

Canyonlands, September 2017

A Driving Trip with Keith and Zena



Bob and Molly Hillery

This was our second US vacation with our friends from England, Keith and Zena. In 2011 we traveled together from Salt Lake City to Seattle, visiting the Tetons, Yellowstone, Idaho, the Columbia River Valley and into Oregon and Washington. This time we were to head in a more southerly direction to visit the “Canyonlands” of western Colorado, Utah and Arizona, before driving up the western coast of California to San Francisco.

Once again we met in Salt lake City and then headed east some to spend two days in the Mile High City of Denver. From there we went to the Colorado National Monument, Zion and Bryce Canyons in Utah and then to the Grand Canyon. A couple of overnight stops (including Las Vegas) took us to the Pacific Ocean and then a drive along the Coastal Highway, California Route 1. We completed the trip with three nights in San Francisco before our friends flew home and we spent a weekend with our California family.

Obviously with that itinerary we saw some magnificent scenery and experienced the majesty of some of the most popular National Parks in the country, as well as the beauty of the Pacific Coast. The four cities included provided somewhat different looks at urban life, including the splendor of Temple Square in Salt lake City, the vibrant Denver clinging to the edge of the Rockies, the glitz of Las Vegas and cosmopolitan San Francisco in the beautiful natural setting of the Bay.

Somewhat ironically, despite us using the title of “Canyonlands” for this journey, one National Park we did not visit was Canyonlands in Utah. While it has much to attract visitors, it is a little off the beaten track and appears to be more for the “off road” adventurer. It also would have demanded more time than we had available on this visit, which in itself suggests a future trip is called for.....

In all, we covered almost 3400 miles, we went from sea level to an elevation of 12,000 feet, experienced temperatures from 42 to 99 degrees Fahrenheit and experienced brilliant sunshine and two hailstorms. We stopped at innumerable scenic overlooks, walked about 35 miles of trails and sidewalks, and drank gallons of water—and Starbucks coffee.

We enjoyed the trip immensely and it was great to spend three weeks with good friends and be able to show them another section of our adopted country.

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Saturday September 2

We had stayed overnight at the airport Marriott and caught the 7am shuttle to get our 8:30 flight to Salt Lake City. Here we would meet Keith and Zena who arrived in Chicago yesterday from England and would be traveling on to SLC late this morning.

Our flight left on time and, although there were a few turbulent spots, it was a pleasant journey and we arrived in SLC on time, shortly after 10am local time. We did have a little excitement as we were about to touch down; suddenly the plane was put on full throttle and we started to climb from our position only a few feet above the runway. Apparently another plane was on our runway so evasive action was required. However, we simply went around and landed safely on the second attempt.

We picked up our rental car (actually a 7 passenger mini-van) and checked in at the Spring Hill Suites close to the airport. About 2pm we drove back to the airport in time to greet Keith and Zena on their arrival from Chicago. They were about 30 minutes ahead of schedule, their bags arrived safely, so we were soon on our way to the hotel to check them in. We then went for a McDonald's coffee and visited a local pharmacy for a few essentials before returning to the hotel until dinner time.



Tonight we went downtown to Caffe Molise, a very pleasant Italian restaurant that Molly and I have enjoyed several times in the past. Despite temperatures still over 90F we ate outside in the tree covered courtyard where it was pleasantly cool. The meal was good and we all enjoyed our food, the drink and the chat. It was nice to start our "catch up" process to begin the holiday. We were back at the hotel by 9pm and in bed shortly thereafter.

Sunday September 3



We were up soon after 6:30 and had breakfast in the hotel. Shortly before 8:30 we left and drove to the LDS Conference Centre where we watched and listened as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra broadcast their weekly concert "Music and the Spoken Word". This 30 minute broadcast has been running without interruption for 89 years and the format (sacred and secular music and a short spoken monologue) has not changed since I remember listening in England as a child. What has changed is the distribution – from radio initially, to television, to cable and now via web streaming.





The magnificent LDS Conference Center

Following the broadcast we walked across to Temple Square and spent a very pleasant two hours strolling through the gardens and water features in this beautiful oasis in the middle of a large city. The temperature approached 90F towards lunchtime but it generally felt comfortable in the shade.

