

Ormand Family Activity

To see the travelogue of David's visit to Canada, [go here](#)

May 2015: Colorado Visit

This year, our finances are recovering from various obligations over the past year or two, and as a result, our goal of visiting all fifty states will have to go on the shelf. On the positive side, this gives us a chance to visit my sister's family in Colorado, and see some things in that state that we have been wanting to visit. As well as some national monuments and parks so that Jerri can add them to her "passport" book.

In planning the trip to minimize time on the road, as well as reaching Fort Collins at a reasonable time, Mapquest tells us that the fastest route from Tucson to Raton, New Mexico, is through the scenic route through Globe, Showlow, and St. Johns. On the way, we pass the popular tourist attractions of Dudleyville and Winkelman. Charity and Faith are always telling me they wish they had grown up in the Arizona wilderness there and could introduce themselves as "the girls from Winkelman"*. Dudleyville is particularly attractive, lying as it does along the Gila River (which still flows).

The road between Winkelman and Globe descends into the mighty Salt River Canyon - obviously formed by a great terrain-forming flood in the not-so-distant past. At the bottom, between the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache reservations, is one of Arizona's great rivers, spanned by majestic bridges.



Of course, "great" and "majestic" are relative terms. The Salt is no Mississippi, but it's as good as it gets here. Faith gets a closer look from underneath the bridge.





Faith and Mommy with the rapids of the Salt behind them. Notice how Faith is taller than Mommy. Mommy recollects how she was here with church groups before, launching their inner tubes from the other bank.

Faith and her dad at the River.





The old bridge must have been built in the '30s or '40s, perhaps as a WPA project, in the closing days of the Art Deco era.

Standing on the old bridge, Jerri notes the difference in decoration styles.



The rest of the journey through Arizona is made through the hill country around Globe, the pine forest around Showlow, and the painted desert between St. Johns and the border. Crossing over into New Mexico, we arrive at the Zuni Pueblo, which isn't much to look at, except for the shops for Zuni pottery and jewelry along the main road. Photography is apparently discouraged without a license (which I imagine the tribal office would be glad to sell to you). The houses, at least away from the Pueblo, out on the farms, are a mixture of crumbling adobe and large blocks of sandstone cut from the buttes in the area.

We were intending to see the national monuments of El Morro and El Malpais that are on this stretch of road, and we get to the first park's

Visitor Center with an hour to spare. However, getting out of the car, we meet the park ranger who tells us the Visitor Center has just closed. I forgot about the silly daylight savings time change between sensible Arizona and our other Mountain Standard Time neighbors. So for now, we just get back in our car and proceed to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Dinner at Santa Fe is at a Mexican place south of the main road (my mistake; I was looking for the downtown area, but it turns out downtown Santa Fe is *north* of the main road) - each plate is accompanied by a characteristic New Mexico roasted pepper - tasty... but quite "warm". When we come out of the restaurant, the rain that has been threatening since leaving Showlow is finally falling, and I have to drive fast (to make up the time to Raton) in the rain on the twisty mountainous road through the Glorieta Pass. The rain lessens on the l-o-n-g road past Las Vegas, and by the time we get to our hotel at Raton has pretty much ceased.

The next morning, we go in search of a drugstore for some needed supplies. Like many railroad towns, Raton has fallen on hard times. Most of the businesses on the main road through town have closed. We find what we need at the Kmart, and then leave via a route through the quaint downtown area. Getting back on the interstate, we cross over the Raton Pass and stop at the Colorado Visitor's Center in Trinidad to get directions to the Great Sand Dunes national monument. Trinidad's interesting-looking downtown beacons to the east of the interstate; I would certainly like to spend two hours walking through it, but today is not the day. After leaving the interstate at Walsenburg and driving into the New Mexico hill country for more than an hour, we arrive at the Great Sand Dunes.



We are familiar with the Sand Dunes phenomenon from the more picturesque White Sands monument in New Mexico along our normal route through Texas. Same story - water action carries the particles eroded from the surrounding mountains and deposits them in the plain, from whence wind action carries them to the dune field. In this case, the water action is a perennial creek,

which is more popular with the visitors (including vans full of school-age kids) than the dunes themselves. Faith and Mommy experience the creek along with the crowds who were there today.

Contextual photo with the mountains in the background, which provide the sand grains washed down by the creek, which are piled up in the dunes to the left (west).



