



MarkHitsTheRoad

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Eastern United States Road Trip (E22A-3)

**West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma,
New Mexico, Arizona**

My Eastern United States road trip wraps up as I headed home with some sightseeing along the way.

I've come across photos of West Virginia's Glade Creek Grist Mill over the years, professional shots taken during all seasons from a number of angles. It's the most photographed site in West Virginia. And as it was on my way, I figured I'd try my hand with a photo stop here.



Glade Creek Grist Mill in West Virginia's Babcock State Park. It's actually not terribly old as it was built in 1976. But it was built using parts of three older West Virginia mills, and it is put to use to grind grain.

The New River is actually believed to be one of the oldest rivers on the continent, its south-to-north direction already well-established when a regional uplift led the river to carve the relatively young 1000-foot deep gorge. It was designated New River National River in 1978, but it was reclassified as New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in 2021.

The gorge creates a number of microclimates that support a huge variety of flora and fauna, the river itself offers top-notch whitewater rafting, and gorge carving exposed some of the best bituminous coal in the world, leading to the creation of several coal mining towns, now mostly abandoned.



New River Gorge National Park and Preserve's New River Gorge



New River Gorge Bridge was the world's longest single-span arch bridge when it was built (it is #5 today).



The view of a bend in the New River from the Concho Rim Overlook. Thurmond ghost town is on the right side near the railroad bridge



As I set off for Charleston, West Virginia the next morning, I stopped at Cathedral Falls, which I later found out is part of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.



I stopped at two mound earthworks sites as I passed through the Charleston area, including Criel Mound in Staunton Park, South Charleston, West Virginia. This is an Adena culture burial mound, and was one of dozens of mounds and other prehistoric earthworks in the area, most now gone. At 33 feet tall, it is the second tallest burial mound found in West Virginia.

I had two Civil War-related first-time visit NPS units to see in Kentucky.



Camp Nelson National Monument, Kentucky, is a new NPS unit, and was established in 2018. Camp Nelson itself was established in 1863 as an army supply depot to support Union efforts in Tennessee and Atlanta. It also served as a major recruiting and training ground for new soldiers from Tennessee as well as enslaved people who were emancipated when they signed up. More than 10,000 Black recruits were trained at Camp Nelson. A small museum explains the history and visitors can walk the grounds of the former fort, although there is little from its fort era to see.



Mill Springs Battlefield National Monument, Kentucky, is another new NPS unit, and was established in 2020. The Battle of Mill Springs in early 1862 resulted in the first significant Union victory in the Civil War. Much of the battle was fought here at today's Zollicoffer Park, where this monument marks the spot where Confederate Brigadier General Felix Zollicoffer was killed. Many of the 125 Confederate soldiers killed here were buried nearby. Victory here helped Union forces take the war into middle Tennessee. This was the last of my eight first-time visits to newer NPS units on this trip.

Pinson Mounds State Archaeological Park in western Tennessee preserves the Pinson Mounds mound complex, which includes 17 mounds and other ancient earthworks. It was built during the Middle Woodland period, between 1 AD and 500 AD. It is the largest known Middle Woodlands mounds group.



Sauls Mound is the highest mound at the site and the second highest prehistoric mound in the country.



This photo shows Twin Mounds and Mound 31 behind the white building to the left, and Ozier Mound, mostly hidden by trees to the right. Twin Mounds is a rare double-conical mound and served as burial mounds, as did Mound 31. Ozier Mound is a platform mound, and is the second-largest mound at the site. It also features a rare surviving access ramp up one of its sides. (Access to these mounds was closed the day I visited.)



Unearthed at Pinson's Twin Mounds were these engraved human cranial bone rattles. Holes at the edges of these cranial disks were used to lace two such bone pieces together to create the rattle. Small yellow quartzite river pebbles were put into the rattles to make the sound.