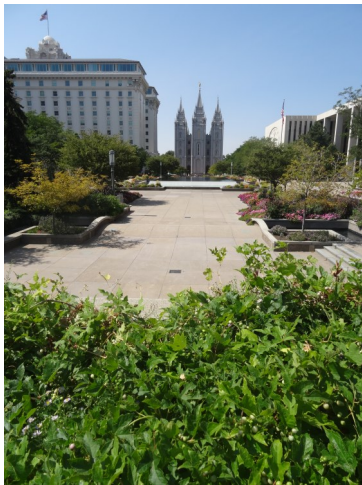


Temple Square

We had a coffee in the only place we found open (Starbucks in the Marriott) and even there we were “asked to leave” at 1pm as they were closing early on this Holiday weekend. So, we walked back to Temple Square, past the old Utah Hotel (now the LDS offices) and the Beehive House (Brigham Young’s home) and eventually to the Tabernacle for a 30 minute organ recital.



*The Beehive House and the Utah Hotel (LDS Offices)
and more views of Temple Square*



The Tabernacle and its amazing organ

By now it was after 2:30 and we had been out for 6 hours so we made our way back to our hotel and relaxed until 6:30 when we met up again for dinner. Tonight we ate at Spencer's Steakhouse downtown (which Keith had remembered from their last visit) and we had a very nice meal. The place was very quiet but the service was good and leisurely so it was over three hours later when we returned to the hotel.

Monday September 4

We had breakfast in the hotel again (it was surprisingly good and not too crowded) and left around nine for the Golden Spike National Monument. It was about a 90 minute drive, mostly on I-15 North, and we arrived in time to catch the introductory movie and then watched the Re-enactment. This is a 20 minutes or so presentation by volunteers who represent a number of the dignitaries who were there for the joining of the Central Pacific (eastbound from Sacramento) and the Union Pacific (westbound from Omaha) Railroad lines to form the first Transcontinental Railroad.

The two companies had been surveying, grading and laying track in opposite directions and were being paid under an Act of Congress. Unfortunately, Congress couldn't agree on a point where the "join" should be and consequently the two crews worked essentially alongside each other for a total of about 250 miles before Promontory Point was settled on. The good news is that only grading had taken place along this length and no rails had been laid, but it still provides a great demonstration of the mysterious ways in which Government can work.

The re-enactment involved quite a bit of audience participation and the volunteers were enthusiastic and amusing so the rather large Labor Day audience saw an interesting show and learned a little more about that significant day – May 10, 1869.



We went through the exhibit area and then drove to the engine house to view the replicas of the two engines used in the ceremony. They are magnificent engines with brass work fittings and decoration typical of Victorian times, and are kept in immaculate condition. Why they were not actually used in today's presentation (as we have seen in the past) was not mentioned.



On the way back to I-15 we took a short detour which allowed us to travel along the eastbound "track" and see the westbound grade only a few dozen feet away.

The Golden Spike National Monument

As we approached the expressway we saw the site of a rodeo that was still in progress. We had noticed it on the way out and promised ourselves a visit if it was still in progress on our return, so we were happy to see that events were still taking place. We spent about 45 minutes under the blazing sun watching a few of the events (bronco and calf riding by kids less than 12 were featured) and enjoying a pulled pork sandwich. It was very hot in the open ground and we were glad to get back in the air-conditioned car but also pleased to have seen a slice of Americana on this Holiday weekend.



Rodeo, Utah-style



We made only one more stop for coffee at McDonald's before returning to Salt Lake and the hotel where we arrived right on 4pm. We re-convened for dinner at 6:30. Tonight we ate at Red Lobster close to downtown. Somewhat surprisingly it was packed and we had a short wait before we got our table. However, it was a pleasant evening and a much cheaper meal than Spencer's the night before.

Tuesday September 5

We checked out of the Salt Lake hotel and left to travel east just before 9am. Today we drove initially on I-80 but soon turned on to US 40 for the 350 mile ride to Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

We made a stop for lunch at a Denny's in the town of Vernal but other than that we kept driving except for brief restroom and information board stops. There were some long stretches of road works which slowed us down some but we arrived at the Fairfield in Steamboat Springs before 5pm.

From Salt Lake City Interstate 80 climbed steeply to Park City where we turned on to US 40 and shortly thereafter crossed a pass at 8020 feet, our high point for the day. From there all the way to our destination we were traveling between 6500 and 7000 feet elevation but the scenery seemed to change significantly quite frequently.

Much of the terrain was high desert with little to break the sagebrush and ground cover picture except the very occasional tree or patch of greenery. The underlying rocky ground, however, provided many variations in color from sand to gray to pink and white. The areas to both sides of the road were often part of a wide, almost flat valley, but would quite suddenly change to steep cliff sides or peculiarly eroded columns and pipes, often with a distant backdrop of mountains. Although it was quite hazy much of the way and the high peaks were not visible, the map indicated many elevations up to 12,000 feet along our route.

