

Ormand Family Activity

October 2020: Colorado

When my father-in-law, Mr. Norton, died earlier this year and his descendents cleared out his mobile home, Charity laid claim to the dining room table set. She was, of course, unable to pack it up to Colorado on the spot in her Chrysler, so it got put in a rented storage unit against such time as we could take it up to her. We had been waiting for a convenient break in my work schedule and somewhat cooler weather. It was becoming apparent that the last weekend of September was going to be suitable.

We did the research on what we could do and see and where we would stay and made all the arrangements. The day before we were to leave, I wanted to load the table and chairs into the van so we could just leave. We went to the storage place and discovered a paper notice hung over the keypad says "no access until 9/30" (that is, Wednesday). Umm... I notice a storage complex employee inside gate and ask him what's going on and is there any way I can get some stuff out of my unit. He says "no way vehicles are going to cross fresh concrete". He assures me that everyone was sent an email informing them of situation. This business has screwed me up before, sending me mails - and yes, emails (nothing wrong with either their sending or me receiving their emails) threatening me with confiscation for non-payment, even though I was signed up for automatic payment. Needless to say, I didn't get any such email. Going home, I explained to Jerri what the man said to me, resigning ourselves to changing our plans to leave before next weekend. She calls the storage business and argues him into agreeing to letting us carry the table and chairs across the concrete. I am impressed with her assertiveness! In minutes we are back at the gate and being led across the (already set-up new concrete). The chairs are easy but the table is heavy, so he gets a hand-truck and loads it. In spite of his earlier intransigence, he proves to be very helpful. Soon the table and chairs are loaded into the van. Crisis averted, we are still on the plan.

The next morning, Jerri finishes packing and we are ready to go by 10:30, with the bags stashed on the bottom of the inverted table, underneath chairs, along with the vinyl record sets both girls claimed as part of their inheritance. The drive from Tucson to Lordsburg is uneventful. I had read that New Mexico had a quarantine mandated for visitors to the state, but I didn't see how that was going to work with pass-through traffic. Certainly there is supposed to be a mandate for masks in public, but people at Lordsburg rest stop aren't using them. At Deming, it is time for lunch, but Jerri wants Burger King instead of Blake's Lotaburger - a NM original, and there's one on HW 26 just before turning onto the road to Hatch. The drive to Hatch on route 26 isn't too bad, not too much traffic, no need to try to pass slow-pokes on the two-lane highway. Truth or Consequences, Socorro, Belen, and Albuquerque pass by as per the usual boring New Mexico I-25 trip. We get off at Santa Fe looking for dinner. Using her cellphone, Jerri discovers that a Furr's Cafeteria is listed! We didn't know any were left, since the ones in Arizona all folded years ago. We both agree this sounds much better than more fast-food, but it's fun trying to get there following her phone

directions (not the only time we will experience this on the trip). A banner over the Furr's entrance says "open for dining", but it's really just carry-out, so after going through the line (nobody else around, very uncharacteristic for Furr's) and get our styrofoam-box-packed dinner, we sit in van and enjoy our dinner in the gathering evening. Through the windshield in the parking lot we observe a bum come by pulling a suitcase - he's wearing a hockey mask, Jason-style. Further up the strip mall, there's lots of coming and going at the Dollar Store. Back out to I25, it's nice to drive through the Glorieta hills without a driving rainstorm or snow flurries. I stop at a highway travel center gas station before getting to Las Vegas; I would have preferred to wait, but I'm not sure where a station is at Las Vegas, and "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". Passing through Raton in the dark, we notice that they have a lighted sign and a star on a tall hill over the city. Over the Pass and down to Trinidad.

Usually, we would stay in Las Vegas or Raton, but we have plans for tomorrow requiring optimal travel times, so tonight will be spent at the Day's Inn in Trinidad. I follow the signs off the highway to Day's Inn, but find that the road in front of the entrance is closed for construction. Trying to loop back and find another way in, we finally give up, pull over in front of a cannabis shop, and call the hotel for directions. The night clerk tells us to take the road next to another cannabis shop (which we can see maybe a block away). Who would have thought that there were so many recreational marijuana places in dinky Trinidad? The route takes us past the bowling alley and in the back way. It's a nice hotel but nothing flashy; maybe Trinidad doesn't have anything flashy. Even though we are given the userid and password, there is no wifi).

Tuesday September 29 - Bent's Old Fort

The Day's Inn advertisement had said "hot breakfast", but there is none. Waiting for Jerri to finish her morning preparations, I poke through the hotel guest booklet and note the ads for Tony's Diner and Las Animas Grill. There is a Trinidad and vicinity phone book in the bedside nightstand, and it has a map identifying Main and Commercial streets. Upon leaving the hotel, we retrace our path of last night to the road under construction (Santa Fe Trail) and work through a residential part of Trinidad back to Main Street, and turn east toward La Junta. There are beautiful old buildings (Victorian) along Main Street and the streets to the north, but we don't have time to explore. There's a park with a statue of miners and a birdcage fountain. The Post Office building looks like a bank or a Greek temple. I *definitely* want to come back and spend a few hours looking through downtown Trinidad! Before long, just out of the downtown district, we come to Tony's Diner, which just fits right in with small-town Colorado. The dining room is really like a patio, with lots of sliding glass doors (for warmer weather). After taking our order, our waitress tells us that Tony was a miner who stayed around and started his restaurant. Tony is actually there, walking around, checking on customers, chatting with locals. I eavesdrop on some old boys at nearby table talking about guns and hunting and politics and the drought and what the stock raisers they know are going to do with their herds with the drought. Restrooms are outside, and there's a kitty bed on the porch with a food dish nearby.

We continue through the east end of Trinidad into farming countryside. Route 350 takes us across low hills and arid fields dotted with cholla (!) to La Junta, which is a busy little

railroad town at the junction ("junta") of US 350 and US 50 and US 160. The signs pointing out the route to Bent's Fort are confusing; finally, we cross the bridge over US 50 to North La Junta and the 6-mile road to Bent's Old Fort.



There's a bit of a walk from where we have to leave the car near the road to the historic attraction. It's a nice warm-not-hot late September in Colorado. To the right (behind me) is the fort. To the left on the other side of the path is a broad marshy area, with cattails and milkweed. The fluffy seed carriers are floating around our feet.

We knew this wasn't a *military* fort, since regular Army forts are so named, e.g., "Fort Lowell" or "Fort Davis" or "Fort Bowie", but we didn't really understand what it was until we read through the placards at the parking lot - it was a *Company* fort, a private installation of the Bent and St. Vrain Trading Company, established here on the Arkansas river which was the border with Mexico, for trading with the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians. This is what visitors such as Kit Carson and John C. Fremont and Indian trading parties would have seen as they approached, when it was active between 1833 and 1849.





Outside the gate is a replica Conestoga wagon, which would have brought the trading goods from St. Louis (the original home of Charles and William Bent) and returning thence with the buffalo and beaver pelts. There is a 5" Howitzer out here, also, probably mostly for the little boys to play with (as I certainly would have in my day), since the military actually had very little to do with the fort (more to say about this later).

After entering the fort, we are a bit perplexed as there are no signs to direct us to an office and nobody around to guide us, so we serendipitously turn to the left and enter a room which is tricked out with replica trade goods and some literature. Shortly, a man dressed as a Mexican peon enters and greets us and takes our admission and gives us a brief introduction to the trading fort. He explains that we may conduct a self-guided tour through all the rooms of the reconstructed fort (the original fort was burned down in 1849 under mysterious circumstances after William got an insultingly low offer from the Army for the fort). We are about to leave on our tour when a chicken fearlessly entered the room and looked us over.

In the next room over is the little theatre typical to Park Service sites, and we get a well-made dramatized introduction to what Bent's Old Fort was, the partnership between the Bent brothers and Ceran St. Vrain (I note that there is a St. Vrain State Park between Denver and Fort Collins just off I-25, I wonder if there is a connection), and some of the visitors, such as a young woman who stayed here briefly after miscarrying her child and an Army lieutenant who was impressed with the fort and made detailed notes with measurements - an artifact which was to serve a critical role when archaeologists and historical reconstructionists would later rebuild the destroyed fort.

In its day, the courtyard served as the focus of communal living for traders, trappers, Indians, soldiers, Mexicans, and white travelers on the Santa Fe trail. These adobe walls (well, the original ones, really) would have heard many languages spoken.



In the center of the courtyard is a press. The buffalo hides were compressed and wrapped in protective cloth coverings for more economical shipment via wagons or pack mules back east.

