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Sightseeing Drive to Fort Worth and Back (F17A, K17A)

In 2016 I took a 3-week road trip to visit relatives in Texas, Iowa and Illinois. The driving portions were long with few stops, and thus pretty dull. So in 2017 I separated the Texas visit from the Iowa and Illinois visits. This resulted in five weeks of travel, but I was able to include a lot more sightseeing.

These pictures are mostly from the Texas trip, although my route back home passed some places in southern Utah that I had visited a couple weeks earlier over a 3-day trip. So I included pictures from that trip, too.



I mostly just drove through Arizona, but I did make a couple stops in eastern Arizona, in particular Lyman Lake State Park. The park has some petroglyphs sites dating from 6000 BC to 300 AD, as well as a ruins site that dates back to the 1300s AD and was home to ancestors of the Hopi.

I continued on through Springerville, Arizona and then east to Socorro, New Mexico, making minor sightseeing stops along the way as I got into position for my sightseeing focus in southern New Mexico and southwest Texas.



Monument Rock in New Mexico's Sawtooth Mountains



Socorro, New Mexico is near the Trinity Site where the first atomic bomb was detonated. Jumbo was a 214-ton steel container originally intended to contain the plutonium release if the bomb failed. But it wasn't used, although it sat 800 feet from the detonation site. A piece of Jumbo is on display in Socorro's historic plaza.

I made several stops and sightseeing detours on the otherwise short drive from Socorro to Las Cruces, New Mexico.



I did some sightseeing and took a short hike at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, one of several refuges that line the Rio Grande River.



Fort Craig was established in 1853 to protect the new border between the US and a defeated Mexico, and to defend travelers and pioneers on both sides of the border from Indian attacks. At one point it was the largest fort in the American southwest.

During the Civil War in February 1862, US troops from Fort Craig fought against the Confederate Army of New Mexico in the Battle of Valverde.



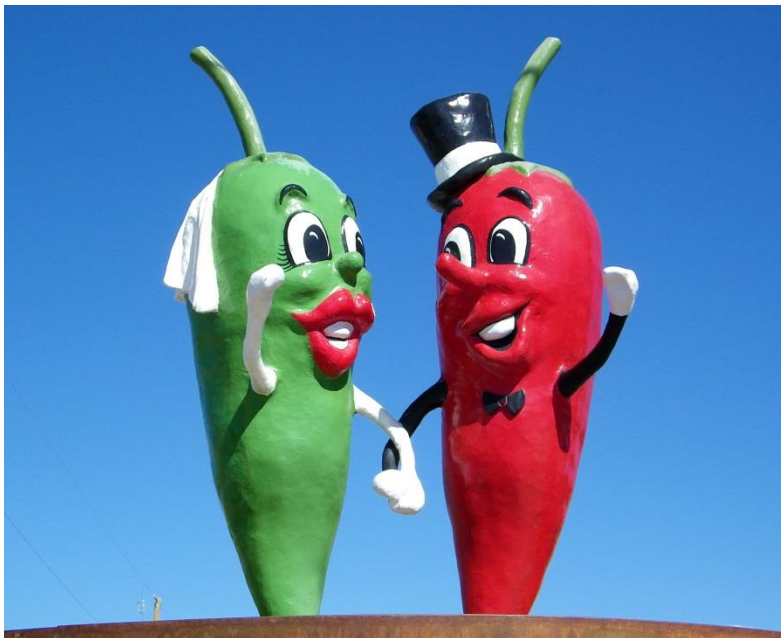
The Battle of Valverde was fought on the far side of this mesa visible from Fort Craig. Union troops headed north around the left of the mesa. Confederate troops followed the Rio Grande River and circled around the right side of the mesa. Although the Confederates won the battle, they had little to show for it – they didn't take the fort, and they lost several men, horses and mules as well as supplies. So they were much weakened by the time they reached Glorieta Pass a month later and were soundly defeated, effectively ending the Confederacy's attempt to take New Mexico.



Lake Valley is a mining ghost town along the Lake Valley National Back Country Byway.