On a number of occasions we would round a bend and the scene would change dramatically from desert to well-irrigated and lush farmland, with corn and other crops still growing. In addition there were many large fields which had obviously recently been harvested of their hay and huge bales were piled along the roadside.

We passed through a number of small towns and villages, some of which looked quite prosperous, with large homes and landscaped gardens, while others clearly had passed their prime and were in various states of decay and abandonment. The differences prompted questions as to why people had settled in these remote areas and, more specifically, why some areas had thrived and continued as pleasant places to live while relatively near neighbors had all but abandoned their lots. Clearly, farming was the major industry and amalgamation into larger holdings had allowed some to prosper while others were obviously eking a meager living from the almost barren land.

Once over the Colorado border we saw a number of huge coal fired power generation plants which not only created major changes to the landscape but which also must be providing jobs for many in the area and presumably had helped create or maintain many of the towns.

So, the overall impression of the day was of a vast high desert but one that was interrupted – and enhanced – by some lush farmland, a

few wide rivers, fewer tree-covered areas and several large industrial complexes.

Steamboat Springs is centered on US 40 with only a couple of streets on either side of its perhaps five mile length. The central area is lined with shops, boutiques, cafes, souvenir and “cowboy” stores and a number of ski shops. Obviously there are slopes in the area but at this time of year (and with the haze of nearby forest fires) the evidence of resorts was limited. There is a lot of new construction in town so obviously the winter ski season and the summer driving traffic is fueling the economy.

Tonight we drove about a mile to eat at the Ore House. We recall eating here on one of our previous visits and it was the first place recommended by the hotel receptionist. It turned out to be a reasonable meal for three of us but Zena’s vegetarian dish was not so good. We were back at the hotel by 8:30.

Wednesday September 6



Steamboat

Springs:

Main Street

Ski Jump

***Its most famous
store***

It was only about 40F when we ventured out first thing this morning, which was quite a change from the 80s and 90s we have experienced so far. However, after breakfast at the hotel and checking out, we drove back into Steamboat Springs for a stroll along the main street. We spent most time in a store that has existed (in the same family for over 110 years) and sells anything “cowboy” and a lot more. We also had a coffee at a local (non-chain) shop before heading east along Route 40. We made one stop after about an hour for gas and then headed directly south until we reached Interstate 70 about 70 miles west of Denver.

The scenery today was not quite as varied as yesterday. We started the climb from Steamboat Springs to the first pass at 9000 feet+ in dense pine forest but this changed to grain farmland as we levelled off and then descended. The route south had a continuous backdrop of high mountains, although the haze detracted some from the view. It was, however, a very pleasant drive and, even after we were on Interstate 70, we were on the western slope of the first range of Rockies and eventually climbed to just over 11,000 feet before going through a long tunnel and starting the long descent towards Golden.

We left the expressway to visit Red Rock Park with its natural amphitheater set on a hillside and surrounded by the deep red rock of the area. Unfortunately, an afternoon concert was just beginning so the open air “concert hall” was closed to all but those attending the performance. We nevertheless spent a while in the exhibit area and promised ourselves to return on Saturday as we leave Denver to head west again.

We arrived at the hotel in West Denver before 4pm and re-convened for dinner at 7pm. Tonight we went to a local Mexican restaurant which proved a new experience for Keith and Zena but one which they seemed to enjoy.

Thursday September 7

Today was our day to spend in the city of Denver. Keith specifically wanted to visit the US Mint so we first went to get tickets for the 2pm tour. Entrance is free but there are only a handful of tours each day and often get booked up completely so we were quite fortunate to get four.



***Denver City
and County
Buildings,
Civic Center
Park,
The Capitol***



Since we had almost four hours before the tour we walked through the main civic park area to the Capitol. Here we sat on the steps at the “Mile High” marker and then went on a self-guided tour inside the building. We spent a little



One of several 5280 feet markers



over an hour on the three main floors and admired the House and Senate chambers as well as the rotunda and high dome (capped with gold leaf outside).



"Sure, the Capitol is impressive, but take a look at this super display of cleaning products!"



We then walked through the central business district for a Starbucks lunch before walking back to the Mint to begin our tour. Security was tight (not surprisingly) so it took about 30 minutes for the 30 or so visitors to get screened and assembled. Once on the upper floor we got a bird's eye view of the manufacturing process in which 40 million coins are made per day – 70% of which are pennies. Supposedly this merely replaces the coins taken out of circulation through loss, "piggy banks" and small change receptacles.

