

Southwest Trip 2008
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SEPTEMBER 2-14, 2008
2600 Miles, \$1800 Cost
Lodging only at Holiday Inn Expresses (HIE)
Points earned at HIEs for future free stays

Planning for this trip took many weeks by Bill and organizing to leave. Ms. Topsy, our kitty, went to boarding with Dr. Howard's staff and George, Bill's buddy, babysat Scruffy and the farm.

We had everything we could think of to take in the SUV and left at 8:15AM, Tuesday, Sept. 2, from the vet's office and a kiss goodbye to Ms. Topsy. Our first destination was to University of Kansas, Paleontology Dept., to visit with PHD candidate and former B&B guest, Dan Williams. Dan gave us a tour of exhibit items and stored items "no one" sees. But first, before we had our tour, I wanted to see Comanche, the only military horse to survive (shot 3 times) the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Comanche has been preserved by the famous Dyche who created the huge wildlife diorama of the 1890's. Comanche was a most unusual project. However, Comanche, with all the military tack and history described of his injuries at the battle and recovery at Ft. Sill, in a closet, but Bill called the room a cloak room. Comanche, a sorrel colored horse, was 14 at the time of the battle and lived until he was 29 as a fort celebrity. I was shocked! Comanche in a closet! However, Dan explained Comanche had a restoration and Comanche would soon be returned to a display room not a closet!

After a detailed description of Dan's research in analyzing extinct life forms in a Montana sink hole full of remains of those critters that fell in the sink hole, we explored some of the university. The university is on a hill with a history of research centers and student facilities. Also, toured the campus Spencer Museum of Art. There, saw a new art technique – swirls of paint color in free flows. A huge quilt collection of 1810 to 1840's or so collection. We went to a great restaurant in downtown Lawrence after the tour. I recommend a small restaurant called Milton's. First time I had chicken and tortilla soup plus salad of capons, goat cheese, and artichokes. Bill had a hand-made stuffed calzone.

HIE – Topeka: Wonderful front desk, a couple holes in curtain in our room and some trouble using remote. However, this HIE is an A grade. While in Topeka, drove around the capital area blocks just to see the down. Much different than Jefferson City. Ate at a chain restaurant.

The main attraction is the Kansas State Historical Society complex. Inside, the complex had a real 1920 train restored (Kansas, Atchison, Topeka line). The exhibits, which we spent 2 hours exploring, include native Americans, WW 1&2, prairie life for the ranchers and farmers, severe weather exhibits, sod house frontier, products, music, etc., originating from Kansas. I would rate this museum and all it offers with the Okla. State Historical Museum. Both are massive and a “must see.”

Weather warm, 80’s, beginning to get cloudy, windy. Left Topeka HIE about 7:30AM to go onto Council Grove & Lyons, then Garden City. About a 300 mile drive day. Views of Kansas on turnpike: Pastures, no white rocks, soil and rocks a clay color, almost showing a light pink color, little site of farm houses, so farms are now called ranches in the flint country. Some names of ranches from Council Grove are Division and Fox Creek.

We went onto the Tallgrass National Preserve of the prairie where I met another horse: A retired ranch horse that stared at me. The preserve is over 2,000 acres to illustrate the prairie and ranch life. We have been there before, so talking with the National Park Service employees was like being at home. Bill took his famous outhouse photo at the preserve.

We drove along the Scenic Byway of 177 through flint hills. In distance were hills, small bluffs, heavy sky, just steam clouds with light rain, about 50 degrees. We drove around Cottonwood Falls just to see the ornate courthouse, the main street leads right to the courthouse adorned with expert restoration. First oil well was spotted outside the small town of Elmdale.

Near Great Bend, Ks., we received a call from the acting Div. of Tourism director asking if we could meet him in Blackwater, Mo. for lunch! We were sure surprised, and we couldn’t explain exactly how we were escaping Missouri for 12 days! Must be on tippy toes about our excursion far away from Missouri to the director!

