

2017 Trip Southwest, Blog Text

Day 1, Saturday, June 3, 2017 - Warrensburg to Great Bend

Our 2017 trip started off with a bang - or could have. We have a nail. Have you ever tried to find an odd size of tire in a store open on a Sunday? Here we are in Great Bend, Walmart doesn't have our size, and all the other stores are closed until Monday. Thanks to the internet, we've found one at NTB in Wichita, so we may boogie on down there tomorrow, then try to make it to Liberal, or at least Pratt, tomorrow night.

Oh, well - on to our trip. Got an early start at 6:30. Cats went to boarding on Friday, so they weren't in the way. Proceeded as normal thru Holden, Harrisonville, Ottawa, and Council Grove. Stopped for lunch at the Gridiron Cafe in Hope - good burgers & rings - and Sandra took pictures of an old thresher.

Saw the Swedish-settled town of Lindsborg, and boy do they promote it. Their painted critters are Dala horses.

Got to Great Bend, new but busy HIE, got the bad news at Walmart - tire can't be fixed as too close to the wall. Plans for next few days are in flux.

322.5 miles total today. Routes taken: MO-Y, MO-13, MO-BB, Joco SW200, MO-58, MO-131, MO-2, KS-68, KS-268, KS-31, KS-170, US-56, US-77, KS-4, KS-156

Day 2, Sunday, June 5th - Great Bend to Liberal, via Wichita

An expensive day. Tire was down to 22 psi this AM, so called NTB in Wichita - they have a tire that'll fit. So, aired up the tire and started backtracking via KS-96 at an easy 56 mph. the tire stayed up, and at least I was getting good mileage. Yep, NTB had a tire, and I was out in an hour, less \$200.

While waiting at NTB, I had time to change tonight's reservation to Liberal KS. It's US-54 all the way. Stopped en route to tour Greensburg, KS, & see their rebuilding effort. Then on to Liberal, arriving about 4:30. Dinner at Cattleman's Cafe - you can't go wrong with chicken fried steak, meatloaf or pot roast.

Tomorrow we get back on schedule. It'll be US-54 to Guymon, US-64 to Raton (with a side trip to Capulin Volcano), and I-25 to Las Vegas (NM).

325 miles today, 647 for the trip.. Routes taken: KS-96, I-235, US-54.

Day 3, Monday June 5, Liberal to Las Vegas

Left Liberal on US-54 about 7:30, bought gas & ice in Guymon, and headed for New Mexico on US-64, with stops at Boise City and Clayton. Our real sight-seeing destination was Capulin Volcano National Monument. After a visit with the ranger, we headed up the road to the summit.

The volcano provides lots of good views of neighboring landforms - craters, lava flows, other extinct volcanoes, etc. This was the greenest we've ever seen the surrounding grasslands. On the way out, we

saw a couple of horse grazing near a long-abandoned house. Meanwhile, thunderheads were building on the horizon.

We stopped at a welcome center in Raton, where we discovered our favorite restaurant (El Matador) is closed on Mondays. They recommended Casa Lemos, where the green chile enchiladas were excellent. On I-25 south toward Las Vegas (the one w/o all the lights) and the Holiday Inn Express there. About Wagon Mound, the storms on the horizon decided to visit the hiway, giving us around 10 miles of intermittent rain, hail & winds.

Dinner at Charles Bakery & Cafe - the green chile was very hot, but I finished my stew. Sandra had a bit more trouble w/ her stuffed sopapilla (green). Did the laundry & ready for the scenic route to Taos tomorrow.

354 miles for the day, 1002 for the trip. Routes taken: US-54, US-64, NM-325, I-25

Day 4, Tuesday, June 6 - Las Vegas to Taos

Left the motel in Ls Vegas about 7:20 and headed up NM-65 toward El Provenir, hoping to get a good view of Hermit Peak. Didn't realize we'd have to go up it to see it, so turned around about 7 miles up. Then headed up to Mora by the scenic route, NM-94. Saw a few interesting buildings en route, and had little traffic to fight on this curvy road.

Mora has some interesting buildings. The barn is just out of town on NM-518, while the old mill is just north of town on NM-434.

From Mora, we headed north on NM-434, which starts out as a typical narrow, winding road, then gets even narrower and more winding. Unfortunately (for those who like narrow & winding roads), the NM highway dept is upgrading about 10 miles of it. We eventually came out at Angel Fire, then visited the New Mexico Vietnam Memorial. It's a scenic & moving place, and was built privately by a doctor in memory of his son, a Marine 2Lt killed in an ambush.