The tour guide was well-informed and quite amusing, which made for a very pleasant and interesting visit. We all enjoyed the tour and learned a little.

By this time (3pm) we were somewhat tired of being on our feet so we drove back to the hotel to swim or simply relax until dinner time. Tonight we ate at Simms Steakhouse, just a half mile from the hotel. The restaurant sat on a ridge overlooking the valley across to the center of Denver and reputedly has one of the finest views of the skyline at night, as well as having good food and service. The view was a little disappointing, partly due to the haze but also because it was just a little too far (about 6 miles) even with the lights on in the city. The meal was good, however, and the service – although perhaps a little rushed – was good also.

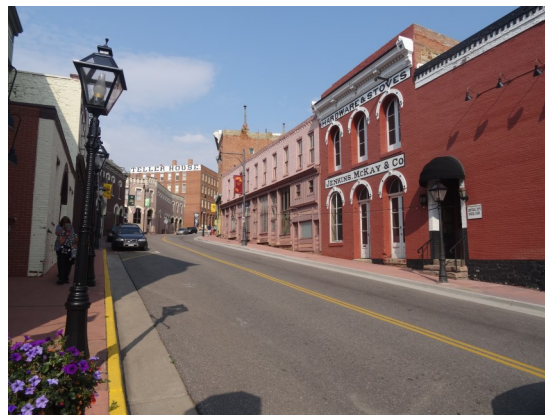
Denver, officially the City and County of Denver, is the capital and most populous municipality of the U.S. state of Colorado. Denver is in the South Platte River Valley on the western edge of the High Plains just east of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. The Denver downtown district is approximately 12 mi east of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Denver is nicknamed the Mile-High City because its official elevation is exactly one mile (5280 feet) above sea level, making it the highest major city in the United States. The 105th meridian west of Greenwich, the longitudinal reference for the Mountain Time Zone, passes directly through Denver Union Station. With an estimated population of 693,060 in 2016, Denver is the 19th-most populous U.S. city, and with a 15.48% increase since the 2010 United States Census, it has been one of the fastest-growing major cities in the United States. The Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO Metropolitan Area is the 19th most populous U.S. metropolitan area. Denver is the most populous city within a 500-mile radius and the second-most populous city in the Mountain West after Phoenix, Arizona. In 2016, Denver was named the best place to live in the United States by U.S. News & World Report.

Friday September 8

Today we went looking for “gold in them thar hills”. We drove out of town in a westerly direction for almost 20 miles and then took a 10 mile drive north to Black Hawk and Central City.

The City of Central, commonly known as Central City, is the Home Rule Municipality in Gilpin and Clear Creek counties that is the county seat and the most populous municipality of Gilpin County, Colorado, United States. The city population was 663 at the 2010 United States Census. The city is a historic mining settlement founded in 1859 during the Pike's Peak Gold Rush and came to be known as the "Richest Square Mile on Earth". Central City and the adjacent city of Black Hawk form the federally designated Central City/Black Hawk Historic District.

Today, both towns are the gambling centers for Colorado and almost every building is a casino. Many (particularly in Black Hawk) are brand new but a good number have been converted from the original Victorian buildings of the gold rush era. The old frontage has been



maintained in general but inside there is the usual maze of slot machines and depressed-looking punters vainly trying to win the lottery.

We walked up a couple of the main streets and admired the buildings which ranged from



private homes to hotels, churches, fire houses, an opera house, and fraternal order headquarters of every stripe. We found the plaque on the Masonic Building of particular interest as it described the year it was built as AD 1864 and AL 5864. The latter is Anno Lucis ("In the year of the Light" and is a dating system used in Masonic ceremonial or commemorative proceedings, which is equivalent to the Gregorian year plus 4000. It is similar to *Anno Mundi*.

This calendar era, which would designate 4001 BCE as 'year zero', was adopted in the 18th century as a simplification of the *Anno Mundi* era dating system used in the Hebrew calendar and borrowing from other ideas of that time regarding the year of creation.



Most of the buildings were well kept-up (at least on the outside) and presumably it is largely due to the influx of gambling revenues. It's conceivable that without these funds the two towns would have fallen into decay and become true ghost towns once the height of the gold rush was over – as have so many in the entire West.

