



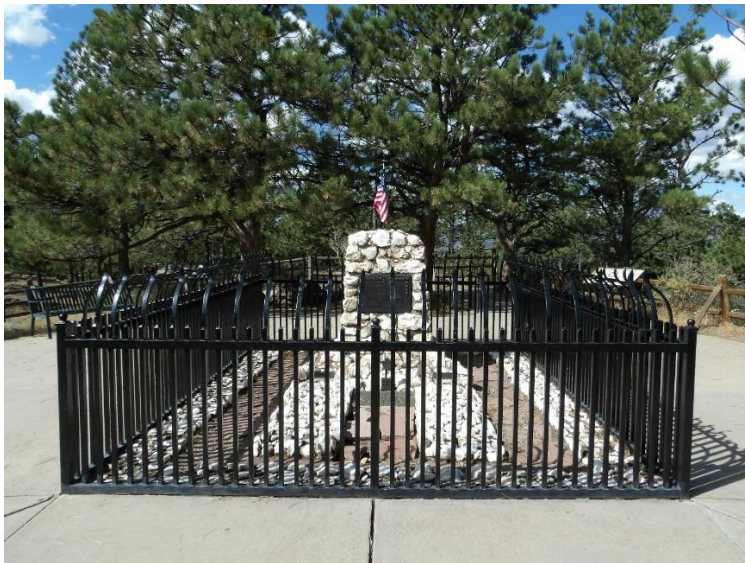
Cross Country Relatives Road Trip (R22A-1)

Heading to the Midwest

I headed back to the Midwest to visit family. A couple weeks before the trip, the trip was in jeopardy because my radiator began leaking coolant towards the end of my last road trip, and it took more than a week just to get the car into the repair shop. Fortunately, the problem was fixed, and I was able to head off on my last road trip of 2022 as planned.

With about 1600 miles of desert and wheat fields between Las Vegas and my relatives, I needed to find something to break up the long drives out there and back. I think that I ended up with one of the most eclectic mixes of sights seen than on any of my past trips in memory.

One of the sights seen on the first day was heavy rain storm with heavy hail that followed me along I-70 as I crossed Utah. Beyond that, the weather was pretty good until I was well on my way home. A winter storm was setting up for Utah and the mountains of western Colorado on the days I had planned to pass through that area. I decided to take a route around it, much like I did with a different winter storm in Montana when I was returning from this trip last year.



My first true sightseeing stop was at Golden, Colorado's Lookout Mountain Park, which includes the grave of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody and the small Buffalo Bill Museum.

My next stop was Dinosaur Ridge, between Golden and Morrison, Colorado. Dinosaur Ridge is one of world's most famous dinosaur fossil and fossil trace sites. It's a hogback formation, created by the steep tilting of a section of several rock layers. This has exposed a Morrison Formation layer on its west side and a Dakota Formation layer on its east side. The Morrison Formation dates to the Jurassic Period (widespread across a large swath of the West, it's named for Morrison, Colorado), whereas the Dakota Formation dates to the Cretaceous Period. A hike around the south end of the ridge lets visitors see a variety of dinosaur fossils, tracks and other related features spanning 10s of millions of years, a number of which were novel to me.



Cretaceous Period dinosaur trackways at a dinosaur stomping ground (left) and Jurassic Period dinosaur fossils (right)



Cretaceous Period crocodiles floating in shallow water as they stalked their dinosaur prey dragged their claws along the bottom, leaving these claw tracks.



