

2015 Trip Southwest - Tid Bits

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Howdy. Trip is over, about 4100 miles, and now it's time for the fun of Tid Bits! We experienced a lot of weather, from high winds, no rain, and high temps, to rain & hail.

Just wanted you all to know some days were windy and other days near 100 degrees. The observations throughout our trip may not be exactly recorded as "located here or there." However, this year there is a fun Tid Bits puzzle to solve.

The first Tid Bit was observed in the Santa Fe area: This is the puzzle - what is being sold? Return your email with the answer and chance to win. What does this Tid Bit mean? "50% off all snakes today."

As we passed through a small bit of Missouri, we passed Blinker Light Rd. near Harrisonville, also the home of the Burnt District Monument, a lone chimney commemorating the infamous 1863 Order No. 11.

Into Kansas, we saw a sign for the "Pottawatomie Trail of Death" byway. Further on, we saw our first oil wells. Sure wish I could place a fake oil well in our front pasture to surprise passers-by and slow those drivers on own on Y hiway as they gawk at our oil well. For that matter, I wouldn't mind having a real, working one.

After stopping at a C-store near Ottawa (the one where I met the lady bowlers many trips ago), we got onto I-35. Just down the road, a bit past Frog Creek, a sign advertised the Wyatt Earp Motel; next exit, there it was - the Wyatt Earp Motel at Lebo, KS!

In Wichita, right at the junction of the Arkansas & Little Arkansas Rivers, there is a big, big, statue of an Indian holding his arms reaching out to the sky. It's called the "Keeper of th Plains" Huge statue right in the middle of a wonderful town of art and history.

West of Wichita we saw a rusty mule statue in someone's front yard, along with a rust covered pioneer wagon. In this area, we saw more working oil wells, some painted in blue, pink, and white colors.

If you live on Four Wheel Drive, near Kingman, KS, do you have to drive one?

Just past the Greensburg, KS, which continues to rebuild from the tornado, we stopped in Mullinville. This is the home of folk artist M.T. Liggett, who builds "totem poles" from metal scrap. If you've driven down US-54 past Mullinville, you've seen them, whirling in the wind.

As we pass through Meade, KS, I always remember the old sign "The Dalton Boys should have stayed in Meade." They went to Coffeeville to rob two banks and were shot to pieces. Their fate wasn't Kismet (a town of 450 between Meade & Liberal).

Liberal, KS, has two connecting museums. One is themed on “The Wizard of Oz” with “Dorothy’s House” & a yellow brick road. The other is a local history museum. It appears that neighboring Stevens County had some disagreements about the county seat’s location, which caused a local shooting war requiring the National Guard’s intervention. All that activity is featured right along with Dorothy and her little dog Toto as a stuffed animal. Dorothy also greets a tourist at the chamber. And, to top off our visit at Liberal’s museum and chamber the employees there wanted to know all about Johnson County’s Mo. famous Old Drum dog! Couldn’t leave for another hour of visiting!

Crossed into Oklahoma, where we saw a barn with a painted horse advertising ... horse feed (what else), near Optima. Further on, we crossed into Texas at Texhoma (funny how some of these state border towns are named – how many can you come up with?). Dalhart, TX, is home to the Nursanickel Motel, which one would presume to be a bargain, even as a Best Western.

Into New Mexico, a sign at the ruined town of Nara Visa says “Whiskey, the road to ruin.” Guess they should know.

Tucumcari is an old railroad & Route 66 tourist town, trying to survive on its location and nostalgia. It’s well known for murals, Route 66 relics, and the Mesalands Dinosaur Museum. That’s where paleontology students learn how to excavate dinosaurs and art student learn to replicate them in bronze. To my amazement I got on a dinosaur wearing a saddle with a halter hanging down from it. If you don’t believe me, I have a photo to prove it.

At Tucumcari, the Blue Swallow Motel, opened around 1940, is the classic Route 66 motel. Totally restored, it’s painted in bright colors (with a mural on the side and even in the carports); when we stopped, a group driving classic 50’s Corvettes had stopped – the Vettes actually fit in the carports.

We spent a night at the Holiday Inn Express here, and ate at another classic Route 66 icon, Dell’s Restaurant, for our first taste of green chili on the trip. It also has great chicken fried steaks – food for every tourist’s taste. In the morning, we left on Historic Route 66, now more of a frontage road for I-40, for San Jon (pronounced San Hone), an even sadder town abandoned by the “Mother Road.” Along the road we saw a sign reading “Keep Out – Trespass and be Scalped.” Some things hanging off the sign looked like he meant it. Wonder if he’s related to the people at the Poison Ink Tattoo Parlor in Tucumcari?