We got to look through all the rooms downstairs and upstairs (carefully climbing the stairs which were uneven with inadequate handrails): Bedrooms for company officers and employees, the kitchen (whose broad hearth polished from use actually is the original, having survived the fort's destruction), the dining room for the upper class people, the counter where the hides were evaluated and the Indians and trappers could select the desired goods in trade, the warehouse rooms...

... and the rooms used later on as barracks for U.S. troops, when Col. Kearny marched through the area with his "Army of the West", the northern activity of the Mexican-American War to secure the New Mexico, Arizona, and California territories from the Mexicans.



After the war, the President appointed Charles Bent as the provisional governor of New Mexico Territory. While he was residing in Taos, a band of Indians and Mexican soldiers, upset about the recent war, rioted in Taos and killed Charles. Since the buffalo numbers were declining and beaver felt hats were going out of style in Europe, the fort was becoming less productive and more of a liability. William Bent (now separated from St. Vrain, after Charles was gone - he was the "glue" of the partnership) offered to sell the fort to the Army, but they offered such an insultingly low price that he declined. Apparently he was concerned that the fort might fall into the hands of hostile Indians or a rival company. There's some confusion whether it was just burned down (actually, adobe doesn't really burn) or blasted with black powder and consequently caught fire, or if William Bent actually had anything to do with it, but it was gone, all the same. William went elsewhere nearby and build "Bent's New Fort" of stone, but it didn't serve as long or as significantly, and shortly after turned to a ruin.



There were swivel guns in the two circular bastions. It was a *fort* after all, a defensive work, but there was never any need or use of the fort in conflict.

From the bastion parapet is visible the corral and the flat roof of the building. I note how the Bent brothers very kindly build little stockades around their air conditioners so as not to spoil the rustic appearance. While we were at the ground level exploring and found the corral, the mule came over to see if we had any treats (we didn't) and to get his nose patted.



Outside the gift shop (maximum six visitors) is a real original Conestoga. It's built like a boat to keep the load from shifting on the slopes of hills. The bucket or trough at the left end (the front) is for use as a feeding manger for the oxen. The driver didn't ride in the wagon, but walked along outside goading and guiding the draft animals. Later on, the Conestoga would be replaced with the much larger (seven-foot-high wheels) Murphy wagon. It would be more like Murphy wagons that would be

used by the freight companies serving Tucson before the railroad arrived.

Next to the Conestoga was this smaller vehicle, with bench seats under the canvas flaps. The sign says it's a "Dearborn" wagon. This immediately calls to mind Dearborn, Michigan - I wonder if there's any connection.



The lady in the gift shop is quite a talker and very knowledgeable about the Western National Parks Association, of which Jerri is a member. They talk for quite a while and Jerri picks up some tips. The additional rule for the gift shop is to not touch anything (which implicitly means you can't take children in there) because of the stupid virus business. I thought masks and limits on the number of customers were bad enough.



After leaving the gift shop, we are finished seeing the fort, and return to our car. Nearby from where we are parked, I can see the old stone arch that the movie at the fort referred to. The Daughters of the American Revolution were the first to recognize and appreciate the historical significance of Bent's Old Fort and worked to preserve and ultimately restore it. This arch marked the location for decades before the Park Service acquired the land

and commenced the reconstruction.

At this point, we return to La Junta and drive through the downtown area looking for lunch spot. I was hoping to find some local color, but we settle for a Carl's Junior with "Hardee's" on the door grips and a young blonde girl who is impatient with taking our orders while communicating through masks. Taking our lunch with us, we continue on US 50 toward Pueblo, pass through several small towns like Swink and Rocky Ford and Manzanola. At this town, US 50 is closed for construction and a detour takes us northward to Crowley and

then westward to Pueblo. Pumpkins are being harvested, and we pass a tractor pulling a trailer loaded with big cardboard containers full of pumpkins. I point out a field of watermelons to Jerri. Arriving at Pueblo, I pull off the highway near I25 to get gas at a Loaf 'n' Jug. There are six pumps, all occupied. I settle to wait behind a car with a fellow slowly putting on his face covering, then slowly getting out of car (the sort of fellow who is wearing his pants below his underwear), then fiddling with something inside the car. This is ridiculous. I give up and try to move to an adjacent lane, but a car is leaving behind us and blocks us. Trying to get out of his way, I move over and another car entering the station blocks us. Trying to get past him, I move yet again and yet another car enters the station. How is this station so popular? I give up, work out of the station back onto the road, and go down maybe 100 yards to a Shell station with no problems. We can finally leave Pueblo on I25, and quickly get to Colorado Springs. On the other side, I am expecting terrible traffic due to unending construction, based on previous experience, but cars are zipping along (the road is posted at 60 for construction ("fines doubled"), but cars are going 80, and it's one of the "keep up or get run over" deals). We get to Denver in record time, and through Denver. There is more road construction into Fort Collins (and cars are again not paying much attention to posted construction zone speed limits).

As we approach to Fort Collins, Jerri is texting with her daughters who have decided our arrival time of 8:30 is too late and will already have their dinner and promise us leftovers. When she learns that dinner - and leftovers - are brussel sprouts, sweet potatoes, and Italian sausage, Jerri decides this is not appealing, so she locates a Wendy's with her cellphone and we pick up a salad for her and chili for me. Arriving at our daughters' cottage, we meet their roommate Savannah (a charming young woman younger than either of our daughters, and confusingly sharing her name with our niece who also lives in Fort Collins), have dinner (I try Charity's brussel sprout mess; not bad at all) and have a delightful conversation about phone spammers and conspiracy believers and relatives who have trouble with telling the truth. I'm not about to leave this furniture in our car any longer than necessary, so we help move their table and chairs to their garage (more stuff they will be trying to sell) and unload the inheritance table and chairs. After maneuvering the table through their front door, we discover the table will not fit through the kitchen door. After a bit of inspecting the table more closely, I note that the "trucks" of the legs are held onto the table top by only a few square nuts. After taking the "trucks" off and moving them into the kitchen, the girls notice that the tops are caked with dust. In cleaning them off, Savannah accidentally vacuums the dustrag, and we have the unanticipated adventure of extracting the dustrag from the vacuum hose. Finally we can reassemble the table in the kitchen, with the help of Faith's jeweler pliers.

At this point we are done with the children for the evening and the day's adventures. We say goodnight and proceed to our standard Fort Collins hotel - Kiva Best Western - and find that late arrivers are being assigned upstairs all the way at the end. I'm reminded about dragging our bags through the Flamingo at Las Vegas, but of course the diminutive Kiva Inn is nothing so strenuous. The room is clean and comfortable, and hey! The wifi works!

Wednesday September 30 - Wyoming State Capitol

The next morning has a lazy start, but at last we collect Faith (who has the day off) for a

nice but late breakfast at Cafe Bluebird. Late enough that there is practically nobody left in the restaurant, which is okay because the last time we were here, it was packed. Very popular. The plans for today is to journey north into Wyoming and see the Capitol. Cheyenne is about an hour's drive. As we approach the border, we see the giant buffalo sillouettes on the hilltops, and on the other side, we note a big fireworks outlet "mall" at the border (interestingly, CO has a total ban on fire; wonder how the Denver government appreciates Wyoming selling firewors on the border). Cheyenne is just minutes north of the state line, and 24th Street goes straight to Capitol. I note 24th is a quiet residential street to within just a block from downtown and the government buildings. We can park at the street (no signs, no meters) and walk right in - again, no guards or metal detectors.



And no mask mandate in WY. Unfortunately, also no apparent self-guided tour booklets in the literature rack by the door, but instead there is a booklet about the Capitol refurbishment program which has some maps. Down the hall is the Governor's Office, and the two guards outside commiserate with their lack of literature and recommend taking the elevator to the 3rd floor and working back down.

The State Seal is outside the building. In other state capitol buildings, the Seal is at the lowest level under the dome.



3rd floor: Includes the Senate Chamber gallery. The government is not in session, and we pretty much have the place to ourselves. Wyoming is not a very populous state, and there aren't very many desks for state senators. I'm thinking the one big problem with the self-guided tour with no supporting literature is that, if there's anything symbolic such as the pattern in the carpet or architectural features, we will never

know it.

Mom takes a photo of Faith and me (I'm hiding behind the chandelier) across the gallery. There isn't an abundance of seats in the gallery, and no obvious accommodations for TV cameras. Note the painting to the left; these four paintings are about the only artwork or decoration in the chamber.



Well, except for the magnificent Tiffany-style skylight. On a clear Wyoming day, there's enough daylight coming in that electric lights aren't really necessary.

Moving out of the Senate gallery toward the House, we encounter the highest level in the Rotunda. Which is really square, not round ("rotund"). The most noticeable feature are the large bronze statues of the Four Sisters.



The skylight for the Rotunda is below the cupola for the dome and just above our heads. Note the style of the painting around the skylight.