Evidence of gold mines was clear on the hillsides, in large part due to the areas of spoil cascading down but, in many areas, the mine entrances were still clearly visible. It must have been quite a sight in the late 1850s when hundreds of prospectors came to make their fortune. As with most gold rushes, this one was essentially over in about 3 years, although here it was later followed by the silver boom. It appeared from our vantage point on the return journey that some are still trying to find the mother lode (or at least remnants of same)

and, indeed, our guide at the Denver Mint yesterday had said that he spends weekends doing just that in these hills.

After a coffee in town (during which there was a brief shower – our first rain of the trip) we made our way back down the hill towards Idaho Springs but this time we followed an unpaved grade locally known as the "OMG Road". We quickly found out why it had been thus christened as the unpaved but relatively smooth road near town (left) gave way to loose gravel which at times was deeply rutted. There was a two mile stretch in which we had to straddle ruts as much as a foot deep and cross others in which we were in danger of "bottoming out" but



On May 6, 1859, during the Pike's Peak Gold Rush, John H. Gregory found a gold-bearing vein (the Gregory Lode) in Gregory Gulch between Black Hawk and Central City. Within two months many other veins were discovered. By 1860, as many as 10,000 prospectors had flocked to the town and surrounding prospects, but most soon left, many returning east. The 1900 census showed 3,114 people.

Many Chinese lived in Central City during the early days working the placer deposits of Gregory Gulch. They were forbidden work in the underground mines. Most of them are believed to have returned to China after making their stake. Gold mining in the Central City district decreased rapidly between 1900 and 1920, as the veins were exhausted. Mining revived in the early 1930s in response to the increase in the price of gold from \$20 to \$35 per ounce, but then virtually shut down during World War II when gold mining was declared non-essential to the war effort. The district was enlivened in the 1950s by efforts to locate uranium deposits, but these proved unsuccessful.

The population of Central City and its sister city Black Hawk fell to a few hundred by the 1950s. Casino gambling was introduced in both towns in the early 1990s, but had more success in Black Hawk (which has 18 casinos) than in Central City (6 casinos), partly because the main road to Central City passed through Black Hawk, tempting gamblers to stop here instead. Tax from the gambling revenue provides funding for the State Historical Fund, administered by the Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

somehow we managed to negotiate all obstacles with no damage to vehicle or occupants. There were at least 40 white knuckles by the time we reached civilization again but all agreed that the drive past many mine openings and abandoned equipment, sheds and tools had been both interesting and exciting!

It was still early afternoon so we decided to take the drive on the hillside opposite leading to Mt Evans. Mt Evans is 14,200 feet high and has a paved road to the 14,000 feet level, making it the highest such road in North America.

Our first stop, for lunch, was at the lodge at Echo Lake, a very scenic spot with a grand backdrop of the Rocky Mountains. Photo on right courtesy of Wikipedia. Our server for the meal was a young lady just completing her summer stint here from her home in the Czech Republic; in fact a number of the staff seemed to be from outside the US. She had one more week of work to be followed by two more of sight-seeing before returning home and attending university.



From Echo Lake we began the steep and at times hair-raising climb towards the summit. The road made many turns in which the sheer drop (several hundred feet?) was alternately on the left and right of the car, giving all occupants a turn at being nervous. Fortunately the road was very quiet so we were able to hug (or often straddle) the center line and avoid the drops or the rocky cliffs.



Summit Lake

We reached Summit Lake, at 12,830 feet elevation, to find that the road there was closed so we were thwarted in our attempt to climb Mt Evans in its entirety. However, the lack of oxygen and the temperature here (43F) were sufficient to avoid too much disappointment at not making it all the way. In fact we were somewhat relieved that we were forced to turn round here as, shortly after we started our descent, it began to rain. Then it turned to sleet, then small hailstones and finally there was a finite white covering on the road surface. All of this caused us to go very cautiously and use almost all of the turnoffs to allow those less timid (more stupid?) to pass.

We made it safely to the lodge at Echo Lake at which point we made a right turn to return to Denver via an alternative route. By now the road was dry again, there was intermittent sunshine and the temperature gradually increased until it reached the mid-

eighties as we drove into the hotel lot – after an interesting and unusual day out.

Tonight we ate at a local Thai restaurant in a strip mall near the hotel. We all enjoyed our dishes in a very modest ambiance and we were in the restaurant for almost two hours – to the point where no-one felt it necessary to move on to another establishment for dessert.

Saturday September 9

We left the hotel soon after nine and went straight to the Red Rock Amphitheater just a few miles west. This is an enormous 9000+ seat auditorium set in the hillside in a natural amphitheater. (See model to right). It hosts outdoor concerts several times a week in the season but, as we were there on a Saturday morning the steep stairs and seating were being used by fitness fanatics of all ages. Some were running along the length of the curved seating rows, others were doing push-ups on the seats and still others were running or jumping up the stairs and seats. At any altitude this looked like hard work but at 7000 feet we could only imagine the difficulty.

