

# *New Mexico and California*

## *August 2018*



*Bob and Molly Hillery*



*This trip was originally planned as one of our “quarterly” visits to our California family but, as we did in May, we decided to add a few days along the way and do some driving in the Western States. This time we chose New Mexico, which has long been a favorite of ours but a state we haven’t visited in a number of years.*

*We opted for three nights in each of two cities, Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and we knew that each would provide us with plenty to do and see both in the city and the countryside around. So, we flew to Albuquerque, immediately drove to Santa Fe for our three days there and then returned to Albuquerque for another three. We then flew to Sacramento for our three-day weekend with Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha.*

*As we had anticipated, both New Mexico cities had plenty for us to explore as we spent one full day in each city and one other in the surrounding countryside. In addition, we had a very pleasant drive both to and from Santa Fe and saw some magnificent scenery—as well as enjoying great weather.*

*Our weekend with the California Hillerys allowed us to see their home in its “pristine” state, as they have recently put it on the market and are planning to move to something a little smaller, but still in Sacramento. As always, it was a busy few days and a very enjoyable time.*

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### **Saturday August 11**

We had stayed at the airport Marriott overnight (after dinner at Phoenician Taverna) and had a leisurely breakfast before getting the 10am shuttle to the airport. While in the lounge we got a text to say that our second flight today (Atlanta to Albuquerque) was delayed about 35 minutes – which, ironically, was good news as the scheduled connection in Atlanta had been quite tight. We left Cincinnati on time and arrived in Atlanta essentially on time so it was an easy transfer between terminals and to our new gate.

As it turned out, this delayed flight left even later than scheduled and so we were looking at a 4:30 arrival in Albuquerque, which still gave us plenty of time to drive from there to Santa Fe in time for dinner. However, as we approached Albuquerque we did a couple of 360 circles as a storm sat over the airport. In fact, the pilot said that if we couldn't land within ten minutes we would be diverted to Phoenix – which would have complicated things a little! The storm did move sufficiently that we were able to land about 5:30pm.

We picked up our rental car and drove the “back way” to Santa Fe, that is on the east side of the Sandia Range rather than I-25 on the west. The distance is about the same but we not only avoided the expressway but went through some very pleasant countryside as we made our way north.

We arrived at the Courtyard in Santa Fe about 7pm, unpacked and immediately sought out a restaurant. We chose a tapas restaurant about 20 minutes away on a back street which turned out to have a limited small plate selection but we were able to pick out three that were very good. With a bottle of wine (expensive but good once we got it fully chilled) and a couple of very good desserts we had a very enjoyable meal. Both of us were feeling the altitude (7000 feet) and were moving at half pace and we were ready for bed when we got back to the hotel at 10pm (midnight at home).

### **Sunday August 12**

We had breakfast at a nearby McDonald's and then set out on our drive to Taos. There are basically two routes between Santa Fe and Taos: the one to the east on quiet country roads (the “High Road”) and the one which follows the Rio Grande for much of the way (the “Low Road”). Both have stretches in common outside each city.

We chose to follow the High Road to travel north and soon were climbing from the 7000 feet at Santa Fe to at least 8000 feet and probably higher in spots. Further to the east were peaks of





up to 13,000 feet. The terrain on the climb was typical high desert; few trees, brush and sandy soil, probably the quintessential New Mexico terrain. However, once we started the descent towards Taos we were in heavily forested ground, with only the road breaking the dense mixture of pine and deciduous trees. Both were beautiful, although quite different, and the drive was pleasant the whole way.



The High Road is dotted with small settlements, usually housing several artists' homes and shops. Surprisingly, on a beautiful Sunday there wasn't much traffic and most of the art studios seemed to be closed. Presumably there are times when the route is more active and the artists find customers for their wares.

Once in Taos, we parked near the main plaza and spent a very pleasant 1 ½ hours strolling along the old streets and past the adobe shops, homes and churches. Almost every building is built in adobe which makes for a very attractive presentation and, presumably, makes use of the native materials and is quite economical to build. The decorations on many of the buildings added a lot of color and character.







We found a café for a light lunch before walking back to the car and driving about 10 miles further west to visit the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. We parked in the main visitor area and walked to view the bridge spanning the Rio Grande at a height of 565 feet above the river. I walked to the center of the 1200 feet long span to get some birds' eye views of the river, which belies its title and appears (at least from this height) as little more than a heavy stream. The surrounding gorge, however, is magnificent and the black basalt walls stand in contrast to the flat desert ground of the surrounding area.