A poster nearby tells about restoring the original painting style from the rather boring replacement at the turn of the century. The occasional poster and the booklet we picked up downstairs explains the restoration project, which includes removing suspended ceilings and other "modern" efficiency "improvements". This story is similar to the one we encountered at La Posada in Winslow that was acquired by the Santa Fe railroad company and "improved" for office purposes, covering over or destroying the beauty of the original architecture and period decorations. It never ceases to amaze me how the early century and mid-century Modernism was so arrogant and unappreciative of what the previous generation had created.

I notice that there are other doors facing the Rotunda on the 3rd floor (the Capitol is, after all, an office building), and one large room with a glass door with gilt lettering is the Joint Appropriations Committee room. I guess this speaks to the importance of appropriations (tax revenues and budgeting) to the Wyoming government.

On the other side is the gallery for the House Chamber. It is similar to the Senate except it doesn't go all the way around. I'm really not certain about the purpose of the huge louvered panel behind the Speaker's desk; I was expecting a big LED scoreboard-type display for the voting results, but it appears to be a big empty window to outside.



In the photo above, two of the four large paintings are visible. These are all of the same pastel-y style, and depict aspects of frontier life from when Wyoming was still a territory.

The House chamber's skylight isn't quite as large or elaborate as the one in the Senate (being flat, for instance, rather than curved) but of a similar, beautiful Tiffany-esque style.



We are ready to descend to the 2nd floor by a finely-crafted wooden staircases from within the House gallery to just outside the House Chamber, where we can peek through the door and see what the state representatives see as they enter.

On the wall outside the chamber are two oil paintings by Golling. We will see more Golling paintings outside the Senate chamber. Bill Golling was a "famous" cowboy artist who lived in Wyoming - not famous like other Western artists like Charles Russell or Maynard Dixon, but a *cowboy* artist possessed of skills that he could capture what he saw and experienced as a working cowboy in Wyoming during the frontier days.

Facing the Rotunda are two more doors. This one leads to the chamber in which the Wyoming Supreme Court formerly met (before it was moved to its own building). On the other side is another door to a room for government literature production (and some people working, so some government jobs for the legislature keep running even when the legislature is not in session) but according to the booklet was formerly the "Territorial Council".



The Supreme Court chamber is smaller than the (still in-use) House and Senate chambers, and sparsely decorated, and obviously too small for the audience that would attend current Supreme Court sessions. Again, no guided tour and no self-guided tour book, we have no clue what the room is used for now.

Come to think of it, in other state capitol buildings we've seen, they have a room or several room for group functions, like a press room or a signing room or a television room or a ballroom. We didn't really come across anything in this building that would fit that role.

An example of another wooden staircase between the 2nd and 3rd floors, embedded in the wall, with an arch for the access point and an arch segment for visibility during the ascent. Lovely architecture work.



I get the impression that, contra other state capitols, the emphasis is not on stonework but on woodwork. This is one of the two "grand" staircases from the 1st to the 2nd floor.

View of the rotunda skylight from the entrance level.



Down the hall are portraits on the wall of famous Wyoming personages. This is Francis E. Warren, who was an advocate of the military and military installations in the state. Adjacent to Cheyenne is Francis E. Warren Air Force Base, unusually named after someone who *wasn't* a famous flyer. It occupies a territorial-era Army fort, with the original 19th Century officers' houses used now for Air Force officers. It is significant in that it is the only Air Force base without a runway for fixed-wing aircraft, because it is a *missile* base, for ICBMs. It explains why one of the main roads into southern Cheyenne is "Missile Drive."

Behind the "grand" staircase, or within it, rather, is another wooden staircase to the lower level, or "garden" level. Not sure why it's "garden", because it's subterranean. Maybe "garden" means "under the garden".

The unique aspect of the bottom level under the Capitol are all these vaults, intended for storing documents. We haven't seen this at other state capitols; maybe larger states have to store documents elsewhere but Wyoming is small enough to store them on-site.



Mosler has been in business a long time. The classified safes and door locks at Raytheon are Mosler. But our safes and doors are nowhere near as pretty as these.

Nearby was another poster on the capitol refurbishment with pictures of craftsmen removing the paint from the safe doors. I am rendered speechless considering the modern mindset that would paint over this beautiful work just because it is "old".



Faith peeks out of the inside of one of these vaults. Hey, they were left open, so it must be an invitation for visitors!

Here both of us are peeking out of a vault.
One of several lateral file cabinets is visible
behind us.



This was very interesting to me - for the irony.
This is a very impressive high-security vault
door. For a room used to store furniture.
Peeking through the inner barred door, I can
see a regular door just to the left. I can pace
off from the door to the adjacent hallway, and
just inside the hallway on the right is the other
side of this door. A normal door, with the
frosted-glass panel typical of other office
doors in the building. A forbidding vault door
and a simple breakable glass door leading to
the same chamber. (Shakes head in disbelief.)

Many state capitols have been outgrown by the government, necessitating adjacent annex
buildings, and Wyoming is no exception. The annex buildings are connected to the historic
capitol by an underground passage. The passage is lined with meeting rooms. I wonder
whether some D&D gamers could reserve a meeting room in the capitol. At the end of the

passage, where it forks to the two annex buildings, there are two statues, one of a woman and the other an Indian with a long feathered bonnet, but no signs or explanations. We don't go any further, having seen as much of the Capitol as we care to.

Over our heads is a semi-transparent skylight. Similar to the underground gallery skylight in Washington, the dome of the Capitol can be vaguely seen.



Nothing left to see, it's back along the passage, up the stairs, and out the door of the building. Across the street is a statue of Bill Golling, the cowboy artist whose work we saw hanging outside the House and Senate chambers.

Near the Capitol are the historic governor's mansion and the State Museum. Can't do both,

and the museum is closer (actually between the Capitol and the governor's mansion). It's also where Jerri can get her capitol passport book stamped, and that's the primary reason we're here today.

It's a city block away. After getting the stamp and a brief visit to the gift shop, we can go right into the (free) museum.



We slowly circulate through the lower level looking at everything - wildlife, dinosaurs, and an extensive look at Wyoming mining. Unsurprisingly, Wyoming is a major source of coal, but trona (for soda ash) is also a significant resource. I was not expecting another important Wyoming resource to be an absorbent mineral used in kitty litter. And WY is the nation's largest supplier of uranium! The other exhibits on the lower level are rather eclectic, such as a Gatling gun, a vest worn by a patriot at Concord, a drum from the Civil War, a water bottle from Iran/Iraq War (hard to see the tie to WY), and many other such one-offs. I knew about Arizona's Pleasant Valley war, and New Mexico's Lincoln County war; it seems Wyoming had their Johnson County war, pitting large-scale ranching owners against the small family ranches whom they accused of rustling. Along with Wyoming's coal-mining industry are stories of coal mine disasters.

By 4:00, Jerri is missing her lunch, so we extract Faith who is already upstairs in an extensive continuation of the museum and return to car. We aren't nearly done looking over Cheyenne, so we will have to come back and see the rest of the (did I mention free) state museum. Getting the car and running down Capitol Avenue, we spot a Subway sign off to the left. Good enough. After lunch, we pop into the antique shop we parked outside - the "Eclectic Elephant", just before it closes. By 5:00, we are ready to leave Cheyenne. As we approach Fort Collins from the north, we see a great cloud of smoke and ash from wildfires in Rockies, and as we drive underneath it, the sun turns red. Charity joins us in the car and directs us to "DC Oakes" on the south side of town. Live music by talented electric guitarist. Limited menu: I choose a spicy sausage plate, our waitress recently returned from

Italy and recommends against the spaghetti dish so Jerri gets ribeye steak, the young ladies both get mac 'n' cheese. After dinner, we have to drive around darkening back ways that somehow Charity knows about to get back to Harmony Road and a more orthodox route back to their cottage.

Thursday October 1 - Family and Antique Furniture

After an even lazier start, I fetch the bagged breakfast kits from the hotel front desk. The nice thing about Kiva is their relatively competent complimentary breakfast, but that sort of thing is gone in this age of Wuhan virus fear and government imposition. After we're on our way, we go by Walmart to get some little things and then find our way to Becky's home and sit with her and talk and have their dogs climb around on us. Ferdinand the Fat Cat enters the room and recognizes me as a cat person, so he climbs up and sits on me for a long time. We are blessed with a brief glimpse of Savannah and Jonathan and his large puppy. After making our plans for family dinner tonight, we leave for lunch. I stop downtown briefly, but we don't find anything quickly, so we return south on College to a noodle place that we saw on the way up. After lunch, we fetch Faith from her home and go down south to her favorite antique mall (A&J) to resume their search for a narrow shelf-case suitable for LP records. It's a pretty good antique mall. As 6:00 approaches, we return north a little ways to Harmony and La Vida Buena restaurant, where John and Becky are waiting. I am stunned to see John's impressive and luxurious beard. La Vida Buena has an hour wait! Becky calls their sister operation La Tarascos on College, which is actually on the same block as our lunchtime noodle place. We enjoy a nice Mexican dinner to belatedly celebrate my birthday with family. Jerri gets street tacos with no toppings (the only choices were onions and cilantro, not cheese and shredded lettuce) and Faith gets quail with mole and has to deal with the little bones. Of the Lee children, only Jonathan can join us.



