

Ormand Family Activity

August 2010: Texas and Oklahoma
(and Arkansas)
(and New Mexico)

Since the last Great Summer Adventure, we had been planning the one for this year. What had been forming was a road trip through Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas; Branson, St. Louis, and Kansas City, Missouri; some president hometowns in Iowa; Nashville, Knoxville, Gatlinburg, and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and see kinfolk along the way in Texas and Oklahoma. However, due to our unplanned trips to deliver furniture and Freshmen to Colorado and Northern Arizona, our plans got trimmed to just the Texas and Oklahoma parts, with a few days through Arkansas to pick up... yes... some National Park Passport stamps for Jerri!

Carlsbad Cavern

The first stop is Carlsbad Cavern in New Mexico (www.nps.gov/cave/planyourvisit/cave_tours.htm). We've been there before, but just for the "stock" self-guided tour; Jerri has found out about some other tours - an old-fashioned lantern tour and a visit to the King's Palace - and has been advised by her sister to see the evening departure of the bats.

The obligatory shot at the park marquee.



The lantern tour starts just after the cavern opens for visitors. There is a great deal of undeveloped passageway in the Cavern, and at least one of these isn't too hard for visitors to walk on holding candle lanterns, like the early visitors used. The thing is, the entrance to this undeveloped part is quite accessible from the developed part of the cavern, and the rangers don't want all and sundry to know about it. So I can't tell you. Sign up for the lantern tour yourself, if you want to find out!



You can actually see a lot by candlelight, and the effect is totally different than the bright electric light in the Big Room.

But photography really doesn't work. We are doing pretty good to get these candle-lit face shots.



The lantern tour is a bit over an hour. Chris the ranger guide is really quite good, with lots of interesting stories, including some of how parts

of the made-for-TV movie "Gargoyles" were filmed right here in this area of the cavern. After we emerge and walk past the other park guests looking curiously at our candles and hand them back in, there are several hours before our next scheduled tour. The rangers recommend the walk-in from the natural entrance. So we do.



It really is an impressive cave. You have to be there to feel it. Or smell it, for that matter; there are dozens of cliff swallows soaring around and dumping.





Two sisters are reacting to the different environment with abnormal silliness. From what I saw (and remember from my own case), it has this same effect on the younger children of harried parents.

Decades ago, visitors descended into the cave via this scaffold. Of course, with their lanterns. No graded and paved paths. We learn that the open shaft so altered the airflow patterns that the bats abandoned this part and moved further in. Later, when the sealed elevator shafts were put in, this entrance was blocked off.



Some famous, huge formations in the Big Room. Faith did a creditable photography job. In the middle of the room, at the "top of the Cross", there is a rope hanging from an opening in the ceiling. This leads to the "Spirit World" that Chris the lantern guide told us about, of formations of remarkable purity and translucency. It seems that the rope was placed by a very courageous fellow that ascended the sides and crossed the ceiling to the opening by free climbing! Gives me the willies just to think of it...





The ladder that the National Geographic photographers descended into the Lower Cave a long time ago. More willies: we heard from several rangers the story of the first explorer, cowboy Jim White. He made a rope ladder like this one and let it down from the edge of the Natural Entrance from as far as he could get.

Carrying his hand-made kerosene lantern, he climbed down into total darkness. He reached the end of the ladder, still in mid-air. He let himself down from the last rung; still couldn't touch ground. So... he let go! Apparently he only dropped a few feet, but he couldn't have known that, and the cave is *enormous*. Brrr....

At the end of our self-guided tour of the Natural Entrance and the Big Room, we go up the elevator (we saw the inside of the elevator five times this day) and hang out in the gift shop until the time for our King's Palace tour arrives.

The King's Palace, Queen's Chamber, and Papoose Room used to be available to the public as part of the self-guided tour. Then the Service discovered that upwards of 1,000 cave formations were being broken off and taken by unscrupulous visitors, and reserved



these rooms for a guided tour. Jim White, the original explorer, named most of the rooms and significant formations, including this room. The pictures of this formation induced the President to send an investigator to the cavern; he was so impressed that he stayed for several weeks, and the National Park designation followed soon after.

Now, while we were on the King's Palace tour, our ranger guide, who was quite an amusing and personable young woman, made a few statements that caught my Worldview-tuned attention:

- Billions of years ago, when the continents of the earth were all together in a super-continent called "Pangaea", this area was a shallow sea, and there was a tremendous coral reef that stretched for hundreds of miles and got to be hundreds of feet thick. Then it got buried and was compressed into limestone. Then the hydrogen sulfide gas from the oil fields beneath reacted with the rainwater leaching from the surface to form sulfuric acid, which carved out the cave and left huge deposits of gypsum.

Wow - where to begin? I can accept that the limestone is the remnant of a huge primordial coral reef (which formed in the near-perfect world before the Flood), although it could just as easily been a fossil accumulation formed by water sorting action, like fossil accumulations elsewhere like the Grand Canyon and Utah and Montana. There are certainly coral fossils in the limestone. But how did a petroleum bed (which *is* there; the area is alive with walking-beam pumps), which is ordinarily believed to be a fossil formation itself, come to be underneath a huge coral

reef in Pangaea? I can accept the notion of Pangaea, too; but the whole story could just as well, or better, be explained as part of the Global Flood as the stock "shallow seas and millions of years" line. Besides, there is *no* independent evidence for "millions of years"; this is part of the evolutionary assumption about fossil-bearing sedimentary stone that cannot be dated with radioisotope methods.

- If you want to hear a different story of the cave's formation, come back in about thirty years when the official opinion changes.