We left the bridge and returned to Taos where we picked up the Low Road back to Santa Fe. This road follows the Rio Grande – sometimes at a much higher elevation, other times almost at river level, but there is only a 15 mile stretch where the river is in clear



sight from the road. We stopped at one pull off to admire the view and watch a couple of rafts as they made their way downstream.



We got back to Santa Fe around 5:30 after a great day out. We ate at the Ranch House tonight where we had a good – not great – meal before retiring around 9:30.

### **Monday August 13**

Today was our day to spend in the city of Santa Fe, so after breakfast at IHOP we drove to the capitol building where we were able to park for the day.

We spent an hour or so at the capitol. It is unlike most in that it has no roof dome, is basically circular in shape and, of course, is built with adobe (or at least it looks like it from the outside). Inside, however, it is similar to many state capitols we have seen, with a central rotunda (smaller than most) and House and Senate chambers at opposite ends of a semi-circular corridor. The grounds are not as large or lavish as most, but there are the usual war memorials and monuments around the building







From the capitol it was a short walk to the Church of the Mission San Miguel, said to be the oldest church in the USA – although we have seen at least one other claim in St Augustine, FL. Nevertheless, it was a very nice little church and most of the adobe building dates from the early 1600s, so it has seen a lot of history in this historic part of the Southwest.





Across a narrow street from the church is the “oldest building in the USA”, a small two-roomed adobe building attached nowadays to the inevitable gift shop. The house is decorated and filled with household effects that could be from almost any period.



We then walked across the Santa Fe River (almost dry) to the Loretto Chapel (right next to the church below), home to the famous spiral staircase that seems to have no attachment to floor or walls. Unfortunately the chapel was closed today for a “Special Event”, so I suppose we were pleased that we had visited here on previous visits.

*The Loretto Chapel is best known for its "miraculous" spiral staircase, which rises 20 feet to the choir loft while making two full turns, all without the support of a newel or central pole. The staircase is built mostly out of wood and is held together by wooden pegs and glue rather than nails or other hardware. The exact wood used to build the staircase is unknown, though it has been confirmed to be a type of spruce, probably non-native to New Mexico. The handrails were added later, in 1887.*

*Apart from any claims of its miraculous nature, the staircase has been described as a remarkable feat of woodworking. According to a Washington Post column by Tim Carter, "It's a magnificent work of art that humbles me as a master carpenter. To create a staircase like this using modern tools would be a feat. It's mind-boggling to think about constructing such a marvel with crude hand tools, no electricity and minimal resources."*







From the chapel it was a short walk – on the Old Santa Fe Trail – to the heart of town, the Plaza. Here are many lovely adobe buildings set around a tree-lined square, the most famous of which is the huge Governors’ Palace. We also found a convenient Starbucks for a light lunch just off the plaza.



*Santa Fe Plaza*



Interestingly, although virtually all the buildings on the square are, or are made to look like, adobe, while looking up information on one building (originally for shops on the ground floor and a lawyer's office above) we read that this – the Catron Building – was brick and that brick was the “posh” way to go on this square in the 1850s. I suppose it was a “rebellion” against everything adobe and caught on for the rich of the day, but clearly has been once more overtaken by adobe. In fact, the brick is now covered in stucco to match everything else!



Our final stop was at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Francis of Assisi, built in the 1880s on the site of an older adobe church. It is beautiful both inside and out and it was very pleasant to sit inside for 15 minutes and enjoy the quiet and the ornate decoration – complete with a large iconostasis behind the altar.





Then we walked back to the car and drove to the hotel where we arrived around 2:30. We had been out for about four hours and had walked about 2 ½ miles, which at this elevation is sufficient. Despite it being the middle of August, however, it wasn't very hot and a cooling breeze made for a good day for walking and sightseeing.

Tonight we ate at Café Coyote in the middle of town and had an excellent meal with matching service.

### **Tuesday August 14**

We had breakfast at McDonald's and then checked out of the Courtyard in Santa Fe and started our return to Albuquerque – but again, not via the fast I-25 but along country, mountainous roads to the west.