In the restaurant for my birthday dinner with my pretty sister and John who is looking more professorial each time I get to see him.

Friday October 2 - Denver and Broadmoor Hotel

After a slow start (hey, we're on vacation!), we check out of the Kiva and go next door to Charco Broiler for breakfast (which ends at 11:00, but it is 10:50 when we arrive, so the hostess reluctantly hands us breakfast menus). I like Charco Broiler; it's darkish, split-level, bar in the back - classic steakhouse lines. Just before breakfast arrives, Jerri loses the ear cap for one of her hearing aids while brushing it out and we can't find it on the floor. This leads to our first adventure of the day: looking up hearing aid outfits and visiting them to find an appropriate one. After three attempts we find one that is promising but it's closed for lunch. While waiting, we go over to the cottage and hang out with Charity and Savannah for a while, then return with Charity in the car to the hearing aid place and get a packet of ear caps. We then proceed to Target and pull up the wipers on Faith's car as a prank. Charity directs us north of town to a small antique shop, still looking for a suitable shelfcase - the shop is quite small, there are a few interesting knick-knacks, but none of the available shelfcases are entirely suitable. We all return to the cottage after picking up Wendy's salads for lunch to wait for Faith. When she shows up, she expresses appropriate appreciation for the windshield wiper prank. After the girls are done with their modest packing, we start the hour run to Denver.

My original plan is to tour the 16th Street Mall. Instead of 16th Street downtown (and the difficulty of finding parking), we go west to the little township of Wheat Ridge and a Brass Armadillo antique mall. Turns out there are six Brass Armadillo stores, and two are in Phoenix. Extensive collection but pricey. Lots of retro hats, but Faith restrains herself. Not any suitable shelfcases. We don't finish looking through the entire store before having to leave for dinner.

Faith didn't see this hat. After looking at the photo, she says she would never have occasion to wear something like this. Probably true.





The three housemates are of a mind to decorate their cottage in "Little Old Lady" style. I suggest these cat plates.

Buckhorn Exchange, at more than 100 years old, is supposedly Denver's first restaurant. Its origin was as a saloon serving railroad workers. It has Colorado Liquor License #1 in view behind the elaborate bar. The founder, "Shorty" Zietz, was an scout during the Indian Wars and met (and received his moniker) from Sitting Bull. He then went on to ride with Buffalo Bill. His son was visited by a party of Indians led by Red Cloud, son of Sitting Bull, who presented him with the sabre of General Custer captured at the Battle of Little Big Horn, and it remains a family heirloom to this day.

The restaurant is in the oldest part of Denver. Getting here from Wheat Ridge as guided by Charity's cellphone, was a trip through a different kind of downtown than we had seen around 16th Street. Soon, we reach the corner of 10th and Osage and park in the lot.

Seating is by reservation only. I made the reservation days ago. We wait in the peerless Colorado evening outside one of Denver's signature aspects taking pictures and waiting to be called in. After a short while, Dakota (Charity's beau) appears after leaving his security guard job for the evening.



Dinner starts with Rocky Mountain Oysters (sliced, breaded, deep-fried, approximately the same texture as real oysters) and moves on to elk and buffalo steaks. Afterwards, sherbet and cake for dessert. The service is excellent and the ambiance is memorable.



The first and second Zietz proprietors were big-game hunters, and interior is festooned with taxidermied animals and birds. The case just to the right in the photo has part of the unusual firearms collection displayed in the restaurant.

After we all look around restaurant at the animal trophies and the guns, we all climb the stairs and look at bar (and lounge, and try to make out the Liquor License #1) and some African trophies and photos of the Zietz men on hunting trips. Further back is the

"Roofgarten" with more seating and a canoe paddled by taxidermied racoons.

Lest anyone should disbelieve, some jackalope trophies are hanging on the wall.



And final definitive proof of the existence of jackalopes. This one was probably taken unawares while watching the sand trout cavorting in the arroyo. This is the same class of proof as the mermaid remnant to be found in Tombstone's Bird Cage Theatre.

We are now all ready to say goodbye to the Buckhorn and to Dakota. It's not difficult to get back to I25 and leave Denver. I've feared the endless road construction between Castle Rock and Monument, but it's not bad at all. After a quick drive through Colorado Springs,

we arrive at the Broadmoor at 10:30. The gate guard confirms we are on the list and informs us we are to check in at the west side. We proceed around the loop road to another gate guard who gives us a vehicle pass and directs us to the valet station. The valets load the bags on a cart and take us inside to the counter. Check-in is quick, and the bellhop takes the cart through the halls narrating a mini-tour for us guests. On the way, we notice a bowling alley and a mineral collection in a display case. Photos of celebrity guests fill the hallway. Beyond the elevators is a lounge with a piano. Our (low-end) "classic" room is fabulous: big-screen TV in an elaborate wood credenza, massive crystal chandelier, padded benches at the foot of each bed, a big window looking out over the lake, and a dual-sink bathroom.

Unfortunately, I am so taken with bedtime preparations and research into breakfast opportunities the following day that I fail to photograph the room interior. Arriving late and leaving in a hurry the next day, we also don't get a chance to explore the property at all. This is a terrible shame, because our brief stay is eminently enjoyable. The Broadmoor is *definitely* going to be a destination for a more protracted visit in the near future (after our funds can recover a bit). The photos I've included herein are stock media from the hotel.



This is the lobby we saw arriving late and leaving quickly the following morning. Beautiful. Spectacular.



Saturday October 3 - Cripple Creek

Everyone has to take a bath in the expansive bathroom with two shower heads, and by the time we are ready to leave, the breakfast places have stopped serving breakfast, and the 12:00 check-out time is upon us. We call the bellhop, who then passes the check-out intention to the valet, and the car is waiting by the time the bellhop has loaded our bags on the cart and followed us to the curb. Upon hearing of our intent to visit Cripple Creek, the bellhop wishes us good luck (apparently, everyone here knows gambling is the real reason to go there) and suggests a visit to Victor, an almost-ghost town where a few people still live (sounds like several towns in Arizona). After a bit of on-the-road research and pathfinding from the back seat, we stop at an IHOP on the way to I25. Of course, it's crowded like any IHOP will be on Saturday morning.

The original plan was to visit the nearby Broadmoor Seven Falls before proceeding with the rest of the day. However, the Broadmoor desk clerk had told us last night that even though the hotel provides a shuttle to Seven Falls, since they are fed by snowmelt (as the case with Yosemite), they won't be as spectacular as earlier in the year (which I take as meaning "disappointing"). We decide to forgo Seven Falls and proceed to Cripple Creek.

US24 is a local artery (lots of stop-lights) until we get out of the Springs. The road threads through mountain curves for several miles then settles to rolling hills and broad bends. The highway becomes the main road through mountain towns like Woodland Park (which deserves a return look all on its own) and Divide, just enough to throw a few more stop-lights in our way. We turn onto state 67, which wends into the mountains. There are *lots* of people parked along the road at overlooks to mountain valleys, photographing the aspens changing.

We pass the road to Victor. We pass a roadside diorama of the Flintstone characters and some dinosaurs. Coming around a bend, see the our first objective: the Molly Kathleen mine.



Standing by the shaft-head after getting our tickets. The tour starts with fitting hard-hats and boarding the skip (a two-level elevator cage; we are packed like sardines with two other visitors into the upper and then get hoisted up for the lower cage to load)

Our guide is a youngish hard-rock miner (~30-40) who is experienced with the equipment and mine structure; it isn't just a memorized script. He demonstrates some of the pneumatic equipment, such a wall drill and stope drill and winch used by child miners to deliver tools to workers assigned up inside stopes and an ore bucket that catches a device for dumping the load into an ore car.

At the beginning of the underground part of the tour was this "diorama" of two miners engaged in the pre-automation method of drilling - one man would crouch holding the drill on his shoulder and the other man would strike it, and between blows the holder would rotate the bit in his hands. Nearby was the classic "widow-maker" drill, and the guide operated it for us briefly, after telling us to close our ears for protection (this happened a few times). It was indeed Very Loud. Of course, there was no hearing protection originally,



until after filtered cigarettes were introduced, and the enterprising miners would use the

filters as earplugs. The guide explained the danger of silicosis - inhaling the dust from the drilling and blasting with devastating effect on the lungs. This was later ameliorated somewhat by new features of drills to run water through the steel to slake the dust.