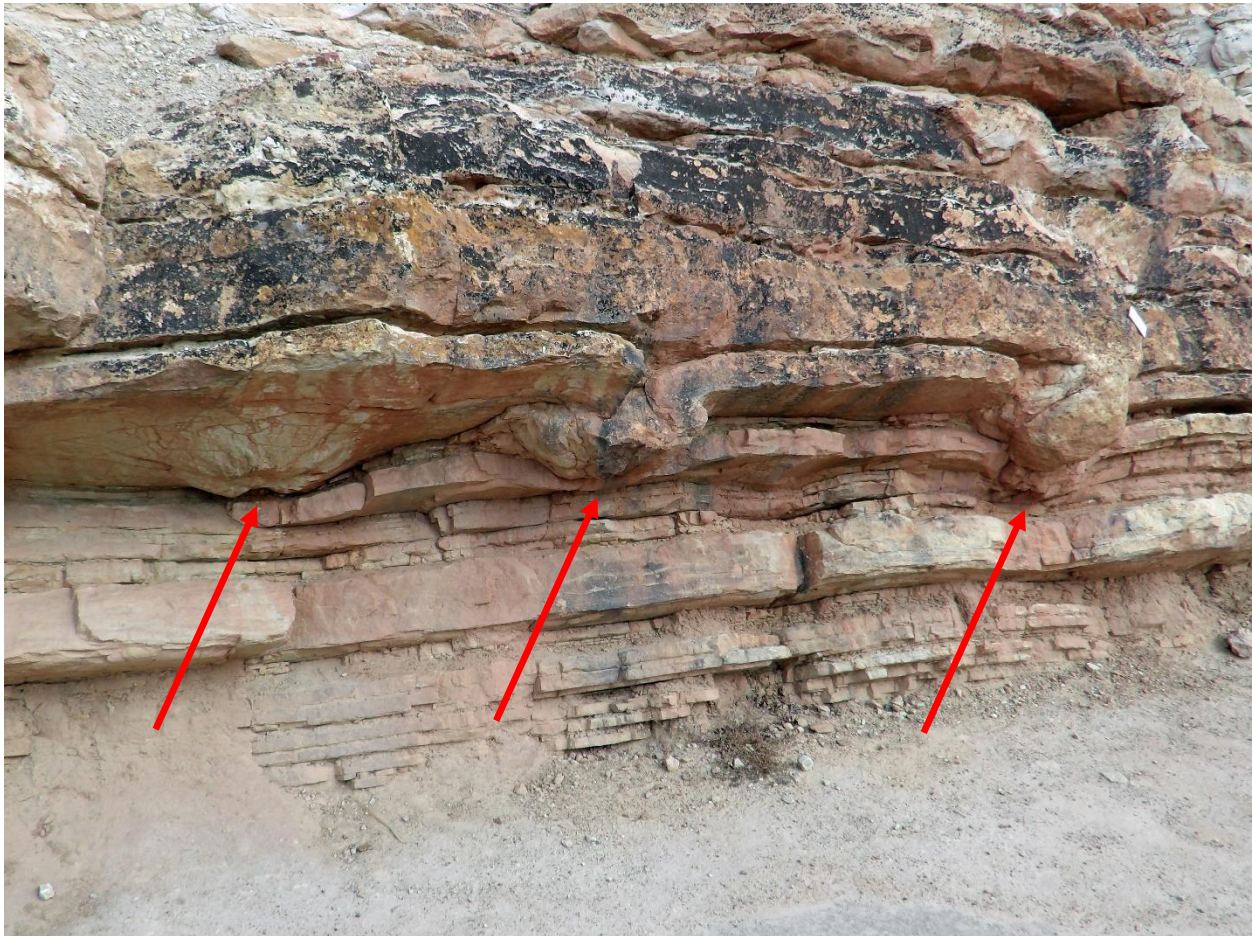
Paleontologists suspect that this is evidence of a Cretaceous Period dinosaur's mating dance. A single dinosaur is responsible for all these tracks and claw marks in place, and there is also evidence of mock nestbuilding. This pattern is similar to what is produced by the mating dances of some modern ground-dwelling birds.



Microbial mats have been around for almost as long as life on Earth itself. They're basically layers of microorganisms such as bacteria and archaea, typically no more than a few centimeters thick. They often form in very shallow water. Here, some sections of the mat had been torn away, allowing the motions of the waves to create ripples in the sediment below.

When a dinosaur weighing several tons walked on soft ground, it left tracks in that top layer that might harden over time. Once hard, if something else buries them, such as silt, sand or volcanic ash, this new layer could include casts of the original tracks. Millions of years later, if this top layer erodes away, we may see the original tracks. But if the layers become tilted, this could expose the bottom layer to erosion first, in which case we might instead end up with the casts.

But what about the layer that was underneath the tracks. A heavy dinosaur's step could compact the layer underneath a track even if the track itself is not captured in that layer. If the layers get tilted, and the layer below the compacted layer is exposed and erodes away, what do we end up with?



Dinosaur bulges. This is a Jurassic Period dinosaur bulge trackway that we're seeing from the bottom up. The bulges only vaguely capture the size of the foot. The unexposed layers above these dinosaur bulges could still contain the actual tracks and casts of those tracks.



As I headed north, I crossed Nebraska through its Sandhills area. The Sandhills cover about a quarter of the state, and are the largest expanse of stabilized sand dunes in North America. Some of the dunes rise as much as 300 feet or more. You can't plow this land for agriculture without the sand blowing all over the place, so it's mainly a place for cattle ranching.