In McPherson, Ks., we saw gas pipelines, processing center for gas of the Conway company. Lunch was in Lyons, Ks. at a good Mexican restaurant, and the marvel of Lyons is the tribute to a determined Spanish explorer, Coronado, to find his Quivira! In history, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico sent Coronado on a goose chase to find riches in Kansas just to get rid of him! A mural on a side of building in Lyons shows Coronado gallantly riding into Lyons thinking he found Quivira!

Noticed a field of sunflowers (Kansas you know) growing on Chisham Trail Rd. on US 56 west of McPherson. Also, thought I saw yellow milo growing. Downtown McPherson is very nice and active. I was impressed. Oh yes, at Great Bend, Ks., the Kiowa Kitchen restaurant, serving Mexican food, is still closed for two years. Visited the Santa Fe Trail Museum which is one of our favorites. Employees friendly and one can see what sod house and other pioneering buildings look like.

Going into a sod or dug-out house is a reality check on just how hard homesteading was.

We stopped again at Ft. Larned, Ks. to take the perspective porch picture Bill likes so much. This time I think I took the better photo of the long porch. I also became fascinated at the names, dates, carved into the stone walls of the fort's buildings. Many graffiti names date 1890, but most are around 1912. The fort was very active for many years, and even Earl Quick of Keytesville, Mo. carved a large square with his name, hometown, and date of 1941 on a wall. There is a researcher at Ft. Larned recording the names, dates, and places on the outside walls of the buildings as part of the character of the fort. This fort is comparative to Ft. Scott, Ks., a fort well-built, maintained, and active for many years. But, the forts were built to produce commerce, trading along the Santa Fe Trail. Ft. Larned is very pretty and a "tourism" must.

Sept. 4 – Stayed at HIE, Garden City, and dinner at the Cattleman's restaurant which is on of our favorites for roast beef, mashed potatoes, etc. Tour bus from Kansas City was at the HIE. The tour was headed for Utah sites, Durango, Colo., and a rather long trip of sight seeing. Switched rooms at this HIE. Stain on carpet that was not the HIE class of a room. Gave this HIE an A because of room change and actually good quality.

Very chilly, but sunny. Headed for Lakin, Ks., by 7:45AM. West on US 50 is now high plains, desert, and pine trees and fences as wind and snow breaks. We are actually on hiway parallel to the Amtrak train systems from K.C. to Albuquerque. We are on parts of the original Santa Fe Trail. Noticed mural of traders coming to Syracuse, Ks. not pioneers or settlers. This was very interesting in how history is promoted.

Many fields of corn, beans, milo, and alfalfa (alfalfa is a very valuable crop throughout the southwest). Past Coolridge, Kan., and now noticing that many little towns are like ghost towns – businesses are closed, buildings barely standing, and nothing from one small town to another. Started seeing prairie dog holes in pastures just west of Kansas border to Colorado.

Saw a road sign promoting Jack & Wanda's Tasty House, but didn't see the tasty house. Still on US 50/400 and arrived a LaJunta, Colo., for a break: Sunny, chilly, altitude is changing so had to wear a sweater. We followed Colo. Hiway 10 a two-lane road of very little traffic, so we saved gas use by driving the speed we wanted and looking at scenery. First site of mountains out of LaJunta and saw antelope in distance, plus first sign of the cholla plant, sandy soil, and in the desert range saw cactus, no trees, no buildings, just the plains. The road we are on is like a ribbon going over hills to the mountains. We are familiar with signs we see: "This Land still not for sale!" This sign represents the conflict between ranchers and the Army in this area. The Army wants to buy land to expand desert warfare tactics.

We are headed for Walsenburg in the mountains. Outcroppings of erosion more apparent and mini canyons we pass by plus ancient lava fields. (New Mexico is a volcano state). One can count the volcano tips for miles around. Walsenburg is a touristy town, but was directed to a café, Carna's, for excellent Mexican home cooking. Went to two antique stores, a western store, and one huge, huge freight depository of everything that could be sold, but prices were high. Didn't buy a thing at the mother of all flea markets, just stared in disbelief.