One more canyon, and we were in Taos. Lunch was at El Taoseno, a locals restaurant with no frills, just good food. We enjoyed lunch so much, we went back for supper. In between, we visited the Taos Plaza, with its mixture of tourist traps and art galleries/stores. Our favorite book store has changed hands and changed names, and it no longer hosts the oh-so-photogenic bookstore cats - the new owners are allergic.

We're staying at the El Pueblo Lodge, a classic Taos motel - a significant upgrade from our previous lodgings at the Sun God.

Only 122 miles on the day, 1124 on the trip. Routes taken:.. NM-65, NM-518, NM-94, NM-434, NM- , US-64

Day 5, Wednesday, June 7, 2017 - Around Taos

The day started with a great breakfast at Michael's Kitchen, then it was off to Taos Pueblo. Despite all our previous trips to Taos, we'd never visited the Pueblo. There's a \$14 per senior person charge to visit, and the tour is by donation. Our tour guide was a UNM Senior from the pueblo. He gave some history and talked about the lifestyle.

It was hot, so we came back & cooled off a bit, then headed to Pilar and the Rio Grand gorge. Water was high, and raft trips were either putting in or taking out here. Came back by way of the west rim & had lunch at Michael's. Followed that with a trip to the Plaza,

After a stop at Walmart for bug repellent, and eventually supper at El Taoseno, we were to bed early, since the wifi at the motel seemed to be overloaded.

For the day 61 miles, 1187 for the trip. Routes taken: NM-68, NM-570, US-64

Day 6, Thursday, Jun 8 - Taos to Santa Fe

Left the El Pueblo Lodge at 7:45 after breakfast - the inn has a wider variety of food than most motels, although B&G is still a staple. How about tamales and artisan toast to go with the eggs? We made a couple of stops on our way down the canyon, to see the rapids. Unfortunately, saw no rafters this morning.

Arrived in Santa Fe just before 10 AM, parked in a \$15/all day lot, and headed to the IAIA museum. This museum feature contemporary Native artists from the U.S. and Canada. The long portico is nicely painted.

Then it was time for lunch at The Shed, a very "in" spot that we found on our first trip to Santa Fe in 2004. We plan lunch there every trip, and try to get the table where Bill got a prize-winning photo. Got the table, but the picture has changed, so Bill managed to get both of us in one shot.

We did our usual tour of the museums and stores around the Plaza. The NM Museum of Art had a special exhibit on loan from the British Museum - drawings by many artists famous & infamous (from Michelangelo to the present). The museum itself is architecturally interesting. Worn out after a lot of walking on a very hot day, we found a place to rest at the Plaza and listen to a girl (and her dog) fiddling for money.

Checked into the hotel about 3:30, did laundry, had an excellent quesadilla at Tortilla Flats off very busy Cerillos Road. Tomorrow we'll visit Museum Hill, stop at the park adjacent to the cathedral to finish visiting a special exhibit of paintings at Madrid's Prado, have lunch, and spend afternoon & early evening at Fennboree.

For the day, 77 miles, 1263 for the trip. Routes taken: NM-68, US-285, NM-14

Day 7, Friday, June 9 - Around Santa Fe

Off a bit later than usual. Stops at Smith's and another grocery for beer & cheese (for Fennboree). First destination was Museum Hill for a tour of some new exhibits at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture. Followed that by a trip downtown and our first experience with credit card pay parking. Walked about 6 blocks for lunch at Tia Sophia's, followed by a perusal of the Prado in Santa Fe exhibit. Then it was off to Fennboree, arriving before 2 and leaving about 7:30. Tomorrow it's back to Fennboree early. Pictures eventually.

32.4 miles for the day, 1295 for the trip. Routes taken: NM-14, NM-475

Day 8, Saturday, June 9 - Fennboree

Here we are, halfway through the trip. Fennboree was fun, and I'll post pictures later. Basically, it's a bunch of people involved in Forrest Fenn's treasure hunt who get together in the woods above Santa Fe to talk about their hunts - but generally to socialize, eat (& maybe party). We talked with a lot of people, we're no closer to finding anything, and we're ready for next year.

Tomorrow an easy trip to Albuquerque on I-25 with a photo stop at Kashe-Katuwe Tent Rocks.

