arches, Peter, my sister, and her husband went next door – to Canyonlands National Park – a National Park I didn't know existed until earlier this year.

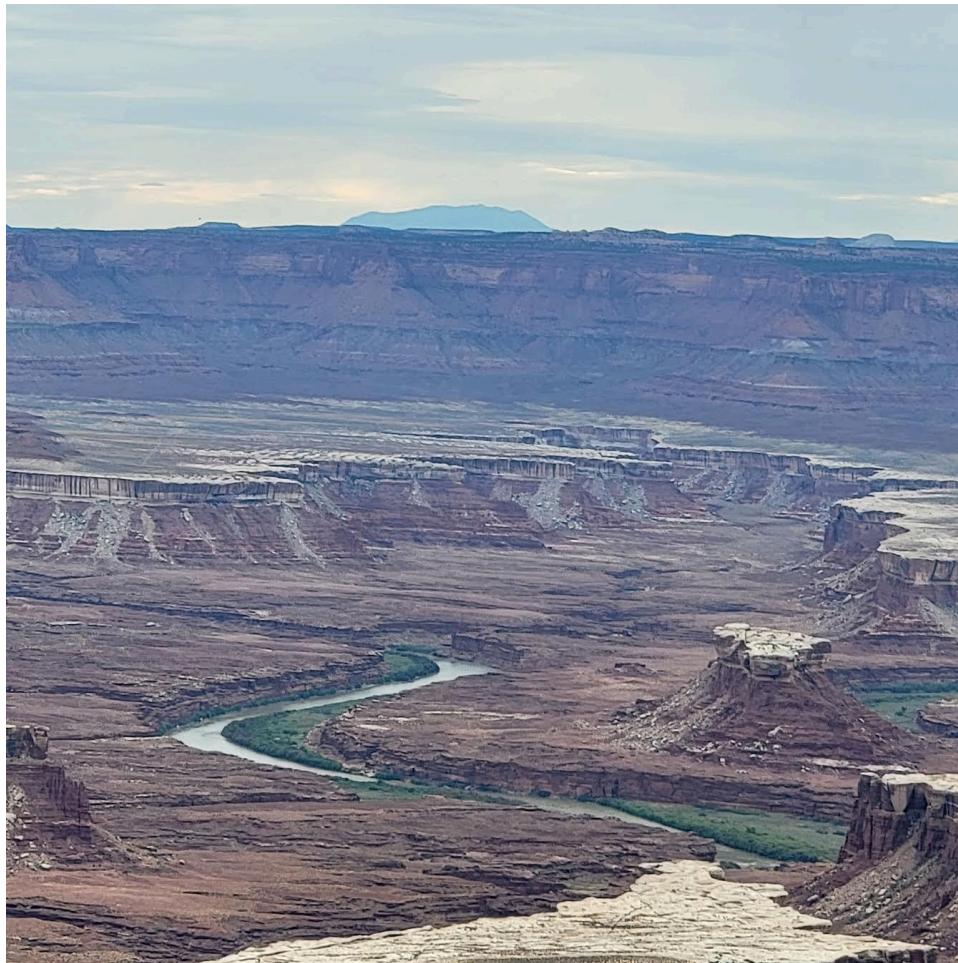


If you know anything about Western politics back in the '60s and '70s, you probably heard the name Udall. Stewart was a three term Congressman who was Secretary of the Interior under Kennedy and LBJ. His brother, Morris, assumed Stewart's Congressional Seat and served for thirty years. There are Udalls still scattered throughout Western politics to this day. What's important for today's entry is that in 1964 Stewart was on a surveying junket with a bunch of mining bigwigs who wanted to put a uranium mine next to Arches (uranium is a big deal in this part of Utah). Stewart said "great idea guys, but you know what would go better? A National Park." Being the Secretary of the Interior at the time, Stewart got LBJ to make Canyonlands a National Park (remember how I told you the National Parks work? The President creates and the Department of the Interior administers). No small feat in 1964, since the U.S. was still in the grips of the Cold War and uranium is essential to annihilating the planet. In fact, one can see the "uranium roads" on many of the Canyonlands floors.



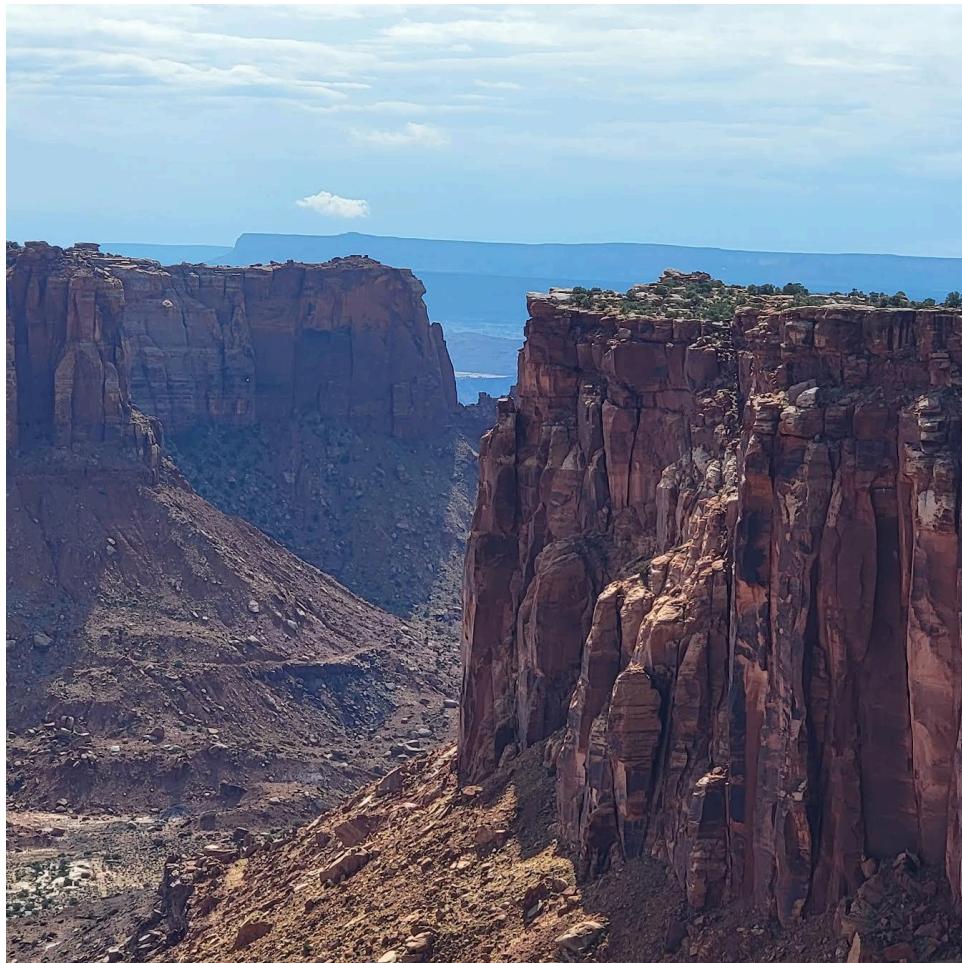
The road you see in the picture was cut in the 1950s. It will take centuries for the ground to recover and revert to its original form.

Canyonlands is located about 20 miles north of the confluence of the Green and the Colorado Rivers. Here's the Colorado:

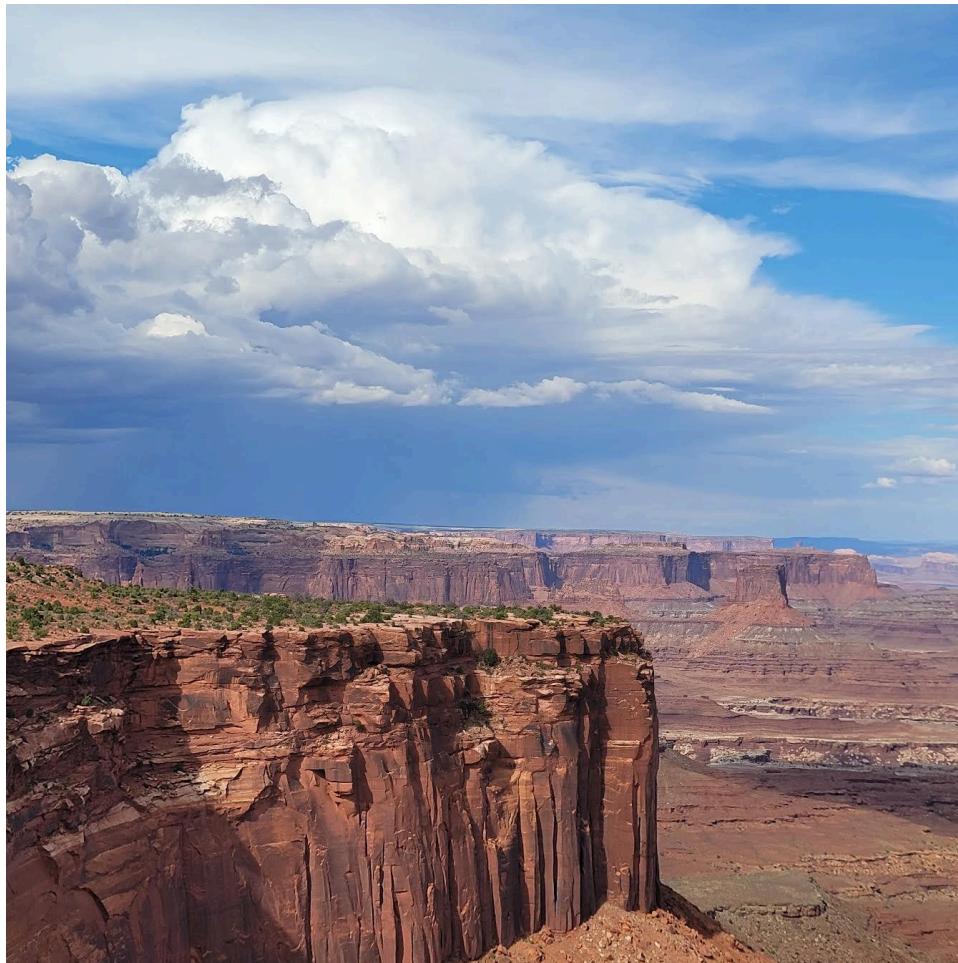


If truth be told, one simply cannot take in all the grandeur of places like Canyonlands in one breath. The best I can do is give you a few snaps to get a sense of what it's like here.





It's uncanny how as soon as I take one picture of a vista, I look out at it again and notice some feature I didn't notice at the time I took the picture. Then I have to take another. For a place that takes eons to change geologically, the view is ever-changing.



There is no topsoil here. No topsoil means no crops. More importantly, no grass. No grass means no Bison or other ruminating mammals. It rains less than 10 inches a year. Now, you might think that what you see is a desolate place.



I find it serene and peaceful. But then again, I'm a desert guy and we are starting to move into desert country. I love it.

My sister can be a stickler for grammar sometimes. We were listening to “Do Wah Diddy Diddy” on the radio and she got grumbly about the lyric “I knew we was fallin’ in love.” Peter, in a quote worthy of entry in the Cockeyed Caravan lexicon, chimed in with his precise British accent and said “You’re worried about grammar in a song entitled Do Wah Diddy Diddy?”

Well, it cracked me up anyway. Guess you had to be there, and I wish you were so you could see what I have seen.



**September 15, 2023: “Darling, I Love You, But Give Me Park Avenue.”**

Like Peter Tork finally getting his opening credit on The Monkees, I finally made it to Arches. You may have noticed that was an arch comment.