The dune field is really enormous. Some of the dunes are quite high. At the Visitor's Center we learn that people will get polished wooden surfboards (we see some of these for rent at the gift shop of a "resort" outside the park entrance when we leave) and "ski" down the sandy slopes. We see some people up on the slopes doing this while we stand gazing at the tall dunes.



We don't have the time or the equipment to advance on the dunes, but we cross the stream and walk across the rock-strewn bank with our bare feet.

The real dunes are quite a distance from the stream. Faith and I hike out of the pebbly stream bank to the top of the first sandy riser, just so we can claim we've been here.



After finishing our visit to the Sand Dunes, it's past the normal lunch hour. Walsenburg is too far away, so instead, we visit the town of Alamosa. We find that Alamosa is the boarding point for the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad.

<https://www.coloradotrain.com>

Faith waits at the station platform to depart for parts unknown. But it won't be this visit; maybe we will be back to ride the train someday.



It takes the better part of an hour to get from Alamosa back to Walsenburg and the interstate, and thence a non-stop trip through Colorado Springs and Denver to Fort Collins. We arrive in the dusk and chat for a while, and then retire to our Fort Collins hotel for the night. This is the only night we will stay in Fort Collins, since with the CSU graduation activities, every hotel is booked. We will stay in Loveland the rest of the time.



My sister Becky, her husband John, oldest son Jonathan, and daughter Savannah. There is another son, the middle child, Matthew, who has a busy life, and we see him twice, briefly.

The cousins. I'm glad they relate well, and only wish they could be around each other more often. As it is, Jonathan goes with his cousins to Elitch Garden and the Capitol, and Savannah shares the adventures the following day. Actually, the two pictures here were taken at the end of our visit, since Charity was unable to travel with us by car due to constraints of her work schedule, so we bought airfare for her to Denver International.



After a late morning, we head back to Denver to get Charity from the airport and to spend a day of (mostly empty) fun at Elitch Garden. Originally, in the late nineteenth century, the Garden was set up by the Elitch family on their land and provided to Denverites as a public park and event venue - very much like the Elysian Grove was in Tucson. But whereas the Elysian Grove was eventually built over with homes (after the springs dried up), Denver's Elitch Garden survived and was bought by the Six Flags corporation and now operates as an amusement park.



After arriving, we head to a roller coaster and spend a fair bit of time in the line. After getting off the coaster, we meet back up with Mommy and have lunch. Then the young people go off in search of other roller coasters and thrill rides, and I go about with Jerri on the tilt-a-whirl and carousel and other low-impact rides. Like the Ferris Wheel, from which I catch this view of the park and Mile-High

Stadium.

And Denver's skyline.



In front of the Ferris Wheel is a big floral clock. It is coming up to 4:00pm, which is when the park closes.



www.elitchgardens.com



After leaving the park, we took advantage of the long daylight-savings afternoon to take a look at Colorado's Capitol. We ditch the car and walk toward the "mall", and see this clock tower. Pretty impressive.

This is the Colorado Capitol, with its golden dome. Wow.



Also seen in the area is the United States Mint. Becky suggested that we could visit the Mint and take the tour; however, it seems that, unlike the Bureau of Engraving at Fort Worth, tours must be arranged by reservation in advance, and only on the website, and when it tells you that all the tours are booked, there is no way to find out when the next available spot is.



Calling them does no good, they tell you to use the website to reserve a tour. Idiotic. Almost like it was run by the federal government.



The clock tower we saw on our walk in turns out to be part of the Denver city government building - really quite impressive on its own right, being across the mall from the Capitol.

Steps lead up from the street to the hill upon which the Capitol is perched, and more steps to come.





