

Colorado, 2012

When Jane was in second grade, Carolyn Bailey (her name is entered here for posterity) returned to school in September with an amazing story of a trip her family had made. They had driven out west to the Rocky Mountains. To Jane, this story was magic, the stuff of dreams. From then until now, she has wanted to make this trip but it had never happened. Not only did we spend most of our



longer holidays in Tucson or England but I had resisted. Long trips with long drives are not something I enjoy. When we were in Kenya, we took a five-week, 7,000-mile drive from Kenya to Capetown. After the first day, I drove the whole trip. Only twice did we stay in one place for more than one night, and we almost never covered less than 300 miles a day. It was the trip of a lifetime, something we would never want to miss, but likewise not something I wanted to repeat.

It is then ironic that I was the one who suggested we do what turned into a 2,500-mile drive. That was because of a convergence of circumstances. The first was the fact that Jane's family reunion was in central Missouri, about a third of the way to Tucson. Once we were there, I reasoned, we could easily drive on to Colorado, and then to Tucson. In Tucson, we had a 1996 Altima that was reliable but needed a \$1000 cable that just did not seem worth it. I suggested that we drive our 1999 Honda Accord to Tucson, make it into our Tucson car, and think about a new car for Dearborn. Bing! Bing! Bing! It was done. (We sold the Altima in two hours via Craigslist).

As so often happens, Jane called Janet and Evelyn's Consultation Travel Service and began planning. As soon as the semester ended in June, we headed west. We stopped by Springfield to see Helen, then on to Roach, Missouri and the Baptist camping facility where we stayed. That was a pleasant drive, and the five days with the Williams clan was also pleasant. (There is a separate note on that). Then off to Colorado.

There is no reason to report everything we did. Much of it is predictable. But after it was over, we discussed the outstanding experiences of the two-week trip west and came up with seven stand-out experiences.

We stayed five days in Estes Park, the entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. Our hotel was three miles from the ranger station and entrance. The view from there was very nice. There was a furious thunderstorm as we arrived, and a lightning strike in our motel grounds that shook our room and made us wonder if we should have stayed in Dearborn. It also disabled the internet system for a time. The prediction was rain and clouds for days and we were quite discouraged. There had also been fires in the park, which fortunately had been contained by the time we got there. Much to our pleasant surprise, the rain abated the next day, and it began to clear up the day after. Then it was perfect. We took several nice walks into the park, and attended ranger presentations three nights. Once we were standing at a beautiful picturesque lake surrounded by a score of

people. Jane made a wonderful observation: “No matter how many millions of people have seen this, it’s just for you. It is a personal, individual experience.”



Trail Ridge Road: We took short walks the first two days, then when the sky cleared we headed up to the Ridge Trail. Everyone takes the road that goes across the top of the Rockies. It rises to 12,000 feet and is about 48 miles long. It twists and rises and plunges. Each time you come to a new turn in the road, you see a totally new scene, new mountains, new terrain, new vegetation, new rock formations. The iconic photo op is the sign for the continental divide. This is the point at which the water flows west to the Pacific and east to the Gulf. On a ridge nearby, Jane saw some big horn sheep. One seemed to levitate vertically up a rock face. There were also some elk in the distance. One was a 6 x 6 (six points, each with six points). Later we saw some elk that were very close. They seemed indifferent to our presence, being more concerned about eating grass than being photographed. That was maximum cool.



Janet had driven this once and was traumatized. The twisting roads, the steep rises and steep descents, the constant attention you have to give to the road. I can see why someone would feel that way, but I loved it. Jane was often sitting there tense, with her foot on the pedal, metaphorically speaking. More than once I said to her, “You enjoy the scenery. I will keep us alive.” Going down, one of the cars in front of me rode his brake all the way down. I just went down to a lower gear and let the car take us down at its own speed. Simple. I actually enjoyed driving that road, with its twists and turns and dangerous places where you could fall off a cliff into the rocks below.



This road was opened in 1933. The first year 290,000 people saw it while driving 83,000 cars. It has been a peak tourist attraction since the day it opened. It is obvious why. The iconic description of the range is from an essay long ago, saying that the mountains are as infinite as the sky and the flowers are as small as a millisecond.