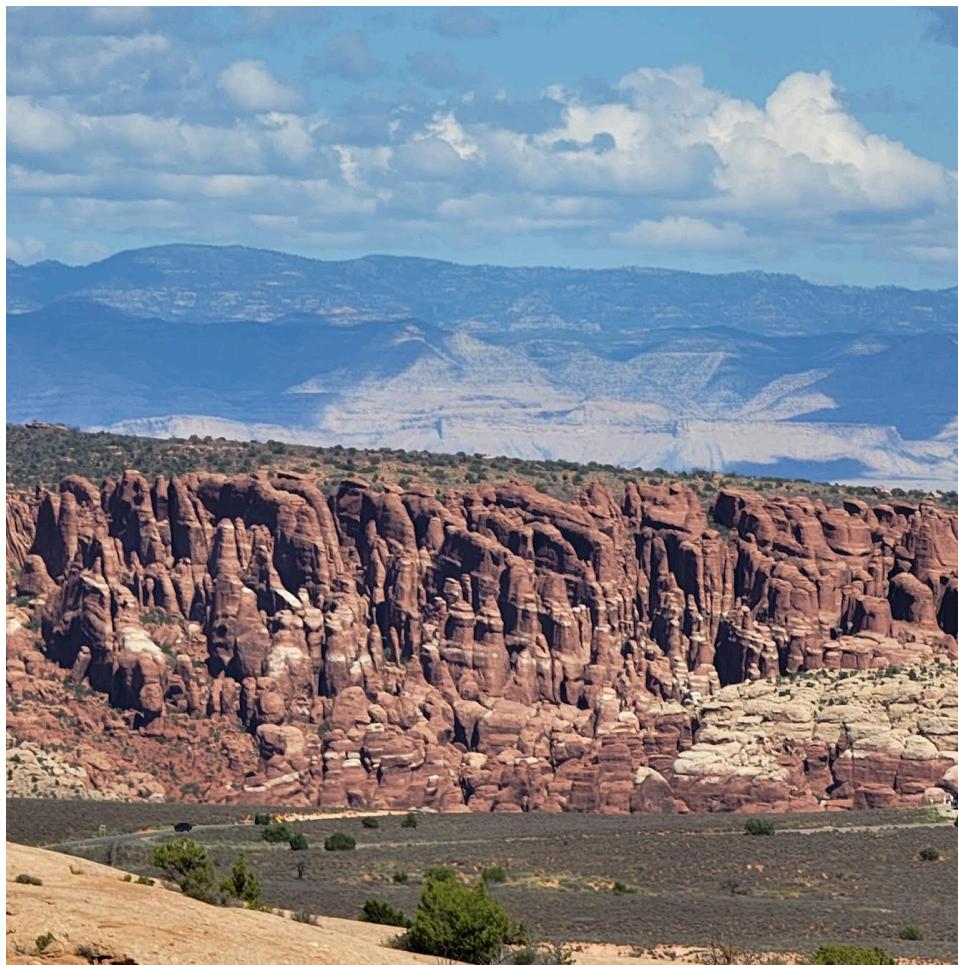


Unlike the late, great Joe Spinell in “Taxi Driver” when he tells Travis Bickle to take it on the arches if he going to bust his chops. That was not an arch comment,

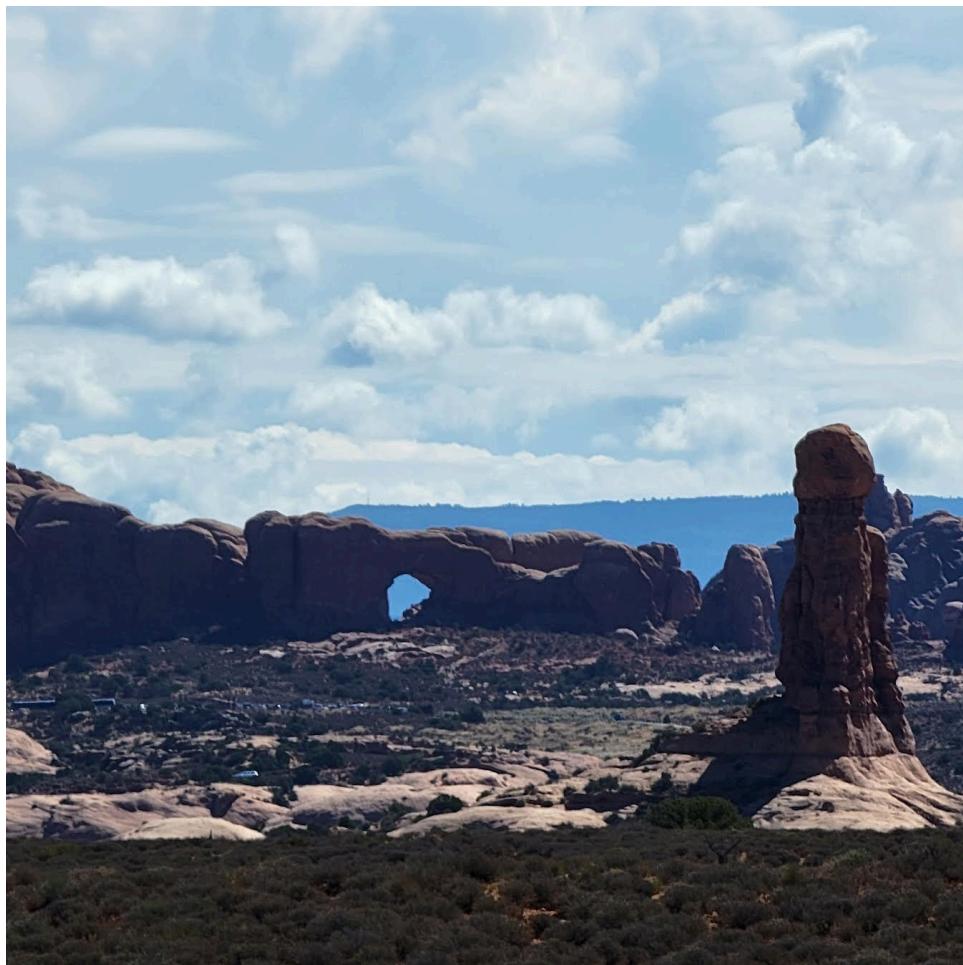


Arches is virtually next door to Canyonlands, so you'd think the two would look alike. Well, they do, to a certain extent. The arches in Arches comprise a relatively small part of the park. The rest of it looks like Canyonlands. I'll explain why in a minute, but before I do, I should say that while I liked Canyonlands better, I was more impressed with Arches. Whereas Canyonlands inspires awe, Arches invokes reverence. Hence, I found myself more introspective when viewing Arches than I did in Canyonlands.





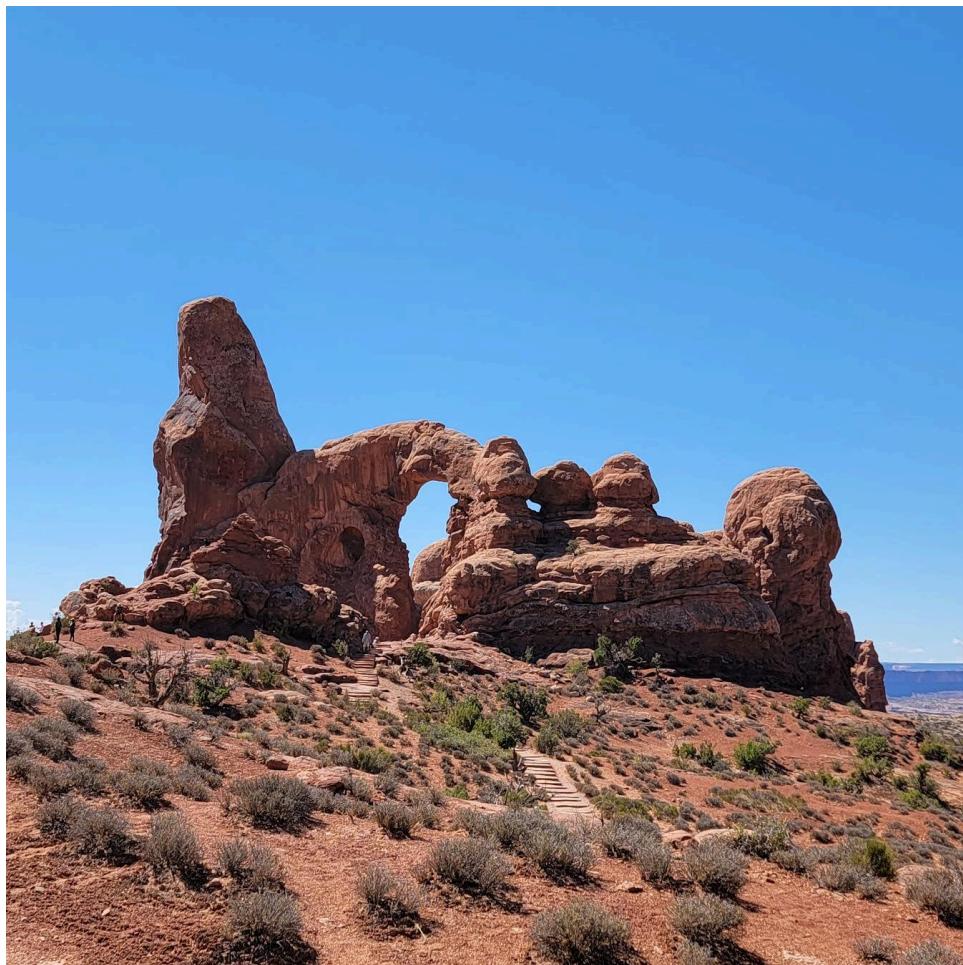






In simplest terms, Arches was formed in a tidal pool. About 250 million years ago, when Willie Nelson was a teenager, a tidal wave hit the area. That was the first in a series of floods that took place over the millennia. With each new flood, the previous layer of salt would be dispersed horizontally, and a new layer of salt would take its place. The receding water would seep into the earth, mix with the previous layer of salt, and form sandstone.

As the continents broke apart and the earth shifted (Arches is on a fault line), the tectonic plates collided, and the sandstone got pushed up. Then, a new flood would come along, and the process would repeat. Multiply that process by 29 – the number of times the area was flooded according to geological calculations – over millions of years, and you get arches – brittle (comparatively speaking) rock formations that are constantly being degraded by wind and water.