The thirteenth of which is "one mile above sea level"

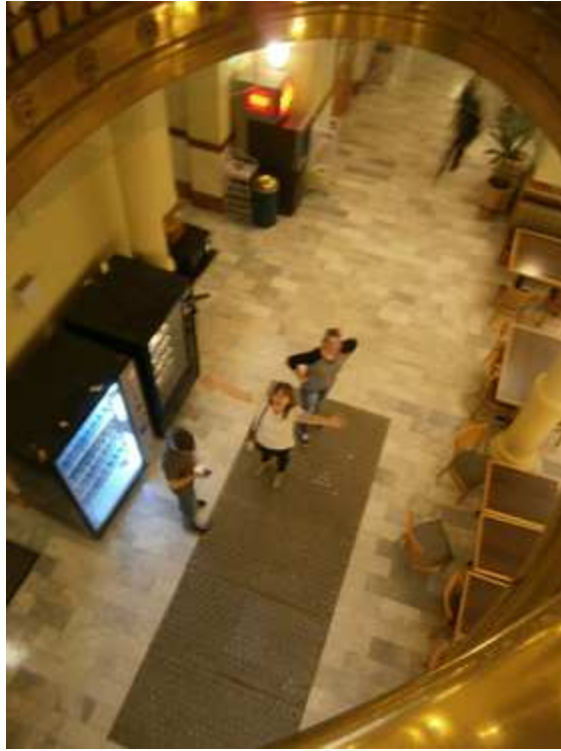
Big deal. Flagstaff is higher than Denver. Heck, *Raton* is higher than Denver. But I guess Denver is unique in that it is approximately (and the thirteenth step is exactly) 5,280 feet above sea level.



We arrived at the Capitol just ten minutes before they close it to visitors, but the guards are nice about it, and let us through the metal detectors to try to find the gift shop. We don't actually find the gift shop, but we do get to see some things inside, like the interior of the Rotunda. The guided tour takes people up there. Rather grander than the old Arizona capitol building, but I think Iowa's

edges this one out.

They appear to have a rat problem in the basement.



Our short tour complete (although we were not actually asked to leave), we come out on the east side to find Pocohontas bewailing the killed buffalo.

The spires of Denver's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Per the website, they have tours of their Roman Catholic glories, but it won't happen this trip.



www.denvercathedral.org



The Denver Masonic Scottish Rite Cathedral. Included only to point out that Tucson's is rather grander.

The First Baptist Church building. Apparently operated by the American Baptists - "progressive christianity", and no real explanation of their beliefs and mission, other than a lot of pride in their pipe organ. Similar to Westminster Presbyterian in Tucson.



www.fbcdenvver.org



Outside the Justice building are these peculiar white statues that somehow symbolize legal proceedings.

Outside the Denver Public Library, the horsey on the giant chair is ready for a story.





On the way back to the car, we pass a "British pub" with a London-style phone booth outside. Of course the young people have to play stuff the phone booth. This completes our *first* visit to Denver.

The next day, accompanied by Becky and Savannah, and under sporadic rain showers, we roll over to Boulder for a couple of free tours, starting at the Celestial



Seasonings Tea Company. Their characteristic artwork style decorates the walls of their cafeteria and the boxes of their tea.

www.celestiaseasonings.com/tours



The tour starts a chance to sample some of their tea flavors, followed by a video of the hippy origins of the company. Visitors are required to put on hair nets (and for some of us, beard nets) before entering the processing areas. We learn some new things about tea, hibiscus, peppermint, and other herbs for infusions, and finish up with a walk around the packaging area. Any chance to see robots,

conveyor belts, sensors, and actuators is sauce for my goose. The tour ends in the gift shop, where Charity loads up on tea boxes.

Practically just around the corner is the Leanin' Tree greeting card company headquarters. Founded by two cowboys upon their return to the States after World War II, the artistic gifts of one and the entrepreneurial abilities of the other produced a thriving company, not quite as big as Hallmark, but after I see some of their cards, I realize I've seen their displays all over the place and didn't realize what I was looking at. The entrepreneur cowboy boss is still around, and is a big-time Western art collector.

Our visit starts with the free hour-long tour of the factory operations. We see their giant high-speed four-color printing press, the embossing and cutting machines, and the noisy envelope folder. There are pallets of stacks of printed card stock everywhere. In the back room is their distribution operation, where they box card assortments for shipment to independent sales points all over the world. After the tour, we walk around looking at the items in the museum - smaller bronzes and paintings. My favorite ones were giant oils (maybe 6 feet high and eight feet wide) of breathtaking landscapes by artist Bill Hughes. I'd put up a scan of one of the posters I got, but it would surely be a copyright problem.

After leaving the museum, we look at the large bronze sculptures outside in the garden. Faith appreciates a "steampunk" horse, put together of various items of scrap metal, including a boat propeller.



Some of the sculptures are "hands-on". Or, in the case of bronc-riding Charity, one-hand-on.