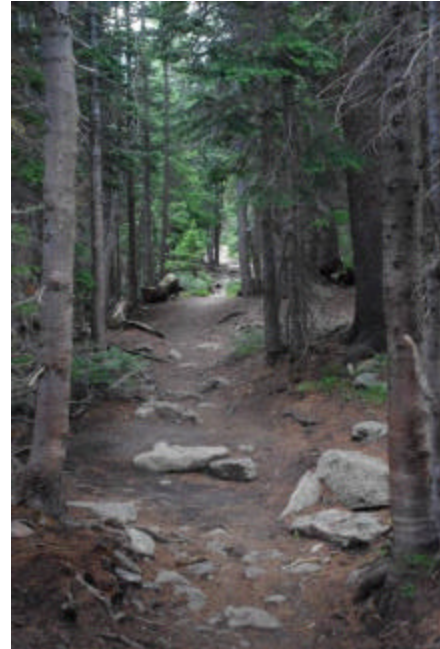
We saw once again something we had seen in Kenya, that as the altitude changes the nature of the flora changes with it. Things grow at 12,000 feet that don't grow anywhere else. Since I love photos of flowers, I often found myself lying on the ground with my macro lens on my camera, trying to capture some high-altitude beauty. It was then I realized a difference between the young man who had climbed mountains in Kenya and Tanzania and had walked in the Aberdares (Nyandarua) mountains, and the not-young man walking in the Rockies. In the past, I would spring up like a gazelle, almost bounding to my feet in a single leap. Now I rose up like a giraffe, in two stages. There is nothing wrong with being a giraffe, but being a gazelle was wonderful.



At the end of the drive is Grand Lake, a small tourist city with a lovely walk up to a waterfall. We walked through a meadow with a lovely river and had a nice walk in the trees. I wanted to get a picture of me straddling the young Colorado River but it didn't quite work out. I calculated what it would take and decided that I might be able to spread out my legs enough for a photo but would probably end up in the stream trying to extricate myself from the pose. As Jane said, “You ruined one camera in a stream in Scotland. Let's not ruin another camera in Colorado.” Wise woman, that Jane.



The Death March. A peak event was what we call the Death March. We were walking in the Bear Canyon area when Jane struck up a conversation with an Amish family. They suggested a lengthy nine-mile walk that they said was quite spectacular. As the woman put it, “The first two miles are very rocky and rise steeply in elevation, but after that the path is flat.” Actually, that was true, but when you are at 9,000 feet elevation “rocky” and “steep” have a different meaning. Actually, “ten miles” has a different meaning.



Let me pause to address a delicate issue. What is it like to make this climb when you are 70 or 71 years of age? Answering that requires some context. We live in Detroit, which is 581 feet above sea level. We are both in reasonably good shape. I probably have an edge in body strength and Jane has an edge in conditioning. She walks four miles a day, perhaps five days a week. I walk two miles a day, two to four days a week. I have always been able to climb hills better than she can, and have better stability on my feet, but she has excellent endurance. In terms of physical preparation for this march, I would call it a draw.



A second issue is the altitude. Normally, you can take a deep breath and feel filled with oxygen. I noticed that the first couple of days we were in Colorado, I would take a breath and not feel filled with oxygen. Estes Park is at 7500 feet and it was as if I could not quite get enough air. I first thought that this is just what happens when you are 71, but then I remembered that when we climbed Kilimanjaro we spent an extra day at 12,000 feet to acclimatize (even though we had been living at 3700 feet in Machakos). And we were 23 at the time. Maybe adjusting it just something you have to do. Anyway, after a couple of days, I realized that when I took a deep breath, I felt fulfilled. I guess we adjusted pretty quickly (and Jane never experienced the sense of incompleteness I did).

This walk was on our fourth day, so we were ready. The walk was close to ten miles and took six and a half hours. We rose 3,000 feet or so, and then descended. For



those who know the area, we started at Bear Creek, went up towards Lake Odessa, then to Fern Lake, the Pool, and down to a hiker shuttle pickup.