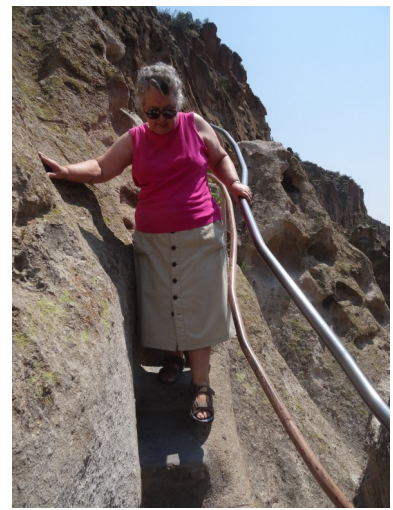
Our first stop was at the Bandelier National Monument (near Los Alamos) which is famous for the ancient Pueblo cliff dwellings as well as more sophisticated housing made from stone which were found on the canyon floor as well as atop the mesa.

We had visited here many years ago and the first thing we noted was that the only entrance to the Monument is via the shuttle bus which leaves from a new Visitor Center, about 10 miles from the main park walking loop. Presumably the number of tourists here has increased dramatically (or is expected to) and Bandelier is following Zion, Bryce and many other National Parks in using a shuttle bus service from a large central parking area. The bus ride took about 25 minutes, the last 10 of which were down a steep, winding road to the canyon bottom and the start of several walking trails.



We – as most tourists – chose the main loop trail which was advertised as being about 1 ½ miles, which we thought we could both accommodate reasonably. It was warm, but not too hot, but we were at 6000 feet elevation, so even a slight gradient was challenging. The first ¼ mile or so was on a flat paved path and took us past several “villages” of stone built homes that were grouped in clusters of up to 100 room “estates”. It was thought that part of this large cluster had two stories and entry to each was via ladders in the roof. This was so reminiscent of similar (but much older) housing that we have seen recently in Sardinia and Cyprus. The ones here were





probably 500 to 700 years old but the Pueblo Indians have occupied this land for much longer – perhaps as much as 9000 years.

The cliff dwellings are reached via a steep path from which wooden ladders can be used to access the caves themselves. Most of the caves are natural but have often had opening enlarged for access and, in some cases, structures have been built on the cliff side to make a much larger dwelling. Again, these were occupied up to 700 years ago,

The climb up to the ladders (which were generally only about ten feet in length) was steep and narrow and quite taxing in the heat at this altitude. However, we both made it back to the main loop and Bob actually climbed one of the ladders to enter one small cave.



Back at “river level” (there was a stream which it was claimed was always flowing but one would have to have a good imagination today to see water) we slowly meandered back to the bus, admiring the near vertical cliff sides in pink and white hues. It really is a beautiful place to visit.

Once back at the car we drove into Los Alamos for a light lunch. Again, we had visited here a number of years ago and were surprised at how the sleepy town has grown and seems to be setting itself up as a tourist destination in its own right – not just a stop off from Santa Fe or Albuquerque.

From Los Alamos we climbed into the mountains – we estimate that we reached 10,000 feet – and were amazed to see a huge flat valley to the right of the road—the Valle Grande.



This, it turns out, is the caldera formed from the eruption that dropped 1000 feet of ash in the canyon that is now the Bandelier Monument and which is the material of the canyon sides and the cliff dwellings. It was said that this eruption, one million years ago, was 500 times larger than that of the 1980 Mt St Helens eruption and it was easy to believe when we saw this 400 square mile caldera.

From the summit it was a long and sometimes winding descent through forested areas as well as high canyons all the way to San Ysidro. Much of the region is set aside as Indian Reservations and is unspoiled; the scenery is magnificent. It can certainly match much of that seen in neighboring states of Colorado, Utah and Nevada. Well worth the extra time versus the expressway.

We then were in the vast Rio Grande Valley with the Sandia Range to the east so it was a flat and fast ride to our hotel on the north side of Albuquerque, where we arrived around 5pm after a wonderful day out.

Tonight we ate at Seasons 52, a chain restaurant that we have enjoyed in Cincinnati and which gave us a good meal tonight.

### **Wednesday August 15**

We had breakfast in the Hotel Lounge and then drove to Albuquerque Old Town. We spent perhaps 1 ½ hours strolling around the plaza and visiting the church there. There were very few people about and we felt that the area was losing some of its charm and certainly didn't match similar locations in Taos and Santa Fe.