The other figure here represents a "tenderfoot" or "greenhorn", a neophyte miner dressed in his street clothes and possessing only rudimentary equipment.

The holes, 6 to 10 feet long, were then loaded with dynamite. The early form of dynamite was transported frozen at 55 degrees; the mine was 50 degrees, so they needed to use stick thawers. As we walked away down the drift, the guide started a recording of the noise of an underground blast, after the miners moved away several hundred feet - a muffled boom and roar.

I overheard a discussion between our experienced miner guide and another member of our tour: "I'm planning to get a mine. They're cheap" "Yeah, they're cheap." During the tour, I picked up the understanding that a mine has to produce more than some threshold to be considered to be a "producing mine", otherwise it is an "exploratory mine" with lower regulatory burden but still potentially profitable. This is the sort of operation amateur or weekend miners would own and operate.

Some more mine terminology we pick up: Crosscuts are horizontal tunnels that lead to exits. Drifts are horizontal tunnels that do not lead to exits.



Muckers shoveled waste rock into the rail carts, and had to move a quota of rubble or they would loose their jobs. A plaque on the wall informs us that the famous boxer, Jack Dempsey, was a failed mucker from the mines in the district.

The "widow-maker" drill suffered from a limitation of needing a floor-to-ceiling support post. This "jack drill" was a later remedy - the pneumatic piston merely needed a good footing, and would hold the drill in position during the operation. The guide explained that these jack drills were dangerous; having been around pneumatic equipment myself, I know that carelessness can cost you a significant injury, even the loss of fingers or limbs.



Originally, donkeys were taken down into the mines and used to draw the ore cars. Later mechanization such as this "steam donkey" or "air donkey" replaced the living animals with somewhat more reliable means. The big tank is pressurized (with steam or (nowadays) compressed air) and feeds a pneumatic motor.

After blasting reduces a large volume to rubble, a drag scoop is employed to pull the material to where it can be more easily loaded. As our guide explains this, he also points out the large rock next to him on the rail - high-grade gold ore. The gold is contained in a band of fluorite.



A stope is a more-or-less vertical excavation to follow the ore body. This stope proceeds almost directly overhead at a steep angle for more than 700 feet. Way up there, sitting on a cross timber, is a "miner" who would brace the drill on the timber and cut more overhead holes for loading with dynamite for the next blast. A job not for the faint of heart.

At this point in the tour, the guide introduces us to a "man-mover", an open-air rail carriage

driven by an "air donkey" like the one above. He explains that it was invented by Mollie's son Perry but not patented, and the rights were stolen by others. Apparently, Perry also invented or improved the "air donkey". I'm getting a little suspicious of all the inventions by an involved part-owner of one Colorado mine among many. The tour group boards the "man-mover", and we are treated to the same sort of trip miners in the day would take - through the dark, because real miners would not light their candles until at the worksite.

At the end of the ride, we are in an open area with a work bench with tools for repairing equipment. Our guide had been in the mine with his brother at some point (apparently working), for he showed us a one-man track car (like a bicycle) and told us how he and his brother had been playing with it and tried to see how fast they could go - took a bend too fast, fell off, and his brother had to have a series of stitches in his abdomen. This was told in the process of describing how safety rules are made: "It only takes one screw-up."



After leaving this open area, we pass into a little underground mine museum. When the mine was played out and switched from actual mining to tourism, the operators cut another tunnel for the tour - and discovered another rich vein. The ore was processed into gold - not enough to turn the mine active again, so they put the gold on display for the tour. Later on, when the mine was on hard times, they had the gold valued: More than a million dollars! The gold was "moved to a safe place"... and never seen again!

There were around 500 mines in the area, and many of them contacted. The Gold King and the Ajax communicate with the crosscuts tunnels of the Molly Kathleen; we saw the connection to the Gold King.



At the end of the tour, our guide showed us the standardized signal code for what amounts to a telegraph between the crosscuts and the hoist operator - in previous days, there was no standard, every mine had its own code, and miners moving between job sites didn't always operate on the same code as the hoist operator - with occasional fatal results.

Our tour is at an end. We stuff ourselves back into the skip and experience the ride back up. Outside once again, we toss our hard-hats into bins for cleaning and reuse, and look around the grounds a bit. Here's a cute cafe built out of a railroad car, with a big miner's hard-hat as an awning. It is lunchtime, and had this cafe been operating, we would have definitely gone in; alas, probably due to the stupid virus, it is not operating, and so we can't.





Mines are places where old heavy machinery is found. An antique steam tractor is old heavy machinery. Therefore, an antique steam tractor is found at a mine. Even though steam tractors have nothing to do with mines. It's still a handsome piece - built by Case.

I think the sawmill is legit. We learned that the slopes of the Rockies formerly included oak and ash, but the hardwoods for miles about were cut down for use as mine timbers. That's why pretty much the only trees left standing are the pines and the aspens.





Just below the level of the Molly Kathleen shafthead is another shafthead enclosed in a weathered wooden shell. In the foreground is a collapsed shaft. This is classic Colorado mining motif. There are many places in Arizona dotted with abandoned shafts, some collapsed, some bordered with fencing, but all dangerous, and every few years we hear of some kids who fell into an abandoned shaft. I'll bet that's even more true in the mountains of Colorado.

The strip mine (open-pit style) still operates profitably in the area.





We are now finished with our eminently satisfactory visit to the Mollie Kathleen mine, and the town of Cripple Creek beckons from down in the valley. We get back into the car and proceed down the hill.

A few hundred yards from the Molly Kathleen is the Visitors' Center. The lady behind the counter informs me that the excursion train is seasonal, and the season is over. So much for riding the train. While we're here (using the restrooms), we look over the exhibits describing the history and life in the mining camps and the fortunes made and lost. We also overhear a tip about the donkeys being shown in town - these donkeys are the descendants of the animals originally imported to the area and used in the mines, and they have been assigned "historical landmark" status (I wonder if the Oatman donkeys have been afforded similar privilege).

Here in the Visitors' Center is a scale model of the Mollie Kathleen. This is what 1000 feet underground looks like as a cutaway.



Back outside in the parking lot is another view of the strip mine on the top of the hill and more relics of underground mining in the intervening valley. A placard nearby informs us that the strip mine is being operated responsibly by Newmont Mining. I once owned stock in Newmont!

Leaving the Visitors' Center, we proceed to the town and park. On closer look, the storefronts having signs offering their wares are all empty. Walking up and down a bit confirms that many of the historic buildings now house casinos. At first, this confuses me,

since Cripple Creek is not on Indian land. Later on, I learn that the state legislature has granted a particular license to the town of Cripple Creek. After an initial attempt to find a more colloquial lunch place, we enter a big hotel/casino, the Double Eagle, where I'm sure a dining place can be found. We get scanned for temperature and get a wristband, and then we can go downstairs to the casual dining facility (clearly formerly a buffet, but now a regular restaurant) and have a late lunch at 5:00. All the time we are sitting there, "ding ding ding beep beep beep" is coming from all the slot machines out in the casino area.

After "lunch", we can resume our walk down the street. This was originally the mining stock exchange. Then the Elks Club. Now, a beautiful old building that is not obviously being used for anything anymore.



The town is built on a slope, not quite as steep as Jerome, but enough where the streets are at different levels, including the east and west lanes of the main street.

Ordinarily, Cripple Creek celebrates an annual Donkey Derby Days as a fundraising event. With the virus "crisis" this year, it has been replaced with some other, more low-key activity, and these animals are available for closer inspection, as Faith and Charity are now doing.



And for petting.

It's already pretty late, and the lights are coming on in the casinos filling the street floors of the historic buildings along the main street. We don't know that there's anything more to do or see, so we get back in the car and proceed down the street. Jerri spots some actual shops, and I attempt to find parking. This is actually a paid spot, but I suspect that at the end of the day, an impound won't be as quick as our popping into a few shops. On the wall above the tiny parking lot is a mural of life in an imaginary mining town, complete with a female blacksmith swinging a hammer at the right side.



There are several more disappointing empty storefronts, a strange "antique" (knick-knack) shop (with junk), and a pretty good candy shop where we load up on chocolates, yogurt-covered pretzels, and pricey truffles. There's a tee-shirt shop next door, but we don't bother; we've seen enough now. On the opposite corner is a lovely Victorian-style building with an elaborate cupola. We drive further down the street, mostly seeing more small casinos. We identify the "opera house" (now their community theatre), and there are two or three other museums here but are closed now. Time to leave Cripple Creek.