We left Walsenburg and headed into the Rocky Mountain Spanish Peaks of 9400 ft. of altitude. Very pretty day, but a crisp, sunny feel of the mountains ahead. We went thru Loveta Pass, and along the way I saw reddish color soil.

We were going to the Great Sand Dunes, nothing like White Sands. These are Dunes blown by the wind, just the color of sand, sand is sand. White Sands are Gypsum, a mineral. One can see the Great Sand Dunes from a distance and the park ranger headquarters is very educational. However, goes for the dunes, big dunes. We headed across the small creek around the dunes and played like we were in the desert of Africa. However, Bill's knee played out on him, because climbing a gigantic dune is work, and I was thinking of avoiding getting to the top. Many were at the dunes playing, bringing their dogs, and try to slide down the dunes on snow sleds. That didn't work. No one could get slippery traction.

Bought Mark Irle a historic postcard about a volcano there. The ranger gave a presentation about how a laddle and spear was used by the ancient ones who came through the dunes area during the pre-historic era. Spent two hours playing on the dunes. The desert now is pinkish-grey sand with small desert plants. Talked with couple from Iowa who were camping at the dune park's camping area, and we saw a couple with three beautiful shepherds heading up the dunes. We left the park on Colo. county road 17.

The dunes are about 30 square miles piling up against the mountain range. We left there about 3PM and arrived in Almosa, staying at a Comfort Inn which was very nice and the front desk personnel were great. Breakfast at Comfort Inn is waffles with an interesting sausage, cheese, sandwich. There were stains on carpet, but everything looked clean. Give the Inn an A. The front desk clerks suggested the two best restaurants in town.

The town of Almosa is the coldest in the country, can go to 40 below. Very little snow, a desert look to it, no green grass, but the town is in the high desert and in a valley. Alamosa has a small college, and the town is part of a railroad distribution and storage area. There is little or none grass in many yards –thus, most decorate yards with sand, cactus, statues, or unusual art.

We were up early to head for the drive to Antonito to catch the Cumbres & Toltec train after a bus ride from Antonito to Chama. The headquarters of the 1880 steam

train is Antonito and Chama. Thus, the ride goes through the mountains from Bonito to Chama and back again. This is mountain train ride. Altitude will change.

This train ride is one the primary stop on our trip. Bill made reservations for Antonito to Chama and then back to Antonito via the train. We drove to Antonito, left the SUV, took a bus to Chama, about 64 miles, and then returned by train to Antonito. This entire trip started at 8:15AM and ended at 4:30PM. Cost for us, senior citizens, includes the bus ride, a huge buffet lunch, etc., was \$75 per person. We would never do the Durango train trip. Our train trip offered so much more and far into the mountains not near any touristy things except the small town of Chama. The buffet was turkey, dressing, and all that goes with a turkey dinner. The dining room was huge, but since about 84 on our trip, the building seemed even bigger. Bill made a comment that the music everyone heard on the loud speakers while dining should have been about trains, not formal piano music.

We were told the snow gets so deep in Chama area that snow mobile riders go across roofs of the houses and cabins, plus the only grocery store in area had a cave-in. The roof collapsed because of too much snow. Only ranches are in the area and summer retreats. The cattle is open range and drove out of the mountains by winter by horseback or 3-wheelers.

The 1880 train used 22 tons of coal for the trip, and all the soot, smoke, etc. went right into our faces. Like everyone else, we sat orderly in the passenger cars until the conductor told us to take off to the open viewing car – no roof, hold on to the sides, stand for entire trip, and take pictures. A bright, sunny, 40degree day, just perfect for pictures.