The honesty is refreshing. This is Thomas Kuhn's changing scientific paradigm principle in action. Up to now (and still largely extant), the story of the Colorado River forming the Grand Canyon through billions of years of slow erosion was the official line. The story is slowly changing, as the relevant scientists are coming to terms with the fact that the Colorado could *never* have accomplished that much erosion. Now, the (creationist-friendly) idea of a large lake and a natural dam breaking, allowing a large quantity of fast-moving water to carve the Canyon quickly is coming into favour. The official Park Service story *does* change! And this ranger isn't ashamed to admit it!

- After describing all the materialistic, evolutionist theories about the cave formation, the ranger explained that, while the King's Palace tour used to be a public, unguided tour, it was changed into a limited-access guided tour because visitors were breaking off formations and taking them as souvenirs. The Park Service takes seriously the mission to preserve the cave for the enjoyment of future generations. But wait... isn't "preserving for future generations" a **moral imperative**? How does one justify any sort of moral imperative from a materialistic evolutionary worldview? It's just wanting your value-free atheist materialism cake and still get the benefits of a theistic cultural tradition.

We are finally done with the cave. But we come back in the evening to watch the bats leave for their nighttime feeding. By 7:30pm, a large crowd has gathered on the stone benches at the (smelly) natural cave entrance. A ranger on a PA set is explaining the phenomenon. We are expecting a dense cloud of squeaking bats to swirl out of the hole like the "smoke" that attracted cowboy Jim White to the cave. It was somewhat anticlimactic. The appearance of the bats was surprisingly sudden, but it wasn't very dense, and in went on until after it was too

dark to see. So I'm glad we saw it, just to say we did... but I wouldn't have gone out of my way to see it, knowing what I do now.

Six Flags Over Texas

We are now done with New Mexico... for now. Next morning we proceed into Texas. After several hours we arrive at Monahans, and have lunch with Jerri's niece Jennifer and her children. Then we continue on to Fort Worth. Just outside, a *terrific* rainstorm arises (it was like driving into a firehose), and we discover that the *new* windshield wiper blades mounted just before we left are defective; I have to pull to the side, get out in the rain, reseal the blade on the arm, and hope it holds. Eventually we drive out of it, and arrive at my Uncle David and Aunt Judy's home in Hurst for dinner and a good visit. It is late when we leave and get to our hotel.

Next morning, we drive the short distance to Arlington, and Six Flags over Texas!



Incidentally, the six flags are: Spain, Mexico, France, the Confederacy, the United States, and the Lone Star state flag. Well, okay, then there

are five flags over Arizona: Spain, Mexico, the Confederacy, the United States, and the Copper Star state flag. I'm not impressed with claiming the failed French colony as part of Texas heritage. When we go to "Tucson Meet (Eat) Yourself", there are Polish flags, Danish flags, Turkish flags, Swedish flags, Lithuanian flags... by the same logic, then, there are *lots* of flags over Arizona! But that's okay; this is just more Zonie ripping on Texas, a team sport that never fails to entertain.



What can you say? It's an amusement park. You stand in lines. Sometimes the lines are in the shade...

Sometimes they're not. It is *smokin'* hot today. As you can see, real Zonies come dressed for it. Girls just bake (mommy got a good burn out of it).





Now, this was interesting. Embedded Systems in Action! For a stiff fee, you could get a "Flash Pass", this little wireless dongle that would discover the line waits of the more popular rides, and allow you to reserve a spot. Then you just show up at that time, and pretty much walk right on. A great idea (if expensive). For more money, you can get the

"Gold" service, and reserve your spot without adjusting for line waits. I'm just impressed that the Six Flags company had an embedded design house invent and build this system as a service to guests and an additional revenue stream.

Tilt-a-Whirl, Texas style. The cars are bulls in a rodeo.





Six Flags appears to have a franchise with DC Comics. They are big on Superman, Batman, Justice League... and, of course, Wonder Woman. Here are three wonder women. We agreed that the character dressed for the part was a bit petite to be a convincing Wonder Woman.

In the afternoon, we meet Bob and Maribeth, Jerri's sister and brother-in-law, for dinner. Then we go back to the park for more. In the evening, just before the park closes, after we get soaked on the "wild rapids" ride, we go up in the "Oil Derrick". Magic Mountain/Six Flags in the Los Angeles area has a similar observation tower; of course, the one here is Texas-themed. From the top, at the west horizon, we can see the light-trimmed tall buildings of downtown Fort Worth. At the east horizon, we can see the glowing buildings of downtown Dallas, where we will be tomorrow.

Downtown Dallas

Sunday morning, time to start the day right. The hotel has a unique waffle iron. Texans are something else... But we've had themed waffles before:



Which isn't to say Texas is mickey-mouse. No, but really... we got up a bit leisurely and got to the breakfast room a half-hour before the breakfast time was supposed to end. Unknown to us, the kitchen workers had already turned the iron off! And even though they were bustling around taking other things down, they didn't tell Jerri who was standing right in front of the iron, staring at it. We guessed it was because they didn't speak anything but Spanish (which was true enough). Jerri was pretty steamed. Eventually the waffle was, too. The lesson: Don't get there late. The staff in pretty much any hotel is going to be non-English speakers, and can't or won't help you.

The plan for this morning is to see the *inside* of First Baptist Dallas (www.firstdallas.org), of which I saw the *outside* on my previous solo visit. We arrive just after the service had started, park in the guest area of their parking garage, and a greeter in a special red vest directs us to the front door of the old building. There's a crowd, and the usher actually ushes, and guides us to a seat. Big choir (in robes), orchestra, pipe organ, stained glass... even kneelers on the pews; that was a new one in a Baptist church! We sit under the balcony. Video monitors hanging from the ceiling relay what the numerous TV cameras are picking up.



Big production.