Trip update - 27 miles on the day, 1322 for the trip. Routes taken: NM-14, NM-475

Day 9, Sunday, June 11, Santa Fe to Albuquerque

Got a late start, but that didn't matter. Our side trip to Tent Rocks ran afoul of a closed road, so we got to Albuquerque early. Our visit with old friend Larry Harrah was cut short, since he wasn't up to lunch. Sooo- we headed for Old Town. A tour of the Plaza featured this picture of some sweet flowers. And it ended with a stop at one of our favorite book stores, where Bill found 4 more to read at his leisure when we get home.

After lunch at the Frontier (a UNM tradition, but also great food at a reasonable price), we headed back to the museums near Old Town. The first one was the NM Museum of Natural History, guarded by these two critters:

The Albuquerque Museum nearby featured a special exhibit on New Mexico in the movies - movies shot in NM, featuring NM subjects (think Billy the Kid), and/or written by NM writers.

We're staying in the Holiday Inn at the airport, way down a long corridor. Dinner at Village Inn, which turned out to be several cuts above Denny's or Country Kitchen. Tomorrow it's on to Las Cruces for a couple of days.

For the day: 128 miles, 1450 on the trip. Routes taken: NM-14, I-25, NM-16, NM-22, NM-556

Day 10, Monday, June 12 - Albuquerque to Las Cruces

Here we are on the home stretch. Instead of eating at the Holiday Inn this morning, we visited Waffle House - they have grits, and I'm a Southern boy. We didn't get rolling until 8 AM, then made a couple of stops en route - Belen to replace a missing comb and TorC for lunch- oops, the places we had in mind weren't open. Ended up sharing a lunch at the Pepper Pot in Hatch, where the food was excellent but the service slow.

Took the river road south from Hatch, and the river is definitely up, to the surprise (& perhaps demise) of trees growing along the bank and on islands. Got to the HIE in Las Cruces about 3, and called Sandra's Uncle Murray to arrange meeting for dinner at 6. While waiting I processed a bunch of pictures from Fennboree. We ate at Si Senor, good food but way too much to eat.

Tomorrow we'll see the RR museum in Las Cruces, then visit Coas book store and browse. We'll meet Uncle Murray, his neighbor Peggy and his son Darren, for lunch. Afternoon is up in the air.

For the day, 220 miles, 1670 for the trip. Routes taken: I-25, NM-195, NM-26, NM-185

Day 11, Tuesday, June 13 - Around Las Cruces

Sightseeing in Las Cruces for us consisted of a visit to the Railroad Museum and shopping at COAS. COAS is a bookstore, some new books but a lot of used ones. And one can never have too many books, which is a way of saying that we bought some (and a CD of Dvorak's 9th).

Lunch was with Sandra's uncle & cousin at a local microbrewery. The afternoon was spent processing pictures for the Fennboree posts.

Tomorrow we're on the way home, via Alamogordo, Roswell, Clovis & Canyon (for the night).

26.5 miles for the day, 1696 for the trip.

Day 12, Wednesday, June 14 - Las Cruces to Canyon (TX)

This was to be the longest day of the trip, an estimated 391 miles. We started late because we wanted to avoid the backup at the road closing for a White Sands Missile range test shot, scheduled for 8-9 AM. I miscalculated, so we were indeed stuck in several lines of cars parked at the top of San Augustin Pass leading to the Tularosa Basin. While waiting, we got a good view of the back side of the Organ Mountains, and assisted minimally in helping some other folks to change a tire for a lady stuck in the line - my contribution was the tire gauge that showed just how low her tire was.

So, now two hours late, we changed some plans. When we got to Roswell, we skipped the museum(s) we'd planned to visit and just ate our last green chile sauce. Then off through the looong lonely to Portales & Clovis. Texas, on the other hand, was well populated with towns and their economic engine - cattle. Hereford claims to be the World Beef Capital, and I'd guess they'd be in the running. Happy is home of the Happy State Bank. Friona's HS sports teams are the Chiefs and Squaws - not much for PC there.

Speed limits in Texas are 75 mph and I ran close to it, so we got to the Canyon HIE at 6:20 PM, had dinner at Feldman's Diner, came back to the hotel getting ready to crash. Tomorrow it's the Washita Nat'l Battlefield (or massacre, if you prefer) and a stay at Weatherford. We'll be on the home stretch!

For the day - 372 miles, 2069 for the trip. Routes taken: US-70, US-60.