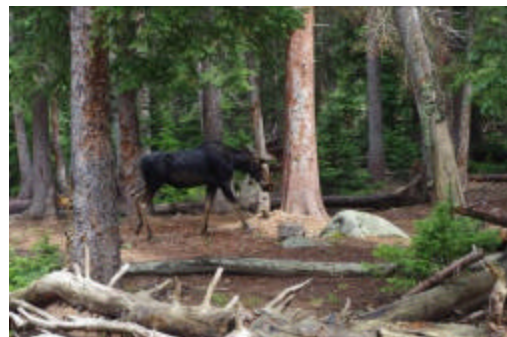
It was a wonderful day. That first two miles, which took two hours, was exactly as we had been told, steep and rocky. Two miles just doesn't describe it. It was a

vigorous climb up a broken trail. As Jane said, "it is not a normal walk when you have grapefruit-sized rocks on your path." As we were finishing the walk, she said if she had known how rugged the path was she would not have come, so she is glad she did not know since she would not have wanted to miss this.

Once we got past that initial part, it changed. We were in the forest area and began to see beautiful lakes, snow-capped peaks, and boulders bigger than houses. When we reached "the switchback" we came to a spectacular rugged area with soaring cliffs, glaciers, and tundra. We were astonished by the beauty of the place. We were above the tree line, and at the glacier level. We saw picas with their squeaky warning cries (eep, eep) and a furry marmot scrambling on the rocks. Near Fern Lake we were an underhanded stone's throw from a young moose with starter antlers. He was indifferent to us. He looked at us as if he were going to whip out a camera and take our photo.



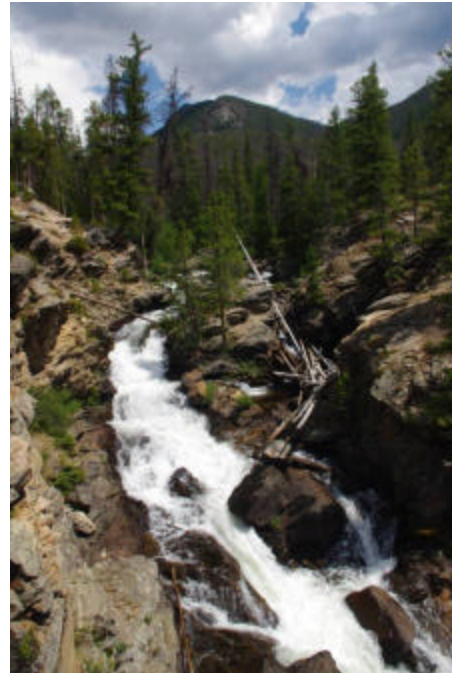
It was really something to be above the tundra (where the trees stop growing) and realize you had climbed that high on your own. We saw glaciers at eye level and small picturesque lakes clustered around. At one point we came to a boulder display. It was as if some ancient volcano had strewn humungous rocks all over the side of the mountain. There was almost nothing growing in this area, which was at peak altitude. Alas, it was here that we had our only unpleasant



encounter with the weather. We had stop and start light showers (raincoat on, raincoat off, raincoat on, raincoat off) for close to an hour. We also had some explosive lightening and thunder. This was nervous-making. When you are walking at that altitude, and the lightening is that close, and there is nothing for shelter or to distract a lightening

bolt, you begin to feel very vulnerable. Jane said she would never again be comforted by the gospel song *How Great Thou Art* with its phrase, "I hear the roll of mighty thunder." That was the single most beautiful section of our walk, and the part that I wanted to be over as soon as possible.

Going down, you descend through the forest. That was very nice. Again, the path became rocky and uneven, but it was worth it. We also began to pass what I can only call raging streams. The summer had been very dry, but the last week had been rainy and the streams were exploding. They were so spectacular that I was impossible to get an adequate photograph of what we were seeing. Once we were walking between two streams. They were perhaps fifty yards apart. You had to wonder how two streams could emerge that close together. Why weren't they a single stream? We also saw a spectacular, rugged falls as we descended. It did not even have a name on the map. It ran down into an area down below called the Pool.



At the end of the day, we were exhausted but thrilled. When we got back to Estes Park we went to the restaurant next to our motel and had a nice meal. It could not have been better.

