

Driving Across Five Western States



August 2013

Bob and Molly Hillery

This was another of our driving trips across several western states, this time with Bob's brother Geoff and his friend Christine. The itinerary called for us to meet Geoff and Christine in Denver, Colorado and to drive as far as San Francisco, visiting sites in five states along the way. Our route would take us across the Rocky Mountains, to Salt Lake City, through the Canyonlands of Utah, the Grand Canyon in Arizona, Las Vegas and Scenic Route 1 along the Pacific Coast of California.

Our son Christopher (with Cyndi and Samantha) joined us at the beginning of the trip for a few days in Denver and we saw them once again at their home in Sacramento after saying good-bye to Geoff and Christine in San Francisco. In addition, Molly and I extended the trip to a total of one month by starting and ending in Salt Lake City. The primary reason for this was to get a much better price on a round trip (versus one way) car rental but we also thoroughly enjoyed the extra days of sight-seeing.

Molly and I have visited all the places seen on this trip—in many cases, several times—but we never tire of duplication and always see something “for the first time”. And, of course, having different traveling companions always adds to the interest and excitement of a trip. This one was no exception.

Western United States, August 2013

Monday July 29

We left home around 7pm to have dinner at Morton's downtown before driving to the airport Marriott for an overnight stay prior to our early morning flight to Salt Lake City. On Thursday we are meeting Geoff and Christine in Denver to start a three week driving trip which will take us as far as San Francisco. Molly and I are starting (and ending) the trip in Salt Lake City as renting a van for a round trip (as opposed to one way) is far more economical – easily covering the extra costs for hotels and meals. It also allows us to tag on a few days in Sacramento to see Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha after Geoff and Christine fly home. In fact we shall see them twice during the month away as they are joining us in Denver for a few days – but more on that later.

Tuesday July 30

We were up around 6:30 and caught the 7am shuttle from the hotel to the airport. By 7:20 we were checked in and through Security and buying a Starbucks coffee to drink before our 8:40 flight. It was a beautiful clear and pleasantly cool morning in Cincinnati and the flight left on time but we soon ran into some significant turbulence which caused a slight delay in the serving of breakfast. However, the final two hours of the flight were uneventful and we landed in Salt Lake on time at 10:20 local time. The weather here was also clear but the temperature had already climbed to near 80F on its way to the mid-nineties! In fact, the long range forecast suggests that we will be experiencing temperatures in the nineties for at least the first ten days of our trip. "But it's a dry heat!"

We soon had our bags and made our way to the Hertz rental car pick-up – with some trepidation in case our request for the large mini-van had not been honored. With four of us and luggage for several weeks, anything else would be far less comfortable.

As it turned out, I received an e-mail as soon as we landed telling me that my Toyota minivan was in stall 26! Unfortunately, when we had fought our way through the crowds (apparently a huge convention was just starting) we found a Chevy SUV in stall 26 – not what we wanted and no way suitable for our trip. The Service Center line was about 40 strong so I went straight to the inside Hertz desk and to the front of a "mile long" line (I was later told that there was a two hour wait for cars!). To cut a long story short, a manager promised an appropriate mini-van within twenty minutes and to my surprise, he came through with exactly what we needed. So, by about 11:30 we were leaving the airport and heading towards Steamboat Springs.



Our Transportation for the Month



The route took us along Interstate 80 to Park City where we passed up two Starbucks (both in supermarkets and usually having no place to sit) before turning on to US Route 40. This we would follow all the way to Steamboat Springs, a total distance of 350 miles from SLC airport. This route was generally a two lane highway (with frequent passing lanes) and was very quiet so it was as good as driving the expressway – but without the amenities. We drove for about 150 miles before we found a McDonalds in the town of Roosevelt (just a dot on the map but actually quite densely populated) and had a light lunch – and re-filled our water bottles. The temperature was in the high eighties even at this elevation of 6000 feet.

We had climbed over a pass at 8000 feet just east of

Park City and then dropped to between 5500 and 6000 feet, where we stayed for the remainder of the journey.

For the most part we were traveling on relatively flat terrain (despite the mile high plus elevation) which was mostly barren or brush land with the occasional patch of farmland (a few cows or maybe a field of wheat). We were, however, surrounded by higher peaks (up to nine thousand feet or more?) and many of the mountain sides were quite steep or even sheer and were beautifully colored from white to deep reds. None of the peaks were high enough to have snow caps; in fact we had not seen any snow on any Rocky peaks as we flew across country and as we landed in Salt Lake City. Obviously this is the time of year when snow covered peaks are most unlikely, but this year in particular has been very hot in the west so we don't anticipate seeing any white at all.

We passed several entrances to the Dinosaur National Monument which straddles the Utah/Colorado border and we could see the white mountains of the park where dinosaur remains are prevalent embedded in the rock. We made a mental note to allow some time for a visit here at some point in the future. For today, however, we had to keep going (mostly at 70mph+) and reach Steamboat Springs, which we finally did at 6:30pm. The land surrounding the city is quite lush farmland and even the hillsides were very green as we covered the final twenty miles into the city. Our hotel was on the eastern edge of town so, after checking in and changing, we back-tracked a couple of miles for a very pleasant dinner at the Ore House restaurant. This had been a barn for over a hundred years and was converted to a restaurant (since expanded) in 1970 so it is the oldest eatery in the city. The food and service were very good in typical western rustic surroundings. We were back at the hotel before 9:30 and it wasn't long before we retired and were asleep after a very long day.

Wednesday July 31

We had breakfast at Starbucks in Steamboat Springs on a beautiful morning. It was relatively cool (60F) at this altitude (6000 feet) and very clear so we had some beautiful views not only in the town but as we headed east towards Denver.



Varying Terrain in Northern Colorado

We followed US40 over a couple of passes that reached over 9000 feet and then turned south to join Interstate 70 at Silverthorne, about an hour west of Denver. By this time it was getting hot (near 90F) and there were some ominous clouds about but we saw only a few drops of rain as we drove the rest of the way to our friends' home in Stapleton.

Ian and Janice moved to Denver a couple of years ago and live in a very nice new development on the site of the old Denver airport, less than ten miles from downtown and on the eastern edge of the city limits. Their home is very nice and is beautifully decorated and furnished throughout. It has a small but very well planted garden and a stone patio at the back and a long front porch. They very much enjoy living here and are within a few miles of both of their children and their five grandchildren.

We spent the afternoon and evening catching up and enjoying an excellent meal that Janice had prepared and it was after 10pm before we retired.

Thursday August 1

We had breakfast at Ian and Janice's home and then took a short drive around their development and ended up at a local Starbucks for a late morning coffee. At noon we picked up our bags from their home, checked in at our hotel (only five

minutes away) and met up with Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha who had flown in the night before. We immediately went to Panera for lunch where Ian and Janice joined us to meet Samantha for the first time. We had another pleasant hour with them before they left for home and the five of us set out for the afternoon.

The weather was quite threatening at this point and there was obviously quite a bit of rainfall in the nearby mountains so we opted for an indoor activity and went on the Coors Brewery tour in Golden. It was a self-guided tour (with audio-phone) and was quite interesting and informative. This particular site is the largest brewery in the country and produces not only all the Coors brands but many of the Miller beers under a relatively new joint venture between the two companies. The free samples at the end of the tour were, unfortunately, of interest to only one of us!



Coors Brewery Tour

We returned to the hotel (there had been no rain!) for a little while and had some snacks in the Concierge Lounge before driving to the airport to meet Geoff and Christine. Their flight from London was about 30 minutes late but they arrived looking very perky so they joined us for a meal at iHop close to the hotel. It was about 10:30 local time (5:30 am Friday for them) by the time we retired with the hope that we would all be awake and up before the lounge breakfast ceased at 9:30.

Friday August 2

We all were indeed up and ready for breakfast at nine but the lounge was so packed that we chose to eat in the main hotel restaurant. I had been for a couple of miles walk before and everyone seemed to have slept reasonably well so we were soon ready for our day out. It was pleasantly warm and mostly sunny so we decided on the drive that would take us to the top of Mount Evans on the highest paved road in North America – at a height of 14,000 feet.