Near Lake Valley is Lizard Mountain – the formation on the upper right resembles a lizard.



Hatch, New Mexico is famous for its chili peppers. If you wonder where all those little peppers come from, this picture might give you some ideas.

There's a fair amount of roadside kitsch in Hatch.

The El Paso Mission Trail heads from El Paso through Socorro to San Elizario. This area features some of the oldest European settlements in Texas. The trail follows the Texas portion of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the Royal Road of the Interior, that connected Spanish strongholds in present-day Mexico to Santa Fe. It is the oldest European highway in the U.S.



In the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, Native Americans in New Mexico revolted against Spanish colonizers, effectively expelling the Spanish from New Mexico for 12 years. 2000 Spanish refugees and some Tigua Indians from San Ysleta headed south, and established this mission near present-day El Paso. The San Ysleta Mission del Sur (of the South) was established in 1682, making it the first and oldest mission established in present-day Texas. The mission church has been rebuilt a handful of times.



The Mission de la Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion del Socorro was established just to the southeast in 1691.



The Presidio Chapel San Elizario was built as the chapel to serve the San Elizario Presidio, a Spanish military outpost. A small historic district in what is now the town of San Elizario is just a short walk from the chapel, and preserves several old buildings, some dating back to the late 1500s. It was the site of the first Thanksgiving held in what is now the United States.



The Old County Jail is one of the historic structures preserved in the San Elizario Historic District. Part of its claim to fame is that it was the only jail that Billy the Kid ever broke into – in 1876 he helped free his friend Melouiadés Segura.



Fort Davis was built in southwest Texas in 1854 to protect a segment of the San Antonio-El Paso Road. It was named for Jefferson Davis, then known as President Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War. The fort is preserved as a National Park Service historic site as it is one of the best preserved of the old southwest forts. The volcanic landscape in the background borders Davis Mountains State Park. It reminds me of the volcanic landscape of Arizona's Chiricahua National Monument.



This donation box in the old Fort Davis hospital features an eye-catching bed pan. Just don't be tempted to try it out.



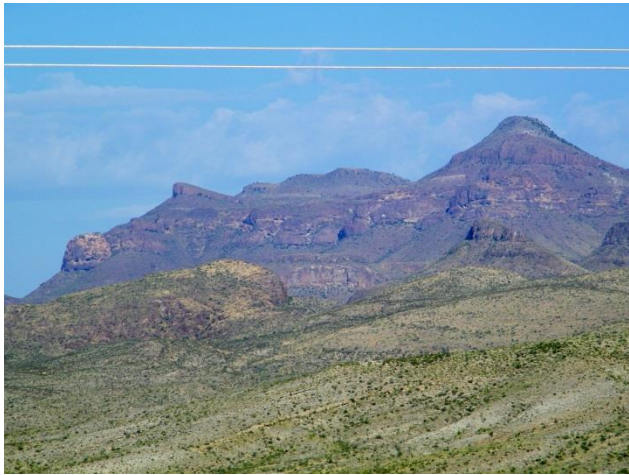
I spent a night in Marfa, Texas. Part of its claim to fame is that part of the James Dean-Elizabeth Taylor-Rock Hudson movie "Giant" was filmed nearby (it was the last movie James Dean made before he was killed in a car accident). During filming, the old Palace Theatre played past movies featuring those stars. It has since been converted into a private residence.

I saw a number of tarantulas out and about on this part of the trip. Of course, September is tarantula mating season, so these large spiders were on the prowl looking for love.



I hope that doesn't explain why this tarantula spent the evening hanging around outside my Marfa motel room.

I then headed for Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas. Along the way...



North of Presidio, Texas you'll see this view. Do you think it looks like President Lincoln facing upwards towards the upper left? The folks who named this Lincoln Face Rock thought so.



Big Bend Ranch State Park is the largest state park in Texas and follows the Rio Grande River for 23 miles. Like nearby Big Bend National Park it features Chihuahuan Desert landscape, but it has looser regulations regarding land use. Campers, hikers and sightseers share the park with grazing cattle.