## *Old Town Albuquerque*

After a light lunch we visited the Petroglyph National Monument, which is located within the city of Albuquerque so was only a very short drive from Old Town. Here we walked three trails on which, it is said, there are 100 petroglyphs. Certainly we can't dispute the claim but on one trail in particular, the major part of the time was spent looking at one's footing, rather than the drawings, as the rocky path climbed steeply up the basalt mesa.

*Petroglyph National Monument stretches 17 miles along Albuquerque, New Mexico's West Mesa, a volcanic basalt escarpment that dominates the city's western horizon. Authorized in 1990, the 7,236 acre monument is cooperatively managed by the National Park Service and the City of Albuquerque. The western boundary of the monument features a chain of dormant fissure volcanoes.*

*Petroglyph National Monument protects a variety of cultural and natural resources including five volcanic cones, hundreds of archeological sites and an estimated 24,000 images carved by Ancestral Pueblo peoples and early Spanish settlers. Many of the images are recognizable as animals, people, brands and crosses; others are more complex. Their meaning was, possibly, understood only by the carver. These images are the cultural heritage of a people who have long since moved into other areas and moved on through history for many reasons. The monument is intended as a protection for these lands and sites from and for visitors to see and appreciate for generations to come.*





However, we did see a large number of drawings which were interesting, although not always easy to understand. The Pueblo Indians of today are said to understand their meaning but prefer not to divulge. In addition, there are apparently many interpretations given by the various tribes. Most of the drawings were about 500 years old and the artwork is simple to say the least; many stick-like figures and many symbols which are obscure to us. Molly pointed out that at the same point in history, Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel so it is perhaps not unfair to claim that European culture was more advanced – at least in art. On the other hand, yesterday in Bandelier we had seen many examples of building, farming and settlement in very harsh conditions that were of the same era and, in some cases, much earlier. Clearly, each period has produced peoples of diverse talents and each is interesting in its own right and we are grateful that we can see examples preserved for our enjoyment and education.

Tonight we ate at a Spanish tapas restaurant called the Cellar. It was an excellent meal (four dishes, wine and dessert) and very attentive service. In fact we enjoyed it so much that we considered going again on Thursday, rather than the upscale steakhouse we had planned.



## Thursday August 16

Today we drove to the hill country to the southeast of Albuquerque on a mission to visit at least two of the Missions on the Salt Mission Trail. This was the route followed north by the Mexican priests in search of new goods (salt being a primary need), new lands and, perhaps most of all, new peoples to convert to Catholicism. In doing so they built mission churches at frequent intervals along the route and we were to visit some of the better preserved examples.



Pueblo Indians had occupied numerous sites along this same route and had indeed been active traders with Plains Indians to the east, so established settlements had existed since the 1300s. The arrival of the Spanish brought mixed blessings: a greater population meant more trade but it often came with a certain amount of oppression and certainly with a huge culture shock.

The one or two story pueblo housing was now next door to fifty feet high and 100 feet long buildings which were richly adorned and which the owners were bent on taking over the tribal religion. It would appear that the Spanish made some concessions in the layout of the new churches and often included a traditional Indian Kiva (meeting house and religious center), presumably in an effort to make Christianity more inviting and familiar.

It isn't clear exactly how well the two became integrated as the pueblos still surround the mission (rather than follow-





ing a more European village style) but it is equally obvious that many Indians were used in the building of these massive churches as it is said that the priest arrived with little more than a blueprint and his own possessions.

The Quarai Ruins are perhaps the best preserved and we spent about 1 ½ hours taking the walking tour of this enormous facility. The ancient pueblo housing has all but vanished (much of it now just a mound of earth), but the mission church is still very much recognizable as a church, even though a lot of the walls are no longer standing. From the descriptions we saw, the artists' renditions and what remains standing, it is clear that the site would have looked magnificent in the mid-1600s when built and decorated. The peace and tranquility of the mission – and its integration with and conversion of the locals – was relatively short-lived, however. Warring tribes from the east and years of drought and crop failure brought about the closure of Quarai in the late 1600s and the whole area was uninhabited for perhaps a couple of centuries. In the 1800s, some Pueblo Indians returned but they were soon ousted by Spanish shepherds from the south who took over and lived here into the 1900s. Now, however, Quarai – and its near neighbor Abo – is an historically interesting but uninhabited site. Pueblo Indians still occupy many sites in New Mexico but most are, in effect, “summer homes” or places of special religious significance and only a very few are inhabited in the traditional sense.

