

Ormand Family Activity

June 2010: Colorado

Right after getting back from our trip to Northern Arizona, which was mostly to deliver Charity for her Freshman Orientation, we met with my Dad, who was giving away excess furniture and other stuff. My sister Becky wanted some of this stuff, and we were wondering how to get it to her up in Fort Collins, Colorado. In short order, we decided that "No Time Like The Present", and *now* was a fine time to take some of the larger items up. So we planned a week-long trip to leave Tuesday, June 15, arrive Wednesday afternoon, hang out for two or three days, and return by Monday.

The standard route to Ft. Collins is to go east on I-10 from Tucson, take a short-cut from Deming to Hatch, drive all the way up through New Mexico, cross over through the Raton Pass, and proceed on I-25 northward to Ft. Collins. Other family groups prefer to get up early and make the entire transit in one driving day, which can be done, but we prefer to be a bit more leisurely about it. This involves stopping in Raton; that's still a full-day's drive, and the Super-8 hotel we have reserved seems overpriced. It's not a *bad* hotel, but I think we should expect better for our \$86. The next morning, after our "free" breakfast in the tiny lobby, we go across the street and check out the Quality Inn. It has an indoor pool, a separate breakfast room, the same room size, for \$3 more, so we make our reservation for the return trip and cancel at the Super-8.

Trinidad is about as close to the border on the Colorado side as Raton is on the New Mexico side. Both towns claim to have a "historic" downtown, but you can see Trinidad's from the highway. Definitely worth a visit sometime. The next town going north is Pueblo, which also has a very interesting looking urban center. Then comes Colorado Springs. There is an awesome array of attractions in the Colorado Springs area, and we are planning to see Royal Gorge on our return trip, which other family groups have visited before. And yes, we have visited the Focus on the Family headquarters on previous trips, with it's "Odyssey" children's area and a well-stocked media store.

Next is Denver. I am sure there is a lot to see and do in the capital city. We see from the map there is a Six Flags amusement park; Denver

is less than an hour's drive from Ft. Collins, so someday maybe we can come here with John and Becky's kids! In the early afternoon, we arrive at Ft. Collins.



My sister Becky is standing in front of me, and her daughter Savannah in front of her. To her side is her husband John; in front of him is the middle son Matthew, and behind him is the oldest son Jonathan. John and Becky are "cold" people, and prefer the seasons (including the snow) and the greenery to our native home in the Sonoran Desert in Tucson. All the kids enjoyed lolling in the lush grassy lawn we are standing in here; I could only dream of a lawn like that in Tucson!



We unload the goodies we have brought in our van: Mom's old Fransiscan Ware "Desert Rose" china, two "doughboy" end-tables that have been in the family as long as I can remember, and the grandfather's clock. The fun thing about the "doughboys" is that they are boxes

with hinged lids, and you can put stuff in them. Including small cousins, although as you can see, she doesn't quite fit.

Poudre River Valley

The reason for Ft. Collins being here is the presence of the Cache La Poudre River. The river gets its name from when French-Canadian mountain men hid a supply of gunpowder here in the old fur-trapping days. In practice, this gets shortened to "Poudre River", and it's a beautiful mountain river that is still swollen with snowmelt. The next morning, we go to a local park and have a look.



The river is indeed running high, and the water noise, the bright sunshine, and the fun of crossing a bridge puts everyone, including two sillies, in high spirits.



The reason we come to *this* spot on the Poudre is the presence of the Seaman water reservoir, which supplies the nearby city of Greeley. Our destination is the dam of this reservoir, which is a short walk from the parking lot.



Presently we come to the spillway. Water is cascading down the concrete steps with a happy noise, which Jonathan and Charity are enjoying here.

The reservoir is built on a tributary to the Poudre, which apparently runs all the time and therefore requires a facility to pass the flow when the reservoir is full. I'm guessing that the spillway is only active when the river is running high, such as now, and this is the primary drain. Or maybe the other way around. Either way, it's interesting. No, there is no hydroelectric generation going on here.





The dam is a large concrete-reinforced earth-filled design between the canyon side and this large outcropping. The spillway is on the other side. The four older kids have climbed up the nearer side of the dam, and are visible almost at the other end.