Mesa Verde: Everyone wants to see Mesa Verde and we were no exception. Within a ten mile area there are scores of ancient stone structures or communities dug into the earth or dug into the cliffs. How they did that is not clear. A couple of those places appeared to be gathering places rather than residential places. That means there was a small residential population but a much larger population that came for special occasions. The ones that were residential had grain storage, underground facilities, chimneys to remove the smoke from underground places, rooms. No one quite knows why these communities disappeared. Perhaps the land dried up and they migrated south into Arizona. They are assumed to be ancestors of present-day pueblo people.

The drive up to the park is amazing. You rise up and up and around and around on a twisting road that seems to go on forever. Looking down is alone worth the trip. In the early days, this trek was done by a private rancher who had discovered the buildings on his land and made some money taking tourists on three-day horse and mule trips. Now the ten mile road is covered in less than an hour (with time out for overlooks).

At the most developed place, we had a presentation by a ranger. She was in character as one of the founding mothers of Mesa Verde, a woman who had pressed to get the place preserved, and had even given a poem to President Roosevelt. That was nice.



Canyon de Chelly: We were not familiar with this canyon but Ted's friend Nelson said it was the most beautiful place he had ever seen. We were so happy we took his advice. The canyon is about ten miles long and is quite spectacular. We drove from place to place for an hour or two. At different places you can look up and down the canyon and see monuments, a stream, green places where crops are grown, and various ancient towns



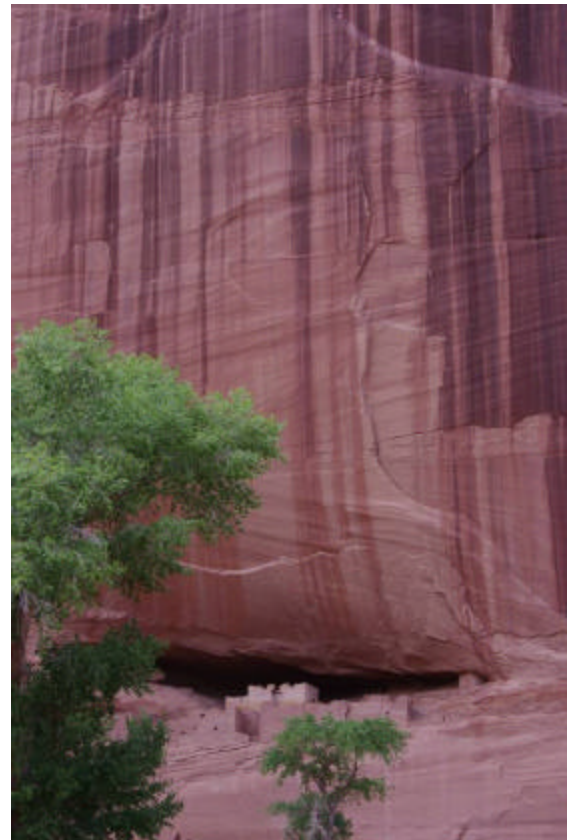
carved or built into the walls. One of the overlooks gives an overview of Spider rock, two towers named in honor of Spider Woman, a Navajo goddess, who is said to have taught the Navajo people to weave. They dominate a whole section of the canyon. This is probably the most beautiful place in the canyon. There were also hawks soaring into the currents. That was fun to watch. The end is the best place. There is a sign on the edge that says "700 foot drop. Keep children and pets away." Jane thought they should have added "and husbands," but I was very careful. (All guys like to do pseudo-dangerous things to scare their women so the women will consider them brave and courageous. It works, unless they consider you foolish and risky). There is a walk down to the bottom where there is a lovely city in the wall. The setting is spectacular, with the cliff soaring well up above the city. It was a two hour walk and we started about 4:00. It was

very steep, twisting around here and there. We saw a couple of horses come down, and a young guy running down with his charming wife trying to keep up while walking. We spent about half an hour on the bottom. The pueblo built into the soaring rock face was very impressive. After a time, we made our way back up. We had anticipated a hard climb but the ascent was not difficult at all. The hardest part was the thirst. We were so glad we had brought three bottles of water rather than two.