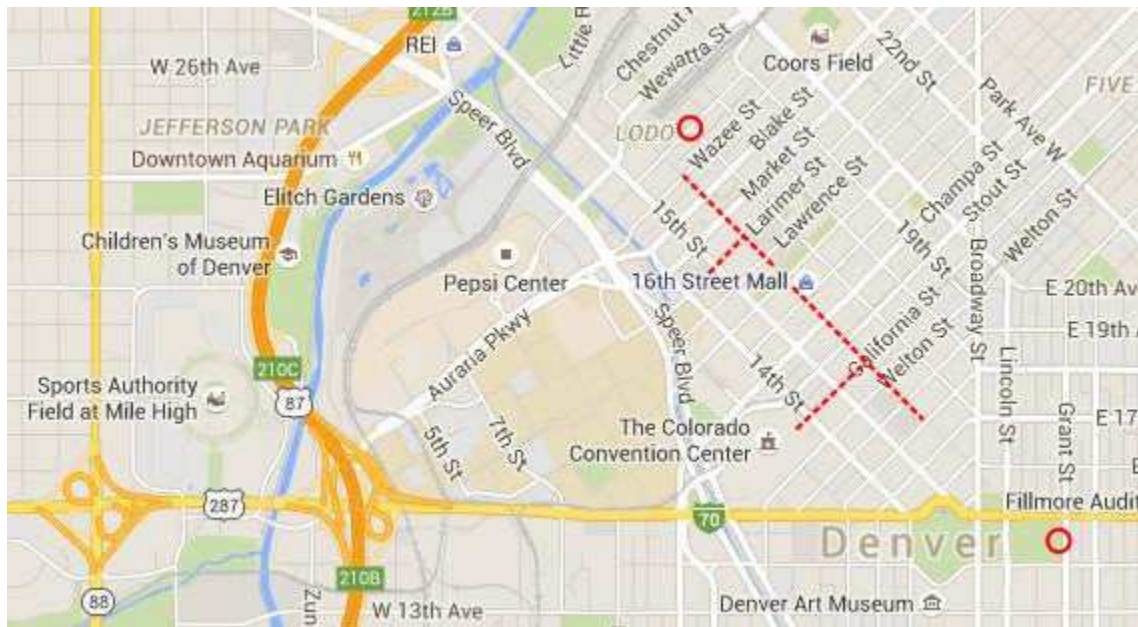
Family picture under cloudy skies with a bull elk in Boulder, Colorado.



www.leanintreemuseum.com

Our tours with Becky and Savannah are done for the day, so we return to their home and relax for the rest of the afternoon and the evening, playing games like Hearts and Forty-Two. The next morning, after taking family pictures (like the ones above), we say goodbye to our relatives and get back on the road to Denver to take Charity back to the airport.

After leaving the airport (why did Denver put their airport so far out of town?), we return to Denver for Part Two of our visit to Colorado's big city.



www.denver.org/things-to-do/itineraries/discover-downtown-denver



Getting off the interstate on Speer, same as we did two days ago to get to Elitch Garden, we ditch the car and walk over to Union Station. This focal building has gone through many transformations in its long life, and is now a transportation hub, a commercial area, and a hotel. By "transportation hub", it seems that the city buses and light rail come past here, and Greyhound buses depart from here - and it is still a station for Amtrak.

The interior is spacious and airy, with a bar and lots of sofas and benches and tables for socializing. The rooms on the upper stories are the hotel facilities.





Here's a detail from the picture above - Captain America, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Supergirl are circulating through the crowd, posing for pictures, and otherwise promoting the Denver ComiCon which will occur next weekend.

Outside again, moving south, the station fills the end of the broad city street. To the left is the Oxford, Denver's oldest hotel, still doing very well and maintaining its elegance, even if not so many train travelers lodge there any more.



Denver was, of course, a nineteenth-century Western city, but the twenty-first century is here now, and the city planners are doing a very good job of preserving and restoring the historic buildings and being careful of which old buildings come down to make way for contemporary glass and steel. I think the mixture of old and new is tasteful.

Sixteenth Street has been turned into a pedestrian "mall" - not unlike the core of downtown Fort Collins. There are free shuttle buses that move up and down the street, hitting the corner stops about every ten minutes. Lots of shops and restaurants and interesting architecture - like the D&F Tower, modeled on the Venetian campanile (bell tower), once part of a major department store, now home to condominiums. The "bell tower" role is still active, and the clock chimes on the hour.