Parting shot at the town welcome sign. Yes, we have indeed been at Cripple Creek.



On the way back, we stop at the Flintstone attraction, but it's on private land and the sign on the (open) gate says "No Entry" - so it's just for looking. Long drive back along the darkening mountain road. Woodland Park is lit up and attractive - definitely looks like a place to explore on a future visit. Finally we get back to Colo Springs and I25.

Heading back north to Denver, shortly after Monument, the construction traffic I had been fearing appears: bumper-to-bumper stop-and-go traffic for miles and miles. Eventually, the reason appears: two lanes merging into one to avoid construction. But even past it, traffic is still pokey slow, until finally we pass some heavy machinery at work *not* obstructing traffic in the free lane (just the rubber-neck effect) and at last the speed picks up. Upon reaching Denver, Charity activates her cellphone GPS guide and directs us round-and-round past construction and a massive street party scene and finally onto 17th Street but heading north, in the wrong direction. I make a U-turn in the middle of the street when traffic permits and stop at the valet station in front of the Oxford Hotel. Our bags are quickly transferred to a cart before our car disappears, and we are at the desk with the welcoming clerk and then up the elevator to our room in short order.



The bathroom has the tiniest sink I've ever seen. The tilework preserves a taste of Denver's oldest still-operating hotel - classic black/white hexagonal pattern on the floor and tile "bricks" around the tub.

The room stock includes a small bottle of whiskey and another of bourbon, and a price list of the items on the night stand: \$30 for whiskey, \$45 for bourbon, \$5-\$10 for other (candy) items. It's nice that they warned us about what would get tacked to your bill after checkout, but I've sure never seen alcohol like this in a hotel room.





The view from window is terrible - a narrow shaft, reminiscent of the creepy feature in our Atlanta room several years ago but not quite so dark and narrow.

Jerri needs a dinner meal, but the girls aren't hungry, so they stay in the room while Jerri and I go back down to the street to Urban Farmer, the hotel restaurant on the corner of the building. She orders a burger, and I choose the fried octopus on the advice of our waiter. As an appetizer before dinner, we get the charcuterie "board" (plate, actually); it is expensive and has two lumps of cheese, a few nuts, and four small bits of toast. Underwhelming. Other than this, the meal is nice and the waiter is mostly attentive. We can look out on the street through the large wraparound windows at all the evening pedestrian traffic of mostly young people, including a *lot* of electric scooters. After dinner, we return to the room to find the young ladies already in their bed trying to sleep with the light on.

Sunday October 4 - High Tea and Red Rock

The next morning, Jerri arises unexpectedly early, and soon we have completed our preparations to leave. I try to call for the bellhop to bring the cart and ferry our stuff to the curb, but it seems that the phone, which is wireless, has been left akilter on the stand such that it is completely discharged and useless. As a consequence, we all carry our own bags to the elevator and put them on the curb while Jerri checks out and asks for the valet.

A view of our Oxford room in the morning. The view may stink, but our light-well window admits copious skylight. It's a nice room, but somewhat spartan; the chair next to the lampstand beside Jerri and the chair for the desk seen at lower right are the only bits of furniture for sitting other than the beds. I think I would have liked to have paid a bit more and gotten a room with a view of the street. But then, it would likely have been noisier.



While Jerri is settling our account, I look around outside. The Oxford is here because originally it was the railroad hotel, to serve rail travelers. Union Station is half a block away.



In a moment, the valet appears with our car, from the south and executes the same U-turn that I did last night. We quickly throw our bags in and drive around the block to Wynkoop and find a public garage (again, with help from Charity's cellphone). From there it is two city blocks to Union Station where we hope to find a breakfast place.



The entrances to Union Station are tricked out for Halloween. We enter and walk through the station grand hall (now facilities for the on-site hotel and dining areas, but there's still an Amtrak office) to the Snooze host stand. The hostess informs us that the wait for a table is 120 minutes. We are bemused that she said "120 minutes" rather than "2 hours", but the end result is the same - we're not going to wait here for two hours.

Instead, we start walking down 17th Street. I'm of a mind to find some unique breakfast place (like the "Home of the Denver Omelette" we found at the other end of the downtown district from here), but I have to settle quickly for a return to the Urban Farmer. After a *long* wait, we finally get our breakfast - huge pancakes, eggs Benedict, and a steep bill. Our not very attentive waiter tells us after the meal that 45% of the restaurant staff have been laid off due to the pandemic.

The restrooms are downstairs along with ATM, both of which are now required. Along the walls of the basement are photos of the Oxford in the early 1900s and the late 1930s and the gorgeous Art Deco style that is still much in evidence. After taking care of business, we return to the lobby and look around before really-truly leaving.

The lobby interior toward the big street-side window. It's not a large lobby, but it's comfy and antiquey-unique. The ornate fireplace appears to have a gas-powered grate; I'll bet it gets used in the cold Denver winter. Behind the railing below the front window is one of the two staircases to the basement level.



View of the lobby toward the desk. The cabinet or credenza behind the two armchairs holds box games for guests. Note the "O-H" motif mixed into the classic ceiling decorations. Over the desk is the second level; Faith and Charity discover a writing desk with a typewriter, some Oxford Hotel stationery, and an embossing press, and write out (silly) commemorative letters. I note that to the right is the passage to some of the meeting rooms, and to the left is the continuation of the staircase to the next level up, occupied by more meeting rooms and their spa. I guess that these old hotels like to try to monetize their reputations by offering a spa service - the Brown Palace does this, as well.

To the right of the desk is an ornate old-fashioned birdcage occupied by a live parrot.



To the left of the desk is the main staircase. Again, note the "O-H" symbology in the ironwork. In the stairwell are old photos and paintings associated with the Oxford and downtown Denver in the '30s era. Below the staircase is the other stair to the basement, and beyond it is the passage to the Urban Farmer.

In front of the desk in the ceiling is a skylight. Above it is that narrow shaft for natural light that our room window opened out upon.



Our visit to the Oxford is now really finished. Mom takes our photo outside the main entrance.

There are a lot of historical plaques like this one telling a brief story of the Oxford. I'm somewhat intrigued to see there is a suggestion of an official "walking tour" of "LoDo" - Lower Downtown. I might have to look into this for future activity options.



Now that we're back on the street, we follow up on an observation that Faith made. In front of the station on Wyncoop, she saw the "Tattered Cover" bookstore, so we saunter back there and go inside. There are shelves of a mixture of new and used books - like Powell's in Portland but not anywhere near the massive scale. Last time we were in Union Station, we found a small bookstore with the same name; I ask the man at the door about this and he tells me that, indeed, another branch of the "Tattered Cover" is in the Station but it is closed on Sundays. After looking around for a good while, the ladies buy some books, and then we exit and continue over to 16th Street and catch the free shuttle going down south.

About a third of the way down, I get the family off the shuttle at Larimer St and we walk over a block westward to Larimer Square. The girls notice a "Garage Sale" store at the corner, so we enter to look around and find an interesting collection of 60s-70s used clothes, furniture (such as a marvelous hi-fi with integral reel-to-reel recorder, and another that looks like a bar but incorporates a phono and an 8-track player), junk (old Instamatic cameras repurposed into desk lamps), and clothes. In the end, the girls don't buy anything because they've already spent their loose money at the bookstore. Continuing along the Square (pedestrian only, and despite the virus, it's quite crowded), we look into a few other places (including Pendleton, with very expensive blankets and jackets).

Now, part of the reason we are here is because I had been under the impression that Charity had not yet seen the 16th Street Mall yet. However, while we are in Larimer Square, she points out a barbeque restaurant sign over a set of stairs going down to an establishment below street level where she had been before with some friends. So at least, she has already been at Larimer Square.



Leaving Larimer Square. The "Garage Sale" store is on the corner in the picture, with one of downtown Denver's tall buildings behind it further down 15th Street.

Back on 16th Street, waiting for the shuttle, I snap a photo of the iconic Daniels & Fisher clock tower. We catch the shuttle and continue down to our ultimate stop at Tremont. It's still 45 minutes before our tea appointment, so we follow mommy into a Colorado tourist store (for postcards) and then back across to the other side to the Rocky Mountain Chocolate store. We get some more (pricey) truffles, and after leaving the shop and biting into some of our new treasures, Faith discovers a yucky defect with hers. She goes back inside to see if the lady will replace it, and comes back telling us that after profuse apologies, the lady had given her a number of free consolation truffles!





Walking down Tremont to the Brown Palace. It was a cold winter day the last time we saw this hotel.

As we get to the corner, the bells of Trinity Methodist beyond the skyway are chiming the hour.