As we neared the top, we saw two or three young Navajo people descending. We speculated on why they were doing that. They appeared to be dressed casually, i.e., women in jeans, etc. Since this was a two-hour walk, they were obviously not planning to come back up since it was now 6:00 and once it gets dark (around 8:00) the security of footpaths with rocks become iffy. I asked a local person back at the gift shop what these people were doing. “They are getting their exercise.” I was struck by two physical patterns in the reservation. One pattern was serious obesity, especially among women, whose heavy bodies seemed at times to move in sections. The other was a lean look that was equally obvious. I don’t know enough to say if these are natural patterns or perhaps the obesity reflects a typical unhealthy American life style. The Navajo have a traditional custom of running before dawn, perhaps an hour. I know this from a young mother that I met in the park when Daniel was a little boy and she told me about growing up on the reservation with her grandmother.



The

custom is dying out now, but still persists in some places. Obviously, the practice of getting exercise also persists, here with walking down the canyon after work. A woman I spoke to said their high school track team trained by running down the canyon and then back up. A few years ago they won the state

championship. She was very proud of that. I can see why.

At the top, Jane stacked some rocks to make an *inunshuk*. It was very nice.

In the gift shop, there was a radio going with a language I did not understand. Since I was the only person in the shop, I started up a conversation with the woman

behind the counter. I asked if that was Navajo (obviously it was, but I wanted to talk to her) and she said it was. That is their local radio station. I asked if everyone spoke Navajo. She said everyone did, then hesitated, then said, “well, not all of the young people speak it.” She was about 40, very pleasant and attractive. She said her youngest son did not speak Navajo. Her older sons did, but the youngest one had never learned. Her mother lived with her and she did not speak English so she could not talk to her own grandson. I thought how English had been a unifying force throughout American history and how having immigrant children learn English was such a victory. Even for Navajo children, learning English opens up opportunities that would never exist otherwise. But for this woman, having her son learn English also involved a defeat because he moved away from their culture and language. I told her about my immigrant memoir project and suggested that she



interview her mother and write up the results. This would be a great gift for her grandchildren and their children. Her mother is a voice from the past who can tell things that will be forgotten. She was very excited about this idea. It was as if I had thrown her a life line. This was a nice conversation.

Durango: Heading south from Colorado Springs, and going west across some beautiful land, we ended up in Durango where Ron and Marilyn Garst retired. Ron was at MSU with me, doing a doctorate in geography, and ended up in Kenya the same time we were there. He tried an academic career for a few years, then went to the Defense Intelligence Agency college and ended up as Dean. They visited us two years ago and invited us to come, but we did not consider it likely at the time. Now we made a point of stopping by. They had a beautiful house



which they designed and built in the mountains. It was filled with memories of Kenya, obviously the definitive experience in their lives (as in ours). It was so far away from a town that it was totally dark in the night. It reminded me of something I wrote in my journal when we were in Kenya: “There is nothing as black as an African night.”

We drove into Durango and then along the Million Dollar Road to Silverton, a mining town that gave the road its name. Along the way, you could see signs of mines on the hillsides where ore has been dumped out after processing. This was a remarkable drive, legendary for its mountain and forest beauty. At Silverton, we went to the graveyard, with its unique history. People from all over the world came to this desolate place to work in the mines. The stones range from elegant to simple. Many people died in mine explosions, snow slides, and from freezing. There were people from around the world (Scotland,



Serbia, Germany, Canada, etc) and there were quite a few dead children. We looked for a grave with “Soiled Dove” on the stones (the term for a prostitute) but did not find one.



The Drive Southwest from Four Corners: Colorado is a remarkable state with lush mountains in the north and deserts in the southwest. Driving southwest from Four Corners (where Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado come together, thanks to the surveyors), on the way to Canyon de Chelly, we saw an unexpected treasure. It was an expanse of red stone with wonderful monuments. It was not even on the map except in a general way, and yet it was one of the most beautiful places we saw on the whole trip. I almost wanted to slow down. I stopped several times to try to capture the beauty of the structures. Not likely.