Just off Sixteenth is Larimer Square, which I saw promoted heavily in the tourist literature so I figured we ought to find out what the deal is.

Lots of people visiting a variety of shops and restaurants. We pop into a knick-knack store (not quite "antiques") and a western wear place - and are amazed at the high-end prices. With the light strings over the street, it could be more of a nightlife place than just a shopping destination. I'm surprised to see cars parked in the street; I would have expected it to be another pedestrian-only affair. Not quite sure what makes it a "square".



More of the old and new, seen southeast after leaving Larimer Square.

On the Sixteenth Street "mall", we find an actual shopping mall, and spend a bit of time at a Barnes & Noble bookstore and a Rocky Mountain Chocolate shop. We notice quite a few young people all dressed up in formal wear - we find out later that it is Prom Night, which is odd for, in my experience, proms are held in event halls or ballrooms and the young people are inside, not wandering in



little groups through the city. I don't know if this brougham carriage is always here, or if it is taking advantage of Prom Night.



We don't go down Sixteenth Street all the way, but we get close enough to see the Capitol at the end, past the tall buildings (the red circle at the lower right of the map above).

Denver has a light rail system. Had I known this ahead of time and had the opportunity to plan, we would have parked elsewhere and ridden the train to Sixteenth Street. We had seen the train running parallel to the interstate a few days ago, so it would seem the network is extensive. Hmm, I wonder if it goes out to the airport? It certainly runs to the west...



... and under the Denver Convention Center, where we see this bit of locally-famous art. I'm sure there's a back-story to why the giant blue bear is peeking through the windows of the convention center.

As dusk approaches, the city lights start coming on. This old building is nicely trimmed with pink and purple pastel. Not sure the Chick-Fil-E advertisement on the building next to it is so tasteful, but it certainly contributes to an urban ambiance. As we return to Sixteenth Street, and dinner at the Cheesecake Factory (stuffed with Prom Night young people, mostly girls), I note the D&F Tower



is trimmed with subdued colored fill-lighting. Speaks to the character of Denver - as opposed to the garish neon trim of downtown Dallas. Or the virtually non-existent urban lighting of Tucson (but then, we are a "dark city", to accommodate the Kitt Peak observatories).



After leaving downtown Denver, we try to find the "unsinkable Molly Brown" house (she survived the Titanic disaster) which is southeast of the Capitol, but the streets are dark and absolutely *crammed* with parked cars, apparently left there by nightlife-seekers. We finally make our way out, and then I learn the lesson again: don't try to be smarter than your GPS navigator. Eventually we

find our hotel, some distance west of the interstate. Seems the hotel has a dinosaur theme going - including the usual uncritically-accepted scheme of geologic epochs.

I wasn't really going to, but since our hotel is already on the west side of Denver, and the town of Golden is not too far away, it would be a shame not to pay tribute to one of America's greatest characters - Buffalo Bill. This time, the GPS is confused by unanticipated road construction, but we go south on the main road in spite of its protests, and it ultimately comes around to guide us to the Buffalo Bill Museum and Burial Site.

Nice little museum about William Cody's youth, early life as a buffalo hunter for the railroad and an Army scout and Indian fighter, his spectacular success as a showman, and his not-so-spectacular failing as a businessman. He died broke but well-loved, and was buried where he requested, here on Lookout Mountain - in spite of the protests of other claimants to the honor, including his namesake town: Cody, Wyoming.



There was actually fear that the body could be stolen, so it was sealed under a concrete slab. There were even pictures of an Army tank sitting next to the gravesite, guarding it.

Scandal and controversy aside, we are honored to visit Buffalo Bill's grave.



www.buffalobill.org

We leave Golden and take the state highway down south to the last Colorado site we will visit on this trip - Royal Gorge. Winding back into the hill country, we come to and through Canon City (where another excursion train ride is headquartered) and up to the plateau marked by evidence of a terrible wildfire. Arriving at the Visitors' Center, we buy our admission and go out on the platform overlooking the gorge.



Actually, that picture was taken from the western side, after we had crossed the gorge in a cable tram. Faith was very quiet during the transit.