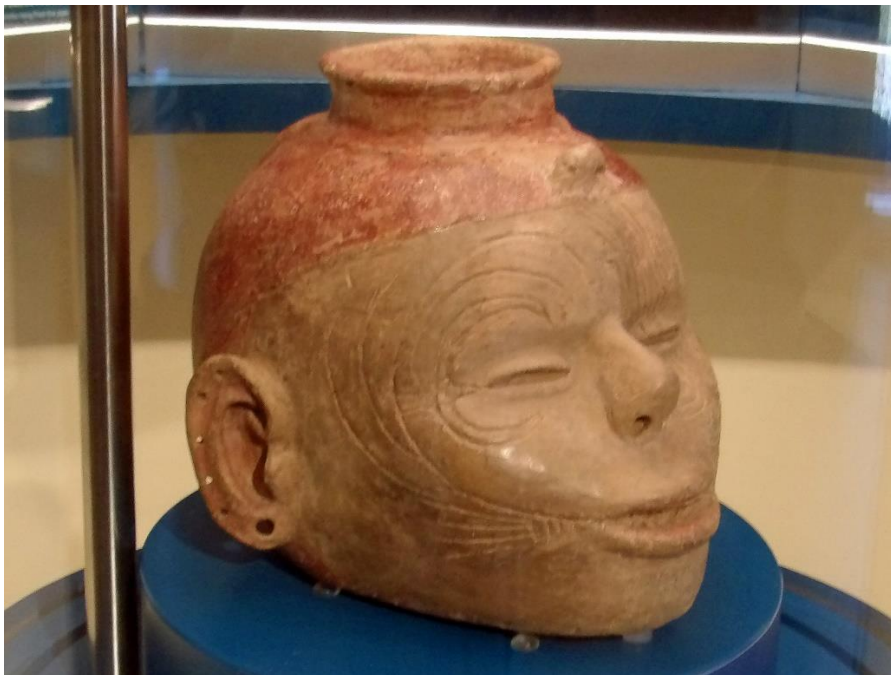
They really put their heads together to come up with these rattles.



Bradford, Tennessee is the Doodle Soup Capital of the World. So, what is doodle soup? Some have described it as Southern "hot and sour" soup. It starts with the drippings or broth made typically from chicken, but other meats can be used. Add vinegar, some water, and a bit of salt and dried cayenne pepper to taste. Stir in some flour to thicken it a bit, and you've got Doodle Soup, although some go on to create a more robust soup with the addition of chopped meat and vegetables.



The old Hampton's Store in Skullbone, the capital city of the Kingdom of Skullbonia, in western Tennessee. This was my last stop before heading west back across the Mississippi River.



I stopped at Hampson Archaeological Museum State Park in Wilson, Arkansas. There once had been a Nodena culture mound site here on what was the Hampson Plantation. Plantation owner James Hampson documented and excavated the mounds and the artifacts he discovered in them. Items from his collection are now featured in the museum's exhibits, including this human head effigy pot. The mounds themselves are long gone, plowed into oblivion and then built over by the town of Wilson.



An entrance to the Bassett World War II German POW Camp, near Joiner, Arkansas. German POWs at this camp worked the cotton fields in the area during the war.



The Southern Tenant Farmers Union was created during the Great Depression to help sharecroppers and tenant farmers get better arrangements from landowners when federal Depression Era farm subsidies did not reach the actual farmers renting and working the land. Sharecropper Harry Mitchell and gas station owner Clay East created the Unemployed League which evolved into the STFU. East's Tyrnza, Arkansas gas station was restored to its 1930s appearance and is now part of the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum.



I stopped at this old mill along Highway 412 near Williford, Arkansas for a photo op. It turned out that this is Morgan's Mill. In February 1864, Union and Confederate forces engaged in a 12-mile running battle from here to Martin Creek, resulting in a Confederate victory.



Mammoth Spring at Mammoth Spring State Park, Arkansas on the Ozark Plateau is the seventh-largest natural spring in the world. Its outflow averages about 9 cubic meters of water per second.



The Mammoth Spring Depot was built in 1885 and is now a museum in Mammoth Spring State Park.



Seven miles to the northwest, just across the Missouri border, is Grand Gulf State Park. Rainwater becomes mildly acidic as it soaks into the ground and into cracks in the underlying limestone and dolomite, dissolving some of the rock. Over time, this created underground caves through which underground streams flowed. Here at the park, a large section of the cave system collapsed.