Sunday School is the hallmark "recipe" of FBC Dallas, and at the end of the service, they introduced recent converts via the monitors - every one was the product of a Sunday School group. I would have liked to have witnessed the Sunday School class, and sent Charity and Faith to "spy" on the FBC youth operation, but oh, well. After the service, I play tourist and snap a few pictures of the auditorium, and then we go into the Criswell building behind the old building. Elaborate nursery/preschool lobby, in a "beach" theme, complete with in-wall salt-water aquarium. A short walk to the north, and we are in the cavernous "vestibule", packed with church people gathering their children and greeting their friends. We notice the pastor is in a "reception line" with velvet ropes and ushers regulating the flow of people who want to shake his hand. Simply amazing. In this area is a scale model of the new campus, to be constructed after the present buildings (excepting only the historic building) are demolished starting in September.

I would have liked to have investigated more, but we need to meet David and Judy for Sunday dinner back in Hurst/Bedford. After lunch, we return to Dallas for more touristy stuff. This time, we start with a visit to the Old Red Courthouse (www.olderd.org) and the Visitors' Center inside (www.visitdallas.com/visitors/visitors_center). The very helpful girls give us some maps and some good tips. Yes, there is a museum in here, but we don't pause here (and pay admission to it); it looks like today will be a JFK pilgrimage.



Behind (east) the Old Red Courthouse is the "JFK Cenotaph", a modern-artsy interpretive symbolic "tomb" for the dead Kennedy. Only moderately interesting. Hot.

In front of (east) the Old Red Courthouse is Dealy Plaza, named for and sporting a sculpture of a Dallas benefactor. North, past the pools, is the building where Lee Harvey Oswald fired upon the Presidential motorcade from the 6th floor corner window (right side, second window down, window looks to be propped open). We pay our admission (less a discount coupon from the Visitors' Center), get an audio wand (that never works right for me), and take the elevator to the sixth floor (www.jfk.org).



Which houses an *amazing* tribute to John F. Kennedy, his family, campaign, and events from his presidency, including the start of the space race and the Cuban Missile Crisis. And an even more *amazing* collection of data about the assassination, including the hearings, the conspiracy theories, the evidence, background of Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby - not the least of which is The Window, left pretty much as it was. Information overload. We spent three hours up there.



And this is the "grassy knoll" that the experts declared "95% certainty" was the source of other gunfire. Except that experts reviewing the experts work disagreed. For me? Who cares. He's dead. It was tragic. Life and the world go on.

So we're done with JFK now. The fountain in Pioneer Square is running, and sillies are putting their feet in it; they're not the only ones - Sunday afternoon has drawn quite a few downtown. There's the Old Red Courthouse back there. Lovely day. Hot.





The Bryan cabin again. Still no placard. Why the "Cenotaph" rates two placards and the Bryan cabin is entirely anonymous is a Dallas mystery.

Then we walk south a few blocks to Pioneer Park, where the stagnant pool is and the sidewalk with the brands of the great ranches of the Dallas area and the inlaid map on the corner with the great cattle trails. Fort Worth makes a big deal of being on the famous Chisolm Trail. Turns out Dallas was on the Shawnee Trail. Charity and Faith are making the best of boring bronze cattle.





Looking northwest over the stagnant pool and the Dallas skyline and the 1.5:1 scale bronze longhorns. After looking at the statues, we check out some of the graves in the Dallas pioneer cemetery. Fun times.

The sculptor actually did a good job on the details. Here is a bronze fly on the flanks of the trail boss' horse. Charity finds it appetizing.



At this point, we leave Dallas and drive out to Campbell (or Greenville, or Commerce) to meet Bob and Maribeth for dinner, visit a while, and spend the night. The following day, we return to Dallas for some more touristy stuff.



Like seeing the Guadalupe Cathedral at noon, just as the bells begin to chime.

I love the perspective of these shots. Looks like the bell tower is rubber.

The Cathedral is across the street from the Chase Building. Pretty darn impressive. Actually, though, I think Dallas' skyline would be more impressive if it were denser, and these amazing tall buildings were packed in tighter, like they are in Chicago.



Visitors can enter the Chase Building (yes, there is a Chase Bank branch inside at the street level) and take an elevator up to the Sky Lobby. For free. Mommy isn't as nervous here as she was in the much lower "Oil Derrick" yesterday.

www.dallassky.com/bldg04.htm

Very decorative.
Water fountains way
up in the sky. If you
look up through the
glass roof, you can
see the "hole" in the
Chase Building.
There are four sets of
elevator shafts; the
interior ones end at
this level, and the
outer ones continue
up on each side of
the "hole".



The view is pretty good. I
just wish the Sky Lobby
had faced east/west, so we
could look at downtown
proper. This is the south
view. The north view looks
down on the Cathedral's
bell tower and on into the
Arts district, where we will
be going next.

Back on the ground, we walk back to where the McKinney Avenue
Trolley (www.mata.org) line ends... just in time to see the trolley

leaving! So we pop into the Dallas Museum of Art to stay cool. Wouldn't you know, it's closed on Monday! But the gift shop is still open, so we look at Frieda Kahlo books and other wierd stuff, and when we've seen it all and ready to leave, we find the next trolley rolling up!

The trolley is free, and old-fashioned, like the Old Pueblo Trolley back home. We ride to the end of the line, looking at the nice shops and eating places along McKinney Avenue. On the way back, we hop off at a Mr. Goodcents sandwich place, walk over to Red Mango for some yogurt, and then catch the next trolley back to where we parked.

Fort Worth

Still Monday, we're done with Dallas (for this trip), and ready to see the iconic Fort Worth Stockyards as a family. In about 30 minutes, we're driving into downtown Fort Worth, and staying to the right, we swing around the Tarrant County Courthouse and onto Main Street, across the Trinity River, and in just a few minutes we are on the red brick streets of the Stockyard district. There's free parking north of Billy Bob's Texas ("The World's Largest Honky-tonk" - doubtless more Texan hyperbole, but I'll let 'em have this one) (www.billybobstexas.com), and we walk across the vacant lot to the historic Stockyards.