Jonathan leads Charity and me on a path to ascend the outcropping. Lots of cactus up here! (During the descent, I sit on one, and carry some away with me...) At the summit, the spillway is viewable from above.

And on the other side, the dam. We stand up here chucking rocks out into the lake. After noticing this, Matthew scampers up this side from the dam in a fraction of the time it took to climb up "the long way".



After returning from Seaman's Reservoir and the Poudre River experience, we have lunch, and the young people run off to see "Karate Kid" at the theatre. Jerri and I visit downtown Ft. Collins.



As I've said before, Tucson could learn a thing or two about urban renewal from Ft. Collins. A triangular segment of the downtown area now known as "Old Town Square" has been closed off from vehicle traffic (including bicycles and skateboards), and upbeat shops and dining establishments have filled the historic buildings along the pedestrian "mall" now filled with sculptures, fountains, benches, and lots of planters and flower beds and shady trees (seen above). Several multi-level parking garages and surface lots are within walking distance of Old Town Square and the shops which line College Avenue, which is the Main Street of Ft. Collins. Very, *very* nice.

Garden of the Gods

The next day we sit around at talk, go as a group to "Toy Story 3" at the theatre, and enjoy home-cooked meals. Saturday arrives, and shortly before noon we are ready to leave. The first destination is in the Colorado Springs area - the Garden of the Gods, which we have heard about before, and it's time to find out what it is.



Turns out it is a *free* park (state? local?) with some amazing nature-sculpted red sandstone formations nestled among the granite hills of the Rocky Mountain Front Range. There is a Visitor Center with displays and the obligatory story of how the formations took shape over millions of years, and

a guided tour bus trip. We don't have time for the tour bus, so we just drive around ourselves with the free map.

It's a shame we don't have more time. This is a *great* place for a picnic lunch and hikes around the sandstone knobs. It isn't really very big (we drive through it in half an hour, and get our Buffalo Burger lunch at the Garden of the Gods Trading Post) and yet not crowded. At least not today.





Although toward the end of the day, we notice a stream of cars entering the park, apparently people wanting to enjoy the gleam of the setting sun on the red sandstone.

We have returned at dusk to see this famous sight: Balancing Rock.





Which, unless it has been very cleverly reinforced, really is balancing on this pedestal less than three feet wide! It's been here a long time, so I guess the environment (in spite of the humans, their cars, and the road-building equipment) is fairly stable. I'd hate to be here if it ever comes

down!

Cathedral Spires. There are many beautiful and interesting formations in this park, including the Kissing Camels, the Scotsman (wearing a stone tam-o-shanter), the Siamese Twins, and so forth. Oh, and we saw a string of horse-mounted riders near the Trading Post, so there are other attractions as well.



Pikes Peak

One of the reasons we went to the Garden of the Gods (besides wanting to check out why this site was "famous") is that we had made a change of plan - rather than see Royal Gorge *this* visit (we will do it again some later time), we will see the One Thing that Colorado is Famous For. The One Thing that Arizona is Famous For is... The Grand Canyon, of course. For Colorado, it's Pikes Peak.

Formerly Pike's Peak, or the Peak named after Zebulon Pike, but for whatever reason at some point they dropped the possessive apostrophe. Pikes Peak is not the tallest mountain in Colorado, but at 14,110ft, it's up there, and historically it is the most well known, and access-wise, it is very close to Colorado Springs. In contrast, Royal Gorge is near Canyon City, about an hour's drive further into the mountains.

There are two ways to experience Pikes Peak, besides looking at it from below (such as, from the Garden of the Gods; it is Pikes Peak looming behind the Garden in the first photo in the Garden section above): Drive up a winding road, with more than a hundred hairpin turns up a steep hillside with no guardrail (brrr...) or... the Cog Railway. Guess what I want to do? But the website seems to suggest that reservations are required, and the earliest we can get them is for 2:40pm. This cuts our Garden visit short.

We arrive at the Cog Railway station in Manitou Springs, get our prepaid tickets, and discover that our seats have been double-booked! Computer hiccup, but they are pretty good about fixing it, and we all are on the same car, just not in the same place as we had hoped. The trip up is somewhat more than an hour.



