

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



On the Road in Utah and Colorado

Pat and I took to the road last month for an eight-day vacation to southeastern Utah and southwestern Colorado. The trip was scheduled around a Mining History Association meeting in Creede, Colorado, where I gave a presentation about my mining engineer grandfather.

Careful readers of last month's ranting will understand that we did not take my car on this trip – not the little red sports car with no back seat and restricted trunk space. Would you believe that Pat went out and bought a car just a week before we departed – so we had a brand new Toyota Venza to break in.

“Break in” are probably appropriate words in this case, because we drove the car 2,000 miles on all kinds of road surfaces including mountain-climbing gravel roads, on hair-pin turns with no shoulders or railings; long sandy dirt roads on a little-visited southern Utah mesa; and the hard-scrabble dirt roads of Monument Valley.

Talk about getting a car dirty. When we got the car home, we spent an hour in the drive-way cleaning off the mud and accumulated bugs, and **then** took it to a car wash.

The trip was fabulous. The new car performed beautifully and the all-wheel drive and high clearance really paid off. We had the driver's manual on the front seat, exploring all the unfamiliar features. We were, however, unable to master the (enter-your-destination part of the) navigation system, which was frustrating because the map feature had us properly located on even the most remote dirt roads.

We began our adventure with a stay at the historic La Posada hotel in Winslow, Arizona. The former Fred Harvey railroad hotel was designed by famous southwestern architect Mary Colter. We stayed in the Albert Einstein room and had a wonderful dinner at the Turquoise Room restaurant, where I discovered that I actually like squash blossoms as an appetizer.

The next day we drove up to majestic Monument Valley, took the Venza through the Valley's network of dirt roads, and stayed at “The View,” a new (don't miss it) hotel within the Navajo Tribal Park, right on the rim of the Valley. Each room has an awesome view of the “Mittens” monoliths, which we were able to photograph at both sunset and sunrise.

On our way up to Moab the following day, we explored Utah's Gooseneck State Park, with unbelievable top-down views of the San Juan River looping back and forth through deep canyons five times within one mile as the crow flies. Not too far from there was Muley Point Overlook, with one of the most spectacular views in Utah. Approaching Moab, we ventured down two side roads to see-forever viewpoints of Canyonlands National Park.

We spent a day at Canyonlands, in the Islands in the Sky District, combining fabulous roadside views of multicolored canyons and formations with short hikes to more fabulous views. The overlook at Dead Horse Point State Park was our favorite stopping place that day.

Our final day in Utah was spent at Arches National Park. We decided that this is our favorite park in Utah (over Zion, Bryce, Canyonlands) because of its incredible beauty and variety of natural arches, mammoth rock formations, and striking hoodoos.

Then it was on to Creede, Colorado, deep in the San Juan Mountains at over 8,000 feet altitude. My grandfather managed silver-lead mines in Creede in 1918. It was there that my aunt Elizabeth contracted influenza in the horrible pandemic. You may remember from a previous ranting that she recovered to celebrate her 100th birthday last fall. My presentation at the mining conference came off fine. Truth be told, the conference was just an excuse for making the trip.

We couldn't have had better weather on our travels, high temperatures in the 70s most of the time, and ever changing clouds that spiced up our photography. We came back having taken over 500 photos, painfully reduced now to a favorite 100. Would you like to see ...?