Upon entering, we present ourselves to the stand by the concierge desk and are taken to our table just outside the main atrium area, right next to a display case with Brown Palace mementos. A server takes our tea orders and fills our glasses with ice water. Soon, individual pots of tea arrive, along with a three-tier serving tray with scones (clotted cream, lemon curd, and little bottles of strawberry jam are provided), finger sandwiches (cucumber, smoked salmon, and egg salad), and little dessert things like petit-fours. A musician on the grand piano is playing hit songs including the Charlie Brown jazz theme, Girl from Impanema, Happy Birthday, and several others. The music echoes from the polished marble of the seven-story atrium with the Tiffany stained glass skylight. Elaborate decorative lamps upon the walls contribute their soft glow. Waitresses keep our icewater classes full and keep topping off the teapots with hot water and asking us if we want more scones or sandwiches. I was not expecting the "high tea" to be filling, but it was.



Dad and his daughters enjoying their tea. The entrance to the spa is just beyond our table.

Mom and her daughters raise their teacups. This is early in the "meal", and the trays of the service are still full of their food morsels.



After a very enjoyable and memorable "high tea" experience, we arise from our table (after paying the pricey bill) and seek out restrooms (nice, unique, but small). By the restroom doors is the original antique-but-still-functional pressure gauge for the "artesian" well that supplies water to the hotel and the spa. Mom has a letter to mail, and drops it through the slot of the historic brass mailbox. Then we are through the door, past the doorman, and back on the street.

Returning to 16th Street, a crowd passes waving "save the wolves" signs - apparently there is a Colorado ballot measure for the upcoming election. After we board the shuttle, an old man with a walker asks if I'm from out of town (yes, from Arizona) and if I have a ranch - clearly a reference to my hat. We continue all the way up to Wynkoop and return to the parking garage. There's an outside pay station, but we can't enter the building where the

elevator to the garage is located without pressing the call button on the pay station and talking to the security guard, who takes my name. I speculate that he is confirming our connection to the car from the license plate photographed upon entry. After leaving the garage, we try to find the road past the Denver Convention Center with Big Blue Bear leaning against the glass windows, but the chaotic downtown streets defeat me and I go past the back side of Center rather than front. Oh well, maybe next time.

The next tourist destination is the famous Red Rock Amphitheatre. I continue to Colfax, then on to I25, then down to US6, then over to I70, and at last pick up the road to Red Rock park. This is a slow, narrow road past many parking areas until it arrives at the large main paved parking area below the stairs to the upper amphitheatre seating.

Giant outdoor theatre, capable of seating thousands, reminiscent of the outdoor theatre at Forest Park in St. Louis where we took in a show, but definitely Colorado. The great rocks on the sides and the one at the bottom of the slope obviously declared their potential to the original entrepreneurs.



The great sandstone rock on the north side. This is what you might have seen in pictures of the amphitheatre. Such a dramatic setting for show guests.



Beyond the stage is the urban core of Denver. I can imagine attenders at night watching the activity in the stage light below while the lights of the tall buildings glitter in the field of view.

While we are looking at the amphitheatre, we observe several crow-like birds with black and blue feathers and white accents begging and digging through the overflowing trash cans. We sit on a bench (there are no actual seats, but numbered spots on the benches) to imagine being there for a show - which there is, in a way; amidst the tourists taking in the spectacle, there are locals jogging up and down the stairs, a young woman doing hand-

stands, and two fellows boxing on the stands far below us.

Mom has been told of a notable gift shop at the Red Rock Park. After we return to the car, we descend to the Trading Post. What we find is, yes, there is a smallish selection of stuff for sale, but this is primarily the Colorado Music Hall of Fame, mostly of groups that had performed at the Amphitheatre: John Denver, the Astronauts, Grateful Dead, Glenn Miller Band, and many, many others. Jerri knows that the Lawrence Welk band performed here, but there is no mention in the Hall of Fame. Of course, most of the merchandise is associated with the music artists.

We also learn that before this was Red Rock Park, it passed through other owners who named it "Garden of the Angels" or "Garden of the Titans" to position it to compete with the more-famous "Garden of the Gods" down in Colorado Springs. For good reason, with all the great sandstone formations all around. Of course, in the slanting strata of the rock, I'm seeing more evidence of the worldwide Flood.



Having now seen the famous Red Rock Amphitheatre, we can leave the park and backtrack along I70 and I76 and I25 back to Fort Collins, about an hour and a half. The family visits with John and Becky and have dinner with them in their home and then we say goodbye for now. We take our girls back to their cottage and say goodbye for now. Our last night's stay is at Fort Collin's Elizabeth Hotel. It takes a little driving around to get to it, and having arrived, find there is no valet. Jerri checks in while I wait and brings a luggage cart out to the curb. After transferring the bags, I find that the room key activates the gate to the section reserved for hotel parking inside the Firehouse Alley parking garage. Firehouse Alley is apparently a local activity zone, and there are strings of lights stretched between the buildings. I was originally thinking that the Elizabeth Hotel was a historic or at least fancy hotel, but we learn that it is actually a boutique hotel similar to Aloft and the Clarendon in Phoenix where we stayed at for a Fan Fusion convention. The schtick at the Elizabeth Hotel is record players in the rooms and LPs available at the desk to borrow. Could be Fort Collins doesn't have any historic downtown hotels in the vein of Tucson's Hotel Congress or fancy ones like the Arizona Inn or Lodge on the Desert. At least our window (or rather, glass door) overlooks a proper patio, a much nicer view than at last night's Oxford Hotel.

Monday October 5 - Return through Colorado Springs



The morning light is more conducive to photography. Here's the Crossley record player in our room. No, we did *not* borrow any LPs to try out.

The lobby isn't grand like some places we've been (like the Broadmoor, but that is hardly a fair comparison) or elaborate (like the Oxford) but it is impressive and elegant in its own way. Often, boutique hotels aim at a bohemian or techno vibe, but that is not visible here.





Lovely winding staircase to the second floor.

Unfortunately, it doesn't go any further than the second floor. There is a playful "animal tea party" theme in the elevators.

The exterior of the hotel is what I had seen on previous walking jaunts in the town, and I had formed the impression of "historic/fancy". It certainly betrays nothing of "boutique". It was nice, not too expensive, and certainly provides easy access to downtown Fort Collins. It may or may not compete with the Kiva Inn for future visits.



The Elizabeth does not provide breakfast, nor are they officially associated with a restaurant (even though the Emporium, where we had dined before, is connected to the hotel lobby down a wood-paneled passageway). The recommendation is the Silver Grill Cafe, just two blocks away on Walnut. My original intention was to walk down there, have breakfast, walk back, and finish our ablutions before leaving, but it is already too late to do all that before the 11:00 check-out time. Instead, we reverse the steps of last night (transfer the bags via cart to the curb, get the car out of the garage with the room key, Jerri checks out while I load the car) and proceed up Walnut and fortunately find a curbside parking spot. The Silver Grill Cafe, established 1933, is Fort Collin's oldest restaurant, and cinnamon rolls are their specialty. On this pleasant October morning we choose to sit on the patio. The waitress is pleasant and helpful, the portions are a bit on the large side, and sliced and toasted cinnamon roll is an option to pancakes or toast.

Faith had left her sunglasses and box cutter in the car, and therefore on our way out of town we stop by the Target and hand them off and say goodbye one more time. Our road to Denver pauses at the Brass Armadillo from last Friday so we can finish what we started. We arrive at 1:00 (and the little cafe in the mall is open) and stay til after 4:30 (when it is not). It feels to me that this Brass Armadillo mall is considerably larger than the one we are familiar with in Glendale, 50% or even 100% larger. The best lunch option we see is the Subway on Kipling, and we have to work our way through the messy road construction to get to it. We then continue to I25 and on to Colorado Springs. Charity and Faith's housemate Savannah is a Colorado Springs native, and she highly recommends the Pioneer Museum downtown; however, by the time we get there it is too late to see or do anything. Our hotel for tonight is the Best Western at the intersection of I25 and Lake Avenue, the same road that runs to the Broadmoor. It's pretty sad, and it's in a sad part of town. Just outside the hotel are the buildings formerly occupied by a Village Inn and some other chain place, but they are empty now. After a quick look on the Internet, I locate our best option for a place open after 9:00 - an Old Chicago not too far away. Of course, I take the wrong turn and we end up back on I25, and it's all the way down to the interchange with Academy Boulevard before I can turn around. Even with this delay, when we arrive at the Old Chicago place, we have to wait about 20 minutes for a table. The place is nearly empty, the service is slow, and we sit in a cold draft watching New York beat Tampa Bay and the Green Bay Packers beat Atlanta. As we leave, we notice a guest who has gotten even worse service - a skeleton at the bar dressed in sportswear and holding a mug.