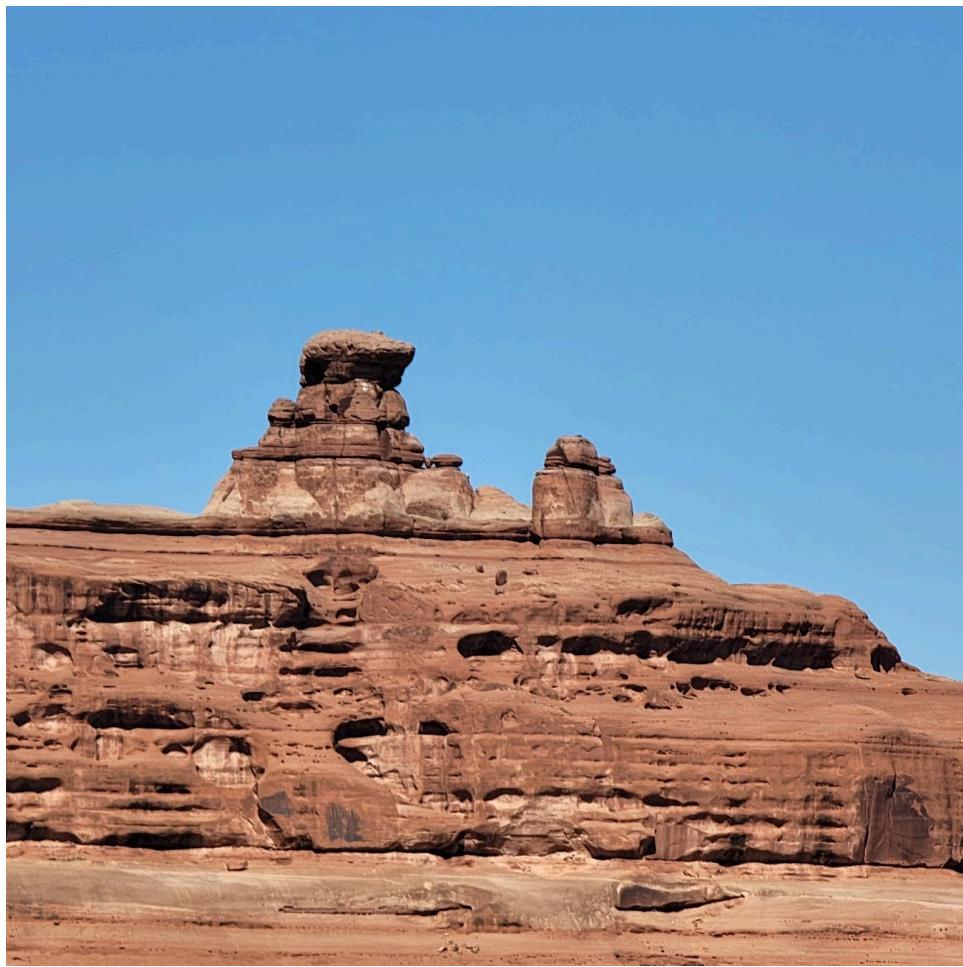
All the arches you see in the pictures will one day break and crumble. In recent history, two have done so. One in 1975 and one in 1983.



For a bunch of rocks, the place is remarkably alive and, like all living things, constantly dying. These formations are part of a complex called Park Avenue.









I thought about Atlantis a lot today as Arches is a place to let your imagination run free. For me, the place operates as a Rorschach Test, and it was easy to imagine myself in ancient Babylon or Egypt as I experienced this other-worldly landscape.

Here is where we had lunch:



I felt like just like a Flintstone.

This guy eyeballed us as we ate, reminding us that, one day, we, too, shall be nevermore. Just like the rocks.



Do you remember that game Tip-It? I can still hum the song from the commercial.



This made me think of that little man balancing on his nose.



And speaking of the Monkees, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a Monkee and ride around in a dune buggy.



You'll notice that Peter is driving. Peter was always the underrated Monkee.

These are petrified sand dunes.



Too much for the Monkee-mobile, I'm afraid.

Believe it or not, there was a guy who tried to homestead the area. His name was John Wesley Stanley and he was a Civil War Veteran. Remarkably, he is the second Civil War Veteran named John Wesley who was associated with the area. The first and, arguably the more famous (or infamous) was John Wesley Powell, who first explored the area in 1869. He was a one-armed Civil War veteran who led a party of incompetent boatmen down the Colorado River to its source near the lake that bears his name – Lake Powell.

First, what is a one-armed guy doing rowing a boat? Second, he lost two boats and three of his nine men on the expedition. Third, he was a mapmaker. That begs the question of who held the paper while he drew the map? But I digress.

John Wesley Stanley ran one thousand head of cattle in this area for ten years. From 1906-1908, he, his brother, his sister, and her two children lived in this:



Six people in 255 square feet. In 1908, they pulled up stakes and moved to Ohio.  
They were insane,  
They did have a nearby watering hole for the cattle though.



This reminded me of something I wanted to tell you when I wrote about our float trip in the Tetons but didn't find a good place for it in that post. If you ever need to drink water from a stream or a watering hole, drink from the hole. The reason is because any bacteria will sink to the bottom of the hole and you won't drink any, whereas with a stream, any bacteria is being carried along with the current and you ingest some if you drink from the stream. This is why animals drink from watering holes, rather than from streams or rivers. The things you learn, huh?

Near Mr. Stanley's mansion are some petroglyphs carved into a rock face.



If you ever have trouble remembering what petroglyphs are versus what pictographs are, just remember petroglyphs are carved and pictographs are drawn. As an example, Charles Manson is a petroglyph.



Post Malone is a pictograph.



As for the above petroglyphs, I'm not all that convinced. You'll notice some of the people in the glyphs are riding horses. That means, at their oldest, the glyphs date from around 1580, when the Spanish introduced the concept of riding horses to the native peoples. These glyphs look like they're in pretty good shape. I think the Stanley brood may have been pulling our legs. If so, I admire that. I've always wanted to drive around the country planting joke time capsules. Wouldn't it be fun to baffle anthropologists a couple of hundred years from now?

Besides, isn't this the logo for a death metal band?

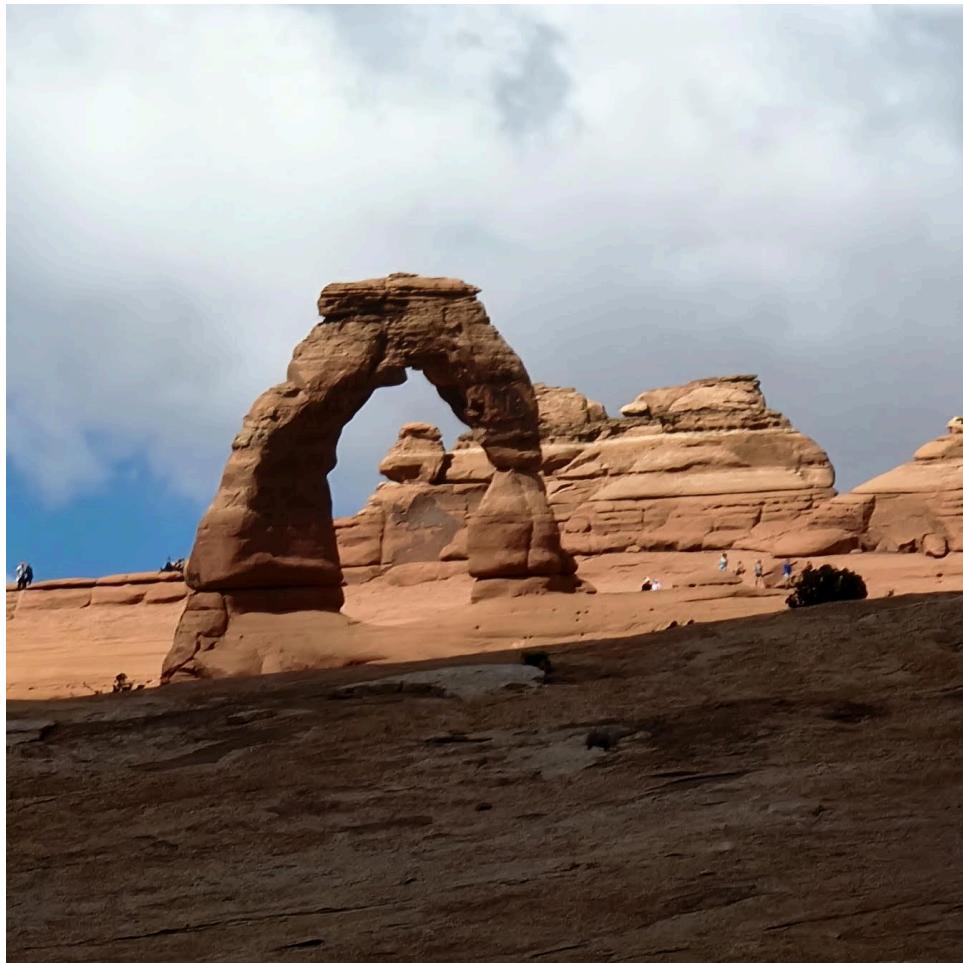


One last bit of geology for the day. Back in the old timey days, this area was a lush tropical paradise. As the vegetation died out, their minerals mixed with the soil and became iron – but not the red colored iron you may be used to seeing, but a greenish iron.



I encountered rock that looks like this in Antarctica too.

So, that's it for today. I don't know about you, but I'm ready to take it on the arches. See you tomorrow.



### September 16, 2023: Fruita the Flume

Today was a travel day from Moab to Kanab. On the way, we took a detour to Capital Reef National Park. I have to confess that some of the pictures below are google images. As I was driving the RV and had to use my phone to navigate, I couldn't take pictures of the single most amazing landscape I have ever seen. And that includes Antarctica.



This part of Southern Utah is indescribable. I have never seen anything like it in real life. The Goblin Valley literally looks like a CGI matte painting from Lord of the Rings.





Helms Deep anyone?

Seeing the Goblin Valley, I couldn't help but think of what Masada must have been like.

Now that I know what's out there, I will have to return at some future date for further investigation.

Utah has five National Parks. By the end of next week, we will have seen all of them.



The Capital Reef area was the last section of the lower 48 United States to be mapped. And it was mapped in the 1850s by no less an intrepid explorer than the great man himself, John C. Fremont.

The key element in the creation of Capital Reef was water. Now, the Fremont River is little more than a gently flowing stream, moving tons of iron deposits through the valley. But back in the Triassic Period, the Fremont was bitchin', carving canyons, creating valleys, and calling the wind Mariah to form this beautiful landscape.



Capital Reef, with less than 8 inches of rainfall per year is classified as high desert. That, combined with the temperate climate in the valley, makes it a perfect spot for growing fruit. Specifically, apples, pears, and peaches. This fact wasn't lost on the Mormon settlers who established the community of Fruita, situated near Capital Reef's Visitor Center and who created the orchards that still produce today.



Fruita.

I have to say that for a religion whose origin story is pretty imaginative, I would have thought they could have come up with a better name.

In its heyday (1880-1941), Fruita was one of the most isolated settlements in the United States, never having more than ten families at any one time. The kids were schooled in one room, by one teacher, grades 1-12, at one time.

Fruita no longer exists. It collapsed with the outbreak of WWII.

When I look back on those bright, golden days I can't help but think of what was lost. The innocence, the promise, the security. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. Wait a minute.... that's not Fruita. That's The Great Gatsby. Never mind.

We didn't have a lot of time at Capital Reef and a lot of the roads are gravel, so I'll just give you a few highlights.