If your interests include both ghost towns and passing wind, you'll want to check out Passing Wind at the Terlingua, Texas ghost town.

I spent the better part of two days exploring Big Bend National Park. I've been there twice before, but not since 1998.



Along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, you'll see the rugged Chisos Mountains. The Chisos are located in the heart of the park, the only mountain range entirely within a single national park. The volcanic mountains feature a number of hiking trails, and this wilderness is also home to bears and mountain lions.



Just some scenic drive scenery.



The Mule Ears.



As Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive nears its end, Santa Elena Canyon comes into view.



The Rio Grande River flows out of Santa Elena Canyon. That's Mexico on the left, the United States on the right.



View towards Mexico along Park Route 12.



I took a hike in the Hot Springs Historic Area. There are a handful of pictograph and petroglyph sites along the trail here.

I didn't see the Hot Springs, though. The Rio Grande was running high due to recent rains and had submerged the springs.



Native Americans also left behind morteros, places where they ground corn, seeds and nuts.



The Rio Grande River continues downstream, entering Boquillas Canyon at the end of a hiking trail.



Across the Rio Grande from the park is the small Mexican village of Boquillas del Carmen. Isolated from other Mexican cities, it depended on Big Bend visitors crossing the river – through the 1990s all you needed was your ID. Visitors would hit the bar, dine at the local restaurant, ride donkeys and ponies, etc. But the border crossing was closed down after the events of September 11, and the village all but died out. The US established an official border crossing here in 2013, and the village revived. It now has about 200 people – and even solar electricity and a (single) phone line running into town.

The locals also make curios – roadrunners, scorpions, cacti, ocotillo – out of copper wire and beads. They set up displays of their goods on the US side and then retreat to Mexico for the day, relying on the honor system for payment. This display was within sight of some Mexicans just across the river.

As I hiked to the mouth of the canyon someone on the other side of the Rio Grande started singing. Then I saw the tip jar on the US side for “Singing Jesus”.



I had only one more sightseeing stop on the drive to Fort Worth, the dunes at Monahans Sandhills State Park.



After my visit to Fort Worth I headed west back towards New Mexico, making a photo stop at this roadside sculpture. I included the picture here because regular readers have come to expect some bull in these write ups.



The Clovis culture appeared in North America about 13,000 years ago. The Clovis may be the ancestors of most native cultures in the Americas (although more recent discoveries have cast some doubt on that theory).

Evidence of the Clovis culture was found at the Blackwater Draw Site near Clovis, New Mexico in 1929, shown here.

Alas, both the site and related museum in nearby Portales were closed – observing more limited winter hours (I had planned my stops when summer hours were still in effect ☹)



I was also thwarted by a change in seasonal hours at the Fort Sumner Historic Site/Bosque Redondo Memorial.

The fort became the designated reservation for both Navajo and Mescalero Apache. The Mescalero were rounded up and brought here. The Navajo were starved out of their home region and forced to walk hundreds of miles to get here. Hundreds died along the way, and more died after they got here as the government was unprepared to feed and house so many people.



Eventually the U.S. government proposed sending them to Oklahoma before agreeing to a Navajo reservation in the Four Corners region.

Lincoln County Sheriff Pat Garrett killed Billy the Kid near Fort Sumner. Billy the Kid was buried here at the Fort Sumner Cemetery.



Roswell, New Mexico is famous for the 1947 Roswell UFO Incident, when a US Army Air Force claimed that a weather balloon crashed on a ranch about 75 miles away (actually closer to Corona) - the Roswell newspaper reported the incident as the capture of a flying saucer. UFOlogists claimed conspiracies, and TV shows such as "The X Files" built episodes around the incident, but Roswell business leaders recognized a tourism opportunity.



Several downtown businesses feature spaceships and aliens in their signage. Some focus specifically on the incident, such as the UFO Museum and International Research Center pictured here.



Even this Roswell McDonalds got into the act.



The New Mexico Department of Transportation did a nice job with its decision on where to place this sign.



Bottomless Lakes State Park features a chain of lakes, the result of several sinkholes. They aren't actually bottomless, but some are surprisingly deep given their surface areas.