Day 13, Thursday, June 15 - Canyon to Weatherford

Another hot one. The main objective today (besides not getting overheated), was to visit the Washita battlefield. At that we succeeded. We got another late start, partly because we didn't have all that far to travel, partly because the breakfast area at the HIE was full of people off two tour buses, and mainly because I slept until 7. After breakfast at McD's, we headed out on I-27 to Amarillo, then I-40 east. I was surprised that the highway was so empty; we had a good tail wind so we made great mileage for

the day.

Turned off of the interstate at Erick and headed north into the grassland country. Stopped at the town of Cheyenne, where we found a local cafe (Zoe's) that had hot beef sandwiches for a good price, so we had a couple to fortify ourselves for whatever the battlefield site might have in store. First stop was the visitor center.

The museum in the VC carefully treads a line - it's theme is "a clash of cultures," mentions the worthlessness of treaties, but doesn't go into a lot of detail on the massacre aspect - Custer was just "implementing policy" (aka following orders). It did mention the forced "de-indianization" policy aimed at the children.

We headed out to the actual battle site. There's an overlook which gives a wide, if distant view, and leads to a 1.5 mile trail. I started on the trail, but the 97 degree temperature soon turned me around, but not until I took several pictures of the restored prairie.

After an easy drive through the countryside, we got to Weatherford a bit after 3 PM, checked in at the HIE, did laundry, and had dinner next door at Lucille's (remember that old Little Richard song? Has nothing to do w/ it).

Tomorrow we're off to El Dorado, KS, near Wichita, and do some visiting. Saturday we get home!

For the day, 245 miles, 2314 for the trip. Routes taken: I-27, I-40, OK-30, OK-47, OK-47A, US-283, OK-33, US-183

Day 14, Friday, June 16 - Weatherford to El Dorado

Had a relatively easy drive today, staying off the interstates and getting in a bit after 3 PM. Saw our best gas prices of the trip at Enid, OK - paid \$1.85/gal!

The travel highlight of the trip was Caldwell, Kansas. We put this on the plan because Sandra has some distant relatives here, but we didn't have their address or any other info, so we kind of hoped we'd find them. We didn't, but we found a gem. The main street in town looks like many other Kansas towns, only unusually wide even for that state. Well, there's a reason for that. It sits smack dab on the Chisholm Trail, and had plenty of experience with trail drives.

Matter of fact, the town is proud of that wild and woolly past, sporting not only this monument to the trail, but also detailed historic signs on the street in front of significant buildings. One building sports painted figures of sporting ladies in upstairs windows. And others ... what do you see in this one? _Yes, those figures on that bank building are genuine wild west silhouettes.

We had lunch at the Red Barn in Caldwell - lots of pickup trucks and the best hamburger I've had in a while. All in all, if I had to choose between Lindsborg and Caldwell, I'd go for Caldwell, hands down.

We proceeded on to El Dorado, texted the Colonel of my reenacting unit, and joined him for a good Mexican dinner at a downtown restaurant. Tomorrow's plans include a stop at Ft. Scott (yes, the fort itself), and the Mine Creek Battlefield near Pleasanton, supper at Holden, and home.

255 miles for the day, 2569 for the trip. Routes taken: OK-54, OK-33, US-81, US-166, US-77

Day 15, Saturday, June 17 - El Dorado - Home

Last day! We left El Dorado About 7:45, headed for Ft. Scott. On a comfort break in Iola, we heard people talking about the big storm Friday night - a bit further east we saw some of its effects, including corn shredded by hail. Roads and streets looked damp all the way in.

Our purpose in stopping at Ft. Scott was, of course, a visit to the Fort. Staff was talkative, but my camera decided the card was full (it wasn't) and wouldn't let me take more pictures. A small prairie has been established behind Officers' Row, and I had fun IDing the grasses and flowers. At the stables, we talked to an interpreter dressed in summer whites - looked good except for the modern glasses.

Up US-69, now a fancy 4-lane, to Pleasanton, where we grabbed a pizza slice at Casey's and headed back to the Mine Creek Battlefield. My last visit was in October 1989, at the 125th Anniversary reenactment. The entrance was guarded by this cavalryman.

It now has a modern visitor center with a small gift store and good displays and interpretation. It was hot, so I didn't take much of a walk - just shot this picture of the restored prairie:

A couple of stops or supper and groceries, and we're home about 5 PM. Lots of unloading and putting up, and the trip was over.

258 miles for the day, 2826.7 for the trip. Routes taken: US-54, US-69, KS-52, KS-68, MO-2, MO-131, MO-U, MO-VV, MO-58, JOCO SW200, MO-BB, MO-13, MO-Y