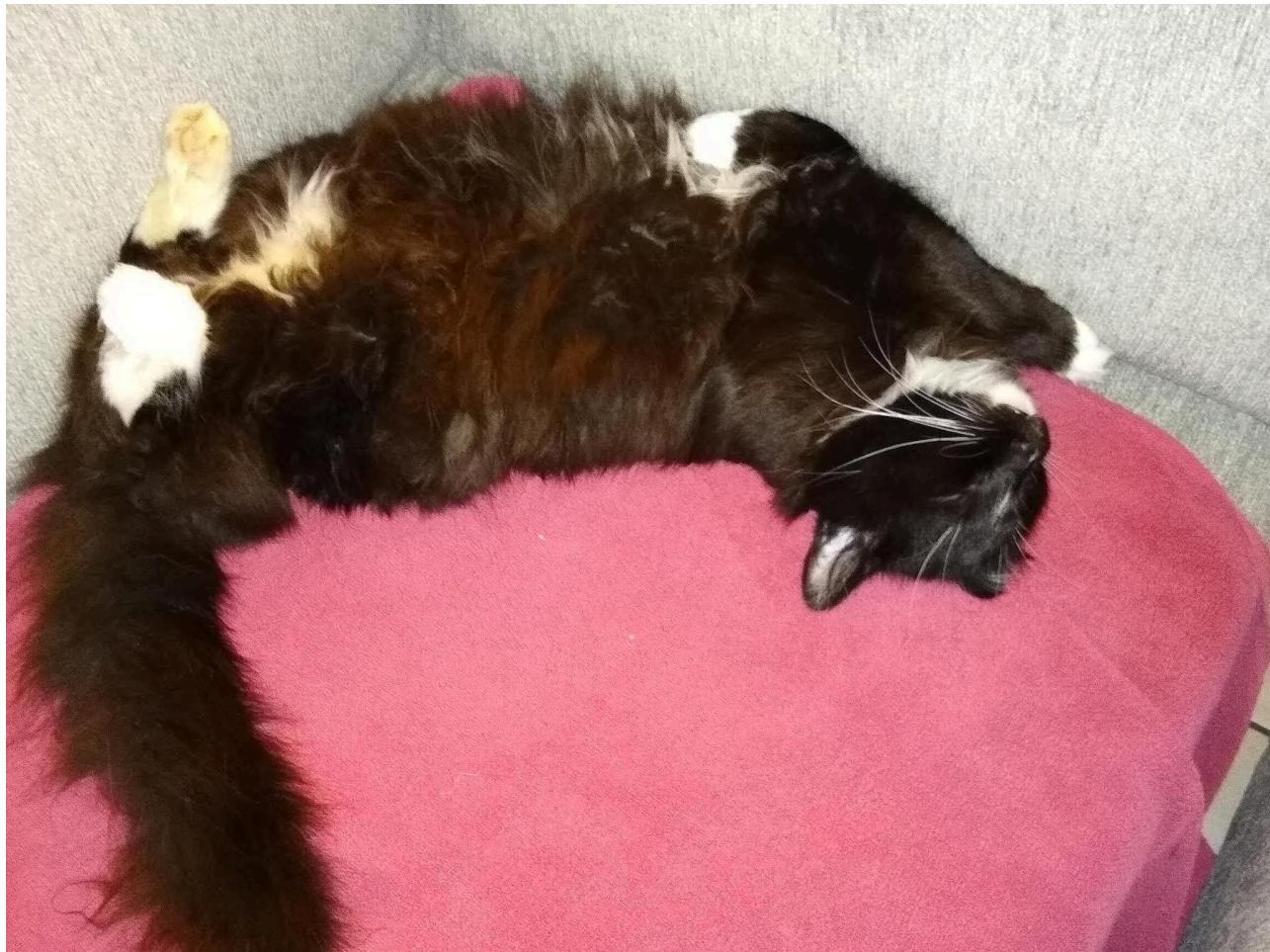
I am now in Kanab, where I haven't been for thirteen years. It has changed a great deal. I'm sure I'll have more to say as the week progresses, but now I'm going out to look at the stars. I hope you do too.

Good night.

**September 17, 2023: Page and Plant**



No, not that Jimmy Page and Robert Plant.





No! Not that Jimmypage and Robertplant!

Page, Arizona and the Plant you see in the high desert of Utah.









Our first stop today: Page. For a little hike to the Horseshoe Bend. Page is in Arizona, where it is an hour earlier than it is in Utah. Arizona does not recognize Daylight Savings Time because Daylight Savings Time is unconstitutional.

Here is our hike:



Looks hot, doesn't it? If you can guess how hot it was, you will win a memento of my choosing from my travels.

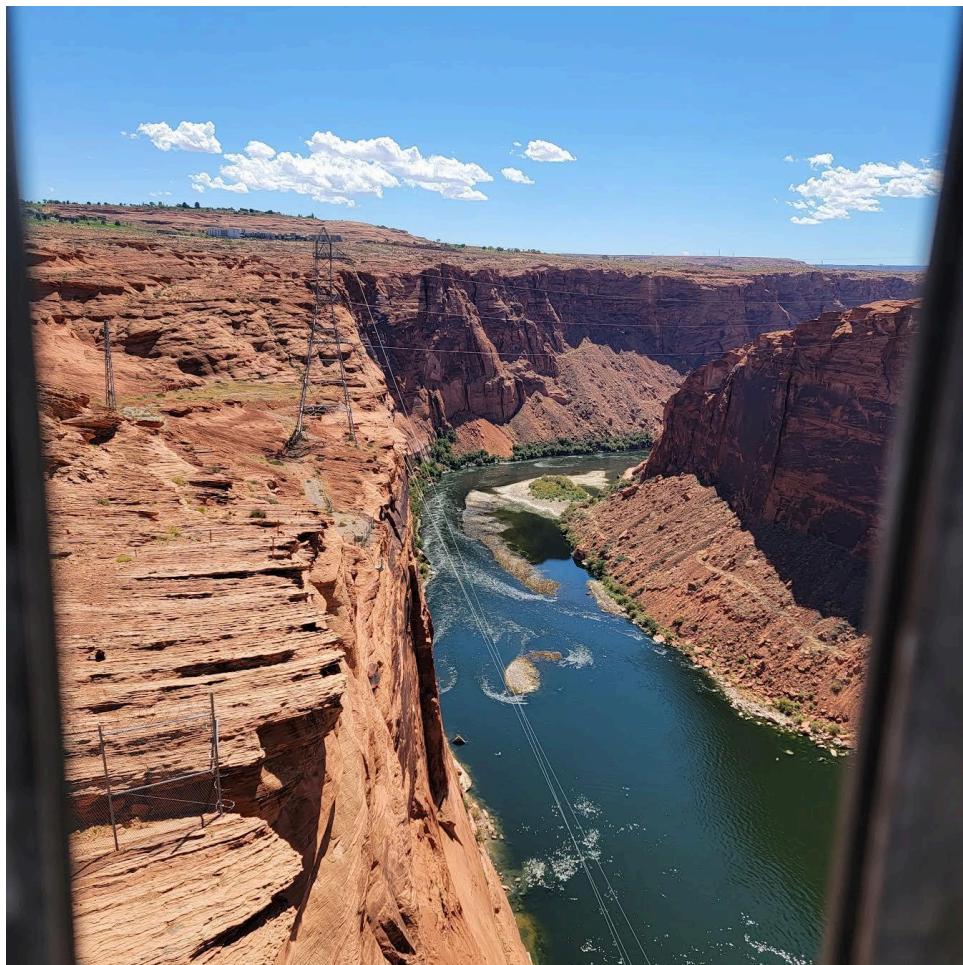
Here is Horseshoe Bend, which was apparently the end of the line for Huck and Jim.





Horseshoe Bend is the last bend in the Colorado River before it empties into Lake Powell, named after the famous Civil War veteran who lost three of his men and two of his boats while making a one-armed map of the area. It is also where my Uncle Maury turned up recently, along with several unidentified men, all of whom are apparently named Bob, who have surfaced of late owing to the low water level.

Here is what the Colorado River looks like before it gets to Lake Powell:



You too can see this view in person if you cross a highway while dodging Utah Subaru drivers who apparently don't know the concept of "pedestrians" as they hasten to the casinos in Page and if you're willing to run a gauntlet of barbed wire between Homeland Security machine gun nests whose purpose is to deter non-specific terrorists from blowing up a dam.

After Page, we went back to Utah to look at Toadstools.



We hiked deep into a canyon.



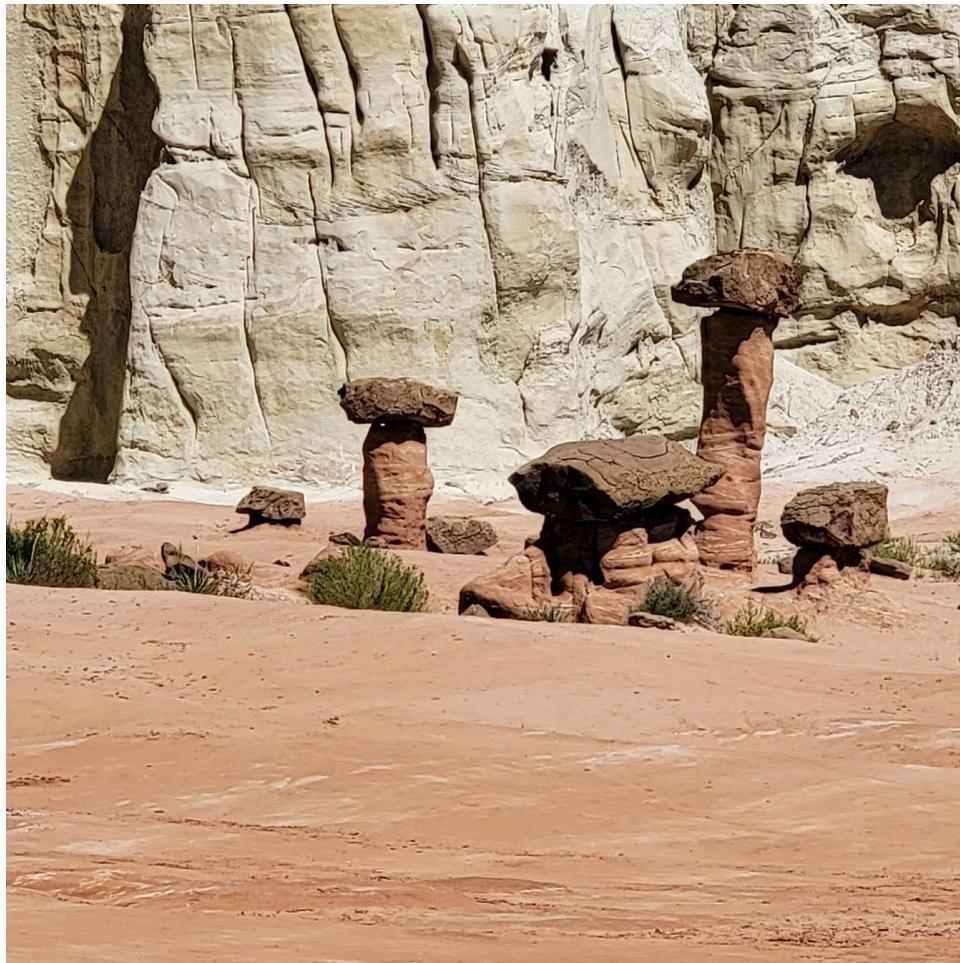
By and by, we came upon a caterpillar, who asked me “Who are you?”



When I replied I didn't know who I was, he gave me a mushroom and the toadstool grew.



When I said I wished to be smaller, the toadstool shrank.



I then asked the Hatter where I should go next.



After thinking a moment, the Hatter told me to go see Page and Plant. When I asked how to find them, he told me to take the stairway to heaven.



So we wound on down the road. Our shadows taller than our soul. The Escalante was Grand, and we saw a lady walking who shone white light and wanted to show us how everything still turns to gold.



When we got there, we asked Page and Plant what to see next. They told us the piper would lead us to reason if we went to see the pink sand.

And so we listened very hard and the tune came to us at last.



All are one, and one is all. And the forests echo with laughter.

**September 18, 2023: “Chasin’ Down a Hoodoo There”**

Bryce Canyon today.



That makes four out of five National Parks in Utah.

And what is Bryce Canyon known for? That's right, baby. Hoodoos. You can put on your rattlesnake necktie, walk 47 miles of barbed wire, and still not get to the end.



Bryce Canyon was named after Ebenezer Bryce, a Scottish shipbuilder who followed Brigham Young to the Promised Land, built a canal to divert water away from the native peoples and into the valley so all the good Mormons could grow stuff, then moved to Arizona after only five years. Now he has a National Park named after him.

Tell me something. Isn't it about time we restored the native peoples' names for our National Parks?

Bryce Canyon is essentially one of the staircases of the Grand Escalante. It sits at an altitude of about 9000 feet. If you've been keeping up with this blog, you should know the basics of how hoodoos are formed. Flood, tectonic plates shift on a fault line, ice melts and seeps into rock, it then re-freezes, cracks the rock, the wind does the rest, in ongoing cycles over the course of millions and millions of years. Unless you subscribe to certain religious tenets, in which case, it all happened in a week's time about 6000 years ago. Uh...