Mount Evans is a 14,265 feet (4,348 m) mountain in the Front Range region of the Rocky Mountains, in Clear Creek County, Colorado. It is one of 54 fourteeners (mountains with peaks over 14,000 feet (4,300 m)) in Colorado, and the closest fourteener to Denver. It is often compared to Pikes Peak — another Front Range fourteener within a short distance of a major city — which it exceeds in elevation by 154 ft (50 m).

The Mount Evans Scenic Byway consists of Colorado State Highway 103 from Idaho Springs, Colorado on I-70 about 13 miles (21 km) to Echo Lake, and Colorado 5 from Echo Lake 15 miles (24 km), ending at a parking area and turnaround just below the summit. The latter has long been the highest paved road in North America and is only open in the summer. Colorado 103 continues east from Echo Lake to Squaw Pass, from which it connects back to I-70 via the Evergreen Parkway and US Route 40.

This is the route we took.

We drove west on I-70 about 30 miles and then started the 28 mile climb to the summit. The road was just two lanes wide and had no guard rails so parts of it were quite hair-raising, especially when passing other vehicles if you were on the edge that fell precipitously away. We did reach the top safely, however, (passing a number of cyclists doing the same climb!) and cautiously got out of the car into the very thin air. Molly was perhaps most affected and spent most of the time sitting in the car. Christopher, Geoff and Christine walked around a little and Samantha (least affected), Cyndi and I took the rocky path to the very summit – only another 200 feet further up but (at least for me) demanding a slow pace and frequent stops.



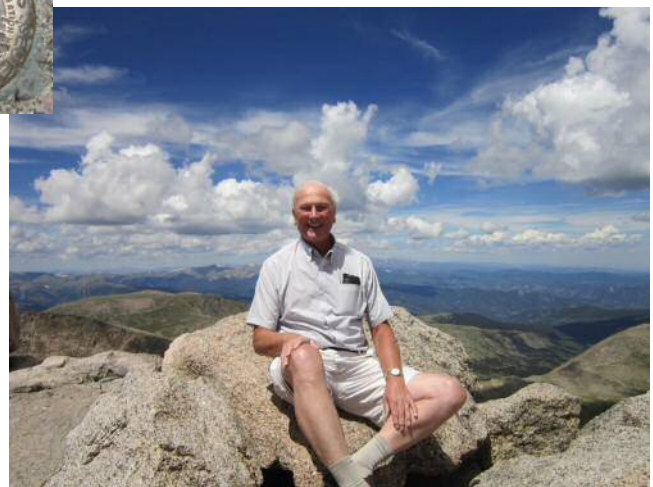
Half way up from below



and above



Unaffected by altitude!



It was after 2pm before we started the descent and almost 4 by the time we reached the town of Golden, after taking a slightly different route back (see box on previous page). We parked and found the first available restaurant where we had a hearty lunch/dinner and – for the driver – a nerve-calming drink!

We then spent another 30 minutes or so on a local street where a party was taking place. There were several food and drink stalls and a couple of entertainment acts in progress but it didn't take long to cover the single block. We then drove back to the hotel and four of us had a coffee as Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha retired. The rest of us weren't far behind and everyone was at least in their rooms before 8:30.

Saturday August 3

After a long day in the car yesterday we chose to minimize driving today and simply go into Denver. Our first stop was the State Capitol. Sammy has started “collecting” state capitols (by having a photograph taken in front of each they visit) so she – and the rest of us – were disappointed to find that it was almost completely engulfed in plastic, presumably for some major renovation. Worse than that, the place was closed so we weren't able to see the inside either. Nevertheless we took the obligatory photos and it was actually quite pleasant standing at the “One Mile High” point on the west steps and looking down the hill towards the US Mint Building (also closed!).



The Colorado State Capitol and looking towards The Mint

We then sat outside in the shade to enjoy a cool drink before driving a short distance to the Botanical Gardens. This was a beautiful place to visit with many different types of gardens laid out in a fairly compact area. In addition, there was a rooftop children's garden that was also extremely well done and informative. In all, we spent a very pleasant two hours there on a hot, and we thought surprisingly humid, afternoon.





We returned to the hotel around 4:30 to swim, relax and get cooled down before re-convening for dinner at 7:30. We ate at a local restaurant called The Berkshire, which specializes in all forms of pig meat. We arrived in a torrential downpour but soon dried out and had a very good meal in pleasant surroundings.

Back at the hotel we said our farewells to Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha as they were not planning to join us for breakfast but spend a lazy day in and around the hotel before their evening flight back to Sacramento.



Sunday August 4



After breakfast we completed packing, checked out and loaded the van for our 250 miles journey to Grand Junction. This was on Interstate 70 all the way so was a very easy drive through some spectacular scenery as we climbed up to 10,600 feet near Vail and then descended the western slopes of The Rockies. The mountains were mostly free of snow, although we saw a few patches in some areas on the eastern side, but the rock formations, colors and canyons were amazing to drive through and seemed to change with every bend in the road.

We made just two stops along the route for coffee and lunch breaks. We had intended to spend a little time in Vail but there was absolutely no parking anywhere near the town so we just drove

through and admired the ski chalets and lodges. However, it was only a few miles to Avon where we did stop. This was also a very pleasant small town, nicely laid out and obviously another prosperous ski resort area.

We did make one final rest room stop at the small town of Parachute which had been the site of a train robbery attempt in 1904 by Harvey Logan, a member of Butch Cassidy's gang, the history of which was presented on two information boards at the Tourist Information Center.

"The Robbery"

On June 7, 1904, an outlaw named Harvey Logan attempted one of the west's last train robberies near here. Also known as Kid Curry, Logan was a member of Butch Cassidy's notorious Hole in the Wall'gang.

When the westbound Denver & Rio Grande train made its scheduled 1:15 a.m. stop in Parachute on that Tuesday morning, a man scrambled on board. He ordered the engineer at gun point to proceed to Streit Flats, roughly 3 miles west of here. There he was joined by two accomplices.

The three outlaws forced the Baggage Master to open the doors of the baggage car and blew open the safe with a charge of dynamite. They were expecting to find a shipment of gold. Historians never established that they actually did. In fact, it is believed by many that the gold had been sent through on a earlier train.

After blowing the safe, the outlaws headed directly for the Colorado River. They crossed the river and mounted horses which they had hidden on the south side. They headed for Battlement Mesa, stealing fresh mounts as they went.

In the meantime, lawmen from Grand Junction and Parachute, along with several local ranchers, formed a posse to pursue the outlaws. For the story of 'The Getaway' and the confrontation between posse and outlaw, please see the historical marker on Battlement Mesa. Cross I-70 and the Colorado River, then follow signs to the Battlement Mesa Information Center.

"The Getaway"

On June 7, 1904, Kid Curry crossed Battlement Mesa near here after robbing a train west of Parachute. He was accompanied by two fellow members of Butch Cassidy's notorious Hole in the Wall'gang.

In hot pursuit was a posse composed of lawmen from both Parachute and Grand Junction and several ranchers.

After crossing Battlement Mesa, the posse caught up with and exchanged fire with the robbers on Mamm Creek east of here. The outlaws escaped unharmed and rode on to Divide Creek where they stole horses and continued east.

Finally, on East Divide Creek, the posse again overtook the outlaws. Hidden behind rocks, the desperadoes warned the lawmen and ranchers to go back or get hurt. Ignoring this warning, the posse went for their guns. In the ensuing battle, one of the robbers was heard to say that he had been hit and that he was going to finish the job. A single, final shot rang out, then all was quiet. Cautiously, the posse approached the rocks behind which the outlaws had been hiding. They found one man dead with wounds in his chest and head. The latter were plainly self-inflicted.

The other two outlaws whose horses were casualties of the battle, fled on foot into the cedar trees along East Divide Creek. They were never identified and they were never seen again.

The dead man, later positively identified by the Pinkerton Detective Agency as Harvey Logan, alias Kid Curry,"was taken to Glenwood Springs. There he was buried near the site of Doc Holliday's grave.