Tuesday October 6 - Bishop's Castle

The hotel offers a sad cereal-only complementary breakfast, but at least the breakfast nook is open. While we are sitting there and eating, we can overhear the conversation at the nearby table of four pastors discussing youth work and mission trips. I've learned that state highway 115 is actually Nevada Street in the city and runs through downtown. I identified the location of the Pioneer Museum and some parking garages around Colorado Blvd, so we *could* go up and peek in the (free) museum for a couple of hours. By Mapquest, it's one and a half hours to Bishop's Castle and just over five hours afterwards to Albuquerque; allowing a couple of hours at the Castle and two hours for meals and rest stops, that's ten and a half hours out of a normal twelve-hour day. Of course, by the time we leave the hotel, it's already just past 11, so a "normal" 12-hour day would get us to the next hotel pretty late (not that we aren't used to that). Jerri wisely advises against seeing the museum. We will have to put downtown Colorado Springs off to the next visit (maybe a return to the Broadmoor).

Our route takes us south on Route 115, skirting the edge of the Rockies, then the towns of Penrose and then Florence where we miss the unmarked intersection with highway 67. We stop at an antique shop to look around and learn that we just passed the intersection. The little shop has nice antiques, mostly (skinny) women's clothing (new, not antiques), and is pricey. I can't help noticing the amazing architecture for what used to be a small home - pillars and arches in the "music room", ornate fireplaces. The lady (who is merely working there, not the owner) tells us that the house was built by an oil executive. When we entered Florence, the town welcome sign had a couple of ore cars proclaiming "King Coal", and

there are other signs (e.g., "Petroleum Street") that indicate that the economic base for the region is energy. Since it's right in front of us and only a few blocks long, we take a quick tour of the "historic district" - gorgeous old buildings, several antique and thrift and knick-knack shops, several cafes and coffee houses, and every parking spot filled. Quite the contrast to sad Cripple Creek. May be a good destination for a future vacation, even though it's pretty far off the main road.

After we take the right road out of Florence, soon we are at Wetmore where 67 ends as a tee into 96. Based on my (poor) recollection of the map, I take the left turn. Many, many miles later, through non-mountain scenery, including the Pueblo Reservoir and a view of the city of Pueblo beyond but no sign of highway 165, it dawns on us that something is wrong. Getting out the GPS, it is confirmed we took the wrong branch of 96. It's a half-hour back to Wetmore and going straight past the intersection with 67. Okay, that's better, *now* it's mountain roads. Unfortunately, we are stuck behind a truck with a hopper trailer full of gravel, and it's struggling with the grades. We are poking along for seven miles at 25MPH before the first opportunity for the truck to pull into a turnout and let the line of cars behind it pass. Just a few more miles is highway 165! More beautiful mountain scenery, with the aspen turning yellow among the green pines.





Just beautiful. I'm noticing that the scenery here is just as nice as it was on the road to Cripple Creek, but there are no hordes of locals out with their cameras. But it *is* Tuesday, after all.

After a bit, we come upon a bunch of cars pulled off the road, and the suspicion that this is the Castle is confirmed by some large hand-painted signs warning visitors to proceed at their own risk. I find a convenient parking spot on the dusty shoulder, and we use the porta-johns available roadside. Above us looms our first glimpse of fabulous Bishop's Castle!





The path past the warning signs goes through a stone gatehouse with a working drawbridge.

I notice a side opening and try but fail to get Jerri's attention. Ascending a rough spiral staircase, I arrive in the room over the arch.



Through the door is the parapet of the gatehouse. Below, I can see Jerri below wondering where I am but unable to hear me call to her. I have to rush down the stair and catch up with her.

Together, we can now proceed to the amazing "castle" which is the life-work of James Bishop. A large sign at the gatehouse declares his alignment with Jesus Christ. Another large hand-painted sign inside the castle on the ground floor describes the legal trouble he has had with the state that has persecuted him without apparent cause; the jury at his trial exonerated him, and yet the judge ordered the sheriff to confiscate "one of his guns", again without any clear justification. Yet another sign reports that the gift shop burned down and therefore donations are important - even though there is a small gift shop just off to the side of the complex.

A stairway in the base of the "castle" leads up to the lower level with four large arches trimmed with iron filigree.



Stained glass windows (some broken, some marked with grafitti) admit the brilliant natural light.

Exceptional stained glass art.
Some of the panes bear writing;
could be dedicated to significant
contributors.



Betty Boop as an angel (I'm not entirely
convinced that's appropriate).

Iron stair to the main hall. Bishop did most of the work himself, not just fitting stone but welding the iron.



WOW

Breathtaking. The apex of the hall is a continuous skylight. Vast glass panels at both ends, with stained-glass accents (at this end is a wizard). A fenced-off storage area containing folding chairs indicates the main purpose of this hall. It's just awe inspiring - the vision of an individual man.





Through the glass doors, an iron catwalk encircles the entire structure. In this place, a short stair ends with this platform.

Further along is an extension or "lookout point", where Jerri is standing with the backdrop of the Rocky Mountain forest.





The gatehouse from the catwalk. The snack shack and the gift shop are to the right.

Bishop embedded artistic flourishes into his concrete work. Clearly a work of love and attention to every detail.





There are stairs (exterior metal stairs and rough stone circular stairs inside the towers) to a catwalk further up. Here is the end of the great hall with the dragon head at the end. I suspect there's a gas line up there so the dragon can "breath fire", rather like the one at Diagon Alley at Orlando's Universal Studio park.

The stairs inside the turrets allow visitors to climb to the top of the "castle" and explore the catwalks and platforms and cages up there. Jerri has had enough trouble with the steep, narrow, irregular spiral stone stairs with handrails that lack confidence, and I don't really see that there's anything up there to add much to the experience of this marvel.





The back of the castle with the other great glass panel - most of the ornate stained glass is on this one. The man shows the scale. Behind us is a little sawmill where Bishop converted trees from his property into lumber. Apparently, part of the dispute with the government came from Bishop gathering rocks from a wide area to use in the building.

We walk around to the front and visit the gift shop - mostly tourist junk, like you find at highway travel centers; only some postcards and a few tee-shirts have any relevance to the castle. I think it's too bad there aren't any books about James Bishop and the process of building the castle. Jerri talks with the storekeeper; she is the daughter of one of the men who helped with the work, so it wasn't entirely a solo job. Outside, I meet a visitor from Flagstaff - how strange it is that two Zonies would be off the beaten path at an obscure but impressive Colorado attraction.

Last picture of me giving scale on one of the two long flanking straight stairs to the level of the great hall. This was just an amazing experience, a visit to a spectacle that is not really promoted in the regular Colorado tourism literature, just something I happened to stumble across. The Mollie Kathleen gold mine and Bishop's Castle were the highlights of this vacation trip!



As we leave through the gatehouse, we pass a man sitting on the rocks who, from what I pick up from remarks overheard from other guests, was actually James Bishop. We continue down highway 165 toward Colorado City. We stop briefly at the beautiful Isabel Lake behind its earthen dam.



Our last intimate view of the fall aspen foliage in the Rocky Mountains.



The gas gauge is now dipping alarmingly through the last quarter-tank, but we get safely to Colorado City and a gas station which has a grocery store advertising Chester Chicken. We enter the store hopefully, but there is no obvious lunch counter; after we visit the restroom and are leaving the store, we see a deli counter where some people are getting stuff, likely sandwiches. Probably the Chester Chicken is sold at the deli department. We continue on

into town, and at the intersection with I25 we find the Three Sisters Tavern and Grill and a nice late lunch of hamburgers and chicken sandwiches. A spider sits above the menus tacked to the wall all through our meal, and I point it out to Jerri as we are leaving. Continuing on down south, we get through the Raton Pass with daylight, and get to Santa Fe at 8:00 where we pull off for an eat-on-the-go Wendy's meal. Arriving at Albuquerque, we get to our hotel at 10. It's been a full day, including an unscheduled detour the wrong way out of Wetmore.

Wednesday October 7 - Last Day on the Road

The Rio Grande Hotel is a nice place we've stayed at before. It's located at I40 and Rio Grande Blvd, which runs south to the old part of the city. The hotel actually has a shuttle to Old Town, but it probably isn't running during this stupid virus time, and we don't have time for it anyways.



The rest of the trip out of New Mexico is uneventful, other than seeing a blimp flying over our heads on the stretch of I10 from Lordsburg to the border.

We had tentatively planned to stop at The Thing outside Texas Canyon, just to see what (if anything) had changed, but Jerri is tired of traveling and is anxious to get back home and see how the cats have fared.