The word “hoodoo” was not invented by John Fogerty. It is a bastardization (read “Americanization”) of the Paiute word “Oodoo,” which means “red-faced rock.” The Paiute people believed their trickster God turned people to stone as punishment. I’m sure you can think of some things our trickster God does to punish us.

Doesn’t this remind you of an ancient Roman temple?



And speaking of arches:



We also saw some wildlife. I was holding out for Pronghorn Sheep as it's about time for them to leave the elevated areas for lower climes, but no such luck.

We did see a Stellar's Jay, though.



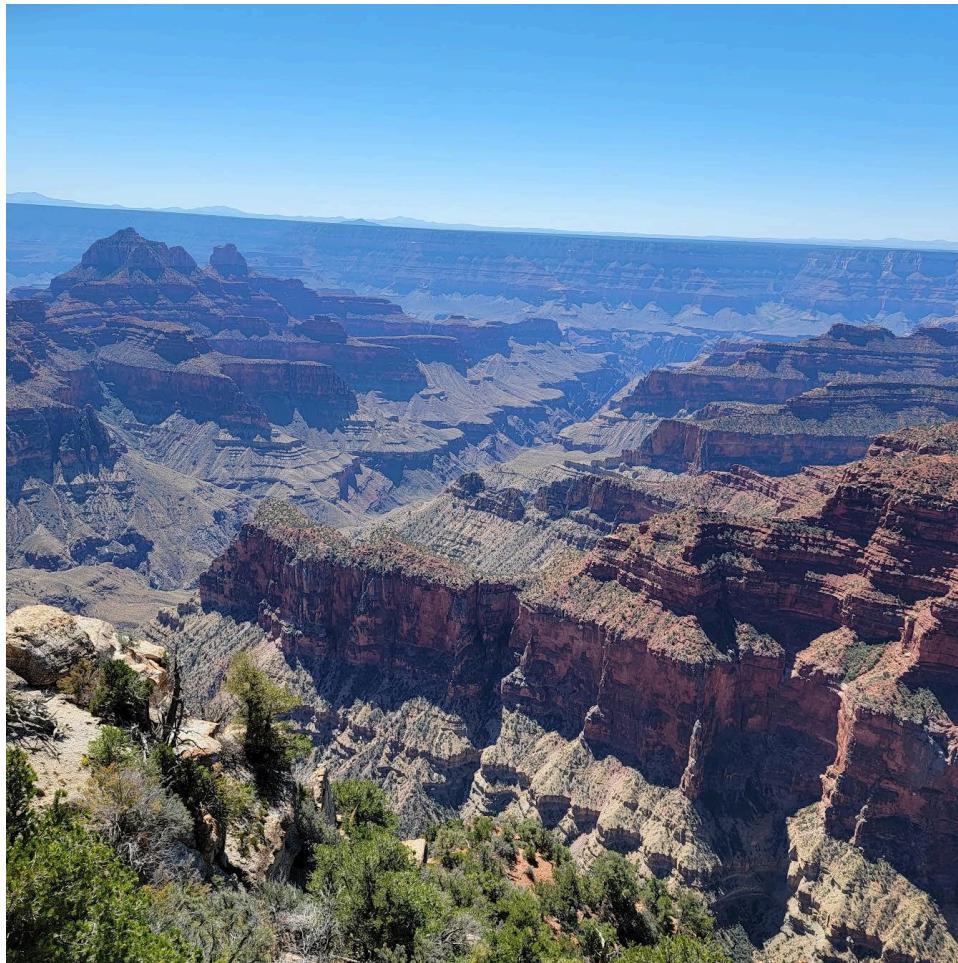
We also saw this little guy, chirping away for all he was worth.



A splendid day all around. So, Arlene, take me by the hand and ask me “hoodoo you love?”  
Mercy.



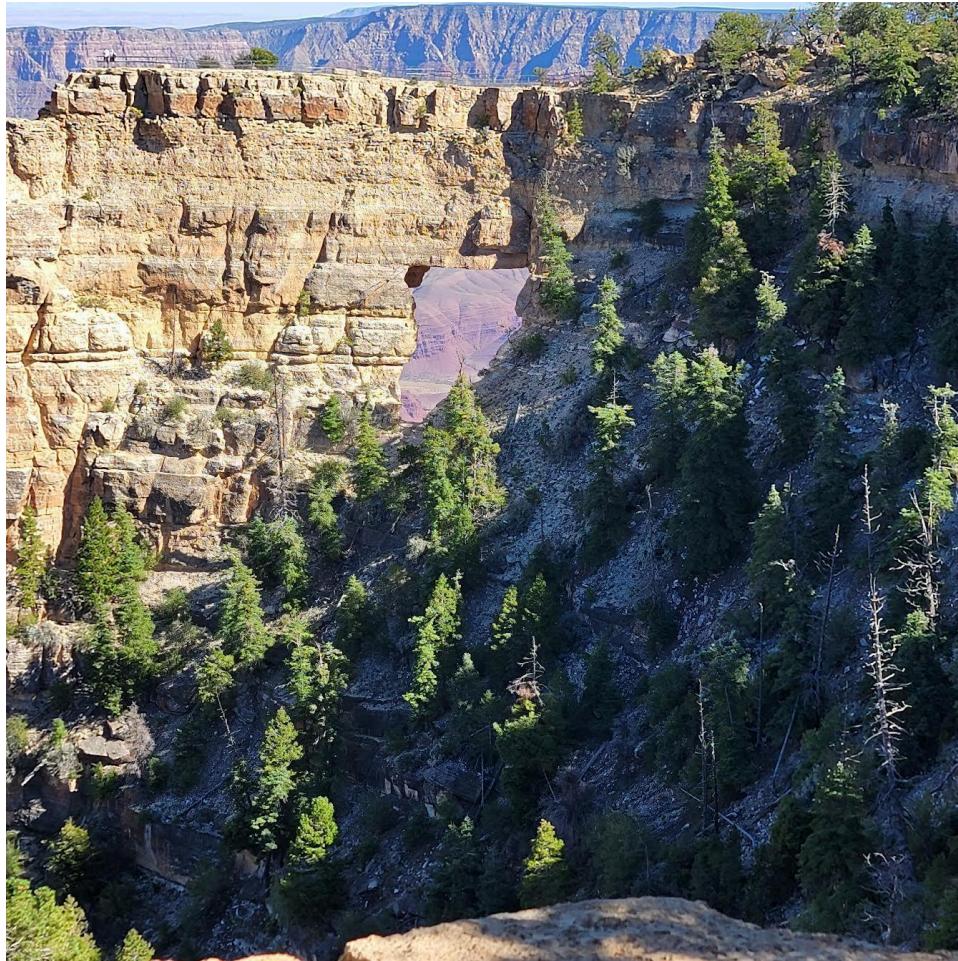
**September 19, 2023: Grand Canyon. Sweet.**



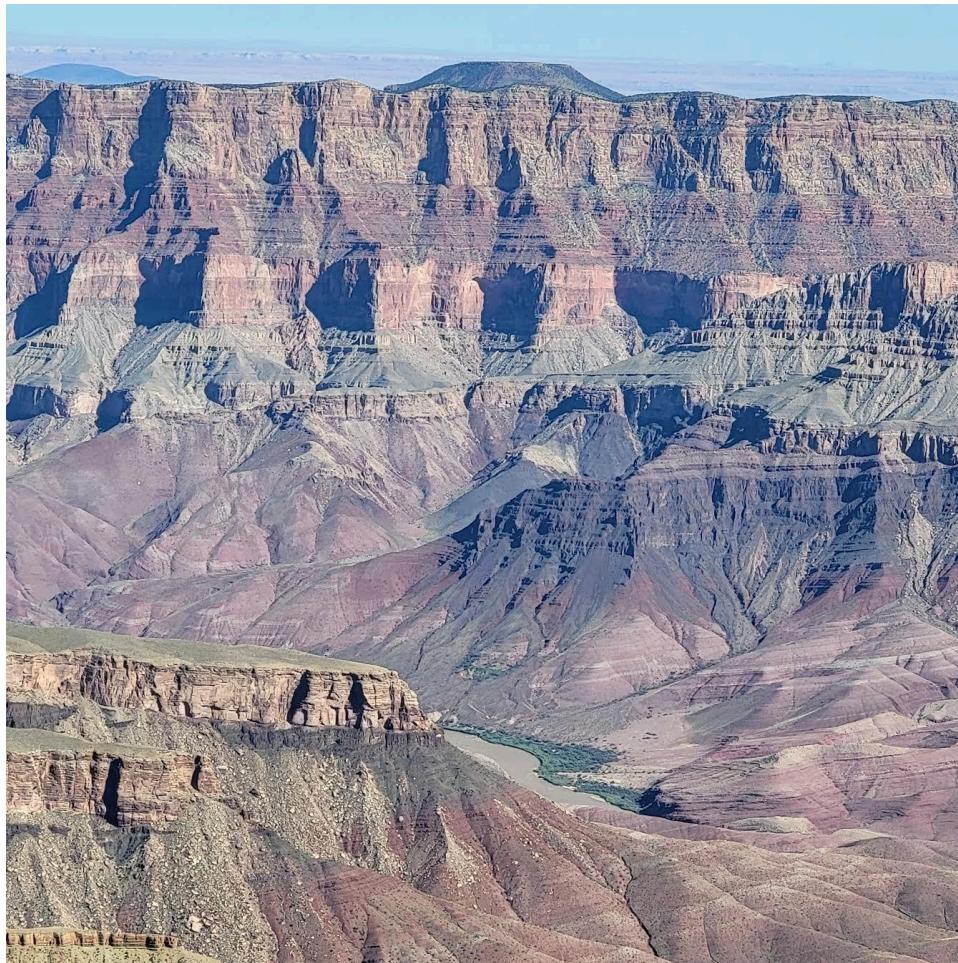
Seriously. What can one really say? It's the biggest hole we have, and it's really spectacular.

We were at the North Rim today. It looks hazy in the picture because it's almost always hazy at the North Rim. Pollution don't you know. Although, it hasn't gotten any worse, apparently, and nearby industries are cooperating with the Park to try to ameliorate the situation. I think I even believe it. At least I'd like to.

At 8400 feet, the North Rim is about 1200 feet higher than the South Rim. That means it gets more snowfall and, consequently, more snow melt in the Spring. That carves the North Rim faster than the South Rim. It also has more trees and other vegetation.



You can see the difference when you look south from the North Rim.



You can't really talk about the Grand Canyon without thinking of Theodore Roosevelt.



T.R. was the Big Daddy of the Grand Canyon. For me, he, more than any other, is deserving of our thanks for this wonderful natural treasure for without him, there would be no Grand Canyon National Park

I'll leave today's last words to him.



### September 20, 2023: Aw, Fer Zion Out Loud

And Zion makes five. We have now been to all five National Parks located in Utah on this trip.



This was my third time to Zion, the last being for a lovely Thanksgiving Dinner in the Lodge in 2010. But things have changed, and I suspect I won't return.

If you ever go to Zion National Park, make sure you enter through the East Gate. That way you can see most of what there is to see before you get to the Visitor's Center and are forced to take a shuttle up the Canyon Road and back down again. While you can get on and off at various stops and, perhaps, see some of the things that aren't closed, the whole shuttle, interpretive presentation, and signage sucked.