The natural theater formed from beautiful red rocks overlooks the city of Denver across a wide valley so it is a magnificent venue in a splendid location.



From the Red Rocks area we drove along I-70 West as far as Vail where we stopped for about 1 ½ hours to walk along the well-manicured streets with their expensive hotels, boutiques and restaurants – all with the backdrop of the ski slopes that have made this a major winter attraction. Judging by the people out today, it also does a pretty good trade in the summer season.

Vail was incorporated in 1966, four years after the opening of Vail Ski Resort. The ski area was founded by Pete Seibert and local rancher Earl Eaton in 1962, at the base of Vail Pass. The pass was named after Charles Vail, the highway engineer who routed U.S. Highway 6 through the Eagle Valley in 1940, which eventually became Interstate 70. Seibert, a New England native, served in the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain

Division during World War II, which trained at Camp Hale, 14 miles south of Vail. He was wounded in Italy at the Battle of Riva Ridge but went on to become a professional skier after he recovered.





From Vail we followed I-70 West again as far as our destination of Grand Junction. All along the route there was magnificent scenery. Obviously the high peaks of the Rockies were almost always present but there were several times when the road snaked through deep canyons with very high walls that tended to obscure the broader view. These areas were perhaps the most impressive, especially when driving, and provided us with views of some amazing rock formations and cutaways of the strata. For many miles we were driving alongside the Colorado River which seemed to be moving at quite a pace – certainly sufficient to have enticed dozens of rafters into its waters.

So, it was a fantastic 250 mile drive through essentially the whole width of the Rockies. Unfortunately, there were few places where one could stop for photo shoots and we have almost given up on attempts at capturing scenery through the car window while traveling at 70MPH, so we have very few photographs from the journey. The weather today was extremely cooperative – pleasant for walking at our stop in Vail and blue skies throughout which raised the temperature into the 90s at the lower elevations.

We arrived at our hotel in Grand Junction soon after 4pm and re-convened for dinner at 7. Tonight we ate at a brew pub with an emphasis on pizza and pasta dishes. It was a very good meal in modest surroundings but with excellent service. We finished the evening with a night-cap in the hotel bar.

Sunday September 10

Following breakfast at a local Village Inn we had only one item on our itinerary for today – to visit the Colorado National Monument which sits just to the south of Grand Junction.

Colorado National Monument is a National Park Service unit near the city of Grand Junction, Colorado. Sheer-walled canyons cut deep into sandstone and granite–gneiss–schist rock formations. This is an area of desert land high on the Colorado Plateau, with pinion and juniper forests on the plateau. The monument's feature attraction is Monument Canyon, which runs the width of the park and includes rock formations such as Independence Monument, the Kissing Couple, and Coke Ovens. The monument includes 32 square miles, much of which has been recommended to Congress for designation as wilderness.