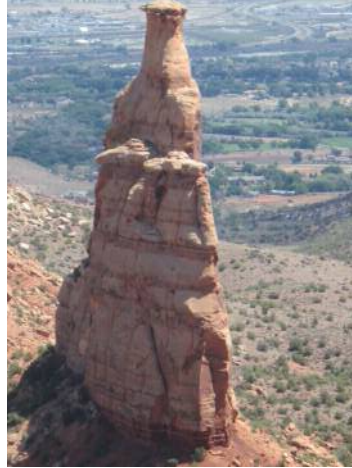
The money or gold -- if any -- that the robbers obtained from their ill-fated crime has never been found or accounted for.

Once in Grand Junction – which seemed very quiet at 5pm on a Sunday afternoon – we checked in at the Spring Hill Suites and went for a relatively early dinner. We found a very nice French-American restaurant just across the street and had what most thought was an excellent meal – only spoiled by tipping policy which soured the evening somewhat.

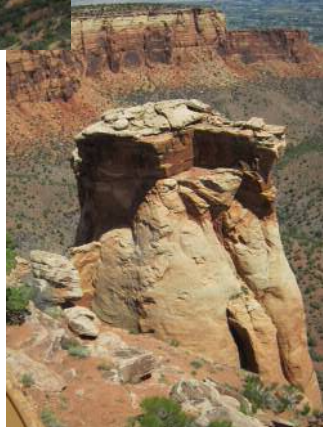
The weather today had been a mixture of sun and clouds (although the temperature did approach 90F) and we even saw a few drops of rain as we drove. There were, however, several areas just off our route that were experiencing some rather severe storms so we were hopeful that everything would have passed by for our visit to the Colorado National Monument tomorrow.

Monday August 5

After breakfast we drove to the west entrance to the Colorado National Monument and then spent the better part of three hours on the 23 mile drive through the park. We first watched a very informative video in the visitor center which gave a multi-million year history of the geology of the area and the various factors which have resulted in the colorful and gigantic rock formations we see today. It appears that the area has been part of an “ocean” (inland sea?) at last three times and each has resulted in various rock layers and various forms of habitation and state of “fertility”. These changes, together with the uplifting as the Rocky Mountains were formed, has resulted in a series of canyons containing the splendid rock formations that we saw today.



Colorado National Monument



The predominant color in the park is a deep red but virtually all colors can be seen at some point or other and, together with the greenery of some trees and other plant life, form – as one lookout suggested – an artist’s palette of shades.

The drive around the canyons reaches a height of 6600 feet so for the most part the observer is looking down into deep (1000 feet plus) canyons and across at tall stacks of rocks or mesas that are as tall as 480 feet. In all, the park presents an enormous panorama that is both beautiful and full of geological interest – but, at least for this writer – a picture that is very difficult to convey in words alone.

On returning to town, we had coffee sitting outside one of the cafes on Main Street and then returned to the hotel to rest up until dinner time at which point we drove a few miles to enjoy a meal at the Olive Garden.

Tuesday August 6

We checked out about 10 and drove west along I-70 until we had crossed the Utah border. Shortly after that we turned south towards Moab and very soon we were driving into deep red rock canyons, not unlike the ones we had seen all day yesterday. The major difference was that the space was more confined and we were generally running alongside the Colorado River with sights of the occasional rafters and several dude ranches.

We drove into Moab (where we would spend the night) but only for a very light lunch before heading north out of town again to the Arches National Park. We watched the excellent 15 minute video in the Visitor Center on how the park formations were formed – primarily as a result of water erosion on the massive sedimentary deposits. As the name implies, many of these rock formations have been eroded further to form arches but, as we soon saw, there were numerous other formations of equal interest



Many rock formations have been given names (“The three gossips”, “elephants”, “cathedral”, etc, etc) but we found that most could be visualized as some form or other in the eyes of the beholder. Again, the predominant color was red (more “brick red” than yesterday) but many other shades were present and all added their own interest to the drive.

We stopped at many parking areas to view the formations (each more interesting than the last, it seemed) and took a few very short walks for better views. The weather was partly cloudy but the sun was striking through much of the time and we experienced temperatures over 95F most of the afternoon, so we didn’t feel inclined to take any of the trails that were longer than a few hundred yards. In many ways this park was more interesting than the Colorado National Monument and there were some vast expansive views to equal those of yesterday but it is difficult to award a “grade” to either that is anything less than superb! And – as with so many sites in the American West - it is virtually impossible to adequately describe and “bring to life” these huge colorful and magnificent areas in the words of a journal (at least for me).

After the best part of four hours in the park we returned to Moab and checked in at our hotel to clean up and prepare for dinner. Each couple independently selected the Desert Bistro which happened to be right across the street at the back of the hotel. We were seated on the covered patio on a very pleasant evening and had an excellent meal; the most expensive of the trip so far but certainly the best for food and service – and something we didn’t expect to find in Moab.

Wednesday August 7

After breakfast and checking out of the hotel we walked a few blocks of the main street to (mostly) window shop before starting our 250 mile drive to Salt Lake City. The first 30 miles to I-70 were through terrain similar to that we had seen in and around Moab but after that we drove perhaps a hundred miles of relatively flat barren desert. There were mountains to the east but the roads (both Interstate and then US-6 North) were across very open countryside.

We stopped for coffee in the small, somewhat run-down town of Green River (although the coffee shop was interesting in its décor and over-crowded contents), after which we started to climb to a summit of over 7000 feet. We stopped at an area that was in the coal mining area (big in Utah even now) and then at a very pleasant rest area that had a lot of information on all the various regions of the state – some of which we had already seen, and some of which were still to come later in our trip.

US-6 led us to Interstate 15 just south of Provo which was our final stop of the journey. We walked around a few blocks of the historic downtown area and saw a number of very interesting homes on pleasant tree-lined streets. We also saw the



*PROVO
The city
and its
homes;
The new
LDS
Temple*



construction site of what we thought was a new LDS temple but when we stopped to talk to two men who were manning an information booth we learned that the building itself was not new but had been gutted by fire in 2010. The decision had been made to restore it to its original state (a very fine brick building) but as part of the process the whole building was

lifted about 40 feet. Apparently they wanted to provide additional underground space (two storeys) and some additional over-all re-enforcement but also wanted to keep the original building (actually a tabernacle – now “elevated” to temple) at street level. They dug down, inserted stilts and then poured a concrete foundation under the existing building – all without causing any damage to the structure. It seemed like an extraordinary feat of engineering – and a very costly one – but when completed and surrounded by gardens it should be a magnificent church.

After leaving Provo we drove the final 40 miles on a very busy I-15 (certainly busier than any road we had been on since leaving Denver) and arrived at the Marriott near Temple Square about 6:30.

We ate tonight at the Market Street Grill just three blocks from the hotel and enjoyed another good meal.

Thursday August 8.

Geoff and I had a quick run up to the local hospital clinic for him to get a scheduled blood test and then we all drove to the “This is The Place” Monument, about 20 minutes from downtown. This is where Brigham Young told his followers that Zion would be built and so it was the end of a 1200+ mile journey across country from Illinois, making Salt Lake City the permanent home for the LDS Church.



This Is the Place Monument



Prior to this trek, the Mormons had established settlements in Palmyra, New York (where Joseph Smith found the tablets that became the Book of Mormon), in Kirkland, Ohio and in Nauvoo, Illinois. Molly and I have visited all of these as well as Salt Lake City.

Following an hour or more there we drove to the Capitol and spent another hour both inside and outside this magnificent building. The very light grey stone exterior and the exquisite marble and frescoes of the inside make this one of the finest State Capitols that we have seen – in addition to which it stands at the top of State Street in a beautiful setting overlooking the city.



Utah's Capitol building, located on a hill overlooking downtown Salt Lake City, is an elegant architectural masterpiece. The building is set on over 40 acres, with beautifully maintained and sculpted lawns, trees, flowerbeds, and shrubs.