The Nature Center was closed. Two of the trails were closed. A bridge was out, and that area was inaccessible. None of the signs or the printed matter explained what it is one might see and why one should see it. One of the primo things to do involve walking through water. No warning about this at all, thus leaving one with the choice of cold, wet feet or passing on one of the major attractions. One would think there might have been some advance warning about that. But no.

I get it. Too much traffic in the park and not enough parking. Hence, the shuttle experience.

The day started off promisingly enough. Thank goodness we entered through the East Gate. We saw some cool checkerboard patterns on weathered rock faces.





We saw the Virgin River – whose water is unfit for human consumption.



We went through a tunnel that took three years to construct.



We aired our grievances in the Court of the Patriarchs.



Believe it or not, the Court of the Patriarchs was not named by Mormons.

In short, we saw some beautiful stuff.



But . . .

The Southern Paiute peoples have lived in the Mukuntuweap area since 1200 B.C. “Mukuntuweap” means “straight up land” in the Paiute language. President Taft declared the area a National Monument in 1909. Guess what its name was. “The Mukuntuweap National Monument.” A mere ten years later, in 1919, President Wilson dedicated Mukuntuweap National Monument as “Zion National Park.” Why do you think that occurred?

In 1858, Mormon scout Nephi Johnson explored the area at the behest of Brigham Young. By 1863, Isaac Behunin, a Mormon follower of Joseph Smith since the early days in New York, called the area “Zion,” which he translated as a “place of refuge” despite the fact that the word “Zion” is a Hebrew word that is synonymous with Jerusalem, being as it is the name of the hill on which the temple was built. But enough of that.

Zion was dedicated as the name of the National Park because Wilson was a religious prig and the dedication committee was comprised of several Mormons, including a Bishop, who would not give their consent to naming a National Park with a heathen name. The whole place has a decidedly Mormon caste to it that I found off putting. Notwithstanding my professional experience with the Mormon Church, which I won’t go into, I think a National Park should be religiously neutral. I didn’t think Zion was and I was just as happy to leave.



### **September 21, 2023: "It isn't as it used to be in the Old Times"**

Yesterday, I remarked to a friend that this trip has largely been a Life on the Mississippi trip for me, and I find the above quote from the book to be apt.

I had work to do this morning. After I finished, Peter and I walked the length and breadth of Kanab, a place for which I have fond memories of previous visits. But as Sam says, it ain't the same.

Kanab used to be a sleepy, well-kept little town that provided a couple of restaurants and a couple of old school motels for travelers to the National Parks in the area. The people were friendly, the vibe laid back, and the pace just right. Now, 13 years later, there are all the chain motels, a lot of traffic, several restaurants, construction dirt and debris, and a lot of noise. I can no longer imagine living here as the disparity between affluence and working-class is stark. The houses are now junky and untended. There doesn't seem to be many locals. Rather, it all seems to be seasonal workers or out of towners.

Kanab was once the locus of several Hollywood productions in the days when Westerns ruled the range. From the '30s through the '60s, countless serials, movies, and TV Westerns were filmed in the area. It has a walk of fame, chronicling all the stars, big and small, who filmed in Kanab.

## *KANAB UTAH UTAH'S LITTLE HOLLYWOOD*



### **The Rat Pack**

The fun loving stars of the so called "Rat Pack", including Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, Sammy Davis Jr., and Joey Bishop, cavorted through such films as "Ocean's 11", "Robin and the 7 Hoods", and their showcase film the comedy western "Sergeant's 3", shot right here in Kanab in 1963. John Sturges was the director and Howard Koch produced for United Artists Productions.

The plaques are all over the main drag. The biggest surprise for me was that *Drums Along the Mohawk* – a revolutionary war story taking place in central New York, was filmed in Kanab.

If you follow the plaques about two miles to the edge of town, you can visit the Little Hollywood Museum.



When I saw the For Sale sign out front, I knew I shouldn't go in because I knew it would only depress me.

But I went in anyway.

It's not much of a "museum." In fact, it's not a museum at all. Just a bunch of unintended backlot structures from movies nobody cares about anymore.



The air of despondency about the place was as palpable as the chill wind that began to blow this afternoon, signaling the impending arrival of autumn.

Thomas Wolfe said, “you can’t go home again.” Well, you can. What you can’t do is expect it to be the same as when you left. That lesson has been driven home to me several times on this trip. From the Mississippi River towns to the deserts of Utah.

I hope you have a great night. Go hug somebody you love.

### **September 23, 2023: Got Our Kicks**

Travel day, yesterday, so nothing to post.

We are now in Holbrook, Arizona and we had a full day of it. It spat rain all day, which made it cooler than normal and gave a really interesting light to the otherwise normal sunny vistas.

First, we went to Winslow. And yes, we stood on the corner. Right there at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Glenn Frey.



I'll hand it to them. They've turned one line of a popular song from 50 years ago into a cottage industry. The Eagles blare from every establishment and all the merch stores sell Eagles-related paraphernalia. I certainly hope the band gets a cut of all the swag they sell. In fact, we are missing the "Standing on a Corner Festival" by one week; only to be followed by the Classic Car Parade the following weekend. The mind boggles.

What used to be Route 66 runs by THE Corner.



As I've witnessed the gradual decline of what is left of Route 66 over the last thirty years, I was prepared for what I saw – boarded up businesses, abandoned houses, tatted up reformed gang members spouting Jesus, and Meth Head Zombies aimlessly skateboarding the sidewalks. Parts of the actual road don't even exist anymore.

I admire the tenacity of the towns, though. The Interstate killed all of these little towns on old Route 66, and they have had to make do with whatever they have – just like when the railroads killed off the little towns that weren't on the line a century before. So, all hail to Winslow.

Although, I'm a little young to remember the Mother Road in its heyday, there are still a few whiffs here and there to summon up my wistful romanticism.





On the way back to Holbrook, we stopped at Homolovi State Park to see the ruins of a pueblo that at one time housed 200 families.



There were also some very nice donkeys who came to say hello.



And then it was on to the Petrified Forest.

For me, my interest in petrified wood lasts about 30 seconds, so I was kind of grumpy at the beginning of the scenic loop drive as I was expecting nothing but logs.



But it got better as we moved into the Painted Desert, which I like a lot.

About halfway through the loop, we saw Blue Mesa.



I thought Blue Mesa was pretty cool. But it's good to keep things in perspective. In what was one of the best quotes I've heard on the trip, a lady from Minnesota walked up to the observation point, snorted a little, and said "it looks like they just fertilized it or else its moldy." To each their own, I guess.

We then went to Newspaper Rock, which was apparently an gathering place for the local clans of the Hopi people to share news and information. True to form, these two characters were talking it over as we arrived.



I was taken totally unawares at the breadth of the petroglyphs and was left astounded by what I saw.





Whenever I'm in the Painted Desert (which isn't often enough, alas), I somehow always think of Bob Dylan. Must have something to do with the seemingly endless open spaces and that intangible feeling of complete freedom.



In true Dylan fashion, when I was young, I always wanted to hop a freight train and ride the rails to wherever the train took me. I felt that way again today.



Not many people know it, but Route 66 used to go right through the Painted Desert. As a monument to that bygone time, a 1932 Studebaker sits rotting at the point where the road used to enter the Park. Today, however, a group of Japanese women were at the Studebaker. A Japanese film company is filming a documentary on Route 66 and the women were playing what sounded like a New Orleans jazz funeral march in honor of the Studebaker.



I look forward to seeing the doc when it's completed.

As we neared the end of the scenic loop, it began to rain a little harder, but just as we arrived at the last overlook, we saw this.



That alone made the day worthwhile.

I hope you're having a great weekend. See you tomorrow.

**September 24, 2023: Window on the World**

Today, I went to Window Rock – the capital of the Navajo nation – a semi-autonomous territory situated within the United States.



Unfortunately, it's Sunday, and the museum, zoo, botanical gardens, and eagle sanctuary are all closed. Only the Rock itself and a statue saluting the WWII Code Talkers was open.





From what I could tell, the Navajo nation is relatively prosperous. At least I've seen a lot worse looking small towns in Texas. Still, one can tell there is not a lot of money floating around, despite the fact that they have a McDonald's and a Taco Bell.

Interestingly, the Navajo nation does not subscribe to Arizona time. i.e. Arizona's unwillingness to join 48 other states and observe Daylight Savings Time. Maybe it's because it's so close to New Mexico that it needs to synch up with Gallup, the nearest town of any size.

After striking out in Window Rock, we tried to visit the St. Michael's mission and museum. You'd think a goddamn mission would be open on a Sunday, wouldn't ya? Nope. So, we went to one of my favorite places – Hubbell's Trading Post.





Hubbell's Trading Post is a real live trading post that has been in continuous operation since 1878.



After the Long Walk and the Navajo people were allowed to return to their native land, Mr. Hubbell opened his trading post. Long Walk? You do know that in 1868, that American hero, Kit Carson, was tasked with clearing the Navajo out of Arizona, right? After slaughtering close to a thousand woman and children, he marched the Navajo nation to a meeting place (the Bosque Redondo) at Ft. Sumner, New Mexico where they were incarcerated for four years. When they were paroled, many walked the 400 miles back to their homeland to begin anew. BTW, Ft. Sumner is where Billy the Kid met his end at the hands of Pat Garrett. It's a lonely place.

Anyway, Mr. Hubbell treated the Navajo right and became a trusted leader of the community named after his best friend – Ganado. Mr. Hubbell's family ran the trading post for 90 years and it still caters to Ganado Navajo community.

I once met a very nice orange cat at Hubbell's Trading Post, so I've always felt kindly toward the place. It's very peaceful there and one of the very few places where I actually believe the Indian goods are authentic and worth the price they charge.





Having a few hours to kill, we went back to the Painted Desert and took in a few of the highlights.



Since the sun was out today, the quality of the light on the formations was totally different than yesterday. Truth to tell, I preferred yesterday, when it was cloudy and spitting rain as it was something out of the ordinary.



We got to see the Painted Desert Inn today, having missed it yesterday because we got there too late. I found the place really creepy and haunted, and I was very uncomfortable there, so I skedaddled as quickly as I could. I did see one interesting mural, though, before I left. If you are the first who can tell me the story that is depicted, I will give you a memento of my choosing from my travels.



Today was bittersweet. I re-visited two of my favorite places – the Painted Desert and Hubbell's Trading Post. The last time I was at either was when I was 50. I'm now 65. If I don't make it back for another 15 years, I'll be 80. If I'm still alive. If my travels have taught me anything, they've taught me to see the things I want to see while I'm still physically and mentally able. Don't delay. Go see whatever it is you yearn to see. Because you never know.

### **September 25 and 26, 2023: John Ford is Rolling Over in His Grave**

And now for the yang. Whereas Sunday was bittersweet, Monument Valley has been a gut punch. What have they done to it? The last time I was here, there was one building with a viewpoint terrace and no traffic or development in the valley. It was more or less pristine. Not so, now. While I'm no fan of John Ford as a person, you better watch the movies he shot here if you want to retain a sense of wonder at a magnificent landscape.

First of all, it's coin-operated. You can't even go to the Visitor Center without paying \$8 head. When you get to the Visitor Center, you're bombarded with uber expensive merch. If you want a snack, you'll pay movie theatre prices. The loop trail is bumper to bumper with vehicles. There is now development in the valley, so you can be treated to the lovely sight of mobile homes dotting what used to be an immaculate, other-worldly landscape. We're here for the rest of the day, but I'll be glad to leave on Wednesday. I know that change is the way of the world and is inevitable, but I'm going to hold this one in my memory – not in today's reality.