Headed south on NM-209 through a massive wind farm on the edge of the mesa, and found our selves on a mostly-flat prairie. Clovis, NM, is thriving with a major US Air Force base. Nearby is the site of the first Clovis points found, the earliest evidence of human activity in North America – we’d been there before so continued on a few miles to Portales, home of Eastern New Mexico State University. We stopped at the University’s museums; the archeology one was closed, the geology and biology ones were small – but with a live alligator to awe the residents of that semi-arid country.

Lovington is home of the Lea County Museum; the sign on the door said “out running errands.” We went to lunch, came back 45 minutes later, and the sign was still there. On through sandy hills dotted with oil wells to Hobbs (no “e”, not related to Calvin). Extremely windy here.

Must now just briefly describe how Carlsbad, NM. has a Caveman auto repair business. There will be a “Ducky” affair coming soon to Carlsbad. I think the attraction was a gigantic toy duck floating in their Pecos River fancy river walk. Carlsbad is also going thru a oil drilling boom. Thus, the town is fat and happy with new industry and buildings. At the museum we ran into a couple originally from Stover, MO – they still eat grits, but now it’s green chili grits.

The oil boom also affects Artesia - the downtown is also full of bronze sculptures with area themes – cattle, caves and oil. Further up US-82, we saw Steep Hill Road in Cloudcroft (elev. 8600). Another favorite attraction is White Sands – there we play in the dunes, others play in the dunes and slide down the dunes. I just took photos – didn’t want to get too dirty playing in the dunes.

We visited with Uncle Murray and friend Peggy for in Las Cruces for two days. With Cousin Darren, we all went to a big Mex. dinner, and chatted all evening. But, wish we had all been together to talk about “who” was going to make green chili grits sometime. While with Uncle Murray we all went to Las Cruces downtown for a festival, museums, book store shopping, and before all that went to farm demonstration at the NM Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum. Saw a variety of sheep breeds for the Navajo weaving.

Saw this sign titled “Mutt Hut” for pets near Las Cruces, plus saw a guy was riding an ordinary bicycle with two dogs in the basket on the rear of the bicycle. A gigantic road runner bird is on display along I-10 west of Las Cruces. I was puzzled by one sign, advertising Alaskan Shelters. Now, ask me why someone needs an Alaskan shelter considering Las Cruces can get very hot in summer.

But, to change the subject, I should have mentioned earlier that at a tv is a weather reporter known for his little chihuahua held in his arms and goes to work with him everyday. I think the weather is reported from El Paso. New Mexico has numerous extinct volcanoes. And, it’s amazing to know there is a volcano right in the middle of Las Cruces, New Mex. Uncle Murray isnt impressed with the volcano at all.

Near Deming New Mex., there is a sign that reads, “Sexy Red Used Books” for a nearby book store. Strange looking store. There’s also a Spanish Stirrup Rock Shop near Rock Hound State Park. On the way to look for valuable rocks (play), we almost hit a road runner, saw a Gambel’s quail, some buzzards, and lots of jack rabbits. The entry to Deming has a 7 foot tall repro Mimbres vase.

New Mexico 35, the scenic route to Gila Cliff Dwellings, is designated as the Trail of the Mountain Spirits. I didn’t see a spirit, but surely some Apaches on the trails in these mountains were guided by spirits. Don’t know if the spirits protected the animals crossing the highway near the Elk Crossing Café.

The next day we saw a truck with green head lights. Bright green. In Buck Horn New Mex., there is a little creek called Little Dry Creek, nearby is Big Dry Creek - both are, as you might expect, dried up. Near Alma, I saw the most crafty barbeque contraption. The yard smoker had the head of a black horse at one end with a halter on the horse, and in the middle of the horse was a BBQ

smoker, with the rear of the horse as a tray for the food needs from the barbeque. Someone had even made a tail for the rear part of the barbeque horse. Betcha there is nothing like it – a horse barbeque, but not the horse.

Further up on NM-12 we saw two tin cut-outs - a cowboy trying to catch a calf. Pretty empty out here, so you better believe the sign warning, “Last Chance for Beer and Water.” This was near Aragon, home of the Square Deal Store.