I couldn't help but observe that, like the Grand Canyon, the published story for the Royal Gorge is "a little water over a long time". But like the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, there is no way that the Arkansas River was going to cut the Royal Gorge in any amount of time. No, like the geologic opinion finally coming around on the Grand Canyon, Royal Gorge was "a lot of water over a little time".

On the other side, there are a few buildings including a theater, where we watch a video about the history of the bridge, including the 2013 fire that swept over both sides of the canyon and destroyed much of the tourist installations. Much of the recovery is completed, but we saw construction of new facilities still underway. Then we were ready to see the bridge and the 1000+ foot drop to the river beneath.



At the bottom of the gorge is the Arkansas River and the footing for the Rio Grande railroad track. I believe it is this track that the excursion train from Canon City takes for a view of the gorge from the bottom. That would be pretty cool. Didn't see any trains, not sure it is running at this time.



Previously, there was an inclined railway that followed a cleft from the top to this station on the river. It was damaged by the fire, and has not yet been restored, although I understood that it was being planned.

That's a 45-degree incline. Faith shuddered at the recollection of the Lookout Mountain inclined railway at Chattanooga, Tennessee.



The flags of all fifty were flying from the bridge support cables. Here's the one that counts.

A view from the Visitors' Center side. Note the cable curving below and to the side; there's another on the other side, which provide tension to counteract the swaying induced by the wind. It was *really* windy up there; I had to hold onto my hat the entire time.





Parting photo at the reconstructed water clock.

Turns out it was fairly late by the time we got back to the Visitors' Center, and the gift shop was already closed. By the time we got back to the interstate, down through the rest of Colorado, over the pass, the l-o-n-g road past Las Vegas, the Glorieta Pass, and Santa Fe, it is past midnight before we get to our hotel on the north side of Albuquerque.

There is a lot to see and do in Colorado. Maybe on a return trip someday we will ride the train out of Alamosa, see Cripple Creek west of Colorado Springs, and maybe look in on Bishop's Castle. Stock picture; we didn't see it, but it is not far from Royal Gorge, in the hills west of Pueblo.



www.bishopcastle.org

The last day on the road. We are going to make up for missing the national monuments on the way up. We come to El Malpais first, and Jerri gets her stamp, but we find out there isn't anything near the Visitors' Center to see; El Malpais is mostly for rough-country hiking.

Besides, "malpais" is "lava field" (which we see a lot of along the road in this region), and we've already seen a decent lava field at Sunset Crater near Flagstaff. So we just get back in the car and move a little further down the road to the El Morro monument.

www.nps.gov/elmo/index.htm



Here is how El Morro became important - a reliable water hole for travelers of all cultures across the New Mexico desert.

And here is why El Morro is important to us. Also known as "Inscription Rock", the sandstone cliffs are covered with human carvings from prehistoric Indians, Spanish explorers and colonial soldiers, the Beale pathfinding expedition, wagon trains of settlers, railroad surveyors, and



even modern people - until the Park Service put an end to the practice. Here, a man from Baltimore made his mark in a beautiful script.



This is the inscription that made it famous - Juan de Onate scratched his "paso por aqui" with a dagger point years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth.

At the point of the cliff where the wall turns westward, there is a forest of inscriptions. I note how the 19th Century types would cut a frame, smooth the interior, and make their inscription in a block font that reminds me of old gravestones.



Lt. Breckinridge was a member of the Beale expedition



The L. J. Rose party was a wagon train of settlers following the Beale trail to California. I believe it was this party that got to the Colorado, was attacked by Mojave Indians, and turned back to Santa Fe. This connects to a history we learned in Kingman.

Lt. Simpson and Mr. Kern were commissioned by the federal government to copy down the inscriptions in 1849. At the Visitors' Center, there were books with good photos of all the inscriptions and the stories behind them, and we probably should have gotten one. I haven't found any decent on-line resources, although www.lapahie.com/El_Morro_Mesa.cfm is a start.



Leaving El Morro, we look back and see the scene that those early Spanish and American travelers must have seen.



This was the end of our tour. The rest of the day was spent following the route we had taken to get here. Slowly driving across the Zuni reservation with a tribal policeman right behind us. Through St. Johns and Showlow and Globe. Back through the Salt River Canyon. Past Winkelman and Dudleyville and Mammoth. And back home to Tucson.

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* Actually, they don't. But they should. Or maybe I'm just projecting...