The Circle C Market in Cody, Nebraska is run by local high school students. The building itself was constructed using straw bales, surprisingly making it the only straw bale grocery store in the entire state. I've come across a number of straw bale buildings in western Nebraska. When trees were scarce, other materials ended up being used to construct buildings.



In the heart of the Sandhills, ancient Cornhusker Druids built this shrine now known as Carhenge, near Alliance, Nebraska. It consists of 39 vintage automobiles painted grey, and is modeled after England's Stonehenge.



The picture of England's Stonehenge is from my 2003 visit there.



The rain on the Plains stays mainly far from Spain



Wessington Springs, South Dakota is home to the Shakespeare Garden and Anne Hathaway Cottage. The garden was modeled after the Shakespeare Garden in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, although the garden probably looks a lot better when it's not after a frost at the tail end of the growing season. The cottage is modeled after the original Anne Hathaway cottage at William Shakespeare's home in England.



Huron, South Dakota lays claim to the world’s largest pheasant (left). However, two of this trio of pheasants in my 2002 photo from along North Dakota’s Enchanted Highway (right) are actually somewhat larger.

Charles (“Pa”) and Carolyn (“Ma”) Ingalls lived in a *Little House in the Big Woods* near Pepin, Wisconsin. They eventually had five children, daughters Mary, Laura, Carrie and Grace, and a son Freddie who died in infancy. Laura went on to become the well-known children’s book author Laura Ingalls Wilder. Several of her books were based on her family’s experiences as they moved around the Midwest and Great Plains. They eventually settled in De Smet, South Dakota. De Smet has preserved several places in and around town related to the Ingalls family.



When the Ingalls family first arrived in De Smet, they lived from 1879-1880 in this house *By the Shores of Silver Lake*.



After briefly living in *Little Town on the Prairie* De Smet, the Ingalls homesteaded this acreage a little to the southeast of town. Pa Ingalls planted these cottonwood trees.



While living in and near De Smet, Laura and Carrie attended this school.



Ma and Pa Ingalls moved into this house in town in 1887.



When Laura came of age and qualified, she became a school teacher to help raise money to send blind sister Mary to the Iowa College for the Blind in Vinton, Iowa. This is a replica of the Bouchie (Brewster) school where Laura taught in 1883.



While she was a teacher, local man Almanzo Wilder transported Laura for weekend visits home. They eventually married and settled on this farm to the north of De Smet, enjoying *These Happy Golden Years* leading up to their 1885 marriage, followed by *The First Four Years* together as a married farm couple here, although they'd eventually move to Missouri.



Ma and Pa Ingalls and their daughters Mary and Carrie are among those buried in the Ingalls family plot in the De Smet Cemetery.

About 1.6 billion years ago, ancient sand deposits in what is now southwestern Minnesota were interspersed with a small layer of clay. Over time, pressure from the buildup turned the sand into Sioux quartzite, one of the hardest known rocks, and turned the clay into catlinite, one of the most workable rocks. Native Americans discovered the catlinite, and several tribes started quarrying it in order to use it to make pipes and other items. The site became a sacred site and neutral ground for several tribes. Catlinite a.k.a. pipestone quarrying by hand using traditional methods continues at the site today, now the Pipestone National Monument.



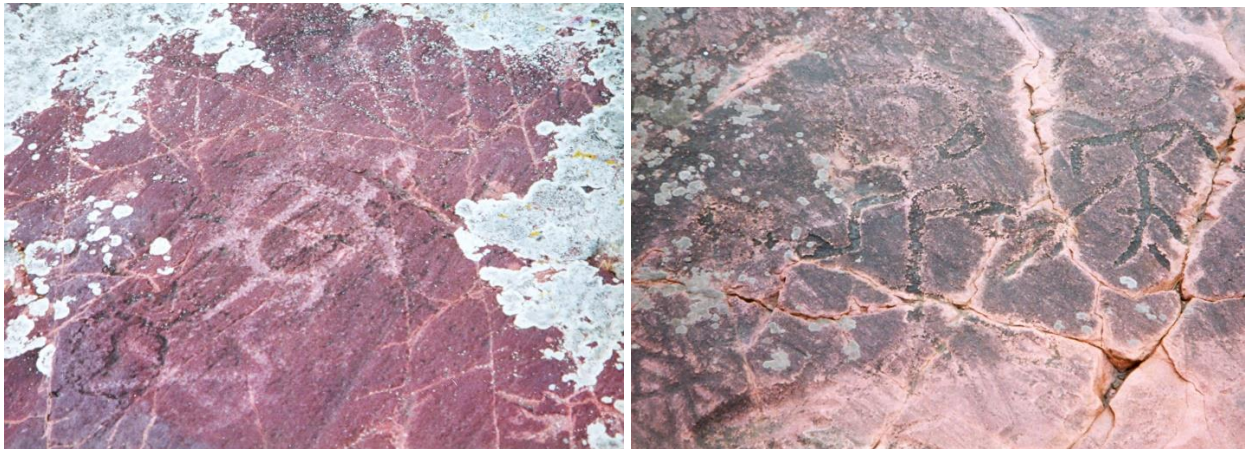
Pipestone quarry. The rock rubble pile to the far upper left is quartzite hand-removed from the quarry so the Native Americans could get at the pipestone.