Headed for Pie Town: Known as the queen of promoting Pie Town. Shared a big hamburger with Bill and we shared a slice of apple pie. Here is the recipe for Green Chili Apple Pie (where there is green chili there is a recipe): Bake chili in oven until warm enough to peel back the skin of the chili, then add the regular recipe for apple pie. Mix pinion tree seeds in pie, spread dough strips on apples for baking – remember your chili must be smooth and soft. Then bake the pie one wants. Chili was wonderful. Pie Town is on US-60, middle of nowhere, but the experience is well worth the out-of-the-way drive.

Went on to Grants via some gravel roads past the Malpais, an old lava flow. Grants’ main attraction is a uranium mine. Left Grants the next morning headed for Navajo country. Visited Pueblo Pintado ruins, and kept our eyes open for horses along the roads, crossing the Continental Divide for the 8th and last time on the trip. Stopped at Red Mesa Trading Post near Torreon; traffic had to stop for a herd of white goats crossing the road, being herded by a brown goat.

Cuba, NM is on a major highway connecting central & NW New Mexico. Had lunch at the Cuban Café, and headed up into the Jemez Mountains via the “scenic route.” If you like driving a dirt-or-gravel road, with mountains on one side and drops on the other, NM-126 is the road for you. The higher we went, the thicker the trees got, until it looked almost jungle-ish.

We spent the night at Bernalillo. Supper was at “The Range” café. You’d think it was ‘range’ as in range lands, but, no, it’s ‘range’ as in kitchen stove. It also has a cow looking very real making a phone call in a phone booth. Across the street there is a 10ft. wooden grizzly bear holding a chain saw guarding the cars in a junkyard.

Back to the Jemez Valley. It’s an interesting place. There’s the Humming Bird Music Camp. Wonder if the humming birds went to camp, or if kids go there to learn to hum? There’s an Old Lizard Road. We kept looking for a Young Lizard Road but never saw one. There’s a Soda Dam. It’s not to be confused with a soda fountain, in this case caused by a build up of travertine from a hot spring; the river cut through it. There’s a Battleship Rock, one of several rock formations with similar nautical names in New Mexico. I think all were named by thirsty folks.

After a stop at Valle Caldera (that’s caldera valley), we went to Los Alamos via a back road, where Bill had to dig out his ID for a grumpy civilian guard. We were later told that ID checks weren’t performed coming in by the main road. From our room we could see a large greenhouse-looking buildings with huge exhaust fans, where the lab is experimenting with fast-growing algae to feed the people on the first Mars expedition.

In the morning we headed for Bandelier National Monument; a part of the highway between it and Los Alamos is adopted by Our Lady of the Woods Wiccan Church. If you get to Bandelier

early enough, you can drive down and park; otherwise you're shuttled about 10 miles from a nearby town of White Rock. The creek through Bandelier has flooded in monsoon season since a fire stripped some upstream hillsides, so semi-permanent flood walls have been built near the visitor center. One of the displays at the visitor center shows such odd plants as the tin toadstool, Kleenex bush, filter weed, bottle plant, and discard vine – all, I'm sure, fertilized by the litter bug.

Abiquiu is best known for a famous artist who lived there for some time, Georgia O'Keeffe. It also has a small library with some friendly people, who were very interested in info about Blind Boone & Blind Boone Park. At Ghost Ranch, the people working at the museums were all volunteers, and very forward about telling us about all the displays. From there, we went to Ojo Caliente (wonder how the hot springs here came to be called 'hot eye'?) and on to Taos.

How do you get customers to visit your book store? Have a couple of cats snuggling in the window – irresistible. Moby Dickens, near the Taos Plaza, has a cute name to boot. On the plaza, the statue is of Padre Martinez, who was much beloved here, especially after he was excommunicated by Bishop Lamy for defending local religious practices. His family was a pioneer and their hacienda is a major museum.

Whither weather? Rain is not expected in June in New Mexico, but they set records during our visit. We kept seeing clouds over the mountains, but this time we got caught in heavy rain & small hail on an isolated road going toward a canyon overlook; needless to say, we didn't look. On Sunday we avoided it, going around the Enchanted Circle, past a Buddhist monastery on US-54, stopping at the New Mexico Vietnam Memorial. North of Eagles Nest a red and green spotted dragon undulates thru a meadow. We passed through Red River, by a recently-closed molybdenum mine where the mountain was completely stripped of vegetation. This time we got to the canyon overlook. But, to forget that storm, there is a Farmers Market Saturdays in Taos. We met Blue grass players there and talked about the music groups in Warrensburg. Also, ended the visit to Taos by taking a Kit Carson tour of his home

As we stayed with high road of Taos we were able to see the roadside notices that where we were was also the Land Grants marked along fence posts showing respect for history of the Spanish grants. We did find out that forest service roads aren't the best option after rains.