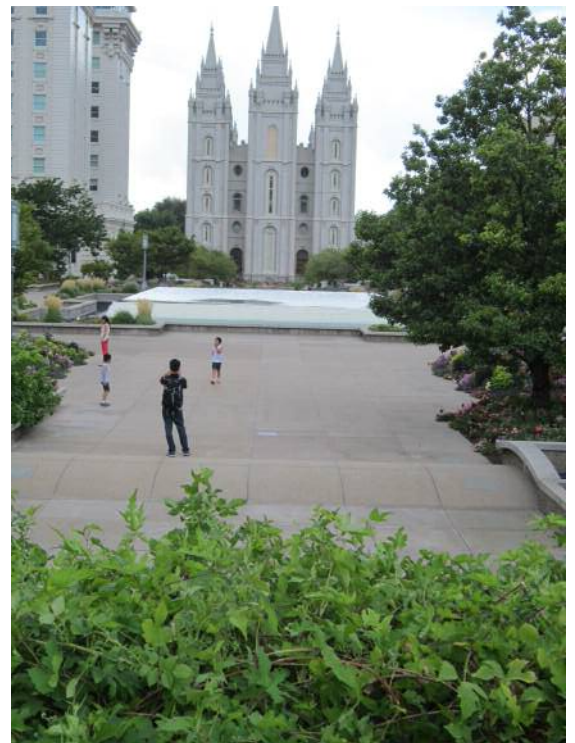
The building was constructed between 1912 and 1916, using granite from nearby Little Cottonwood Canyon. The dome is covered with Utah copper. There are 52 Corinthian columns.

Inside, the Capitol is divided into two wings, each lined by Georgia marble Ionic columns weighing 25,000 pounds, with the Supreme Court on the east end and the House of Representatives on the west. In the center is the 165-foot tall rotunda. The ceiling of the rotunda is beautifully painted with clouds and seagulls, paying tribute to the state bird. Twelve paintings lining the rotunda were a WPA project and painted elsewhere then attached to the walls. The paintings depict scenes from the early history of the state and its settling.

After lunch we walked through Temple Square, visited the Assembly Hall and the Tabernacle and gazed at the huge multi-turreted Temple and the beautiful gardens and water features. We experienced some very strong winds and it threatened rain but the storm seemed to pass on both sides of the city without causing us to get wet.



Temple Square

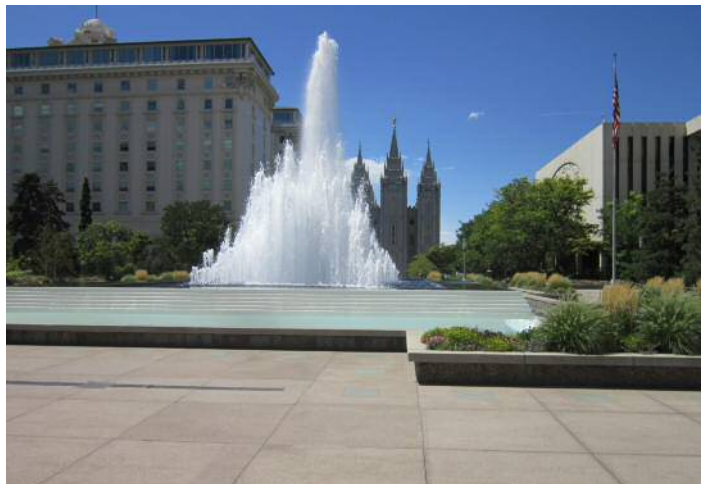


At seven we walked to the huge LDS Convention Center where we spent 1 ½ hours watching and listening as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir conducted its weekly two hour rehearsal. It was very interesting to watch as the various directors led the choir through segments of both sacred and secular songs, often repeating a line or two as much as half a dozen times until he was satisfied (or ran out of time!). The program for which they were rehearsing has been broadcast every Sunday morning since July 1929 and I can remember listening to it in England as a child. The words of introduction and conclusion have not changed in all those years:

The announcer opens and closes the broadcast with an adaptation of Richard L. Evans' hallmark phrase, beginning with, *"From the Crossroads of the West, we welcome you to Temple Square in Salt Lake City for Music and the Spoken Word with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square."* The announcer introduces the music with information about the piece, or with short scriptural or literary passages. At some point, usually near the middle of the program, an inspirational spoken message is delivered. The quote, *"Again we leave you, from within the shadows of the everlasting hills; may peace be with you, this day and always,"* signals the end of the program, and it is usually followed by the choir singing the hymn "God Be With You Till We Meet Again".

On leaving there we found an Italian Bistro near the hotel where we had a late (very good and reasonably priced) meal before walking through the brand new City Center Mall back to the hotel around 11:30.

Friday August 9



Today we spent our whole time on Temple Square. We spent almost two hours in the two visitor centers learning about the Mormon faith and enjoying the wonderful paintings and other exhibits. We then went to listen to the noon organ recital in the Tabernacle (fantastic!) and, after lunch, Geoff and Christine toured the Brigham Young home (The bee hive house). Unfortunately we got signals crossed about the meeting place after their tour so Molly and I had an early finish to our touring while Geoff and Christine went back to Temple Square to visit the observation deck on top of the LDS Church Office Building. We all met up again for a steak dinner at a favorite restaurant of mine and Molly's, Ruth's Chris.

Saturday August 10

After breakfast we checked out and drove to Springdale, UT, a distance of about 300 miles. We went part way on Interstate 15 and part on US Route 89, before the final 20 miles or so on Utah Route 9 to the hotel, right at the bottom end of town.

The route was pleasant but by no means as spectacular as many we have experienced over the past week until we were within about 30 miles of our destination at which point we were driving through canyons with a backdrop of red rock similar to that at Arches. Along the way we did climb over three mountain summits, the highest of which was just over 7000 feet but the hills here were much more rounded than many we had seen further north. With a stop in Richland for a light lunch and clear blue skies most of the way, the drive was pleasant and easy and we were settled in the hotel soon after 5pm.

Christine and Geoff immediately took to the pool while Molly and I relaxed in the room until we met up again at 7:30 for dinner at the restaurant next to the hotel. The meal and service were very good but, for the second time on this trip, we re-

ceived the bill with the (18%) service charge already added despite the fact that the menu specifically stated that this was only for parties of six or more. We chose not to challenge it this time as we had with a similar 20% charge in Grand Junction.

Sunday August 11

Today we spent about five hours within the Zion National Park. After breakfast we took the town shuttle to the Park Visitor Center where we boarded another shuttle bus for travel within the park. This shuttle has been operating since about 2000 after the yearly attendance in the park (about 2.5 million then, 3 million now) was threatening to destroy the very reason people wanted to come here. Now, cars are not allowed in the peak months.

We chose to take the shuttle to its final stop about 15 miles up the canyon road – after which we thought we would work our way back, stopping as we felt the urge. At the head of the road, a paved trail follows the Virgin River for another mile, after which it continues as an unpaved (and more difficult) trail for many miles further into the canyon. We took the one mile walk to a point where the canyon walls were narrowing considerably but not quite to the point where they are only 20 feet apart.



The Park Shuttle Bus

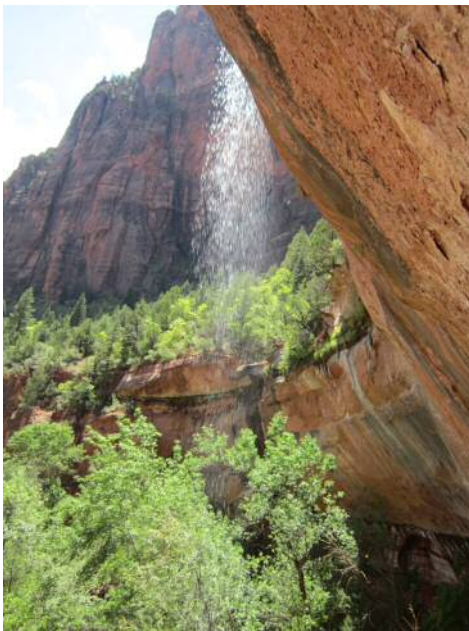


The whole of the drive and the walk had spectacular views of the canyon walls on the east and west sides of the river, reaching in places a height of about 2000 feet about our level. Most are essentially vertical with less steep inclines only for the first few hundred feet above

river level in some places. The colors once again (as everywhere in southern Utah it seems) varied almost the entire rainbow spectrum with reds, pinks, grays and whites predominating.