The Grand Gulf Sink is at the downstream end of the collapse. Here the water begins flowing underground again through a small opening. Because a section of Grand Gulf is now open, during a heavy rain water flows into the sink much faster than it flows out, and the sink can actually fill up.

Water that flows out of Grand Wash Sink eventually reaches the surface again when it emerges at Mammoth Spring.

My last NPS unit of the trip was Pea Ridge National Military Park in northwest Arkansas. I had stopped here back in 2000, but it was so close to closing time that I really didn't see much of the park.

During the Civil War, four slave-holding border states remained in the Union, including Missouri. However, there was a push by some in Missouri to join the confederacy, and a buildup of Confederate forces at Pea Ridge was aiming to push Union forces out of Arkansas and then take Missouri.

Confederate troops seemed to have the upper hand at the end of the first day of fighting on March 7, 1862. But that night, Union forces regrouped and radically changed their battle strategy. The next day, they opened with an effective artillery bombardment of Confederate positions, softening up the enemy. For the actual engagement, Union troops were lined up across the entire width of the battlefield. By noon, the Confederate troops were in full retreat. The Union victory here helped establish Federal control over northern Arkansas and most of Missouri.



Pea Ridge Battlefield, site of the second day's fight



During the Civil War, I am on what soldiers called Telegraph Road approaching Elkhorn Tavern. This was an old military road built in the 1820s to connect St. Louis, Missouri, to Fort Smith, Arkansas. In 1837-1839, this route was part of the northern land route of the Trail of Tears, when the Cherokee were removed from the Southeast and sent to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). More than 11,000 Cherokee passed by here during those years. The tavern served as a supply depot for those heading to Indian Territory, at this point just 30 miles to the west. From 1858 to 1861, the road served as the Butterfield Overland Stage Route that ultimately connected the eastern United States with California.



The Bentonville, Arkansas site of Sam Walton's 5&10 store. This eventually evolved into what we now know as Walmart. Today the former store is home to the Walmart Museum.

The last of my targeted stops for the trip had more to do with what was found there than with what I'd see there. But first had to figure out where it was because every source I found that normally tells the location of archaeological sites like the Cooper Bison Kill Site said that the location was restricted information.

Native Americans from early on used the herding instincts of some animals and geological features like cliffs, sinkholes, gullies and river embankments for hunts that allowed them to corner and kill a number of animals at once. Chase some buffalo herd off a cliff or mammoths into a dead-end gully, and the hunting party could kill months' worth of meat at once.

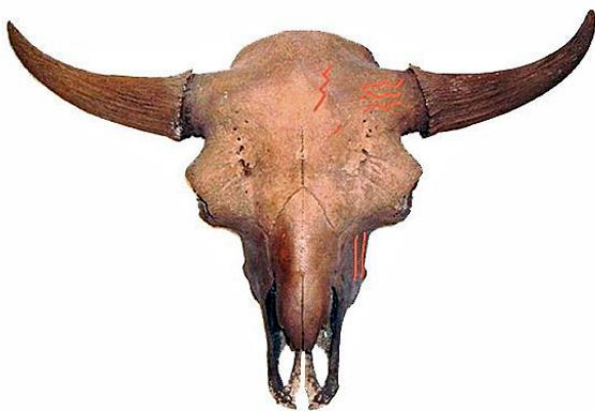
About 10,500 years ago, Folsom Man natives had three bison kills along the banks of the Beaver River in northwest Oklahoma over three seasons, each kill netting about 20-30 animals. That alone would make the site archaeologically interesting, but one of the bison skulls found there had been painted a bit, suggesting that it might have been used for ceremonial purposes. And because this was about 10,500 years ago, that painted skull is the oldest known painted object yet to be found in North America.

Although I found a “nearest city” approximate location for the site, I also found a research paper that included a hand-drawn map of a short segment of the Beaver River. I compared that segment to Google satellite images of the Beaver River, determined the candidate site, and then looked into my candidate further. I found that land at that site had been carved out of a larger managed area for some reason, suggesting that it was managed by a different agency. I also noticed a faint trail from the nearest parking area to my candidate location along the Beaver River.