The Garden of the Gods is a city park in Colorado Springs. It was donated to the city long ago with the understanding that it would continue as a city park and would be free to anyone. It is not big and you can go around the whole thing (with short walking tours) in an hour or two. It is a mark of how beautiful this state is that something with such spectacular red cliffs and monuments can fail to make the top six list.

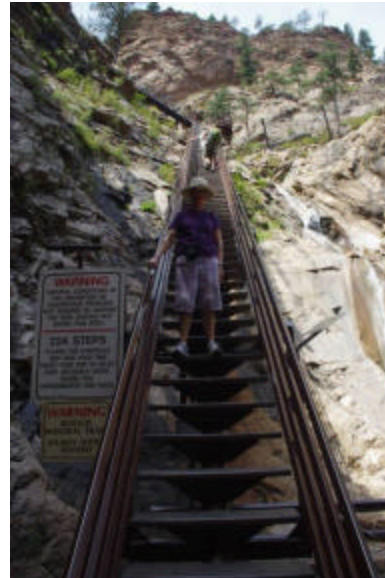
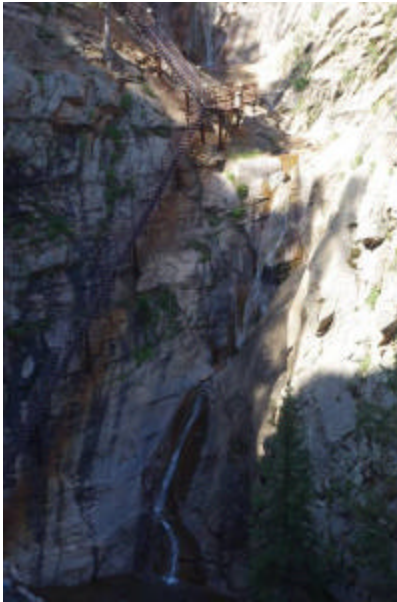


Other Places

Pike's Peak: When my mother was a girl, she went to Pike's Peak. This was before the cog railroad was built so she and her father went up in their car. That trip was something I heard about all my life, the drive up Pike's Peak. I did not know what to expect but it was really less than I expected. We had an entertaining host as we went up but there were lightening storms so we had to stay in the gift shop the whole time. I got no good photos on the peak, although the photo of Jane and me in the Garden of the Gods in front of the red rock with a window shows Pike's Peak in the background.

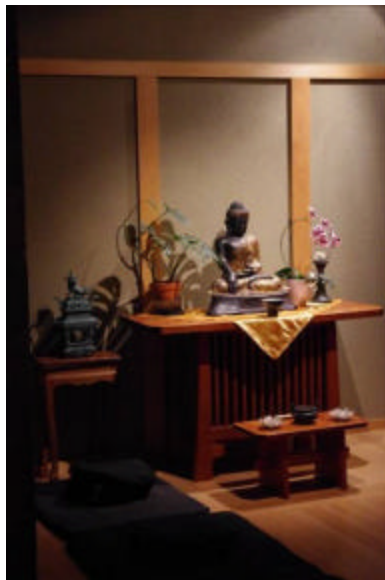
Seven Falls. There is a commercial site that we actually found quite nice. It is called Seven Falls. It is actually one falls, but there are seven manifestations of the falls, hence the name. (the seven falls are of four types: Fan, which stays in touch with the rock; cascade, which falls; horsetail, which sprays outward; and plunge, which has free fall). There is a steep climb of 234 steps up to the top of the mountain, then a nice walk back into the site. There are pleasant views of Colorado Springs, and graves of two noted local

people, one the founder of the site, the other of Helen Hunt Jackson, who wrote the popular local novel *Rebecca* (which Jane downloaded and read). We enjoyed the walk.



Focus on the Family: In Colorado Springs we went to the national headquarters of this politically conservative organization. It was Saturday so everything was closed except for the bookstore and exhibit area. There were five large buildings in the complex, each more impressive than the other. The exhibit was about the founding father and his son. It bordered on a cult of the individual. The bookstore had thousands of books. I told Jane I would probably agree with 80% of everything there (such as responsible parenting, for example) but the sections on Muslims and gays and other similar topics were over the top. And somehow this becomes conservative Republican politics.