Inkwell Lake



Lea Lake is the largest of the lakes and has been developed with beaches, swimming and camping.

The Lincoln County (New Mexico) War began after John Tunstall and Alexander McSween opened a store in the county that competed with James Dolan's business interests. Seriously. People took sides, and several people were killed. The situation escalated, leading to the Battle of Lincoln, a five day gunfight. Supporting Tunstall-McSween were The Regulators, which included Billy the Kid.



Tradition holds that Billy the Kid once hid under the floor in the living quarters of the Tunstall-McSween store.



After he was captured, Billy the Kid was held in a jail cell at this spot upstairs of the Murphy-Dolan store (the walls were long ago removed). Billy the Kid managed to get a gun and shot his way out, killing two people during his escape. He was tracked down and killed at Fort Sumner three months later.

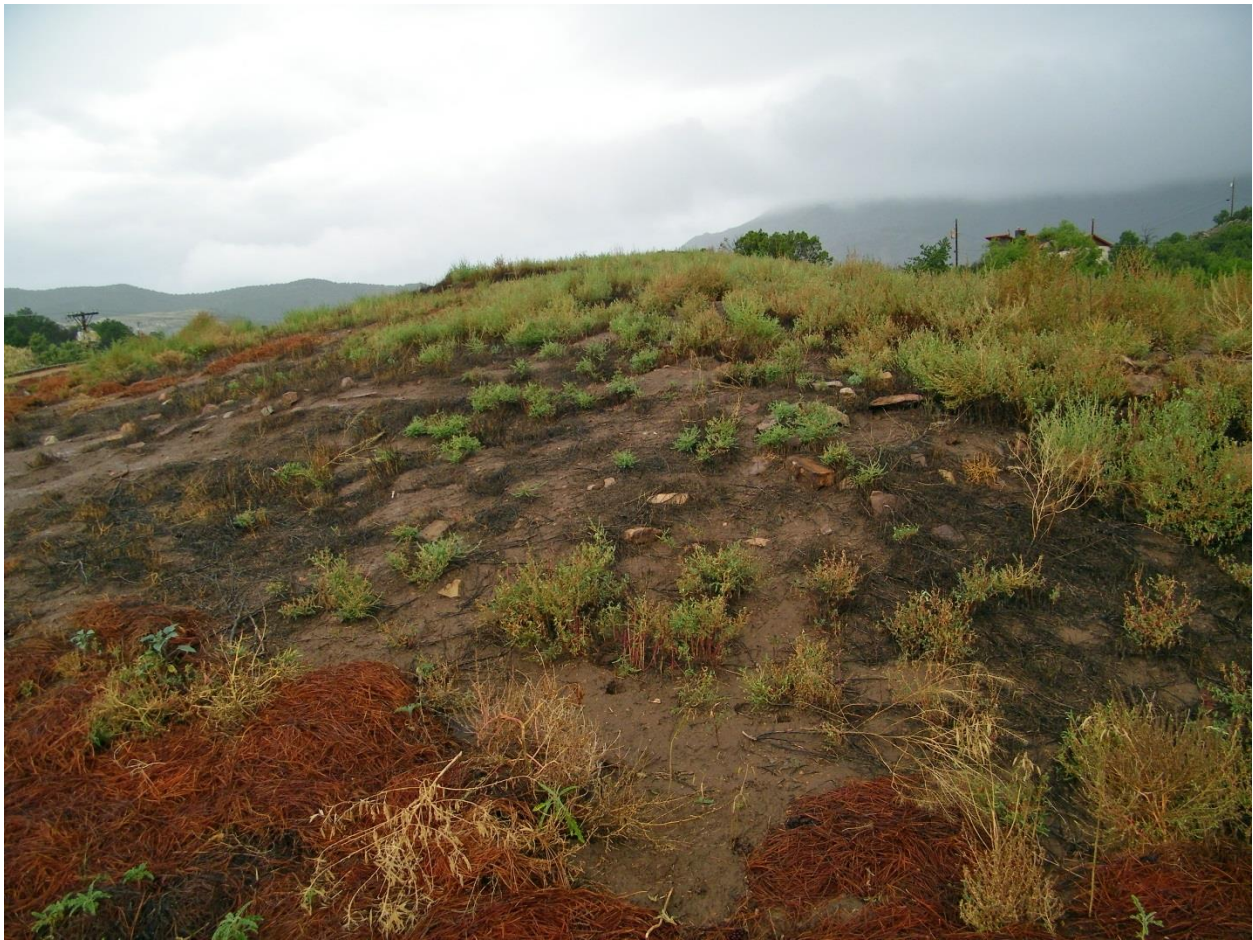


Smokey Bear (often incorrectly referred to as Smokey the Bear or Smoky the Bear) was created as an advertising mascot for the Forest Service in the 1940s. In 1950 an orphaned black bear cub was saved from a fire at Capitan Gap (pictured). He became a living symbol of the Forest Service's anti-forest fire campaign and lived at the National Zoo for 26 years until he died in 1976.



Smokey's remains were returned to New Mexico and buried in what is now the Smokey Bear Historical Park in Capitan, New Mexico.

Lousy weather dogged me the rest of my time in New Mexico, so many of my planned stops were shortened or dropped. But I did check out the Tijeras Pueblo Ruins Site just east of Albuquerque.



It doesn't look like much to most people as adobe walls faded away, and excavated ruins have been backfilled for preservation. Ancestral Puebloans had built a 200-room pueblo here but abandoned it in the early 1400s.

On a trip to New Mexico earlier this year, I ended up skipping a visit to the Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site near Ganado, Arizona due to road construction blocking access when I got to town. Because of changes to my New Mexico plans, I had a little extra time for Arizona sites, so I added Hubbell to my itinerary for this trip.

The trading post was established on Navajo lands, providing trading goods to the Navajo and providing an outlet for Navajo wool and sheep – as well as Navajo craftwork, including Navajo rugs, basket weaving and pottery. Navajo rugs sold through the Hubbell Trading Post often feature specific design elements and some use of a particular shade of red.