The train trip from Chama back to Antonito as about 64 miles through the most interesting of the mountains. Many drivers along the hiway we saw in distance stopped their cars to wave at passengers. We waved back, and other drivers actually followed the train as long as the rail lines was near the two-lane highway. We were told the story of a woman, who had 12 children, married at 15, and her and husband had a 4-room house in the mountains we went by on the train. The couple's business was to be a main stay for water, coal, etc. in that area during the early 1900's. The lady lived to be 95 and recently passed away. All her children are connected to the Cumbres-Toltec railroad and some were actually working on the train we were riding. Her husband died because of a blizzard and ill health. Most of the workers on the train are volunteers. We met Carol Bush who said she was also a volunteer at the Albuquerque Natural History Museum. So, she dared us to write her name in the guest book there. Since we were going, to the museum, we sure wrote her name next to ours in the guest book! Most volunteers for the train ride every day from middle May until middle October are volunteers. Only the engineer and other train maintenance folks are paid. The train is co-owned by the states of Colo. & New Mex.

We left on Saturday, Sept. 6, from Alamoso and drove back to Antonito and then onto Chama. We saw the road and beauty of the mountains were Madge & Larry Harrah have a summer camp. The mountains rise about a green, stream laden valley of camps and cottages. Their cabin must be closed by October, because snow covers the cabin, and they have to protect from snow mobilers going over the roof or breaking into the cabin. The drive to their camp is 200 miles from Albuquerque where they live.

We stopped in Chama this time to re-take some train pictures of the new ride starting up with much more cars on the engine than we had. They were expecting a very large group. During our trip we were around tourists from Italy, Germany, England, and Australia. And, we met nine tourists from Missouri!

We saw the few motels in Chama, a café, and some touristy stores, but the season by Sept. was closing down in Chama, so tourists who came were basically train riders. We headed on US 64 through the desert area to Bloomington – not weather getting hot, 77degrees. Countryside to Chama was very green, a mountain environment, very few houses which were mostly summer retreats. In this area leaving Chama boulders of big rocks actually looked like Elephant Rocks in Mo.

We arrived at Aztec, New Mex., and to may favorite little pioneer museum. Our guide before was Ms. Kitty, and Ms. Kitty is still there laying on the fanciest divan in the museum. She meowed to me, but didn't offer another tour. Ms. Kitty actually had her follow us to every pioneer building in the museum complex. And, she waited until we came out of the buildings. The museum is old, dusty, things are jammed in certain rooms and garages. It's a great museum to see and walk thru the items of history even though they are dusty and in need of more volunteer work at the museum.

Bill saw a sign out of Aztec of an adopt a hiway section sign brought to travelers by the Libertarian party. Bill was pleased there were Libertarians in New Mex.

On way to Shiprock from Farmington now. We have listened to the Navajo radio station promoting the Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock. Couldn't understand a word of Navajo, but we did hear a fair auction in Navajo! Selling rugs and sheep.

What was funny from Farmington was a Navajo sitting in a truck trying to sell lawn mowers. There's not enough grass to mow anywhere! Close to 90 degrees on way to Shiprock, but did not stop at Shiprock, because we had been there so much, and even attempted to drive the ruts and caverns of holes up to the Shiprock. We have learned that is not a good idea. However, the Navajo are meeting with the State for an agreement to have Shiprock made accessible as a state park. That ought to get rid of the ruts, debris, and dangerous roadways to get the rock. The state calls this tourism opportunity, and I think the Navajo might disagree.

There is a Chat & Chew Café in Shiprock. And, a religious sign that says, “Those who throw dirt loose ground.”

Our next HIE stay was at Cortez, Colo., one of our favorites. This HIE is perfect as before. Our Mexican restaurant we went to was excellent, and I got my first enchilda and last called a Mole enchilda which means chocolate syrup on my enchilda!

We also had a HIE free drink, buy one, get one free. I had a frozen maguerita and Bill had a beer. We sat at the bar’s patio next to the HIE on a warm evening just watching the traffic go by. That was treat! The bar was called KOKO’s. Just like our radio station’s name!