Air Force Academy: We took a walking tour of the academy. The central focus is the chapel. The Protestant Chapel is enormous and quite beautiful. We could not go in because of a wedding, but the aluminum architecture was very impressive. We went into the surrounding areas to see the Catholic chapel and the Jewish chapel (quite nice) and the small Buddhist chapel. I noted a sculpture from the Israeli Defense Forces, made of stone from the Holy Land. I wondered how many military academies have something from a foreign



country's military forces. I was told there was a Muslim chapel in the basement but it was not very developed. Just after we got home, I saw a news item about the religious makeup of the academy: 11 Muslims, 16 Buddhists, 10 Hindus, 43 atheists. They also have an \$80,000 rock garden/fire pit for several "earth-based" religious individuals. This includes pagans, Wiccans, druids, witches, and various Native



American faiths. Only in America.



We also spent some time in the academy graveyard, and in the monuments area where they acknowledge their heroes.

Not Hopi: We loved the Navajo reservation but were less impressed with the Hopi reservation, which is entirely inside of the Navajo reservation. A dispute over their boundaries has led to bad feelings and extensive litigation in the federal courts. The Hopis have not done well in this and appear to have reacted strongly. I am sympathetic in a sense. I think if I were a Native American I would hate to see tourists coming in, taking photos, looking at me as if I were something in an exhibit. I remember going to the Smokey Mountains as a kid and seeing a Cherokee man sitting there in a Hollywood-style headdress waiting for tourists to take a photo for a fee. How humiliating. Still, the Hopi went a bit far. When we were in the Hopi Museum (just opened a few months ago) there were signs that said “no photography, no sketching, no note taking, etc. etc.” I half expected it to say “no memories allowed.” This applied to the outdoor area of the reservation as well. Following a road sign to a town, we drove up a sharp hill and took a couple of photos, one or two of the town, two of the beautiful monument and spectacular views below. Only later did we realize that even outdoor photography is prohibited.



Great Sand Dunes: Ted told us to visit the Great Sand Dunes in Colorado. We were not sure we had time since we were on the way from Colorado Springs to Durango but we decided to take the hour long detour. We were very glad we did. These were the largest sand dunes in North America, and the countryside around it is quite nice. We did not have time to climb, but walked around for a while and had a nice time. A woman took a photo of us in front of the dune. Alas, it was not good.



Hubbell Trading Post. This is an odd little National Historic Site. There were other trading posts, but this one was different. It was the original trading post in the area, starting in 1878. Not only did they sell goods but they realized there was a market for Navajo art works and encouraged local artists to perfect their skills. Also, it is still active. You can go in there and buy whatever you need, at least in terms of what trading posts sell. In the back is a room with Navajo blankets and other quality works of art. The Hubbell house is there (over 5000 square feet), the barns, some old transportation. One

wagon that caught my attention was a Civil War ambulance. The ranger said the founder of the post was an officer in the Union army who used it after the war to transport his family out west. I had attended a talk in Springfield about Civil War medicine and realized that the creation of a medical corps was a critical event. Until then, Union doctors had to beg wagons from generals, who often took them after the battle and headed off to the next battle, leaving the wounded soldiers behind. The wagon was in excellent condition. I was very pleased to see it.



I had a chat with the Navajo guide who told me her father was from the Four Corners area but her mother was from around here. Following Navajo custom, the man goes to live with the woman's family so he moved here and she was born nearby. She also said the old shepherd economy was dying out because people went to school and just did not want to be shepherds. Things do change.

Wupatki: Jane had gone with Ted and the kids to a place in northern Arizona where there were several pueblo-type structures. There were houses but also circular places that apparently were for athletic competitions. This was not a major area but was quite interesting. There was also a blow hole from which air was pouring quite vigorously. If I were the chief of this land, I would want my house built right next to that natural air conditioning unit. I also saw a very colorful lizard.



When we had been back home for a couple of weeks, we were sitting on the back porch enjoying the sense of being outdoors. Jane got very happy thinking back on that trip. She said it was perfect, maybe the best vacation we had ever taken. Nice.