Although the area experiences a relatively small amount of rain annually (I believe I heard 15 inches), very significant flash floods can occur at almost any time of the year if there is rainfall or snow melt anywhere in the catchment area. It is these rapid rises in water levels that have carved this enormous canyon and which have on several occasions in the past decade caused the road to be washed away and, in a couple of instances, have cut off residents at the Park Lodge about half way along the route.

Posted signs indicated that there was “little” danger of any flooding today, however, as we walked under virtually clear blue skies and the temperature climbed to a high of 100F. Obviously it was vital to drink lots of fluids in these conditions but despite the heat, walking wasn’t terribly strenuous and in fact there were many shaded areas where it felt very comfortably cool.



On the return from “The Narrows”, I walked on ahead on the paved path because I wanted to get on the shuttle bus to an area called The Grotto where a 1.6 mile trail led via Emerald Pools to the Lodge. The other three continued at their pace and we all met up again at the Lodge where Christine and Geoff had lunch. Molly and I chose to wait until we were back in town and get a snack at a local coffee shop before returning to the hotel. My 1.6 mile loop walk was very interesting with a 150 feet climb above the river to some waterfalls (not much more than a trickle) and the almost-dry Emerald Pool. Perhaps the best part was the fact that, even with this relatively small climb, the views across the narrow valley were even more spectacular and each turn in the trail seemed to reveal an even better panorama.

We all made our way via the shuttle buses back to the hotel where we relaxed or swam and then met up again for dinner, which tonight was at a Mexican restaurant across the street from the hotel.

Monday August 12

Today we visited Bryce Canyon National Park, about an 80 mile drive from Zion. The drive up from the canyon at Springdale in Zion was spectacular, with switchback curves and a mile long tunnel hewn through the rock to quickly reach an elevation of close to 7000 feet from less than 4000.

Following that there was a 50 mile drive on what seemed like relatively flat ground, with lots of trees and fertile farmed areas, but we were indeed steadily climbing to the park level at over 8000 feet. We stopped for a light lunch (coincidentally as a shower passed over – the only rain of the day) just outside the park and then used the shuttle bus service to get us into the park and to many of the major viewpoints.

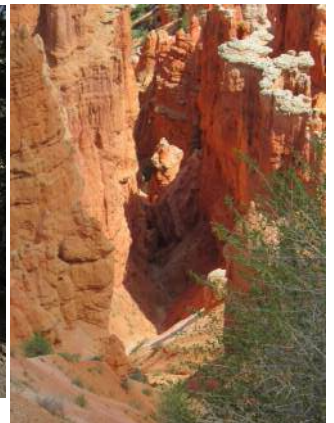
As with Zion, we chose to ride the shuttle bus to the end of its run at Bryce Point (a little over 9000 feet) and then work our way back via the various viewpoints, either on the shuttle bus or by following the relatively easy rim trail.

Bryce is a huge natural amphitheater and the rock formations are generally viewed from above, except by the intrepid few (actually hundreds today) who walked steeply down into the canyon and could view the orange and pink monoliths from below. This must provide some spectacular and somewhat eerie views as one passes between the towering (up to 200 feet or more?) structures on a narrow trail.

The four of us, however, stuck to the rim trail and met up at most of the half dozen major viewpoints as walking speed and bus schedule permitted. We all met up again at the Visitor Center at the northern park entrance.

Many who visit the canyon parks of Utah consider Bryce the most beautiful and it is certainly difficult to argue with that assessment. The pillars often appear very fragile (uneven shapes formed as a result of centuries of erosion) and at the same time can seem to be as eternal as anything on earth. I suppose that is the very essence of formations such as these (not only in Bryce) – while the view from any point must not have changed on a macro scale for millennia, the forces of Nature are forever changing the landscape such that some of the formations we saw today may well be gone if we return in five years.

The colors of Bryce – although similar and as varied as any in the parks we have visited – tend to be more orange and pink when viewed as a whole, but closer examination will reveal many shades across the spectrum.





Following the eight mile round trip close to the western rim, we returned to the park in the car and drove the fifteen miles to the extreme southern end of the park at an elevation of 9100 feet. From here we had much more expansive views across the entire amphitheater which was typically at least thirty miles across – to the 11000 feet Aquarius Plateau, the highest plateau in North America. In addition, some of the viewpoints on our return to the park entrance provided close up views of many formations, including a huge natural bridge, technically called a “window” in these geological formations. All in all we had a wonderful six hours in the park.



Bryce Canyon



We decided to drive as much as possible on the way home in daylight so chose to eat at the Thunderbird Lodge at Carmel Junction, coincidentally where we had stayed with my cousin Roy five years ago. The restaurant was crowded with tourists and the meal was much as we had remembered from our previous visit but at least we had only a 40 minute drive back to the hotel after eating. It was 11pm and still 80F when we got back. Bryce - at the much higher elevation – had reached a high about 5 degrees lower than that.

Tuesday August 13

We left Zion about 10am for the almost 300 mile drive to Grand Canyon. We had to take a slight diversion as part of the main route US89 was closed for repairs following an earlier landslide. However, the alternative route was very pleasant and quiet and we climbed on a number of occasions to elevations exceeding 7000 feet. There were some grand views across wide valleys to steep cliffs opposite (specifically at the Vermillion Cliffs) and some long stretches of typical desert land across Navaho and Dine reservations.

An unexpected oasis in this otherwise under-populated area was where we stopped for lunch at a small hamlet called Cameron. It had been an early trading post between the Robertson Brothers and the Native Americans and a rather fine trading post had been built and expanded into a hotel and restaurant. This compound now contains shops, camp grounds and other facilities but it was the restaurant with its magnificent pressed tin ceiling that was most attractive and interesting.

On entering the Grand Canyon National Park from the east, we made a stop for our first view of the canyon before driving another 15 miles to the El Tovar hotel on the canyon rim near the train depot. This is a National Historic Landmark built in 1905 and is typical of the structures built at that time to attract visitors to the area, particularly those arriving by the newly laid railroad line from the south. The structure is built from Oregon pine and local limestone in the grand style of that era. The rooms are small and the fittings reflect the age in some cases but it is a pleasant change to actually stay in such an iconic place.

We had a late light dinner in the hotel bar, partly because we had had a late (and rather large lunch) but also because it took Geoff several hours to arrange a helicopter trip into the Canyon for himself and Christine for Wednesday. As it turns out, our meal wasn't as late as we thought because Arizona doesn't switch to Daylight Savings Time and so is essentially on Pacific Time. We should be on the same clock time now until the end of the trip.



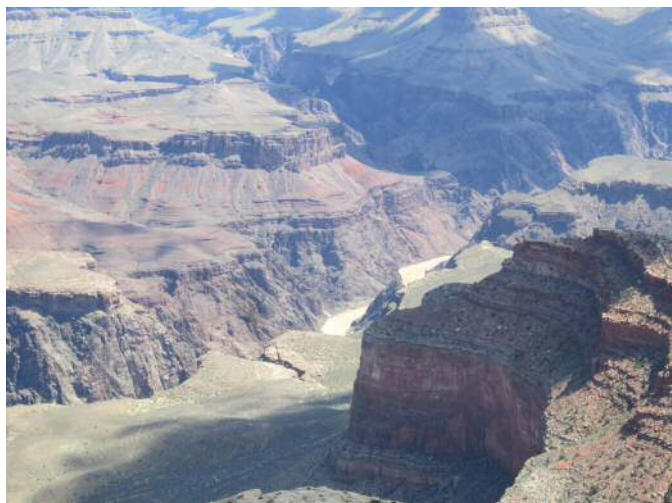
Wednesday August 14

Today the two couples split up as Christine and Geoff had planned a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon and Molly and I chose to see the "big hole" from ground level. Molly and I were up about eight and had breakfast at a coffee shop in the next lodge to ours; coffee and delicious pastries. We then walked to the bus stop for the "Red Route" that ferries visitors to Hermit's Rest, a point about 8 miles from our hotel and as far west as the park shuttles go.

