

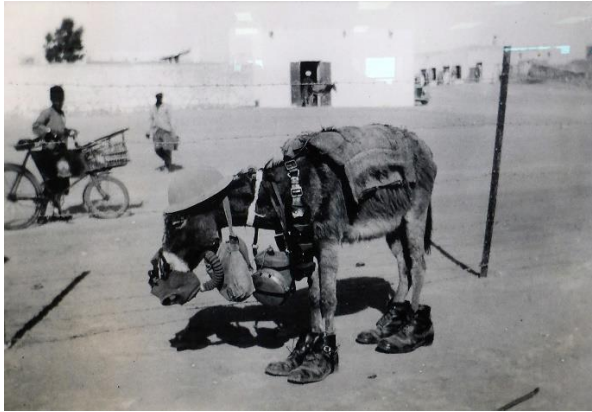
Tri-State Getaway Road Trip (K23A)

Because of some pent-up travel desires due to the COVID pandemic, all of my trips over the last two years were nine days or more. With things getting back to normal, I took what amounted to a long weekend getaway trip this time, four days during the week (midweek travel is cheaper and less crowded, and one of the perks of being retired is that every day is a weekend), picking off an assortment of new and repeat sites in the Kanab and St. George, Utah and Mesquite, Nevada areas.

I started by breaking up the drive to Kanab, Utah with a stop at the Donkey History Museum in Mesquite. This new museum (it opened last fall) tells the history of the donkey, its role in settling the American West, and the key roles donkeys have played in everything from mining to the military. The museum also features a lot of donkey-themed collectibles, toys, photos and art.



Although the English get all the attention for their early permanent settlements in what is now the United States at places like Jamestown (1607) and Plymouth (1620), donkeys beat them to it. They've been here since 1598.



Donkeys have supported U.S. military operations as beasts of burden, although their vocal cords are usually removed for this work so that their unpredictable braying doesn't give troop locations away.



And of course, if it weren't for donkeys, we wouldn't have Democrats.

Worth noting... They thought about calling it the Ass History Museum (*ass*, *jackass* and *burro* are other names for donkeys), but they were concerned that the name might draw an entirely different type of visitor to the museum.

(Mules are only half-donkeys, the result of a male donkey breeding with a female horse.)

North to St. George, Utah, and then east for a bit on Highway 9. Staying on Highway 9 would take me through Zion National Park, but the park has gotten so popular that you'll usually encounter a traffic jam at the south entrance, and this time a sign warned of restrictions on thru-traffic. I switched to a more southern route – same distance, no traffic jam – to Kanab. This route passes the south end of the Smithsonian Butte Back Country Byway, which has been on my someday list for years. With plenty of time, I took the road to Grafton Ghost Town and back.

Signs warned of a dangerous stretch along part of the road, but it was just a short but steep stretch that was about 1 ½ lanes wide – any car that can handle a steep hill wouldn't have had a problem the day I drove it.



At the start, you're driving past part of the Vermilion Cliffs "step" of the Grand Staircase.



But shortly, the Grand Staircase's next step up, the White Cliffs, comes into view. Zion National Park is in that area.



The steep section of the road heads down there.



Grafton Ghost Town is located just outside Rockville, Utah. I first visited it in 2011 when I stayed at nearby Springdale at the southern entrance to Zion National Park. But some filming was going on (possibly *Electrick Children*) – movie trailers and actors in costume were all over, so it looked more like a movie set than a ghost town. Today, I was one of only a view visitors. Pictured is the old school/church and the Alonzo Russell home. The home dates back to about 1862.



Grafton's old cemetery

I planned on two nights in Kanab, Utah, which I often use as a closer and cheaper alternative to Page, Arizona as a base for exploring or hiking in southern Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The national monument has a visitor center in Kanab, but it was closed during the pandemic, and when operating its hours generally haven't fit with my own daily activities. But as this was a short trip, I didn't bother with making the Mountain Time Zone adjustment, so I finally was able to visit its small but informative visitor center museum.



Among its features is a mural that shows the rock layers that underlie the Grand Staircase, a sequence of plateau "steps" that head down from the Aquarius Plateau to just north of the Grand Canyon.



Sample rocks from each of the layers shown in the mural



Example Native American artifacts found in the national monument



I headed for the Cottonwood Canyon area, a favorite low-key hiking spot. Most of the wildflowers I saw here a month ago have faded, but Black-eyed Susans were now in bloom in many areas.



For a few miles, the Paria River flows along the east side of the Cockscomb monocline.

The next morning, my drive west to Utah's Snow Canyon State Park near St. George was delayed so I could get a new car battery, my fourth with this car. Unlike the first two that died without warning, this one just started the car sluggishly after the car had been parked for a while. Although Snow Canyon isn't all that remote from civilization, my plans for Gold Butte the day after put me well off the beaten path, so I figured it was better to get the battery tested – and replaced – than risk a dead battery in the middle of nowhere.