Three girls on the catwalk, where the buyers used to inspect the cattle lots. This is looking south; the tall buildings of Fort Worth are visible on the horizon.





As noted before, the old original pens are unique - brick floors, concrete water troughs, and small - not much more than ten steers per pen. And the place is kind of dilapidated, like the owners aren't too interested in maintaining their historic tourist site. Although really, I guess not too many

tourists come back here; they're all up front in the museums and the shops.

Looking east. After we're done here, we go into the Cattle Exchange building and find the Stockyards Museum, which is full of miscellaneous old stuff (including the cursed wedding dress - as it was passed along, the brides lost their husbands at a young age), including a



picture of "Niles City" - an enormous cattle processing operation, maybe a mile square, maybe more. As I stared at this picture hanging on the wall, I managed to recognize the back side of the Cattle Exchange and the Rodeo Arena. The pens we had just left were a tiny part of the ultimate extent of the Fort Worth Stockyards operation known at the time as "Niles City". The pens stretched eastward from here to those buildings, and westward about the same distance. Incredible. The smell must have been phenomenal - cow manure and urine, carcasses and blood, smoke...



This is what tourists come to the Stockyards to see - the twice-daily "cattle drive" down the street, just like it was in the late nineteenth century. Except then, I don't think the streets were paved, and the herd would have been a *lot* bigger. But it gets the idea across. Even if the

cattle and the cowboys were probably bored of it, I think it is a valuable historical reminder, for those who can appreciate it.

The back end of the "drive". These are legitimate 1:1 scale Texas longhorns. I think they are also in better condition than the cattle of the day would have been, after being driven hundreds of miles along the Chisolm Trail!



It was my desire to spend the better part of a day looking over the beautiful city of Fort Worth. I spent only maybe three or four hours here on my previous solo visit, and I would like my children to recognize that there really *are* some good aspects to Texas (including the River Walk in San Antonio). About the only thing we have time for is look at the fountain

architecture in the Water Gardens in what was formerly "Hell's

Half-Acre". Notice Mommy sitting at the top of the stair; she preferred not to descend and experience the fountain "up close and personal".

The teenagers enjoy the best of the fountains.

After this, we leave Fort Worth and start driving back to Commerce. About ten miles out of the city, Jerri realizes she doesn't have her camera! So we go back in, back to this spot, Charity hops out and runs over to where Mommy was sitting (in the picture above) - and the camera is still there! It's little adventures like this that put the spice in family vacation trips!



Hot Springs, Arkansas

The next morning (Tuesday), we say goodbye to Maribeth, and Faith drives eastward from the Dallas/Greenville area to Texarkana. Jerri has us stop at a few Visitor Centers and convenience shops looking for postcards, but it seems nobody has any. Then we turn north and drive through very green country and some mountain clouds and rain showers, and arrive at what I think is the most interesting stop of our tour: Hot Springs, Arkansas.



It's pretty hard to tell where anything is from the road atlas, so Jerri drives through town (not knowing any better), and turns up this mountain road, at the top of which is this observation tower. From the top, we can see the town, but the descriptive placards don't give a clue what you're looking at. They do, however, tell the history of the area, from colonial days when Indians and trappers discovered the hot springs, to when the first settlers came attracted to the springs, to the booming nineteenth century when there was a "wild west" town here clustered around rotting wooden shacks over the springs for

bathers, to the turn of the century, when Hot Springs became a playground for the Golden Age elite, eventually including gangsters (like Al Capone) and baseball players (like Babe Ruth and the Yankees). The wooden shacks gave way to ritzy hotels (like the Arlington) and glorious marble bathhouses comparable to anything in Europe. The hot natural springs were accredited with healing properties, which eventually induced the U.S. Government to build an Army Navy convalescence hospital. In the early times, the federal government made Hot Springs a "national preserve", which meant that the government would "regulate" access to the resources, but it was still pretty much a laissez-faire chaos. After the springs lost their significance as a therapeutic opportunity, and commerce at the bathhouses fell off, the feds turned it into a national park. So today, there is a national park "embedded" within the city of Hot Springs.

After descending from the tower and the hill, we identify what we saw from above as the Arlington Hotel, the Army Navy Hospital, and Bathhouse Row, but where are the springs? I had the expectation of finding steaming caldera and streams. I will learn I'm not the only one.



Here's Bathhouse Row, on one side of a wide, beautifully landscaped street. In the middle of the Row is Fordyce Bathhouse, which has been renovated as the National Park center and museum (www.nps.gov/hosp/planyourvisit/fordyce.htm). Inside, we inspect the turn-of-the-century Roman-style baths and the medical treatment facilities.

The Men's Room. In the stalls are huge bathtubs, wrap-around showers, and other plumbing fixtures. Under the stained-glass skylight are these marble benches around the fountain, where the clients of the day would cool off from their baths and "quaff the elixir" (drink the spring waters) from the fountain. Very elegant and posh.



On the top floor was a parlor where men and women could socialize, separately or together, with a piano, a Victrola, and billiard tables. There were also (separate) sunning roofs where visitors could soak up some Arkansas rays (in the nude) after their baths. There was also a well-equipped gymnasium.



There were also extensive facilities for the treatment of various ailments through the hot baths, massage, and other means, like these. Some of their implements look like torture tools. Maybe the clients thought so, too, or maybe they were so "blinded by science" that they didn't care. That was

a fun time! (Not very different from our own). Surprisingly, the Park placards at some of these displays of intimidating nineteenth century paraphernalia informed us that they actually provided a benefit!

But where are the springs?

Well, the Fordyce Spring is in the basement! Along with the tanks and the extensive (bewildering) plumbing and the machinery for the elevators, the bathhouse provided a view of the source of the healing waters for curious visitors. Of course, the bathhouse owners felt obliged to dress it up a bit with quartz crystals and such...