We alternated between riding the bus and walking the rim trail to give us a selection of views of the canyon and several glimpses of the Colorado River a mile below us. Once again the scenery was spectacular but it is so huge that size and distance really don't seem to mean much. The river averages a width of 300 feet, but appears as a stream; the north rim is 10 miles away and 1000 feet higher, but at times you feel you could touch it (at others it might as well be 50 miles away); a ridge within the gorge can look like a castle from one viewpoint but could be just another "Bump" from the next.



There were nine stops westbound along the rim; Molly walked about a mile and I walked a little over three but we met at several spots and ultimately at the Hermit's Rest at the end of the shuttle route.



The Grand Canyon

We chose to return to the hotel from there via the eastbound shuttle (only three stops) and, after picking up a few things, we took the “Blue Route” shuttle to the Visitor Center. There we were able to enjoy coffee and a cookie before visiting the Center

and watching an excellent film on the Grand Canyon; its geological history, its human inhabitant history (presumed at more than 10,000 years), its flora and fauna, its eco-systems and its current recreational and tourist activities. Perhaps the single most interesting point made was that the California Condor (with a nine feet wing span) is now regularly seen in the canyon after approaching extinction only a decade or two ago.

We returned to the hotel about 4pm but spent a good while watching several young condors circling above and waiting for what we were told was an adolescent to take off from his perch on a nearby rock. He did not oblige!



A visit to the nearby gift shop yielded Native American ear-rings for Molly and an alabaster carved figure for me – nice souvenirs of our trip to this wonderful site.

We relaxed and cleaned up in the room and waited for Geoff and Christine to return before leaving for dinner at the Arizona Steakhouse, just a few minutes' walk down the rim path from the hotel. Christine and Geoff were very late getting back from their long day out (helicopter ride, Imax Theater and a walk/shuttle bus along the south rim) so they ate much later in the hotel. We did get an unexpected treat as we walked back to the hotel after our meal; there were at least a dozen huge elk grazing on the lawns that lined our path. It was a little dark to get good photographs but the antlers were something to behold.



Thursday August 15

We checked out of the El Tovar hotel and left the Grand Canyon National Park soon after 10am on our way to tonight's destination of Las Vegas. Our first stop was at the town of Williams where we stopped for a short walk along part of old Route 66 and for Christine (alone) to take a ride on the "Route 66 Zipline", which she said was "Brilliant".

We then drove west on Interstate 40 and we kept seeing exits to other parts of Historic Route 66. One of the towns where this occurred (Seligman) rang a distant bell with me from our trip along Route 66 several years ago so, on a whim, we exited the expressway. It turned out



to be an interesting little detour as this was one of a number of small towns along the old route that have tried to bring back the flavor of the way things were before the expressway was built by having (generally) fifties era vehicles on the street and shops and cafes with memorabilia of that time. In fact we had coffee in a store that was packed with a wide assortment of old signs, advertising boards and “junk” from the days when Route 66 was the main road and the major route west for tourists.



We also had a short stop at McDonald's in Kingman (where the temperature had climbed to 100F) before proceeding to Boulder City and a stop to view the Hoover Dam (temperature now 108F!). Christine and Geoff were just in time to take the last power plant tour of the day while Molly and I viewed the dam and its surroundings (including the magnificent new bridge over the canyon that diverts traffic from the old road across the dam wall) from the Visitor Center. When the tour was finished we all walked on to the dam road and looked down over the wall and – in the other direction – at Lake Mead, formed as a result of the Colorado River and, of course, the source of water for the generation of electricity.



Hoover Dam, once known as **Boulder Dam**, is a concrete arch-gravity dam in the Black Canyon of the Colorado River, on the border between the US states of Arizona and Nevada. It was constructed between 1931 and 1936 during the Great Depression and was dedicated on September 30, 1935, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Its construction was the result of a massive effort involving thousands of workers, and cost over one hundred lives. The dam was controversially named after President Herbert Hoover.

Hoover Dam impounds Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the United States by volume. The dam is located near Boulder City, Nevada, a municipality originally constructed for workers on the construction project, about 25 mi (40 km) southeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. The dam's generators provide power for public and private utilities in Nevada, Arizona, and California. Hoover Dam is a major tourist attraction; nearly a million people tour the dam each year. Heavily travelled U.S. 93 ran along the dam's crest until October 2010, when the Hoover Dam Bypass opened.

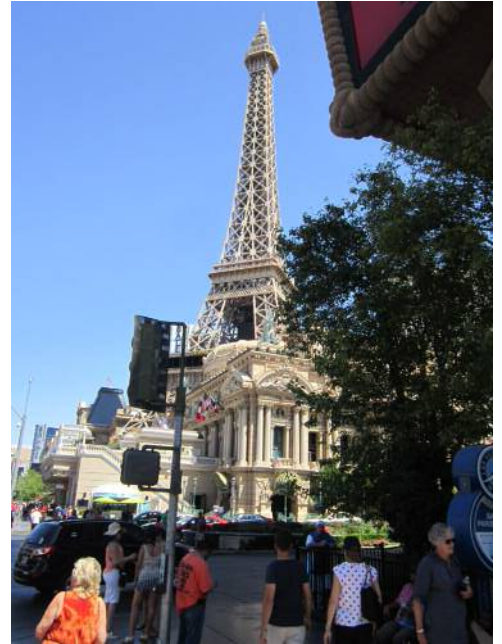
We then drove the final 30 miles to our hotel just off The Strip in Las Vegas and relaxed and cleaned up before dinner. We ate at the revolving Top of the World restaurant on the 106th floor of The Stratosphere, a huge tower that combines casino, hotel, restaurants – and “Extreme Rides and Thrills”. The meal was good and quite expensive but served at a leisurely pace such that we completed one complete circuit during our time there. Obviously there were fantastic views of the entire city and a sea of lights in all directions, including those of the more famous casinos along The Strip.

Following dinner we went up another few floors to the open observation deck (still very warm) where we could watch (but not join in) the thrilling rides that were available 800 feet above the ground. In addition to the “free-fall” from here to ground level, those inclined could scare themselves half to death on other gravity defying rides. I think most of us were happy to descend the elevator to street level and drive back to the hotel (around midnight).

Friday August 16

Today was our day for “doing” the hotels along The Strip. Christine had several in mind but we were able to cover only about four because each casino/resort is so enormous that merely getting from parking garage to the first sites (usually the casino) could take up to 15 minutes.

Our first stop was at Planet Hollywood where Christine and Geoff had booked a show for tonight and where they picked up the tickets. They also made a dinner reservation at an Italian restaurant quite near to the theater so we could eat prior to the 9pm show. The



Paris Casino (complete with Eiffel Tower) was next, with its extremely lavish hotel reception area.

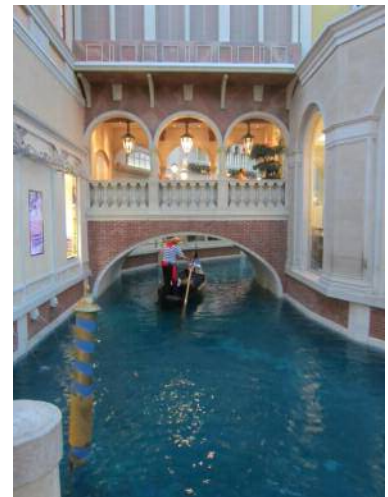
Next we walked to Bellagio and marveled at the size of the place, its exterior architecture and the lavish decorations inside. Once again, it seemed as though we walked miles between sidewalk, casino and hotel lobby but the whole was a picture that



simply defied the imagination. The Cosmopolitan (next door but 20 minutes away!) was perhaps less marvelous but the Venetian (a drive from where we had been parked for the previous three resorts) was the most spectacular, with very realistic reproductions of St Mark’s Square and canals complete with gondolas and singing gondoliers.



The Venetian



We returned to the hotel for a little over an hour before leaving for dinner. The Italian meal was very good (and reasonably authentic) and we finished in nice time to walk to the theater for the show. This was called “Las Vegas, the Show” and was a musical history of many of the famous stars who have appeared in the city since the fifties. Unfortunately, the “impersonators” weren’t very good and the volume of the presentations far out-weighted the talent of the performers. Still, it was an experience to see a Las Vegas show, although I can’t imagine that this was up to the standards of the more popular and star-studded productions that the city has to offer. Perhaps another day, another show and we would have had a different experience.