(And before some cellphone aficionado smugly suggests that this is why I ought to get a cellphone, I'll note that in remote Gold Butte, there's a nice phrase that is apropos for cellphones: No Signal.)



I had a half-day visit to Snow Canyon about six years ago, and wanted to see more of the park. The sandstone canyon is interesting because of the presence of old lava flows with the sandstone. Those above the canyon date back over a million years. Flows on the floor of the canyon itself came from a cinder cone just north of the canyon about 27,000 years ago.



The two colors of sandstone pictured here are both Navajo sandstone, but they differ by the amount of iron in the rock. Iron, of course, rusts, resulting in the reddish-orange color.



Navajo sandstone is basically the result of a massive sand field that over time was buried and then petrified. A tell-tale sign is the cross-hatching pattern seen here in the rock, the result of the shifting direction of the prevailing winds when the sand was originally deposited.



A natural arch along the Pioneer Names trail



Moonflowers generally bloom after sundown. The blooms usually last only until late the following morning.



Some of the hardened lava flows in the canyon, as seen from the Snow Canyon Scenic Overlook. The Lava Flow Trail passes through this field, and leads to two surviving lava tubes that you can explore.



The lava rock on the floor of Snow Canyon came from this volcanic cinder cone. You can also hike up and into the cinder cone.



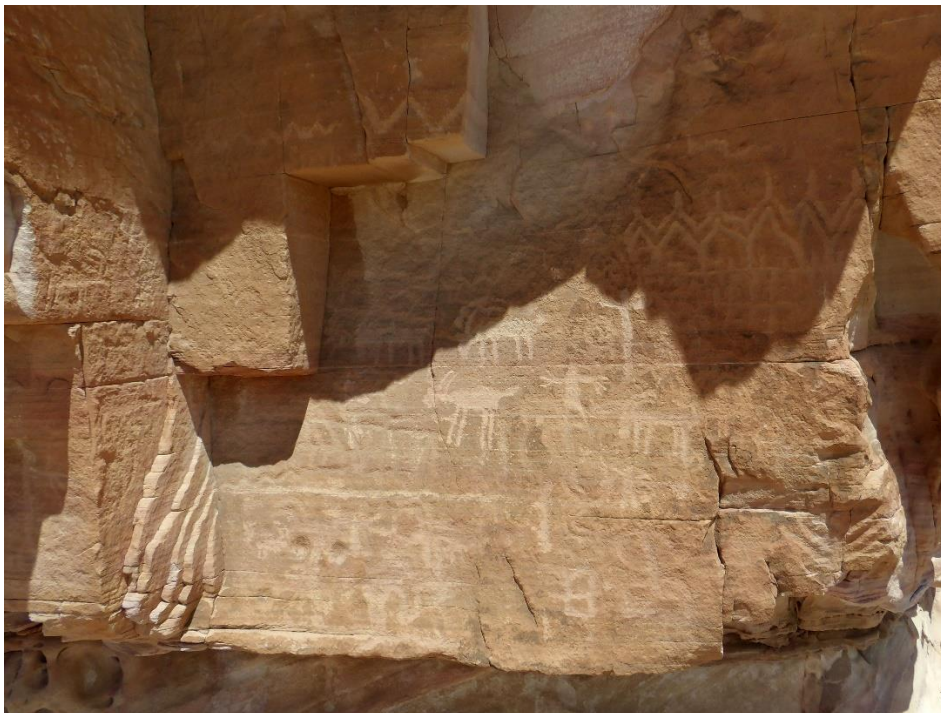
Looking south into Snow Canyon from the Snow Canyon Scenic Overlook



I spent the night in Mesquite, Nevada. Before heading home the next day, I stopped at Gold Butte National Monument for a repeat hike of the Falling Man Trail. I first hiked it a couple years ago to check out the petroglyphs there, but just as I got to the Falling Man petroglyph itself, my camera's zoom feature stopped working. My resulting photos of the rock art were less than satisfactory.



The Rabbit Ears, along Falling Man Trail. With rabbit ears that big, they must have gotten good reception. If you're old, you probably groaned at that. If you're young, you probably went, "Huh?"



Petroglyphs at Calvin's Rock



As you can see, Falling Man petroglyph comes into view from this point. But when I reached this point when I hiked here a couple years ago, my camera's zoom feature stopped working. I took some pictures anyway, and with some cropping I got some so-so photos of the rock art. This time, I took several photos, zooming in just a bit more with each one.



This was the most I zoomed in. But my camera doesn't have image stabilization, so it's a bit sensitive to the fact that I can't hold the camera as steady as I'd like. But I did end up with much better pictures of Falling Man than I got last time, so the hike was a success.

There are other colorful rock outcroppings at Gold Butte's nearby Whitney Pocket area. As I have explored Whitney Pocket extensively on past visits to Gold Butte, I only made a quick photo stop there before heading home.