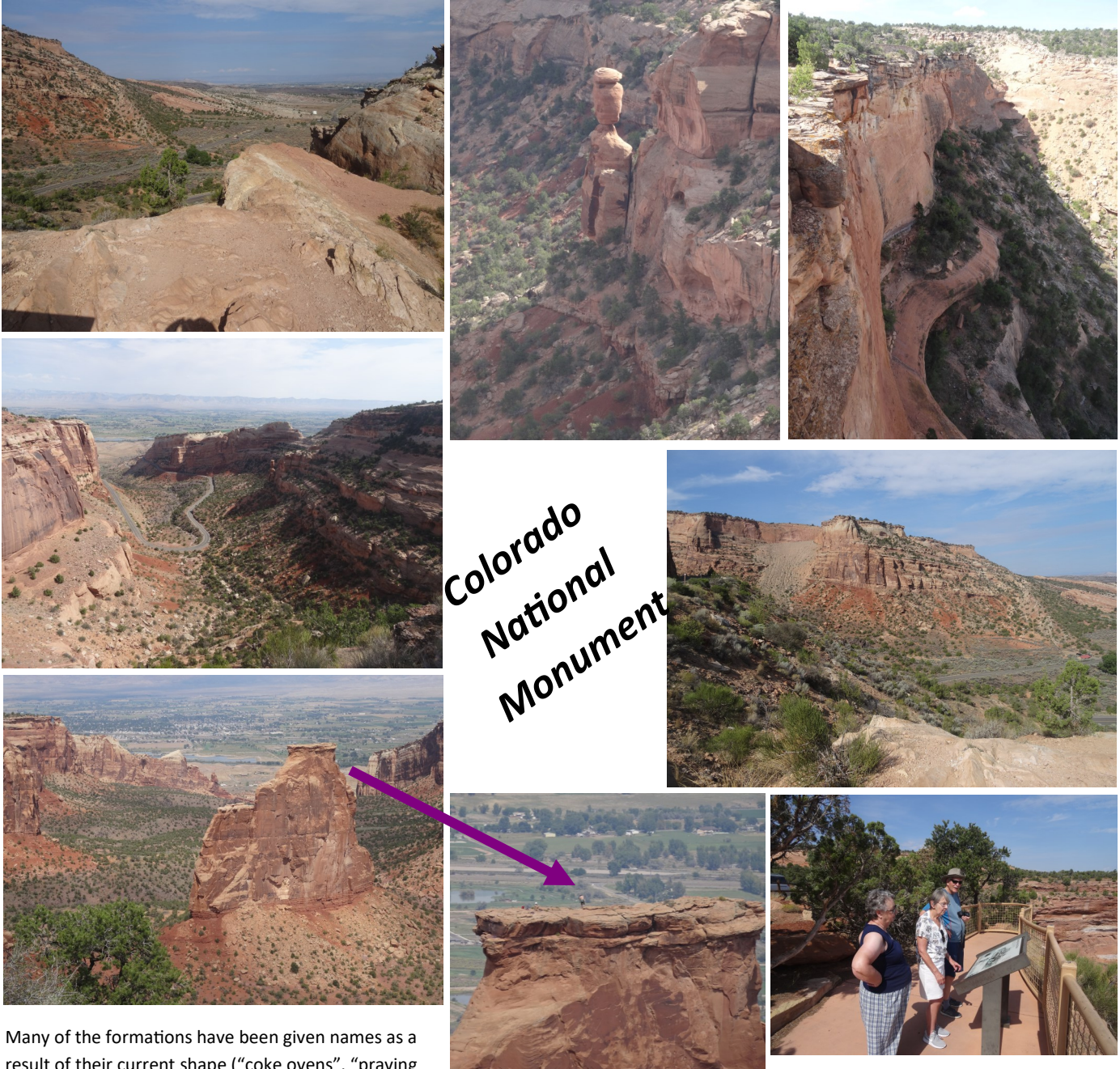
The area was first explored by John Otto, who settled in Grand Junction in the early 20th century. Prior to Otto's arrival, many area residents believed the canyons to be inaccessible to humans. Otto began building trails on the plateau and into the canyons. As word spread about his work, the Chamber of Commerce of Grand Junction sent a delegation to investigate. The delegation returned praising both Otto's work and the scenic beauty of the wilderness area, and the local newspaper began lobbying to make it a National Park. This didn't happen but to ensure protection of the canyons President William Howard Taft (who had visited the area) stepped in and used the highest powers available to him via the Antiquities Act and presidential proclamation to declare the canyons as a national monument.

The area was established as Colorado National Monument on May 24, 1911. Otto was hired as the first park ranger, drawing a salary of \$1 per month. For the next 16 years, he continued building and maintaining trails while living in a tent in the park.

The park became more well known in the 1980s partly due to its inclusion as a stage of the major international bicycle race, the Coors Classic. The race through the park became known as "The Tour of the Moon", due to the spectacular landscapes the race passed through on Rim Rock Drive.

The National Monument is seen from many overlooks along the 30 mile Rim Rock Drive through the park. This road was built in the 1930s as part of Roosevelt's employment efforts in the post-depression era and is a major engineering achievement in itself. However, it is the stunning scenery that makes this area such a big attraction and we spent six hours taking in the strange rock formations and the amazing color palette that they employ.

We stopped early at the Visitor Center where there were a number of interesting and informative exhibits as well as short video presentations on the history of the Monument and its geological changes over the past 300 million years. I could not do justice to the detail presented on the effects of wind and water erosion, major terrain uplifts and shifts and the three or four times the area was covered by oceans and lakes. Suffice it to say that the formations which attracted us today have been a long time in the making, have involved many different events – and are still ongoing. In VERY simple terms, deposits of various densities and hardness (and color) have built up, been lifted as the Rocky Mountains formed, been eroded by wind and water and, in many areas, have fallen away to leave the canyons and monuments that we see today.