We concluded the evening by “cruising” The Strip to see the lighted buildings. Many were indeed spectacular but the streets were absolutely packed with cars and pedestrians so the process was slow and a little harrowing at times.

Saturday August 17

We left Las Vegas with one final drive down The Strip before getting on to Interstate 15 towards Los Angeles. We were soon out of the built-up area of the city and into true desert with very little greenery – and temperatures already over 100F.

We crossed the California State Line and started a long downhill stretch, making our first stop for lunch at Denny’s in Baker. We then continued until we saw the sign for Calico Ghost Town, a silver mining town of the late 1800s which has been revived as a tourist attraction, starting in the 1950s. Since neither Geoff nor Christine had seen Old West ghost towns, we decided to stop and take a short walk along the single street with its wooden buildings of the mining era.

At its peak there Calico had had a population of 3000 so there clearly was more accommodation then than now, but several buildings were originals – including saloons, assay office and stores. Remains of the homes of



Chinese personnel who came principally as cooks and laundry owners were just barely visible at the back of the main street. Also visible (with a good imagination) were the entrance to the mine and some of the tailings produced during the 30 or so years that the mine was active. Actually, there was a later mining period in the twenties and thirties when a company exploited some of the deeper veins. The town was abandoned completely in 1934 and restoration began when William Knott (of Knott's Berry Farm) took it over in 1951.



The temperature here was almost unbearable; near 110F, with no shade and the sun beating down on the dusty hillside and Christine suddenly felt a little queasy. A cold drink helped revive her but she obviously was near to heat exhaustion, so was glad to get back in the air-conditioned car for the final two hour drive to Bakersfield. Here we were at the southern end of the Central Valley and in the middle of fruit farms and lush green fields, providing a stark contrast to most of what we had seen over the past week or more.

Christine didn't feel up to dinner so Molly and I went to a local Hungry Hunter for our evening meal. We both had seafood (lobster and crab legs) and enjoyed it very much.

Sunday August 18

Molly and I chose to go to a local McDonald's for breakfast while Christine and Geoff ate at the hotel. We got on the road to the coast about 10:30 and had a very easy and short (150 miles) drive to Morro Bay. The scenery along the way was a mixture of Central Valley fruit farms and essentially barren hills on the eastern side of the coastal range, the latter giving way to heavily forested green as we descended to the Pacific Ocean.

The temperature change from the start of the day in Bakersfield (93F) to that which greeted us in Morro Bay (61F) was very dramatic and, for the first time on the trip, sweaters were in use by some. Our rooms weren't immediately ready (it was before 2pm when we arrived) so we strolled along the sea front for a couple of hours. The mist was low here and the huge rock (the icon of the town) just across the harbor inlet was partially obscured as we started our walk and totally in the clouds by 4pm, as we returned to the hotel. We are certainly hoping that the mist is not as prevalent on the drive up the coast tomorrow as this is obviously one of the highlights of the trip. We shall see.

We ate tonight on the seafront at the Galley restaurant that has views over the water..... or would have if it were clear. Nevertheless, it was a very good seafood restaurant and an enjoyable evening.

Monday August 19

We left Morro Bay around 10:30 on a morning when the marine layer was almost completely blanketing the town and the famous rock was only partially visible. We were hoping that this might change as we drove north along Highway 1, one of the most scenic drives in the country.

Unfortunately, the marine layer clung to the coast most of the time so the huge vistas over the Pacific were denied us. However, there were some breaks from time to time (particularly when we veered inland slightly) so we did get some sunny periods when the coastal range hills and even the beautifully blue ocean could be seen clearly.

For Molly and I who have done the trip several times, the cloud cover and its movement added an interesting



dimension to the journey but it was a shame that Geoff and Christine couldn't see just how spectacular the views can be along this stretch of road.

We stopped to see the enormous elephant seals playing in the water and sunning themselves on the sandy beach and we were able to get some "long shots" in a couple of additional places that provided a glimpse of the Route 1 experience. We also stopped for coffee at a very unusual and interesting art gallery/café near Big Sur and we had a half hour stroll around Carmel.



California Route 1

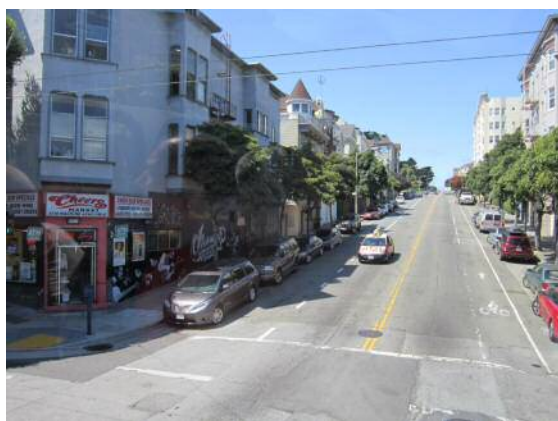
Then it was into the late afternoon traffic on Route 101 as we completed our journey to the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown San Francisco. This is the hotel that our nephew Mark chose for his father and Christine and he very kindly included Molly and me. The stay in this luxurious hotel is giving us a taste for how "the other half" lives. I think it will take us the entire three night stay to simply find all the rooms in this enormous suite.

We ate dinner at a very good restaurant right next to the hotel that had been recommended by the concierge and it was almost 11pm before we retired.

Tuesday August 20

Geoff and Christine wanted to visit Alcatraz while in San Francisco (which Molly and I decided against as we had been some years ago) but at this late stage all they could get that included the Alcatraz Tour was a two day package which also provided a catamaran ride on the Bay as well as a coach tour of the city. So, in effect, we each did our own thing for the two days we were to be in town.

After breakfast at a local diner, Geoff and Christine got in line for the Powell Street cable car and set off for Chinatown and then on to Fisherman's Wharf for their catamaran trip. Molly and I walked to Union Square where we got a two day pass for the Hop-on/Hop-off bus.



We got on the bus and went around the downtown area until we arrived in the Golden Gate Park where we got off and had lunch sitting outside in the café attached to the art museum. The weather was very good – almost clear blue skies and a temperature in the upper sixties, although a stiff breeze made it a little chilly when in the shade. Despite that we re-boarded the bus and sat on the open top deck as we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge in a very strong wind. The bridge was visible almost to the top of its two main towers so we got some good views, just as Christine and Geoff did from below on their boat ride.

Molly and I stayed on the bus as it returned over the bridge and through the financial district and the Embarcadero as far as Pier 39 on Fisherman's Wharf. Here we strolled around the wharf area for an hour or more and then got the bus back to Union Square. After a late afternoon coffee, we returned to the hotel about 5pm.

We all met again at 8pm and dined at a very good Indian restaurant right next to the hotel.

Wednesday August 21

The morning started cloudy but soon gave way to clear blue skies so we all had a perfect day for the last full day of the trip before Geoff and Christine fly home tomorrow. They continued with their two day package tour which today included a four hour coach tour of the city followed by a visit to Alcatraz Island and the penitentiary, which they thought was “Brilliant”.

Meanwhile, Molly and I continued the use of our Hop-on/Hop-off pass after having a late breakfast at a French patisserie and a slow stroll through Chinatown.

We took the first bus as far as the Golden Gate Bridge and I got off at the south vista point and walked across the span (1.7 miles officially). It was a very easy and pleasant walk and the wind didn't seem too strong. I had some great views of the city and the bay and saw some of the America's Cup sailboats up close as they passed under the bridge. I met up with Molly again at the north bus stop and we both then took another short ride into Sausalito. This is a very arty and expensive small town with exclusive shops and cafes but the main reason that tourists visit here is for the views of the Bay, the Bridges (Golden Gate and Oakland Bay) and the city of San Francisco. Once again, we couldn't have asked for a better day for such views.





*The Heart that Tony Bennett left
In San Francisco. Painted by the
singer.*

After returning to the hotel about 5:30 (almost exactly the same time as Christine and Geoff) we made arrangements to dine at Morton's, about a ten minute walk from the hotel. This was a great way to conclude the three week trip with them.