Now, Hot Springs is kind of a canyon town, like Bisbee, but not as... interesting. We also learned that the hot springs are at the foot of the hill on the east side, upon which the observation tower stands, so we were actually looking over the unseen springs when we looked down at the town. When the town was... civilized... the springs were mostly capped and the hot water piped to the bathhouses. Originally, the water would drain into a stream running between the two hills, but it was a sanitation problem, and the feds (as part of the "national preserve") built "the arch", a stone culvert, over the stream, which itself became the foundation for the wide street we now see.



On the north side of the Fordyce is an ornate walkway to the hill in the back. On either side of the walkway are fountains, which we originally took as just decorations. But no - they're hot!

Continuing on the walkway to the rear, we discover a quaint little reconstruction of what the springs might have looked like in the day. I'm guessing this spot looks the same as from the early 20th century, when the walkway and the ornate stair was built.



We climb the stair at the back of the walkway and find "The Promenade", a beautiful brick walking road with benches and landscaped park grounds. Up here, we find another lady who is looking for "the natural springs". Per the walking map, they're up here somewhere.



Running back down from the Promenade is a little path with iron rails. We take it, and discover... a "natural spring". Or at least, a recreation of what one might have looked like. The hot water runs down the steep hill and ends up in a series of pools in a delightful city park.

I dabble my hands in all the pools and streams and fountains. By the end of the day, my fingers are throbbing and the skin is sensitive. I must have gotten a slight burn from the 143-degree (naturally) water. I don't know how the

early visitors handled it. After "civilization", the bathhouses tempered the hot water with cool water down to 100 degrees.

Across the street from the park is the Arlington Hotel (www.arlingtonhotel.com).

We peek inside.

Magnificent! It's a bit pricey, but it would be a real experience, much like the Gadsden or the Copper Queen hotels, and the hotel has its own baths for guests. Plus, the hotel is in the heart of the historic downtown, allowing easy access to the Park, the walking trails up the mountain, and the shops across the street from Bathhouse Row, nestled at the foot of the western mountain. On our way back to the car, we visit a few of those shops. Downtown Hot Springs is struggling like downtown Tucson, but not as badly. We will come back tomorrow.



The next morning, armed with information gleaned from the internet, we return for one last look at Hot Springs. Just before downtown, I stop at something I saw yesterday, and want a closer look at - the Daughters of the Confederacy monument.

Yep, thought I saw it - The Confederate Battle Flag. DoC or not, southern or not, it's a unique town that will publicly display the un-P.C. "racist" Confederate flag.



So, back to Bathhouse Row. Most of the bathhouses are repurposed or being renovated. Only two still function as bathhouses. The original approach to public baths, modeled upon European expectations that were in vogue more than a hundred years ago, was the "Roman"

bath - men and women separate, after disrobing, an assistant puts you into a tub and lathers you up. Then an optional Sitz bath. Then a needle shower. Then being packed with hot damp towels to "help you to perspire freely". Then a cool-down time. This service is still available at the Buckstaff (www.buckstaffbaths.com). Very structured. Very traditional. Not very modest or private (although you *can* wear a bathing suit if you want). And, you can walk in, pay \$24, and do it.

The Quapaw is a bit more updated. You can do a private bath, or you can sit in a co-ed hot pool (proper bathing suits required). Now, I might not have gone for the traditional deal at the Buckstaff, but I could have gone for *this* at the Quapaw. And \$18 for the pool. But you have to give 24-hour notice. Oh, well.



www.quapawbaths.com



All right, one more interesting thing. In Roman times and in European settings, it isn't only soaking in the hot water that is therapeutic (which I can understand, kind of like Ben Gay or sports medicine), but also drinking the water. But, the water is just *spring water*. They monitor the composition, but it is unremarkable, unlike the water at Manitou Springs, Colorado. Still, clients at the bathhouses were encouraged to "quaff the elixir", filling their cups and pots at spouts like this one.

But they still do that! Here is a modern hot-spring bottle-filling station. And lots of locals were coming up in there SUVs and battered pick-ups to fill their five-gallon jugs with warm water. I suppose this might be like Tucson and elsewhere, where you can fill your water jugs with filtered



"spring" water for 15c to 25c a gallon, only in Hot Springs, with its historical connection and constantly flowing water, it's free. Anyways, I fill a cup and "quaff the elixir" on the way to our next destination. I'm sure it will have added twenty years to my life!

Okay, *finally*: yes, we encountered pseudo-science! The Park Service fed us the story that the hot water now flowing from the springs originally came from rain water... 4000 years ago! I'll bet most people hear that, accept the voice of authority, and think, "wow, that's old water". But I thought, "how can they possibly know it was rainwater 4000 years ago?" After all, near us is the Agua Caliente spring, and though it doesn't flow hot water ("agua caliente") any more (thanks to stupid men thinking they can improve things with dynamite), it was *an artesian well* flowing from *an aquifer* like all the water in Tucson. Sure enough, the story comes out - Carbon-14 dating! For pity's sake. C14 dating is unreliable enough in its intended application of dating organic remains. As rain water (with whatever proportion of C12 to C14 might have been present 4000 years ago, which we can't know, since the proportion has never reached equilibrium) soaked through the soil, leaving behind its original carbon load and picking up non-atmospheric C12, how could it help but end up with an artificially old "age"? And after all, *diamonds* have C14 in them, but the "scientists" would never accept that these minerals were only a few tens of thousands of years old.

Fort Smith, Arkansas

Our last visit in Arkansas is Fort Smith. Originally, this was chosen because they have a trolley museum, and Jerri thought that would "ring my bell". Well, we never saw the trolley museum, just some tracks, but Fort Smith turns out to be very important from an American history point of view. Our first stop is the Visitors' Center, which is in Miss Laura's (www.fortsmith.org/visitors/welcome-center.aspx), a former brothel in the former red-light district in the halcyon days of the frontier. We got a very good tour, and only narrowly dissuaded Charity from getting a "I worked at Miss Laura's, Fort Smith" (or something like that) tee-shirt. Then we left to see the actual fort.