Many of the formations have been given names as a result of their current shape ("coke ovens", "praying hands", etc) or commemoration of people and events of the past ("Independence Monument", "Wedding Monument"). The Wedding Monument, for example, is the place where John Otto (the "father of the park") was married. Unfortunately the marriage didn't last (she couldn't take the outdoor life) but his legacy is commemorated here and in other areas of the Monument. The named formations are clearly identifiable – especially when seen with the aid of an explanatory information board and a prominent overlook on or near the road.



With or without names, the overall view from the 6000 + feet altitude of the canyon rim is amazing and almost impossible to describe or even capture on film. Every conceivable shape seems to be covered in towering irregularly shaped pillars or vertical cliff faces polished smooth and virtually all pastel shades between white and black are visible. All this clings to or stands within a deep canyon which rises sharply from the vast Grand Valley that houses the town of Grand Junction and contains both the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers.

As the Visitor Center video pointed out, the Monument is a great place to “find yourself” whether you are visiting for three hours or three days and we certainly had some great experiences and many “Wow” moments in our six hour tour today.

Tonight we ate at Olive Garden, an Italian chain restaurant.

Monday September 11

We checked out and ate at iHop before taking I-70 West across the Utah line before turning south at Cisco. This route took us essentially along the Colorado River as it carved yet another canyon, making for some more spectacular scenery and huge rock cliffs. Towards Moab we were running essentially along the eastern edge of the Arches National Monument, our destination for today.



We arrived at the park right on noon and spent about 45 minutes in the Visitor Center browsing the exhibits and watching a movie about the formation of the monument.

Arches

Much like the Colorado National Monument, Arches has seen many changes over the millennia and has at times been a flat plain, water covered (or at least lashed with heavy rainfalls) and cracked by frosts, but the main features that attract us today have formed by erosion. The movie made a point that this is an ongoing process and the scenery is always changing – sometimes quite dramatically as in 2008 when one of the large arches collapsed. Most change is imperceptible to the tourist, however, and so we viewed a snapshot in time that may or may not look similar the next time we come.

Most of the more spectacular rock formations have been given names based on the shapes, so we saw, for example, the Three Gossips (very obvious), the Organ (clear) and the Tower of Babel (not sure!).



As in all parks in the west there were dozens of overlooks, some demanding a short hike to see the main features, others quite visible from the parking lot – or even from the car.



We spent the most time at an area called “Windows” at which there were several short trails to see a number of arches and tall columns. We all spent some time on the walks near the parking lot but I wandered off a little and came across a “primitive trail” that was not easily followed and had some serious climbs and descents. It was indeed primitive and the only clues as to its path were a number



of small rock cairns placed strategically on what was otherwise a trail almost indistinguishable from its surroundings.



I eventually made it back to the car and looked around for the other three. They, in turn, were about 300 yards along the original trail looking for me! We eventually met up but I sensed a little annoyance at my wanderings – with perhaps a little relief that I had indeed made it back.



From this same spot, Keith and I took another short stroll to see a rather amazing Double Arch.



Late in our visit we saw the Delicate Arch and a number of other named features before turning round and heading back to Moab. We reached our hotel soon after 5pm having spent a very pleasant, interesting and hot (90F+) day in a fascinating National Park.

Tonight we went to the Sunset Grill for dinner. This restaurant perches on top of a hill facing west and, since we arrived around 7:30, we were able to watch the sun set as we waited for our table. The meal was good and reasonably priced. The service was leisurely so it was almost 10pm by the time we drove back down the hill to our hotel.



Tuesday September 12

We checked out of the hotel around 8:30 and went to the Pancake Haus for breakfast. We then drove 300 miles to our next destination about 20 miles from Zion National Park.

Our route took us north from Moab about 30 miles to join Interstate 70 where we turned west and stayed on that road for about 150 miles. The scenery was varied – from desert to deep canyons – and was particularly spectacular north of the [Capitol Reef National Park](#) *(Courtesy: Wikipedia)*. At Salina, we headed south on I-70, now contiguous with US89, and stopped for coffee in Richfield. From here it was somewhat over 100 miles to our destination and the terrain became more green and fertile with lots of beef cattle and other farmland.

We went through a couple of heavy showers and heard some rattles of thunder but it was dry, sunny and warm (85F) again by the time we reached the Thunderbird Lodge in Mt Carmel. This is about 50 miles from Bryce and 20 miles from Zion so a very convenient location for our visits over the next two days, its only drawback being that it is somewhat isolated from the restaurants of Springdale, the nearest tourist town. Consequently we ate in the hotel restaurant and had a pleasant meal at a very reasonable price.