Pink quartzite cliffs near the quarry



A pipe carved out of catlinite (pipestone)



I've wanted to return to the Jeffers Petroglyphs site in southwestern Minnesota for several years now in order to get more and better photos of the up to 5000-year-old petroglyphs carved into an outcropping of pink quartzite there than I got during my long-ago first visit. Unfortunately, taking photographs of the rock art is no longer permitted. And although I have a photographic memory, I don't have a built-in data port or SD card reader that would allow me to transfer what I saw to the computer. So, as much as you may want to see more new petroglyph photos, you'll have to content yourself with these old photos from my first visit.



Ya got trouble, folks! Right here in River City!

Trouble with a capital “T” and that rhymes with “P” and that stands for pool!

Mason City, Iowa is the hometown of Meredith Willson, who created the hit musical *The Music Man* (*76 Trombones* is among the show’s songs for those needing a little musical priming). The musical’s River City setting and some businesses and characters were based on Mason City and Willson’s recollections.



The city has created The Music Man Square, to promote this connection. The facility includes a faithful reproduction of *The Music Man* movie set (with the movie studio’s blessing), the Meredith Willson Museum, an ice cream parlor, a gift shop, a large community meeting room, a music classes space and a recording studio.



Meredith Willson's piano is one of several personal items featured in the museum.



76 trombones hang from the ceiling of the music room in The Music Man Square.



The Music Man Square's River City set features a floor made with pine blocks. In its early years, some Mason City streets were paved with pine blocks, which reduced the noise from horse and carriage transportation.



The Music Man Square was built next to Meredith Willson's boyhood home.



In downtown Mason City, you'll find Ransom's Pleazol, one of the oldest bars in town, and the only one with a 10-foot snooker table. The Pleez-All Billiard Parlor in *The Music Man* was based on an earlier version of this bar.



Also downtown you'll find the City National Bank and the Park Inn buildings, both designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and now combined into the Historic Park Inn. Wright was closely associated with the Prairie School architecture style, which tends to feature horizontal lines, distinctive eaves, integration with the surrounding landscape, and minimal ornamentation, although a number of other architects also practiced this style.



Mason City's Rock Crest-Rock Glen Historic District is home to one of the largest collections of Prairie School architecture style buildings, including another Wright-designed building – the Stockman House (pictured).



Not to be outdone is Max Weaver's Rancho Deluxe: The Original Bicycle Garden, a "found object" art park in Mason City.

I then headed for Cedar Rapids, Iowa for a couple nights. While there, I saw my nephew and his family (as always, I leave family details out of these things), visited some family history-related sites, and worked in a little bit of sightseeing.



One of my stops was Wilton, Iowa, known as Wilton Junction in the mid-1850s when it was first established around a railroad junction. It was about that same time that my great great grandparents, Christian and Elisabeth Gensicke, settled there after emigrating from Prussia. Christian worked there as a wagon maker. They had six kids while living in Wilton Junction before moving to a farm in Benton County, Iowa in 1868. I was just curious about the town and didn't expect to find anything that was contemporary to their time there.

The building (left) was actually built in Wilton Junction in 1856 while they were there. In 1860, it became a confectionary, and it has remained one ever since, although the soda fountain (right) was added in 1922. It is the oldest continuously operated confectionary in the world, and has been in the same family since 1910.