Beautiful mountain scenery, but not particularly different than our own Mount Lemmon or Santa Catalina mountains. But *considerably higher*. Here, we look past the heads of our fellow passengers at the view that inspired Katherine Lee Bates to compose her poem "America the Beautiful" 115

years ago.

Further up, we encounter the treeline, above which trees cannot grow, and the best the ground can support is a thin, tundra-like sod. Patches of snow remain in June. Remains of wooden railroad ties, telegraph wire, and construction debris from long ago line the rail route.



We have now achieved our family altitude record - the summit of Pikes Peak in Colorado, at 14,110 feet above sea level.

(I still have it in mind to return as a family to Death Valley for the lowest altitude record!)



Tremendous view from the Top. Looking north along the Front Range. Mom and her kids are right on the edge of the cleared-off summit area. The parking lot for the brave auto drivers is behind me, along with the summit house; a shop for "Got Oxygen?" and other Pikes Peak tee-shirts, hats, and other merchandise. And doughnuts...



The view eastward. Shadows of the clouds (almost at eye level) drift across the city of Colorado Springs. The red Garden rocks are center up, between center and the left edge of the photo.

The cars we rode up in. These are Swiss-made (no surprise); the original ones had a steam locomotive specially designed to be level on the 26% grades of the hillside. We were permitted 30 minutes to be on the summit, to limit our exposure to altitude sickness, and the conductor (a girl named Shannon who clearly enjoyed her job, even though this was her



last trip before leaving for Germany and her studies in law) made it clear that we had to be back promptly or risk becoming hikers.

Manitou Springs

After descending from our record-breaking adventure, we take the opportunity to explore Manitou Springs. This is a simply beautiful but obviously tourist-oriented town, very much like Estes Park (near John and Becky's, which we have visited many times). Or actually, there is a tourist-oriented "core" and the "real" Manitou Springs of gas stations and grocery stores toward the east of the canyon. The most interesting thing about Manitou Springs, and of course the reason for its existence, is the abundance of natural artesian mineral water springs.



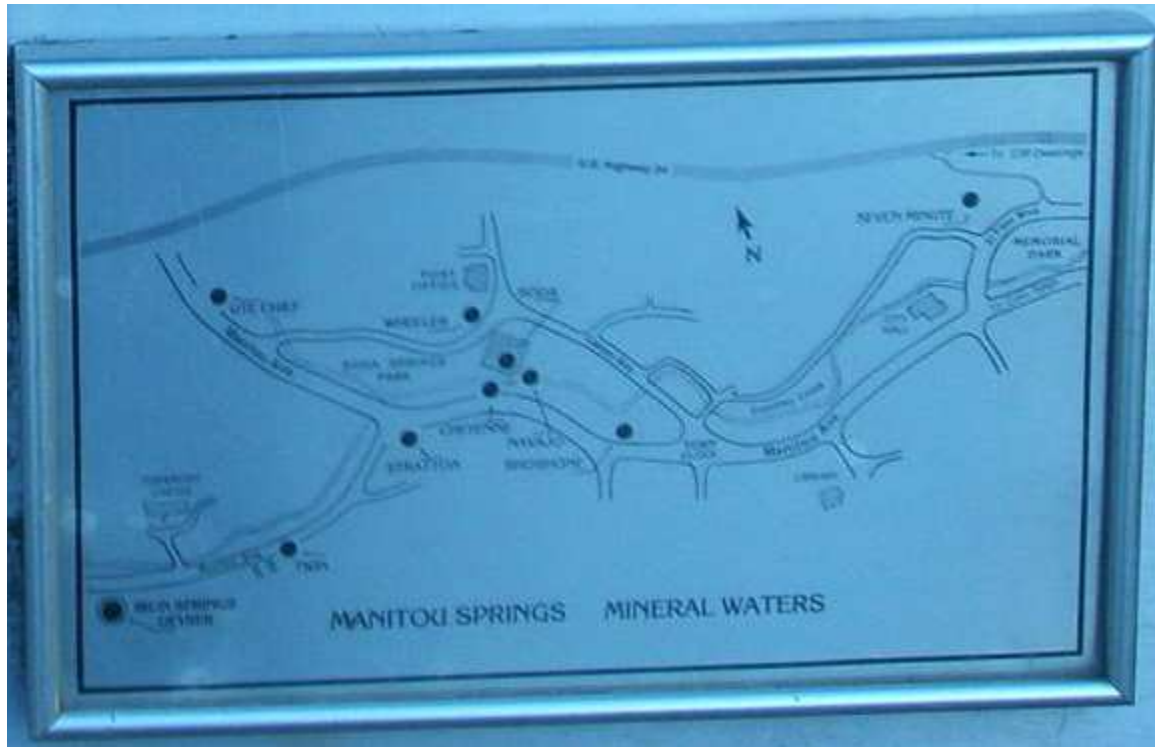
capture the flow.