When I got to the site, I made sure there were no “No Trespassing” or other such restrictions, and then followed the trail to the river. The excavations occurred in the 1990s, so I didn’t expect to actually see anything, although the site is still monitored in case more artifacts emerge from the eroding riverbanks.



Cooper Bison Kill Site, along the Beaver River, Oklahoma



The paint on the Cooper Bison Skull was radiocarbon dated to about 10,500 years ago, making it the oldest known painted object found in North America. The skull is at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma. This photo is from an Oregon Public Broadcasting website.

So, exactly where is this place? That's restricted. 😊

(Although not in the case of the Cooper Bison Kill Site, a lot of people now geotag their photos, sometimes sharing them with Google, which then adds them to Google Maps. I use them to find candidate interesting places that are left out of more routine tourist information sources. But that practice is being increasingly discouraged for archaeological sites. Increases in tourist visits at such sites often leads to site damage from careless tourists, as well as from vandals and looters.)

The Cooper Bison Kill Site may have been my last targeted stop for the trip, but I still had to get from the Oklahoma Panhandle to Las Vegas. Two long drive-thru days would have covered the 1,000 miles. Three days would have allowed for some New Mexico sightseeing, including a couple sites that I had missed on trips home from Texas both last fall and earlier this year. That was the better option.



Luna Theatre, Clayton, New Mexico



Whenever my nieces visit New Mexico, this Roy, New Mexico salon is where they get their hair done.



Santa Fe, New Mexico has a number of museums, with its Museum of Indian Art and Culture especially worth visiting. Usually, I hadn't been there in years, so I thought I'd check out its current exhibits. Except all but one of its exhibit spaces were currently being redone. The lone exhibit was quite interesting – design patterns in the ancient pottery finds – but no photos were allowed. The museum's sculpture garden is worth seeing, too. I also toured the adjacent International Museum of Folk Art, but I didn't find its eclectic mix of exhibits terribly interesting.



Coronado Historic Site is a state park that preserves the site of the Tiwa Indian pueblo of Kuaua. It was occupied starting about 1325 AD and abandoned in the late 1500s. Parts of this ancient adobe pueblo have been reconstructed to help visitors visualize the community. Among the archaeological finds here were some impressive murals, regarded as one of the best examples of pre-contact Native American art to have been found anywhere in North America.



Any actual ruins, however, are much harder to see, especially in photos. Unlike the stone ruins further west, adobe bricks melt away over time. This site has that in common with both the Posi-Ouinge and Poshuouinge ruins sites to the north that I visited in 2017.



Outlines of rooms at this ruins site are more apparent when looking at them via Google Satellite. The reconstructed walls are at the bottom, next to the parking lot.

My favorite ruins site is Chaco Culture National Historical Park, in a remote area of northwest New Mexico. In addition to the concentration of ruins at the heart of the park, there are a handful of outlier sites. The ruins at outlier Pueblo Pintado are open to the public.

I first visited here in 2017, but monsoon season was in full swing, and a thunderstorm with lots of lightning was approaching as I got here. I did a quick tour and then headed out.

Culturally and archaeologically, the site is closely tied to Chaco and is regarded as a Chaco Great House. It appears to have been originally established about 1000 years ago and abandoned in the mid-1200s, during an extended regional drought.



Pueblo Pintado ruins, or Kin Teel, as the Navajo call it



Another view of the ruins at Pueblo Pintado, including a kiva, an often-underground ceremonial room.



Broken pottery pieces from at least 800 years ago litters the ground at one of the sites “middens”. Middens are basically community garbage dumps, which actually are usually very archaeologically interesting, much like abandoned wells and former outhouse pits, all places where things were discarded. “Garbage” reveals a lot about a culture.

I hadn’t planned on making any photo stops in Arizona or New Mexico when I set off on this trip, and held to that when I headed east. But because I made a handful of sightseeing stops in New Mexico as I headed back home, I figured I’d better get something for Arizona as well. So, when I crossed the border from New Mexico into Arizona, I stopped at a Navajo/Route 66 site.



The Tee Pee Trading Post, Lupton, Arizona

And with that, my sightseeing on this trip was finished.