Unlike Fort Worth, the U.S. Army fort here has been significant enough to survive in large measure. Just across the Arkansas River was Indian Territory. Originally, a frontier stockade was built here as a garrison on the navigable river. Later, eastern Indians (like the Cherokee) migrating



westward encountered western Indians (like the Osage) who resented the intrusion. Violence erupted, and the U.S. Army needed to be near. Ultimately, the fort served as a stop on the "Trail of Tears", for eastern Indians on their forced marches to the Territory. The newer Fort was built just east of the old stockade. This is the Commissary (or victuals warehouse). Note the features at the ground level, where the original wall attached.



When the fort was built, there were two large buildings to serve as barracks and offices. One of these survives as the leftmost part of this building. Later on, as the Army post was no longer needed, the facility was used as a Federal Court and Prison, most notably by the "Hanging Judge" Parker. The

right part of the building was built (after much pleading for Congressional funds by Judge Parker) as a more humane prison. The original prison (holding cell, really) was the basement of the original building, and it was primitive and unpleasant.

Inside the "newer" building is part of the original cellblock, and a good set of displays about Fort Smith, frontier law enforcement, and the phenomenon of the Indian Territory. Seems that the



United States had no jurisdiction in Indian Territory, so outlaws could escape across the river. And the Indian Nations had no authority over United States citizens, so outlaws had no threat from officials on the other side. Eventually, things changed a bit, and United States Marshalls and their Deputies could venture into Indian Territory to apprehend criminals and bring them back to Fort Smith for trial.



Such as held in this courtroom, upstairs in the original building. Judge Parker officiated for most of this time period, and sent many outlaws to the gallows. The thing is, *he didn't approve of capital punishment!* Yet he made his sentences according to the law of the land. I thought this was

interesting, considering how judges in our day feel it within their right to act on politically-correct ideas outside the stated law (the "activist judicial").

And this is the gallows. Apparently, just like the movies, it really *was* kind of a morbid holiday when executions were performed. It's still a part of the local Fort Smith color; at Miss Laura's we got to play with a working model of a gallows with five condemned wooden men.



This is pretty much the last remnant of the wall. A concrete path marking the location of the original wall runs around the Fort grounds (similar to the marker for the Presidio wall in downtown Tucson), and the foundations of two of the bastions are still present. Interesting that Fort

Smith actually *had* a wall, when most western forts (like Camp Lowell in Tucson, and Fort Union in New Mexico, and Fort Davis in Texas) were just buildings. Certainly Fort Smith never was attacked or besieged, so those walls were functional but not useful.



Over the tracks and on a hilltop overlooking the river is the site of the original stockade. Nothing left but the footings for the two towers, and a flagpole and cannon. Down the hillside, to the river bank, and this view of the majestic Arkansas. The other side is Indian Territory, Oklahoma.

It's starting to get late. The Park Service has closed the Fort, and the museums are all already closed. This is a picture of the trolley rails and wires looking back at the bridge over the river to Oklahoma. It's a purely tourist, model trolley, not a functional public transit system like the trolley in Tucson is supposed to be; the guide at Miss Laura's explained something about how federal regulators declared that the low-cost trolley would have competed unfairly with other transportation modes, so the city chose to scale back the recreated trolley line. Another case of unintended federal interference in local affairs. Get used to it.





Turning around, I take a shot down Garrison Street at downtown Fort Smith. Given more time, and better condition for Jerri's feet, I wouldn't have minded a walk down to the church and back to look it over. Or a different season, maybe; it's smokin' hot today. But it appears to be an impressive and expansive downtown area, and worth a closer look. Fort Smith appears to be a very agreeable city to live in, in a very beautiful and green Southern state.

Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Later that day, we arrive in Pryor, at my Aunt Yvonne's house on the farm, and after settling in and dinner, we visit for a good while. Now, years ago, I remember a trip to Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and seeing a drama about the Tsa-La-Gi, the "Trail of Tears". Turns out that they don't do the drama anymore, but Tahlequah is still an important pilgrimage for Okies (and their descendants). So the next day, with Aunt Yvonne and her 11-year-old nephew Slade, we take a day trip.



One theme that comes up very frequently is how the Cherokee, led by their great chief Sequoyah who invented their syllabary written language, became a literate people. Here's a bilingual

street sign. I didn't get a good notion of how many Cherokee still use their language, much less the written form, in an English-dominated culture. Slade (who is part Cherokee, just a bit more so than I am myself) knows a few phrases.

www.cherokee.org/Extras/Downloads/syllabary.html

Our destination is the Cherokee Heritage Center (www.cherokeeheritage.org). After blundering around Tahlequah, we find ourselves on the Northeast State University campus in the middle of Freshman Orientation. I hop into the Bookstore and ask directions. Oops, we are on the north side, the Center is on the south side. We ask, but Charity is already enrolled at Northern Arizona, and is not interested in visiting at NSU.

We get to the Center just in time for the next tour of the "village". This is a recreation of what a 18th Century Cherokee village would have looked like in their original Georgia and South Carolina context. There are Cherokees in period costume at period activities, like this basket maker at her wattle-and-daub house. Note the large basket in the foreground; beautiful work.





The inside of the council house. The Cherokee society was matriarchal; male chiefs made the decisions, but they were subject to overrule by the leading Old Woman. Tribal membership was established through the mother, and married couples settled in the bride's village.

Contrary to usual (bow and arrow) expectations, the Cherokee used blowguns extensively! I didn't catch whether they poisoned the darts, but it didn't seem that the little darts could take down even a small bird or rodent. Here's our guide evaluating the accuracy of the blowgunner's aim.