Just when I thought all was normal, saw a restaurant that read, "Sugar Nymphs Bistro and then a painted pink pig attached to a pink mailbox. By June 17 going to several of our favorite museums, namely now would be the the two "Hill Museums, Native American and Folk Art museums. In Santa Fe, my favorite museum is the International Folk Art Museum. One large gallery there is an overwhelming tribute to kitsch.

At Albuquerque we visited another favorite bookstore, ate at our favorite restaurants, went to a party and drank some local beers.

We left Albuquerque and first returned to Mosquero to visit Jim, the owner of the general store in his little town. Hope someone reading this would consider within means of travel to visit with Jim at Mosquero and help him some. The paintings on out buildings are real, one would believe a

cattle drive was coming right to him. All that is needed is more customers and at Jim's store and a little green man statue given to Jim to slow down the traffic going thru the one street town.

After visiting the various exhibits in Santa Fe, we planned to meet the family in at their CS Cattle Co., area of New Mex. I was giving a special book of the family years ago. How a book from a ranch in the Cimarron I found at the Sedalia, Mo., library was a surprise, but being invited to meet the family was a bigger surprise. The family has inherited the ranch of over 125,000 acres.

While we were in Cimarron with the ranch owners, I told what I knew of Lucien Maxwell, who owned much of northeastern New Mex. Lucien was born in Kaskaskia, IL & was of prominent family, but Lucien left with Kit Carson and headed for New Mexico, and they sure rose to fame and amazing history

We finally finished driving the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail, the La Junta – Raton section. The interstate through the pass was a lot easier than the trail travelers had it. At the top of the pass there's a display with historic information, heavily vandalized. Throughout New Mexico we noted that a lot more road signs were perforated than we're used to seeing, even in backwoods Missouri.

We had a great meal at the Alleyway Café, Cheyenne Wells, CO. The owners of the little restaurant were seemingly waiting for us to come to dinner. What a meal. Bill and I ate a whole lot for lunch and bought a cinnamon roll for breakfast. I suggest stopping in the town of Cheyenne Wells, eat a whole lot, and feel like family to the restaurant owners. Here I was told by the family's son my fondness to have a non-working small oil well would be more in expense that I could handle. I guess I'll have to make a wooden oil well sitting in the middle 40 acres.

Our next stop was Burlington, Kans. Where Bill could ride his Traveler and I rode Comanche on the 1904 restored horses. We were charged 25 cents for every ride. I took 2 rides, Bill too, and an older fella came to join us and he paid 25 cents for his daily ride on a camel.

I will tell you now you will not believe the little of Lucas, Kan. At first one doesn't see the Garden of Eden, the town's main attraction, then the cement statues describing the Garden of Eden, and then the concrete pyramids of art, not big, but all the little pyramids are sitting in a pasture seemingly waiting for attention. The person who designed the Garden of Eden died many years ago, but his work with concrete is for all to see of imagination what a Garden of Eden should be. All were hand made by the owner of the house years ago. Plus there is history of why the concrete figures are everywhere in the yard. I can send you the unique reasons why the statues pyramid structures are in the yard. Oh, yes – you can visit the owner in his concrete mausoleum.

Even knowing that Lucas is called the Grassroots Art Capital of Kansas, the artistic design of the public bathroom in downtown Lucas was more than I could imagine. However, there is more in Lucas. Go to the bathroom of perfect, design, and beautiful little jewel like inserts in the floor, walls, doors, and to the walkway of toilet paper made in cement going out the door of the bathroom is beyond my comprehension. And, more art is amazing. Forks, knives, spoons of

cement and color are in the ground upside down, not the fork in the ground, but the fork and the other utensils standing up right, upside down.

This year, 2015, is the end of the famous Tid Bits observations until next year's trip. Hope you laughed, and tried to believe all the things Bill and I saw from our SUV along the blue hiways of New Mexico and Kansas. Have a good time reading the adventures you, too, can plan someday. It's a small world! And, one never knows whom one will meet around the corner. All mentions of places in the Tid Bits are as accurate as one can make riding in a car going 50-60mi. and hour and trying to write a trip journal!