The trading post was built in the 1880s. It still operates as a working trading post, selling Navajo rugs, weaving and pottery to tourists, and groceries and ranch supplies to the local Navajo.



Some products sold at the trading post specifically cater to local ranchers.

When I saw these, for some reason Beyoncé's song "Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)" popped into my head.



No, this is NOT a selfie. But someday this picture of a Hubbell Trading Post resident may come in handy.

I then drove through the Hopi reservation, stopping to tour the Hopi Cultural Center. But the Hopi have restrictions on photography for both personal use and publication, so I didn't take any pictures while I was a guest on their lands.



I did finally see the Explore Navajo Museum in Tuba City, Arizona. It was closed when I tried to visit it on a previous trip this year.

From there I decided to head north to Page, Arizona and then to Vegas from there. I did squeeze in a short hike along the drive home. My route also passed near some places I visited on a 3-day trip that I took shortly before the Fort Worth Trip. So I've included a few pictures from that trip here.



My short hike was in this area towards the south end of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.



On the earlier trip, the day I got up to southern Utah I had time to take the Johnson Canyon/Alton Amphitheater State Scenic Backway which leads to an area below the Pink Cliffs, home of places like Bryce Canyon. Eagle Gate Arch is located along Johnson Canyon Rd.



The decaying remains of the Great Western Movie Set. A lot of westerns were filmed in the Kanab, Utah area. This set was reportedly used for outdoor scenes for the TV series "Gunsmoke".



View of the White Cliffs from Johnson Canyon Road.



The Pink Cliffs and part of Bryce Canyon National Park come into view.

On that earlier drive back to Las Vegas I made a return visit to Gold Butte National Monument near Mesquite, Nevada, that time to look for some petroglyph panels that I missed on my previous visit. I followed that up with an exploratory drive along one of the monument's back roads to the Arizona border.



Petroglyphs near Whitney Pockets along Black Butte Road.



This route to the Arizona border was more rugged than the route I checked out last time I visited Gold Butte, but it had some decent views of the central part of the monument.

And that was the end of both trips.