On a positive note, our RV park is really good. It's Goulding's. Apparently, Mr. Goulding came to the Monument Valley and opened a Trading Post. Now he owns everything in sight – even the Goulding Lodge, where John Wayne once stayed. You can see the Duke' room and, presumably, where he made do-dos. Then, you can eat at Goulding's Restaurant, shop at Goulding's Grocery Store, buy a duplex from Goulding Realty, fill up at Goulding's Chevron, and be cremated at Goulding's Funeral Home. Just shoot me now.

What you apparently can't do at Goulding's is get a reliable internet connection. I think the next Goulding's purchase should be an internet company.

Notwithstanding the crass commercialism of the place – replete with a lighted football stadium and artificial turf – I'm going to try to keep in good spirits. My comrades have not seen this place before, and I don't want to wreck it for them. We are going on a sunset 4x4 tour of the valley floor, after paying a hefty ticket price and an additional \$32 entrance fee for the four of us. But hey, we'll have a real Navajo guide who will no doubt tell us all about the spiritual importance to the Navajo people of the Monument Valley, while we ooh and ahh at the mobile home developments.

The Navajo are related by blood to the Apache tribe. Interesting. The Apaches were warlike, nomadic, and have been ghettoized. The Navajos are pastoral, have their own nation, and, if the Monument Valley is any indication, business-minded. Cha-ching.

## September 27, 2023: Hoven and Weep

Travel day today. We are now in Durango, Colorado for a few days where we will no doubt see fire in the sky at some point. The fall colors are just starting to pop around the Animas River and while we had to dodge a seriously messed up backpacker at Wally World, the mellow vibe is a welcome relief from the resentful Navajo attitude we've suffered through for the last couple of days.

To catch you up: We went on a “3.5 hour sunset drive” through Monument Valley last night with a real live, jinuine Navajo Guide who managed to stop at every single souvenir stand that dots the Monument Valley loop road to give us plenty of time to shop for real live jinuine Navajo merch.



And the proprietor lives in these palatial digs. Right there in the Monument Valley.



These establishments and homesteads are everywhere. But not to worry. For a mere \$5, you can get the John Wayne spirit and get your picture taken sitting on a horse.



Here's an imponderable for you: The Navajo Nation is an independent nation situated in the states of Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado. It is a nation of 200,000 people. The nation holds oil and natural gas leases, solar energy, water and riparian rights, mineral rights, and has an active labor and management economy in all of these areas. So why is everyone so poor?

To make matters worse, the tour didn't last 3.5 hours and we didn't see sunset. The misinformation we were given on the tour includes: 1. The word "Navajo" in Spanish translates as "thief"; 2. Camp Pendleton is in Los Angeles; and 3. The Spanish came to the Four Corners area in the 1600s.

OK, I'm done. No more bitching about the Navajo and the Monument Valley. Here's how I choose to remember it:



We got out of Dodge bright and early this morning. I think we all had enough of the bad juju. On the way to Durango, we first stopped at Hovenweep National Monument.



Too bad the Visitor Center was closed. That said, we met up with a Bureau of Land Management cop who was very helpful and gave us info on what to see and what to miss. The highlight was the Castle.

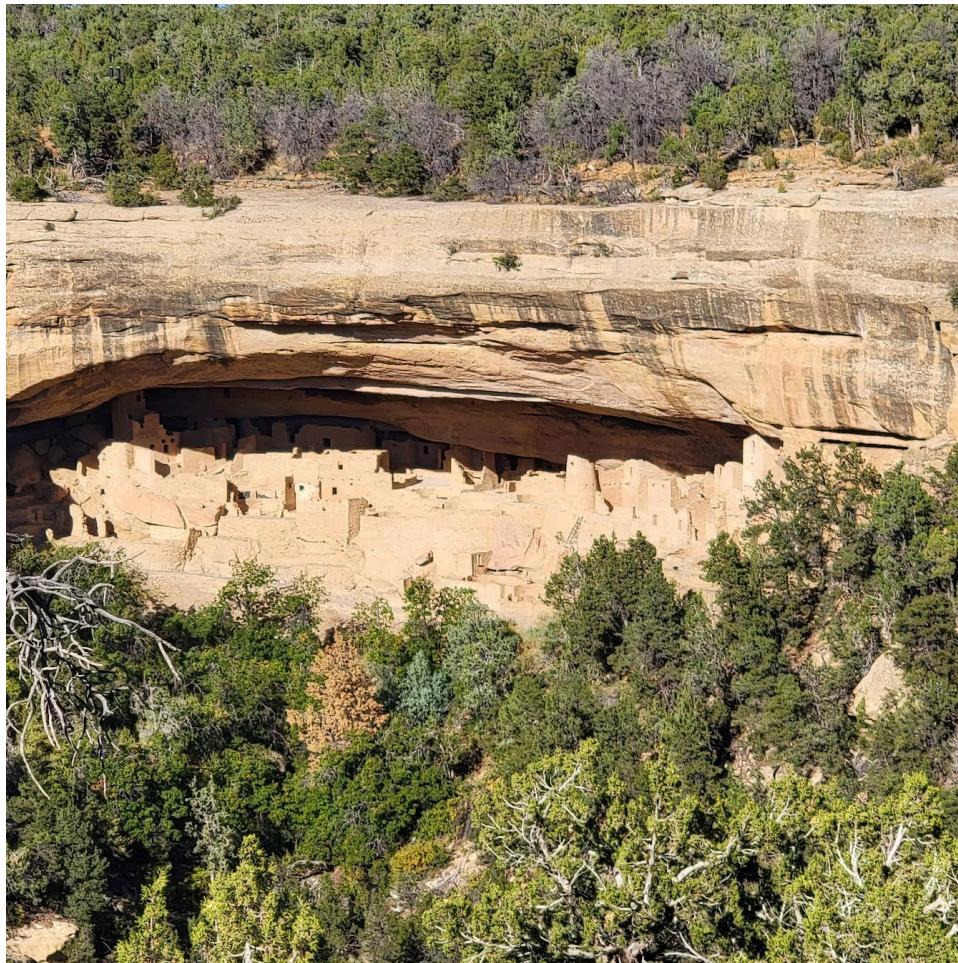


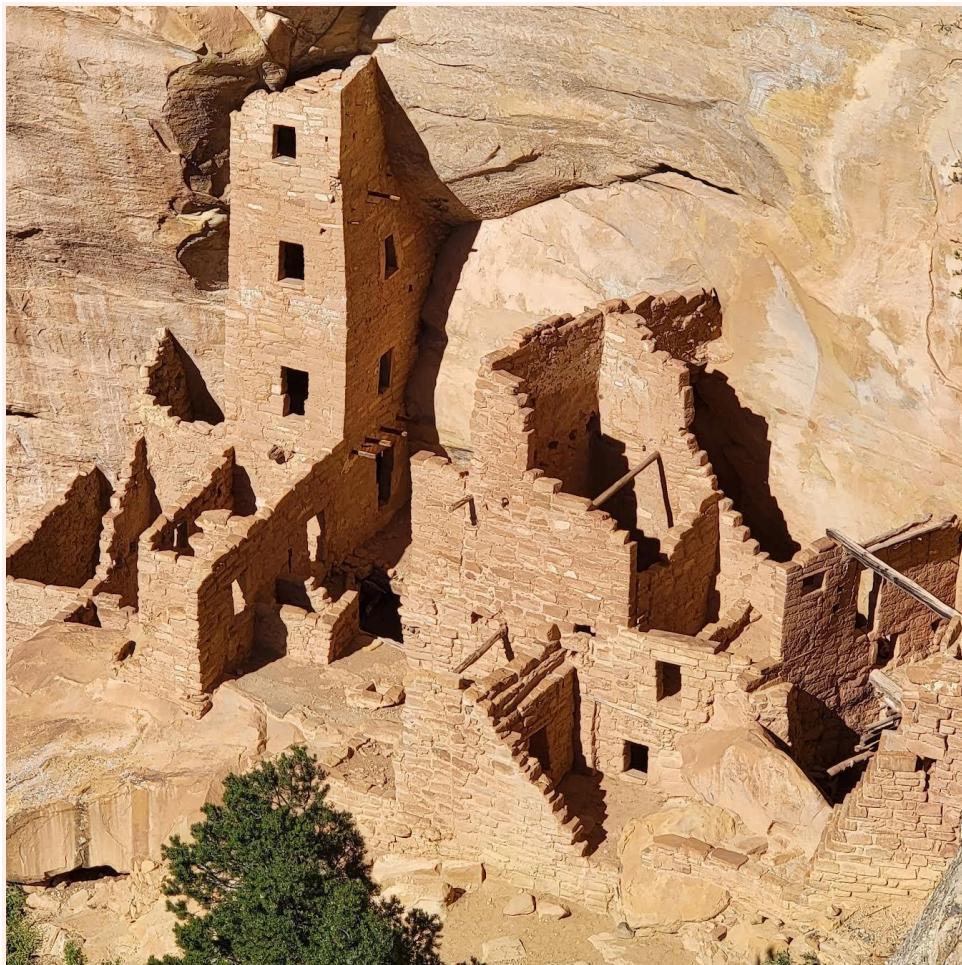
The Pueblo people occupied this part of the Four Corners region from roughly 500 – 1300 CE. Then, they abruptly left. No one really knows why, although resource depletion seems the most likely explanation. Or perhaps, the chough you see above is an augur of past secrets:

“It will have blood, they say. Blood will have blood.  
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak.  
Augurs and understood relations have  
By magot pies and choughs and rooks  
Brought forth the secret’st man of blood.”

Whether because of a Pueblo Macbeth or for some other reason, the Pueblo migrated south and became the Hopi and Anasazi people you may be familiar with.

Our last stop for the day was Mesa Verde National Park, to see what? Yup. More pueblos. In fact, Mesa Verde has the largest and most comprehensive pueblo system and the single largest ruin in North America.





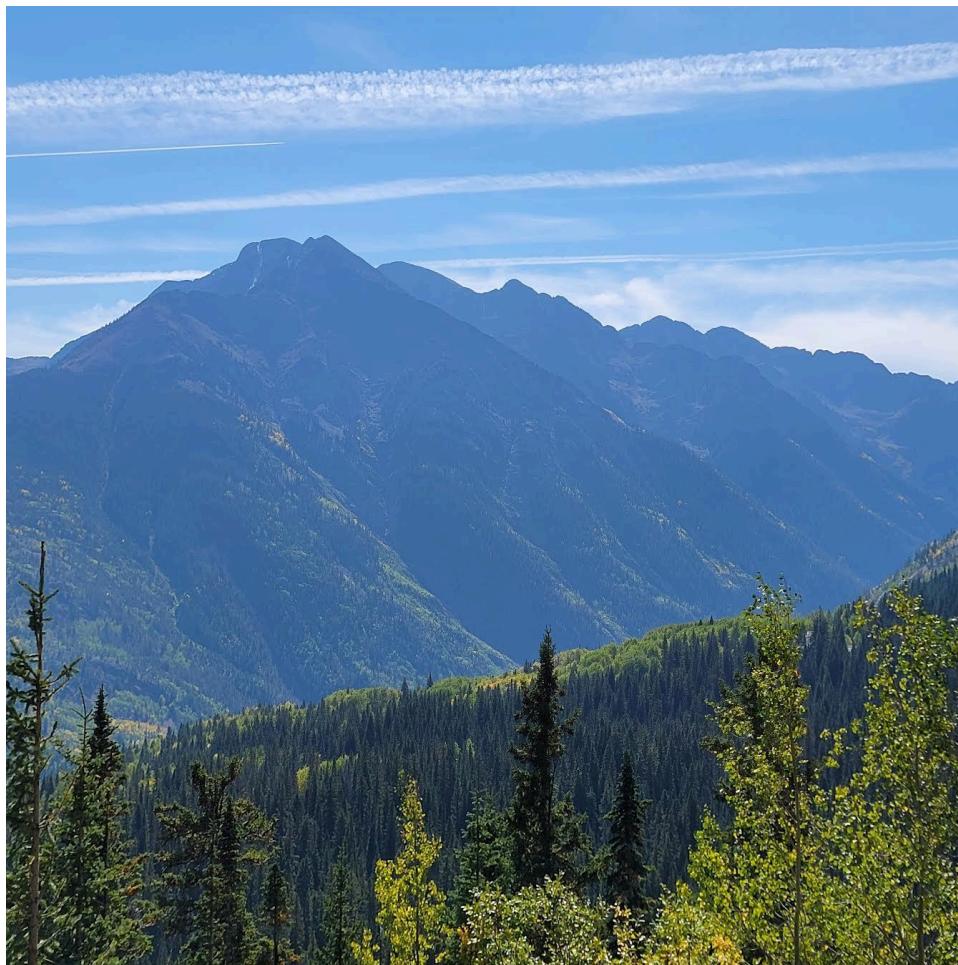
It was super cool. Plus, we solved a centuries old conundrum about the Pueblo people, i.e. how the heck did they get from one level to another? Well, today, we learned the answer.