It was a fascinating story and another interesting look at what to Europeans would be considered recent history but nevertheless covers an important and extensive period in the history of the southwest and the US in general. Certainly, whenever we are out west we observe that the Spanish influence here was generally much further ahead (architecturally, culturally and religiously) than that which occurred on the east coast – and about which we hear so much more.

It was a relatively short drive back to Albuquerque to complete our break in New Mexico, Tomorrow (Friday) we fly to Sacramento for a weekend with Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha. We did indeed return to the Cellar for another wonderful meal.

That concluded our short break in New Mexico where we had a very interesting and enjoyable six days. The rest of this trip was to be spent in Sacramento, visiting with our family.



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## Friday August 17

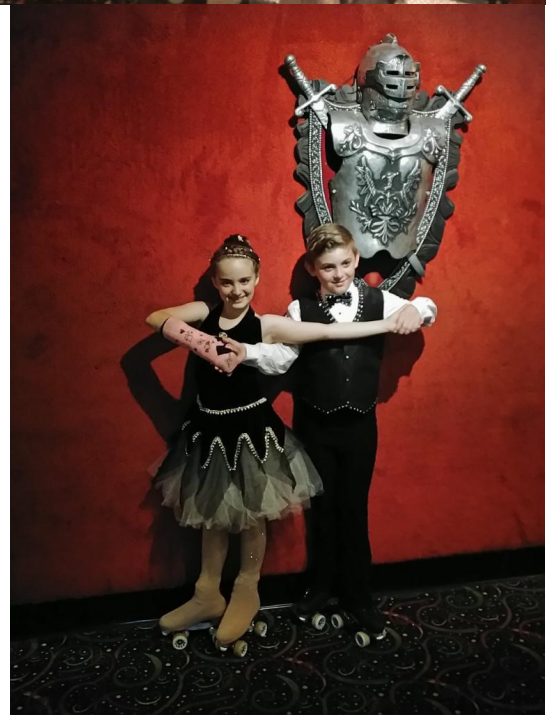
We checked out of the Albuquerque Marriott and drove to the airport for our two flights (via Salt Lake City) to Sacramento, where we arrived soon after 4pm.

This evening we had dinner with Christopher, Cyndi and Sammy at Anthony's, a small Italian restaurant close to the hotel that we have enjoyed several times in the past.



## Saturday August 18

We had breakfast at iHop and then drove to Citrus Heights to watch Sammy (and Cyndi) practicing her skating. There were no lessons today but Cyndi kept Sammy on track with her necessary routines. We don't have any good pictures from this morning's session, but we would be remiss if we didn't include some of Sammy's recent triumph at the Regional Championships.



We met Christopher for lunch at Chili's and then spent another hour watching Sammy at her latest sport – roller boarding! She has a coach here too who not only showed her technique but encouraged her and



gently pushed her in a very friendly manner. We sat in the shade of some trees (it was over 100F and the roller park is outdoors!) so none of us were too saddened when the lesson was over.



We then spent about 1 ½ hours at their home (now readied for sale and in a state which we had never seen before) and watched pictures from Sammy's recent debut at the Southwest Regional Skating Championships where she did very well in her three singles events and took a First with her partner.

After returning to the hotel to clean up we were picked up around 7:30 and went to the Melting Pot to celebrate Cyndi and Christopher's 18<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary (actually on August 6).

### **Sunday August 19**

We walked to Starbucks for coffee and at 10:30 left for an early lunch at Huckleberry's, a breakfast/brunch/lunch place that Cyndi and Christopher wanted us to try. We had a very good meal and then went to see more Sammy skating videos and a number of archived photographs. At 3pm, they got a call to say that a potential buyer wanted to view the house so we left and went for ice cream!

Molly and I returned to the hotel for a while before rejoining the family at their home at 6pm. We got the grand tour of the "ready to sell" home and then went to dinner at an Indian restaurant very close to our hotel. We said our goodbyes for this trip around 9pm and retired shortly thereafter.

### **Monday August 20**

We packed, checked out and went to iHop for breakfast before our 1:30 flight home to Cincinnati, via Salt Lake City. Both flights were on time and we arrived home about midnight after another very enjoyable trip to the Western States.