So, it is quite likely that my great great grandparents patronized this store while they lived in Wilton Junction. Especially because Christian apparently had a bit of a sweet tooth. Wrote my grandma about her grandfather Christian:

One of my first memories is of my grandfather, who, as was the custom of those days, lived with the family of his son. I had an inordinate craving for candy at this stage of my life, and I found out early that my grandfather always kept a supply of old-fashioned sugar candy of many colors and flavors, which is no longer to be seen in the stores. He would become very impatient of my insistence to be supplied, and would finally, angrily, storm from the room.



I visited Buffalo Bill's burial site earlier in the trip. I knew that he had been born in Iowa, so as I planned the trip I looked up where. It was outside of LeClaire, Iowa, just one county over from Wilton. So, I thought I'd check it out, as well as his nearby boyhood home.



LeClaire is a Mississippi River town. It features a Buffalo Bill Museum, my second of the trip and third of the year, although this one seemed to focus primarily on his Wild West Show years. The museum had a lot more about the town, but its most interesting feature was the last of the river's stern wheel tow boats, which visitors could actually board and explore.

On my way back to Cedar Rapids, I took Mt. Vernon Road from Mt. Vernon to Cedar Rapids. A seedling mile of concrete pavement was constructed here in 1918-1919, part of an effort to show the advantages of paved roads (and promote the sale of cement) in the still-early days of the automobile. My grandma mentioned above was an elementary school teacher before she got married. For a while, she was courted by the school's art teacher, a pre-fame Grant Wood. When Grant bought his first car, he asked my grandma to try it out with him, and they drove over to the seedling mile.



Today, a marker at the site commemorates this. Well, not their date, but the seedling mile.

After finishing up in Cedar Rapids, I headed north to Decorah, Iowa to see my dad, and then east to suburban Chicago to see my sister and her family. Normally the drive between the two can be done in a day, but I had some sightseeing plans for along the way through southern Wisconsin.

But first, I stopped at Iowa's Effigy Mounds National Monument. Native Americans in the upper Mississippi River valley region built a number of conical, linear and effigy (shape of animals and birds when seen from above) mounds for ceremonial and burial purposes. I had hiked to see several of the mounds at the park on past trips, but I always found the visitor center to be closed. This time I was able to tour the museum in the visitor center before heading into Wisconsin.



My first Wisconsin stop was at Indian Mound Park, a small roadside park that features a handful of conical and linear mounds, including this linear mound.

My next stop was at Spring Green, Wisconsin. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright was from here, and it is here that he established his Taliesin Estate. The area features a number of Wright-designed buildings.



Taliesin



The Midway Barn on Taliesin Estate



The Romeo and Juliet Windmill on Taliesin Estate



Tan y Deri on Taliesin Estate



Riverview Terrace, once a restaurant and now the Frank Lloyd Wright Visitor Center



The Wyoming Valley School, in nearby Wyoming, Wisconsin



Unity Chapel was built in 1886 by and for the descendants of Richard and Mary Lloyd-Jones. The chapel was designed by Chicago architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee, although the interior was designed by a “young boy architect of the family”, Frank Lloyd Wright, one of their descendants, when he was just 18.



Frank Lloyd Wright was buried in the Unity Chapel churchyard after he died in 1959.



With one of my planned stops not accessible due to road construction, I had a little time left in the day when I reached Stoughton, Wisconsin. Although founded by Englishman Luke Stoughton in 1847, many Norwegians settled in Stoughton from 1865 through the early 1900s, and the town celebrates its Norwegian heritage. This includes the Norwegian Heritage Center, a museum focused on the Norwegian immigrant experience. Alas, no photos were allowed inside, as most items in its displays were on loan from other museums. Primarily from Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, the town where I started the day.

Lake Koshkonong is a large but shallow natural lake southeast of Madison (and Stoughton), Wisconsin. Native Americans, including ancestors of today's Ho-Chunk people, used the lake as a source for wild rice. They also built 23 burial mound groups around the lake that included about 500 individual conical, linear and effigy mounds. Although many of those mounds have long been lost to settler farming and modern development, dozens are preserved at Indian Mounds County Park and the adjacent Koshkonong Mounds Country Club golf course. The mounds date from the period between 650AD and 1200AD.



A bird effigy mound "flying" towards the left, viewed from its left wing



A turtle effigy mound, viewed from between its head and left front paw



This hole on the country club's golf course is flanked by a pair of conical mounds. The larger one on the far side of the putting green was once a ceremonial mound.

After this stop, I drove straight through to my sister's.

After finishing my visit with my sister and her family, it was time to start the journey back home to Las Vegas.