And yes, the Cherokee did use bows and arrows. Their arrows were characteristic in having two vanes (one feather) that twisted slightly, producing a "rifling" effect.

The warrior demonstrates the use of his bow against an enemy hay bale. A bit further along, we find a group of men making arrowheads and spear points from flint, and a bit further, a woman making pottery. It was really an interesting visit, and all the Indians spoke to each other in their language, and the guide was teaching us useful phrases like "hello" and "thank you".



After the tour of the historic village was complete, we quickly looked at another village (unguided) representative of Indian Territory. It was the usual (western) clapboard buildings - house, church, blacksmith, general store, one-room schoolhouse - with the uniqueness of books and wall-hangings in Cherokee writing. Back inside the (air-conditioned) Center, we went through the museum. Two parts - one, how the Indians lived with the European settlers during the Colonial period, and two, how the Indian Removal Act came to be and how awful the resulting "Trail of Tears" was - families dragged from their homes, forced to march (actually sounded a bit like the Bataan

Death March) by United States soldiers, how white settlers were impatient for the Indians to leave before seizing their property, the suffering during the winter. I kind of think it was a bit heavy on the emotive side than the purely factual; I prefer a museum that simply presents the facts and allows you to draw your own conclusions, rather than drag you down the path of how you ought to react to it.

Still, I learned two things that I hadn't considered before. First, it was the much-beloved People's President, the Hero of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson, who really had it in for the Indians, and who was really pushing for the Indian Removal Act. Second, we often hear of how "the white man broke all the treaties with the red man". In fact, the U.S. Government (motivated by the Indian Removal Act) approached a group of Indians (since the Indians didn't really have any official or central representation) to negotiate a new treaty. Often, and in the case of the Cherokee, the group that signed the treaty on behalf of the rest was actually a minority position (most Cherokee did *not* want to be relocated). The (minority) party that accepted relocation left for the Territory on their own after disposing of their property, and arrived intact and prospered, while the other (majority) party that resisted the inevitable were forced (very unjustly and brutally) into the Trail of Tears. So the Indian/White friction that is so often reduced to emotional sound-bites was really more complicated.

Returning to Pryor, we took Slade and met his parents Steve and Mandy at Thomas Restaurant, where her daughter (and Charity's friend) Tasha was working. It was odd to be served by the young woman who used to jump on the hay bales with us as a freckle-faced girl. It was even odder to sit at the table and watch her serve her parents and little brother! It was neat to see the other patrons of the restaurant greet my relatives, their fellow Pryor citizens. That legendary "small town" feel. Lots of "Pryor Tigers" tee-shirts, too. But Pryor isn't so small anymore, and growing.

It was also odd to see the chairs in the restaurant carved with "D". Not "T" for "Thomas", but "D" for "Darryl", the restaurant owner. It was even odder for Darryl to appear from the kitchen where he works as a chef, wearing either scrubs or pajama bottoms.

Claremore, Oklahoma

The next day, we intend to visit my cousin Patty Smithee and her children and grandchildren in Tulsa, but on the way, we will stop in Claremore and see the Will Rogers Memorial (www.willrogers.com).

Will Rogers is the famous son of Oklahoma, mostly associated with Claremore, but born in Oologah, not too far away (and where his birth home is another historical preserve, not unlike the various Abraham Lincoln historical sites).



"I never met a man I didn't like." I knew Will Rogers was famous for being a commentator and for making these pithy "plain guy" philosophical statements. I also knew he met an untimely and tragic death in an aviation accident at Point Barrow, Alaska. I knew he was a real cowboy, especially a lariat twirler, who made good. I also know that most (especially young people) today don't know who Will Rogers was.

What I didn't know is how much show business he was into! I didn't know he got his show-biz start in a "Buffalo Bill" style Wild West show. I knew he parlayed his rope-twirling plain-talking schtick on the vaudeville stage; I didn't know that stage was the *Ziegfeld Follies*! And I could never have guessed how many Hollywood movies he made! Which was really his ticket to glory and fortune. Here we are watching a short movie of Will at home in Beverly Hills, directing sightseers to other stars' homes, dealing



with domestic issues, and trying to think up an idea for a screenplay.

I also didn't know he was into collecting saddles and cowboy art. Turns out he was pals with Charles Russell, whose work I've viewed in a gallery in Fort Worth. I would never have guessed that.



In one of the several theatres in the Memorial, we saw a video of the funeral events after his death. It was amazing how the attention of the entire nation was arrested by the death of Oklahoma's favorite son, and how many people came to the funeral. His body is now buried here in Claremore.

I also didn't realize how politically progressive ("liberal") he was, certainly fashionable in the Franklin Roosevelt days. And I didn't get a hint of his spiritual leanings, if I will meet him one day, or if his moral position was merely an acceptance of the civil religion of the day (which we are loosing in our day, but it was not and still is not authentic Christianity).

After this, we went on to Tulsa, saw my cousin Patty, her children Kendolyn and Jeremy, their spouses and their children. We also took a quick trip to a Tulsa used bookstore, kind of like Bookman's in Tucson, but not as well organized. Kind of like Bookman's used to be, on Tucson Boulevard, but bigger. And then we took Yvonne back to the farm.

Finishing Up

The next day, we say goodbye to Yvonne (which is tough, because she is starting to cry - some day there will be no more goodbyes) and leave on our trip back home. The destination for today is my Aunt Roxie's home in Canyon, just south of Amarillo, Texas. It takes a long time to drive across Oklahoma, and it's late for lunch when we stop for it in Weatherford.