Thursday August 22

We had only a half day left here before leaving for the airport so we had a leisurely breakfast at the same restaurant that Molly and I had visited yesterday and then strolled through Chinatown. A coffee sitting in the bright sunshine on Union Square and a final glimpse of one of the iconic cable cars ended the walk and we then checked out of the hotel around 1:30.



*The **San Francisco cable car system** is the world's last manually operated cable car system. An icon of San Francisco, California, the cable car system forms part of the intermodal urban transport network operated by the San Francisco Municipal Railway. Of the twenty-three lines established between 1873 and 1890, three remain (one of which combines parts of two earlier lines): two routes from downtown near Union Square to Fisherman's Wharf, and a third route along California Street. While the cable cars are used to a certain extent by commuters, the vast majority of their 7 million annual passengers are tourists. They are among the most significant tourist attractions in the city, along with Alcatraz Island, the Golden Gate Bridge, and Fisherman's Wharf. The cable cars are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

The driver of a cable car is known as the gripman. This is a highly skilled job, requiring the gripman to smoothly operate the grip lever to grip and release the cable, release the grip at certain points to coast the vehicle over crossing cables or places where the cable does not follow the tracks, and to anticipate well in advance possible collisions with other traffic that may not understand the limitations of a cable car. Being a gripman requires great upper body strength needed for the grip and brakes, as well as good hand-eye coordination and balance.

Besides the gripman, each cable car carries a conductor whose job is to collect fares, manage the boarding and exiting of passengers, and control the rear wheel brakes when descending hills. With the common practice of carrying standing passengers on the running boards of cable cars, passenger management is an important task; more important, it is said, than collecting fares!

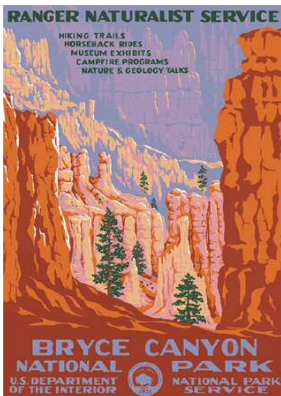
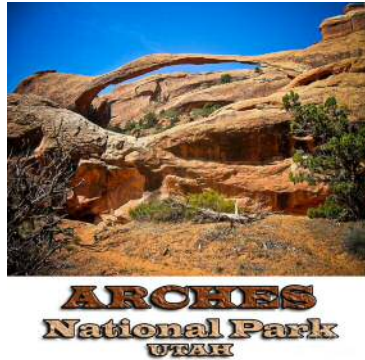
We dropped Christine and Geoff at San Francisco airport in plenty of time for their 5pm flight to London after a very enjoyable and interesting three week trip. Molly and I continued our stay in the West, had another weekend with family and then returned the car to Salt lake City.

Some Facts about our Trip

Five States



Six National Parks/Monuments



Four Major Cities: Denver, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, San Francisco



Temperature Range: 50 to 110 F

Thursday August 22 (Continued)

After leaving the airport, Molly and I drove another 15 minutes to the San Mateo Marriott for our overnight stay.

Tonight we drove the 13 miles over the hills to Half Moon Bay where we met our college friends, Brenda and Peter Aldred, for dinner. It had been several years since we last saw them so we had a very pleasant evening and caught up on each other's activities.

Friday August 23

We had breakfast in the Concierge Lounge and left the hotel soon after 10am. With just one stop for coffee and light traffic all the way, we arrived in downtown Sacramento just after 1pm where we met Cyndi and Christopher for lunch. They had arranged for us to eat at a new restaurant Cyndi had tried called The Rind, which specializes in cheese plates and other meals based on cheese and accompaniments. They have dozens of artisan cheeses and the staff is very helpful in helping to pick out various selections as well as the "sides" (fruit, nuts, honey, etc) that go with your pick. We enjoyed it very much and, to top things off, there is a chocolate shop right next door where Molly was persuaded to select a couple of favorites.



We checked in at the SpringHill Suites in Natomas about 3pm and relaxed until we met everyone again (including Bill and Shirl) at Sammy's karate lesson at 4:30. The seven of us had an early dinner together at Sizzler and then Molly and I returned to the hotel for an early night.

Saturday August 24

Molly and I walked to the local Starbucks for a light breakfast and then left for Christopher and Cyndi's home where Samantha was up and ready for another ten million mile bike ride with Granddad. We donned our helmets, knee pads, elbow pads and gloves; got our supplies of food and water; and left on our ride. We seemed to make very good speed because we were back home within half an hour – exhausted of course but pleased with our accomplishments.



All five of us went for lunch at iHop and then we split up until early evening. I managed to get in a short walk and Molly and I cleaned up for our return to see Samantha et al. We arrived at their home about 5pm and watched some photographs and

videos of their summer, including Sammy's graduation from pre-school and her first day at her new school in her blue and red uniform.

We then went for a "dual anniversary" dinner at the Melting Pot in Sacramento and had a wonderful meal. As usual, Sammy ate very little but entertained herself for the entire 2 ½ hours and was still lively as we left.



Sunday August 25

Molly and I walked to Starbucks for breakfast and then relaxed in the hotel until soon after 11am. We then drove to Christopher and Cyndi's home for a lunchtime barbecue followed by a swim in their pool and some additional photo and video viewing of their summer activities..



We left just before 5pm to go back to the hotel to clean up and change ready for an early dinner (6pm) at Mimi's as Sammy had to be in bed by eight to get a good night's sleep before school tomorrow. We said our good-byes (with lots of hugs and kisses) around 7:30 and returned to the hotel after a lovely weekend with our California family.

Monday August 26

We checked out about 8:30, had a iHop breakfast and then got on Interstate 80 for our journey back towards Salt Lake City, via our destination for tonight in Elko, Nevada.



I-80 passes through some gorgeous mountain scenery between Sacramento and Reno, although today the distant views were obscured by the smoke from the fires surrounding Yosemite Park, about 150 miles to the south. In fact, the smoke was present for at least another 100 miles past Reno before we had more or less clear skies. By this time, of course, we were in the vast expanse of desert that is Nevada where there is an awful lot of not much except sage and brush. There are, however, many high peaks in the state and we climbed two passes over 5000 feet and one over 6000 feet as we made our way east. In the Sierra Nevada range just west of Reno we went over Donner Pass and the road climbed as high as 7200 feet.

We arrived in Elko about 4:30pm after driving over 450 miles, mostly at the posted limited of 75mph. We made two stops for gas and coffee but otherwise kept going for the entire seven hours.

Tonight we ate at an Italian restaurant (Luciano's) in Elko and had a pretty good meal in pleasant, if a little rustic, surroundings.

Tuesday August 27

We were up before 8 and packed before having breakfast at a local McDonald's – then it was back on to I-80 for the rest of the trip (240 miles) to Salt Lake City. It was a beautiful sunny morning and the route was interesting and easy driving: mountains, some farming, the salt flats and then into Salt Lake City. We made just one rest stop and, after a one hour time change, we were in our hotel near Temple Square by 2pm MDST.

We had a late Starbucks lunch in the hotel and then caught up on paperwork for the trip, cleaned out the trash, etc from the van and relaxed until dinner time. We once again ate at one of our favorites, Ruth's Chris, just a couple of blocks from the hotel.

A light rain started about 30 miles west of Salt Lake and it was still raining a little for part of the afternoon. We guessed that this was the first rain we had seen since just before we entered Bryce Canyon over two weeks ago when there was a similar brief shower. Before that, we could recall only one other rain on the entire trip, that being on our third night in Denver when there had been a very significant storm. All in all, we have been very lucky with the weather and, particularly after the first few days of partial cloud, we have had mostly sunny days and clear blue skies.



Wednesday August 28

We had changed our return reservations to take an earlier direct flight to Cincinnati (9:50am) so we were up and checked out of the hotel by about 7:30. Our flight to Cincinnati was on time and we were home in Mason by about 4:30pm after another great trip in the American West.

The trip with Christine and Geoff covered 2680 miles but for Molly and I there were an extra 1520 miles: 620 miles from Salt Lake City to Denver before we met Christine and Geoff and a further 900 miles from San Francisco to Salt Lake City (via Sacramento) to return the car.

Th