I'll check in tomorrow after we follow Joe Walsh's example. Good Night.

**September 28, 2023: Couldn't Get Much Higher**

Spent a full day Rocky Mountain way.





We drove the San Juan Scenic Skyway Loop from Durango, through Silverton, Ouray, Ridgway, Dolores and Mancos. All 236 miles of it.

Our first stop was Silverton, where a narrow gauge railroad runs between it and Durango.



If it looks familiar, it's because you've seen it in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, some of which was filmed around Durango.

The Rockies is a generic term for the mountain range that runs from Mexico to Canada, roughly along the Continental Divide. The particular range we drove around today are the San Juan Mountains, through which the Animas River flows.





Here's some of the runoff:



So much for the land of sky blue waters.

The big draw for this area was mining. You can see the remnants of mines past dotted throughout the mountains as you drive the twisty, curvy road.

Most of the pictures in this post are at elevations of between 12,000 and 14,000 feet, making the mountains look more autumnal, with cooler temperatures than the valleys which are still pretty hot.



The main thing I learned today is this: While the San Juan Scenic Skyway Loop has been designated as one of the top scenic drives in America, don't drive it in the winter. Colorado is the avalanche king of the United States. More people are killed by avalanches in Colorado than in any other state, even Florida. So if you absolutely have to drive it in the wintertime, don't be like the Donners and knock off early or else you might be humming "Timothy" before the spring thaw.

#### **September 29, 2023: By a Waterfall, I'm Calling You-hoo-hoo-hoo**

Another day at about 10,000 feet. The air was crisp as we went on the elusive Durango waterfall quest. We found them, but it took some doing.

Before hitting the falls, we stopped off at one of the myriad hot springs that dot the San Juan Mountains. This particular one was spouting off on a regular basis.



Now: there are about a dozen signs around this hot spring warning the unwary not to climb on the formation. Why? Because it's really slippery, what with it being all slime covered from centuries of mineral deposits. So what did the nice looking overweight middle-aged lady do? She tried to climb the formation. She slipped, of course, and got all wet and slimy. Then she got mad that no one warned her. I didn't say anything. I just pointed at the sign. She got huffy and I walked off. Sheesh.

Not to be deterred, we continued with our quest. We went off road in a Kia looking for THE falls we had heard so much about. To wet our whistle, we saw this:



Nice enough, but not the uber falls of myth and legend. So on we went.

We next came upon a flume.



For those of you who are Six Flags fans, you already know what a flume is. For those of you who were fortunate enough not to be exposed to Six Flags Over Texas when you were teenagers, a flume is a long chute that carries mine leavings to a running water source, deposits them into that source, after which, they are presumably carried downstream somewhere, messing up the landscape for the next millennium. We tried to follow the flume, but we were thwarted in our efforts by BLM security cameras and we decided not to risk incarceration just as the government is getting ready to shut down.

And speaking of security cameras, I have discovered that a whole lot of people live way off the beaten path.



We're in the middle of a National Forest, on an unimproved road that has no service in the winter, and we see tons of "Private Property" signs and houses of all shapes and sizes tucked away like what you see above. Who the heck lives in these houses? People in the Witness Protection Program? It's mystifying. Although, we did come across an old crone in a beat up 4x4 who for all the world looks like the prototype of the witch from Hansel and Gretel. She nodded at me as I passed, but she did not speak. I saw her vehicle disappear down a deserted path in the wilderness and felt a goose walk on my grave.

But on we went, the elusive falls still out of our grasp, and nowhere to be seen. Or heard. As we continued down the rock-strewn dirt road, we saw this:



Remember what I told you about avalanches yesterday? It's no joke. Trees were snapped in half from last winter's avalanche.



I have to say I was puzzled as to why cabins are being built in an avalanche path. Maybe the contractor is following the Tao of Garp, figuring what are the odds of two avalanches in the same location. Me, I don't like the odds.

Over hill and dale, through the enchanted forest, dodging avalanches, at risk of being carried downstream by a flume, and being given the malocchio by one of the weird sisters, we made it – after a 100 foot descent over the road not taken. At last, Valhalla. It was worth the struggle.



Then we had to go back.

It was a beautiful day and I currently have no complaints. Tomorrow: An All-American day about which I shall no doubt regale you with further adventures and misadventures of the Cockeyed Caravan. Until then, adieu.

### **September 30, 2023: Talons Up!**

What does one do on a crisp fall afternoon in Durango? Football! What else? Today, we went out to cheer the Ft. Lewis College Skyhawks on to victory!



Not. It was a tough day for the Skyhawks. They lost 85-7. Yes, 85-7. I couldn't get a shot of the scoreboard as they turned it off as soon as the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter ended, but I did get one at halftime.



Ft. Lewis is a liberal arts college of 3,500 students. Before it was a college, it was an Army fort, then an Indian school. In keeping with that tradition, Native Americans can attend Ft. Lewis tuition free. It has graduated 16% of all Native American college graduates in the U.S. It is known for its engineering, business administration, and music departments.

Coming from Texas, where Football reigns supreme, it was interesting to see how the other half lives.

Ft. Lewis is a Division II school. Its football field wouldn't nearly stack up with a typical Texas high school stadium. And the players on the two teams were so small! Again, a typical Texas high school team would outsize the guys we saw 2-1.

It's not that the Ft. Lewis team was bad. As soon as they learn how to pass, catch, run, and tackle, they should be ok. As the Hungarian Bear Killer, Jr. Ranger Balazs Csaforudas said after seeing his first American football game in person, "it was the closest game I've ever seen."



After a siesta at the RV, we headed off to the Bar D Chuckwagon to eat meat and listen to some cowboy music.



Tonight was biker night, so the place was this weird amalgam of what I think were real, authentic cowboys and biker wannabes, who were harmless enough I suppose, even though I don't think biker culture is anything to emulate.

There was a blacksmith shop selling metal merch. A leather shop selling leather merch. An art gallery selling art merch. A music shop selling music merch. And a merch shop selling merch merch. The food was so-so, but I was impressed at how they managed to move 700 people through the chow line so efficiently.

The band was also so-so. I found their repertoire a little strange as they had no electric guitars or drums. I had never heard an acoustic "Freebird" or "Satisfaction" until tonight. I probably don't need to again.



But the audience loved it. Especially the patriotic stuff – saluting veterans, singing “God Bless America” – the usual stuff. The best part was the toddler dancing to “The Devil Came Down to Georgia” - a song that is nails on a chalkboard for me.

The evening was actually a lot of fun, and a great way to end our time in Colorado.

Tomorrow, on to Santa Fe to rendezvous with old friends, then the clubhouse turn into Texas. Stay tuned.

### **October 1 and 2, 2023: Old Friends**

We've been trying to outrun autumn in the high country. A front blew in while we were at the Bar D in Durango and, while the sun is still warm, there is a significant amount of chilly wind blowing in both in our last stop in the Rockies as well as in Santa Fe.

On the way to Santa Fe yesterday, we stopped at Chimney Rock National Monument for a last look at the Rockies.





Chimney Rock is yet another pueblo ruin and was more or less a repeat of what I've already told you about.

We got to Santa Fe around 4, and I was able to have dinner and drinks with my bud, Angela.



We went to a fashionably shabby-chic restaurant in Tesuque Village, where the rich movie folks go when they're at their second homes in the Santa Fe area.

After dinner, we had drinks at the Four Seasons and managed to scarf a balcony table for a view of the sunset.



When I got back to the RV camp, I was able to get this pic, which I think may be an apt metaphor for our journey.



Today, I met up with my high school friend, Lynn, who showed me all of the Santa Fe theatres.



We had a great day together, catching up, talking about old times, and generally avoiding the intermittent rain and hail. It's a good day to be inside.

We're nearing the end of our journey. One more stop at Palo Duro Canyon tomorrow, where we will meet up with Adriana and our new dog, Pippa. Then back to Dallas on Thursday when I'll give you a recap and some final thoughts. Have a great night.

#### **October 3-5, 2023: Not with a bang, but a whimper**

I wish I could tell you we ended on a high note, but we didn't.

Remember how I told you we were being chased by autumn? It caught up with us in Santa Fe, where on Monday we were largely confined to quarters during the afternoon as it rained and hailed. I'm so glad I got to see my buds Angela and Lynn before the worst of it hit.

On Tuesday, we schlepped it to Palo Duro Canyon. The weather was okay, and we had the obligatory stop at the Cadillac Ranch.



But the RV park was janky and I felt sorry for my compadres who had to stay there that night while I got to sleep in a real bed for the first time in 6 weeks after meeting up with Adriana, Pippa, and Angela, who came in for the day.

On Wednesday it rained, and Palo Duro was not much fun. We did the scenic drive, but it was raining pretty hard and was therefore anticlimactic. So, we started back to Dallas after lunch and drove through massive thunderstorms most of the way. Here are a couple of pics of the second biggest hole in the U.S. (for you, Ruth)





We all slept in yesterday and embraced the heat (not), which we had not felt for many weeks as we unloaded and returned the RV.

So, that's it. 50 days, 6000 miles, 16 states (17 for Doug, Balazs, and Peter as they got to set foot in Idaho).

The 3 Best things for me besides the camaraderie of my traveling companions: Teton Float Trip, the Little Big Horn Battlefield, and seeing my ancestor's name in St. Charles at the beginning of Lewis and Clark's journey.

Worst things for me: Monument Valley and Zion National Park. I doubt I'll go back to either.

Best RV site: A toss-up between Durango and Santa Fe. Worst RV site I stayed in: Wibeaux, Montana.

What I wish I had seen: Medicine Wheel, Wyoming. I screwed up the itinerary and missed it.

What did I learn? I think I took this trip to see if the America I once knew still exists. I don't think it does. I know that's my problem, not America's, but it still hurts a little. Small towns are dying. There is a lot of poverty. There seems to me to be a distinct lack of pride in being American beyond the vapid platitudes of "God, Guns, and Trump" (a flag I saw in Colorado).

I found a great deal of apathy wherever I went. Interpretive signs on exhibits were misspelled, food service was bad when we ate out. It seems like no one really cares any more as long as you buy the merch and give a good review on Tripadvisor.

I wish I knew what to do about what I saw and felt, but I don't. I'm getting old and I am therefore irrelevant. I worry what this country will be in 20 years. So, I'm going to leave it here with the words of Don Quixote: "Too much sanity may be madness and the maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be."

I wish all of you all the best of everything. Thanks for tagging along with the Cockeyed Caravan.