I can't resist experiencing this. Here is the first one we come to, "Iron Spring", on Ruxton Road back to town from the Cog Railroad station. In earlier times, the springs just jetted up, I guess, enabling their discovery, and the settlers then built spring heads over them to enhance and

Charity and I sample the waters. We should have had a cup... I taste every one we stop at. To my undiscerning palate, they all taste pretty much the same - mineral or "sparkling" water. Except for the last one, a pump-well inside a gift store; it tasted entirely like sulphur.



Mommy and Faith try it, too. Or at least I think Faith did; she was pretty much resistant to the experience. Until the last, least pleasant spring, where she succumbed to the peer pressure from the other store patrons and tasted the "rotten eggs" water!



"Iron Spring" has a map of where the other prominent springs in the area are located. The "Iron Spring" "You Are Here" is at lower left.

We go on into town and find a parking spot on the crowded main street, and locate the five springs in the center cluster on the map. This is apparently "Shoshone Spring". There is a public access outlet outside where I cup my hands and taste the water. Inside the round building is the spring itself, with a huge iron pot to capture most of the flow for bottling. Or so the signs indicate, but I don't see any industrial apparatus for doing so, unless this is a relic from the Old Days, and now, unseen pipes take most of it off for bottling in small plants elsewhere.





Most of the springs are out where everyone can enjoy them. Some are inside, like "Navajo Spring" here. "For Patrons Use Only". I didn't notice the sign until I had already tasted it...

"Cheyenne Spring" is very much like "Shoshone" with a little round spring-house, and very much like "Shoshone" and "Navajo" with a continuous flow of water. "Stratton Spring" here, like "Iron Spring" is intermittent, or "urgle SPLURT urgle urgle SPLURT". Pretty interesting and cool. Very pretty spring-head.



After visiting a few of the interesting springs in Manitou Springs, it is getting late, and we want to get back into the Garden of the Gods to see the Balancing Rock. Afterwards, it is late enough that we need to leave, so after a Chick-Fil-A dinner, we get back on I-25, through Colorado Springs, back through Pueblo, back through Trinidad, through the Raton Pass in the dark, and to our pleasant (and preferable) Quality Inn hotel room.

Capulin Volcano

The next day - the last day of our little Colorado vacation trip - we have a very nice breakfast (much better than the Super-8, even with sharing the room with a fun bunch of kids on a church youth group trip) and then load the car for the last time and set off to Capulin Volcano.



Which is a National Monument! We use our "Golden Eagle" pass for the last time (never got our money's worth out of it), and Jerri gets a stamp for her National Parks Passport Book!

Capulin Volcano isn't as unique as Sunset Volcano; it is green and tree-covered like all the other hills in the area. Which, it turns out, are mostly volcanoes also! What sets Capulin apart is the windy road up the side to the top. That's where we go, after stopping in the Visitor Center to use our Pass and pick up the brochure and get our usual "millions of years" dose.





Capulin is unique in that it has a well-formed vent, and a path where visitors can descend into it. So here we are *inside a volcano!*

There is another path that goes around the rim of the vent. If we had more time (and Mommy weren't suffering from tummy problems, which she attributes to her

experience with the mineral water yesterday), we might take the one-mile hike around the edge.

Today is Sunday, June 21st. Father's Day. I can't think of anywheres I'd rather be!



The visit to the Volcano, including the windey drive up and down the outside and the short hike inside, doesn't take long. We pretty much have to return to Raton to pick up I-25 again. Then it's a full day's

drive, with a late Subway's lunch and a late dinner at Kranberry's in Lordsburg. At last we are home back in Tucson, at the end of our second vacation trip in as many weeks!