Where I see something I haven't seen before. Interesting, but not surprising. Kiosks for placing your order inside a fast food place. Well, I suppose if you can now get your airplane tickets at the airport from a vending machine instead of talking to a counter attendant who looks at your driver's license and gives you a little folder with the cardboard tickets inside... why not fast food? The silly thing is, it doesn't really speed things up or allow more people to place orders (like the kiosks in airports *do*), and it doesn't reduce the number of workers, who still have to bring the orders to the counter, and it doesn't even reduce the incidence of mistakes, since people placing orders can't figure it out and the counter workers have to come around and help them. So... cute... but I don't really like it.



When we were visiting Uncle David and Aunt Judy, they told us about a trip their senior adult group at their church took. They told us about the giant cross at Groom, Texas. It didn't really register until we saw it ourselves looming over the horizon halfway to Amarillo. We stop to take a look - along with a lot of other people.

www.crossministries.net



Around the foot of the giant cross is a plaza with a number of statues depicting the Twelve Stations of the Cross. It's pious art, yes, but the sculpture work is quite good. Off the plaza to the north is a "visitors' center" with a fountain with another sculpture of Jesus, and a very well-stocked

Christian knick-knack store. Not a bookstore, really, just religious goodies, especially apparel. And Christmas Tree ornaments! Jerri restricted herself to postcards. On the other side of the Center is an

empty office area that looks like it may be staffed with counsellors in the future.

Off the plaza to the west, and really the last Station, was a Golgotha scene, and just adjacent to that was this Empty Tomb scene. You can go inside and see the angel looking at the empty shelf. Jerri here is getting into the spirit of the event!



Next to the tomb, in a little building, is a replica of the Shroud of Turin, along with a narrative of what we "know". I don't know for sure, I don't really care to take a position, but it is a significant relic, and I was glad to see it, and to see the Face imprinted in the cloth that has aroused so much

speculation.

All in all, it was a very inspiring visit. This was no mere civil religion, this was Christianity, although with a bit of a pious, even catholic air about it. I thought this is a great witness; nobody who is attracted by the giant cross and checks it out can claim ignorance of Christ and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. On the other hand, it does draw detractors. When we left, someone had put a DVD in our windshield wiper. When I looked at it later, it was an anti-Obama diatribe. Not what an unbeliever needs to see...

We continue on to Amarillo, turn south, and arrive at my aunt's house in time for dinner. We meet my cousin Sharon, her husband, her step-daughter Caitlyn, her son Brian, her two daughters-in-law, and all her little grandchildren. My cousin Sarah's son Sam was there, too. We have a good visit, including a brief discussion of something else David and Judy told us about - the big "Texas" drama (www.texas-show.com) in Palo Duro Canyon nearby. Won't be this trip, but I would like to see it sometime.



Then it's on to Clovis for our midway hotel stopover. The next morning we get back on the road, and drive through Roswell. Turns out Roswell was the remote, isolated location picked by Dr. Robert Goddard for his rocket experiments. Here at their municipal museum is an actual launch gantry and actual rocket used by Dr. Goddard.

Unfortunately, we arrive at 9:00, and the museum doesn't open til 10:00. Just as well, we don't have time for it. I'll bet it's a good one, though.

There's a lot of real rocket or space or atomic scientific stuff in this part of New Mexico.

Unfortunately (depending on who you are), the primary "spacey" attraction Roswell is famous for lies on different lines.



Silly, really. But they must make a pile of it, because it's everywhere. Even the streetlamps have the alien eyes on them, so clearly the city government gets into the local culture. And obviously Coca Cola has their regional emphasis.

We continue through Roswell, and Artesia (which is a little town with a beautiful downtown area with lots of bronze sculpture, including an impressive tribute to the petroleum industry - www.artesianm.com), and arrive at Cloudcroft (www.cloudcroft.net). On our way out, we went through Cloudcroft on Jerri's sister's recommendation, but got here too late to see or do much. Now it's earlier in the day.

Cloudcroft started as a resort town created by the railroad, so it's a synthetic, not an organic town, and its primary industry seems to still be as a resort, for people to stay in lodges and enjoy the cool altitude and the pines. In winter, there is apparently skiing. It is a very pleasant location, and there are lots of signs of hiking. For instance, this is the signature railroad trestle near Cloudcroft. The rails are gone now, but there is a platform for hikers on the other side.



Characteristic of a resort town is a "downtown" of shops aimed at tourists. This is our chief object for this stop, visiting the little shops and not buying the touristy stuff. Jerri can't help herself in some instances. Speaking of "chief", here's Faith with one, now. Poor old Kalijah...

The shops are closing again as we get back in the car to leave. The evening is spent driving: Down the other side of the mountain and through the tunnel. Through Alamagordo. Across the White Sands range. Through Las Cruces. Just before Deming, Jerri wants to stop at the tourist trap place to look for a state magnet for Arkansas, now that we've been there. Usually, if we stop, we stop at "The Thing" in

Arizona, or "Bowlin's Continental Divide" on the other side of Deming, on the south side of I-10. We've seen the "Akela Flats" gas stop on the north side, but never bothered to stop. This time, we do.

Inside Akela Flats, it's just a knick-knack shop like the other two. In fact, it turns out to be operated by the same outfit that runs Bowlin's. It is the outside of Akela Flats that is unique, and wins it a place on the list of other Americana schlocky places.



False fronts of buildings painted up to be a "wild west" town, with silly visual gags and puns. Here's the evidence we were there. I doubt we will return.

Then back to the road, through Deming and stopping late for our usual returning dinner at Kranberry's in Lordsburg. Jerri didn't have a great experience here; she found a bug in her salad, and her beef stew was too spicy (I swapped my roast beef for her stew, aren't I swell?). We can see a terrific storm in progress over the mountains to the west, exactly where we are going. I am driving now, full of trepidation for what we will run into. Sure enough, we run into heavy weather, and I am following in the wake of slower trucks, hoping that the broken

wiper will hold up. But it lets up outside of Benson, and the rest of the way home is pretty good. All the same, I'm glad when we arrive at our home safely after a *great* vacation trip.