Our experience at the Ute Casino was not pleasant before we arrived at Cortez. Tony Hillerman wrote about loading dock in one of his stories about a robbery at the Ute Casino. We stood on that loading dock and entered the casino. We were there an hour because my money got caught in a machine (only .20 machine) and wouldn’t out, so waited and waited and studied why Utes don’t look like Navajo from the advantage of my chair at the slot machine waiting and waiting. I eventually got my money out of the machine, won \$3, and they gave me a deck of used cards. Won’t go back there!

At Farmington, this was the HIE that gave us a two-room suite, two televisions, and very nice for us, because we have the priority card and can be upgraded in rooms by just asking.

We left Cortez and headed for Mesa Verde. Mesa Verde was so pretty in warm sunshine, that got hotter as we hiked. First, we took a rather short hike to the massive Pueblo ruins called the Palace. It’s the biggest, and all we had to do was go up an incline and climb a short ladder. The next hike lasted a long, long time. We took the petrologyh trail which we had to sign for. That should have warned me, but no the day was pretty and the trail looked so inviting. You betcha. The trail went down to the valley, over rocks, between rocks, next to cliffs, then back the side of the valley to more invigorating tracking of sheer terror! We met two couples, one from western Canada who were pretty suited for the hike, but the other couple, an older fella with young girl friend, were left some where going back into the valley. Her face had turned red and the older fella was limping along on a cane.

However, I did not whine. There was no way out except by more finding how to go up over boulders, slips in the rocks, and hand holes carved in the rocks. When we go to the rhim of the canyon, the trail was straight, easy, and very hot. I didn’t drink much water, because Bill was ahead and trying to pace me faster. Altitude didn’t bother me, because we were used to it at 9,000 ft. Finally, after hoping some helicopter would suddenly appear and rescue us, we arrived up the steep hill and to the park ranger sign in. I told him to give me something for surviving. And, he said only a Junior Park Ranger badge would honor the invorgating hike I had

experienced. I was so proud of my badge, and to this day I will show my badge to anyone!

After the hike we sure looked forward to the hot tub most HIEs have. Actually, we weren't as dirty as the train ride where the smoke, suet, and little coat bits blew back on our hair, face, and clothes. Oh yes, after leaving Mesa Verde, we passed a craft shop with a full size wooden Indian smiling as he dragged a white woman (also made in wood) away. Also, near the wooden Indian and out in middle of no-where hiway were so plastic pipes arranged so artfully that it looked like a goat standing at fence watching passers-by.

The Saloman ruins north of Farmington is a wonderful stop to see how a farming family of the area, the Saloman family, knew what was on their farm and tried to preserve the history of native Americans who built the kivas and community buildings on their farm. We saw how the homes and kivas were preserved and how difficult it was to dig up all the sand to find the ruins buried. These ruins were in the Chaco style, because many who left Chaco started a familiar life near Farmington centuries ago.

Headed for Ghost Ranch, Georgia O'Keeffe, about 8:19AM from the HIE. We saw a business called Hurricane Air & Swabbing Service of Farmington. What business is that? Answer: Oil well maintenance. Ghost Ranch is a museum in honor O'Keeffe and a retreat for members of the Presbyterian church. The national church owns the ranch. We were welcomed at the Ranch, then told of where we could hike around the grounds: Beautiful sitting for the brown one-story buildings of museum, lodging, dining room, art center, and other buildings related to a successful retreat for those attending classes, conferences, or just relaxing. Ghost Ranch is like a Chautauqua for events. I watched a painter teach a class and then went to art center and watch another art class. Stole a rock from Ghost Ranch for Alex Wales, the minister of the Presbyterian church here.

After Ghost Ranch, went to Santa Fe. Traffic is exciting every where else in Santa Fe but old downtown around the plaza. Got to our HIE just in time for hale storm in Santa Fe! Had a good Mexican supper where the owner had pictures of his beloved quarter horses. Next morning, we were on Santa Fe plaza by 8:30AM and went to the usual museums, but Georgia O'Keeffe museum under exhibit change so visited many art galleries, bought a lemonade from my favorite vendor, and just walked around and enjoyed sitting on a plaza bench.

