



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (VIII)
Grand-Kohs Ranch, Old Montana Prison, Yellowstone and Grand Teton
National Parks, Jackson Hole, San Juan Forest, Balloon Festival**

Traveling America (VIII) Report One: A Visit to a Working Ranch

September 24-28, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. For *Traveling America (VIII)*, we pay a call on the places depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Route for Traveling America (VIII).

The National Park Service and America

Since dropping out of corporate America, I have made it a point to avoid airports in order to drive less-traveled roads. When possible, I stay away from the four-lane interstates and the cramped airline seats. I like to cruise the blue highways, those two-lane passes that sometimes allow cars to pass. The old saying, "Getting there is most of the fun" rings true for these trips.

During the past four years, I have made several trips across America. With each trip, I have gained a better appreciation of this country. I have come to understand what a fine location the United States has on earth. I have grown to cherish our vast wildernesses---those undeveloped lands set aside for us to succor when we venture from our urban and suburban confines.

And with each mile I have traveled across these wondrous terrains, I have gained an increasing respect for the National Park Service. Along with the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonians, and the local museums, the National Park Service is preserving our national heritage and identity.

After I stopped writing about computer networks and took up the pen to write about America, I considered visiting every National Park Service site in the country. I am not discounting this possibility but the places are so numerous and dispersed that I may have bitten-

off more than I can chew. I'm told there are "...more than 380 parks in the National Park System."¹ Still, I've not discounted the idea. After all, anon tells us, do not be circumscribed by your circumstances. *Traveling America (VIII)* is a modest undertaking to reduce the inventory of national parks to visit. To that end and once again, here we go!

The Grant-Khors Ranch

The Grant-Khors ranch in Montana is a working ranch, not a petting farm or a dude ranch. (See Figure 2.)² Cattle, horses, and cowboys take part in year-round activities of ranch life, including branding, dehorning, castrating, studing, milking, and haying. My interest in this site was heightened because of my early childhood years when I spent my summers on a ranch in New Mexico.



Figure 2. Grant-Khors ranch house and barns.

As I walked around Grant-Khors and listened to the guides tell Reporterette, Milli, and me about the operations on this ranch in the 1800s and the hardships endured by the ranch hands, I recalled a quote from the writer Louis L'Amour, "It was a hard land, and it bred hard men to hard ways."³ Charles M. Russell offered, "Cowpunchers were...all careless, homeless, hard drinking men."⁴

From a personal experience, I disagree with these stereotypes. Contrary to the pulp novels and the western movies, it also bred men who, while hard as nails in their demeanor, were as tender as mothers when it came to looking after the critters under their care. I concede their tender loving care for a cow led to a fatter cow and fatter profits at the slaughterhouse. But they were not hard or careless men.

The Cowboy Way. The wild aspects of ranch life and western America attracted misfits. So did the gold rush. So did the Homestead Act.

¹ National Park Service, www.nps.com.

² Courtesy of the National Park Service, www.impactphotographics.com.

³ Kathy Etling, *The Quotable Cowboy* (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2005), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52, in Charles. M. Russell, *Trails Plowed Under* (1927).

We all labor to gain leverage on life. Some of us try to gain an advantage with real estate; some of us use the stock market; others feed at the political pork barrel. The 1800's cowboys were no different from us non-cowboys. They simply plied their trade with cows.

Those legendary cowboys, the men (whom movie star Gene Autry offered, "A cowboy is kind to children, old folks, and animals."⁵) did not look kindly on another man's weakness. Most of those I came across were self-reliant individuals and believed everyone else should be of the same mold.

Nonetheless, the hired hands on our ranch---and the cowboy friends and relatives whom I came to know---seemed to have a "live and let live" approach to life. I never came across a cowboy who told someone he was headed for hell if he didn't pray to the correct god or genuflect in the right direction; or a cowboy who told a woman how to manage her birth canal. It bothers me when someone holds the position of, "Your belief is my concern. Therefore, I'm going to alter your belief."

Johnny Grant. In 1859, attracted by high grass, a protected valley, and ample creeks, Johnny Grant settled in Deer Lodge valley to raise cattle. Located in southwest Montana, the area had been used for centuries by Indian tribes as a passageway between their hunting and trading grounds. The Native Americans did not look kindly on Johnny's cows and cowboys.⁶ Therefore, adhering to the adage, "Necessity is the mother of invention," Johnny altered this saying with, "Necessity is the mother of matrimony," and married women from several of the nearby tribes.

History does not record if Johnny was a Mormon and thus, if he had multiple marriages. Whatever the marital bed arrangements might have been, Grant managed to build a fine business and avoided the nearby Indians' hostility.

We walked around the main compound of the ranch, and I reminisced about my times on my father's and step-mom's ranch in New Mexico. One particularly poignant scene was a chuck wagon behind the main house and corrals, seen in Figure 3---a wagon similar to a deteriorating vessel I played-on in my youth in our Wagon Pasture. A National Park Service cook was serving beans, bread, and coffee. We arrived too late to partake of the vitals but not too-late to take in the scenery.

The scenery. Who could not wish to travel in this part of our country? The views are so continuously spectacular that it is easy to become nonchalant about them. Another mountain range. Another sweeping meadow in front of the range, Blue skies with the clouds seemingly placed over the mountains and meadows for a Disney-like effect. All-too-often we sit in our couch-potato sofas and opine, "Next channel, please. When does Wheel of Fortune come on?"

There is a saying that goes something like this, "If you are not moving, you are not living." Perhaps the adage is overdone, but maybe it is underdone. The point is for us to get out of bed or get off the sofa and do something with our bodies, as well as our minds.

⁵ Etling, 37.

⁶ Responding to the "Sins of the Past" report, one of our readers offers the idea that the name "Native American" is incorrect. After all, he says, so-called Native Americans came from Asia---they just happened to arrive in North America (across the Bering Strait) a few centuries before the Europeans dropped-in (across the Atlantic Ocean). So, no one is a Native American. We all came from Africa, and the Native American is no more native than the Mexican walking across the dry Rio Grande into America. Well stated. Your take on this issue is a fine and politically incorrect position. I trust you are not interested in running for political office.



Figure 3. A scene at the Grant-Khors ranch.

Conrad Kohrs. This man represents what we like to think the pioneering western American man was all about: tough as nails, a resourceful risk-taker, a rags-to-riches career.⁷

Like many of our pioneers, Kohrs was not American. He was born in Germany in 1835 and left home when he was 15. He sailed around the world as a cabin boy and migrated to California to search for gold. He moved to the Montana territory with only the clothes on his back and his bedroll.

He had learned about the butchering trade from relatives and launched his career cutting-up cattle. Before long, he owned butcher shops in many gold camps. Next, he decided to grow the cattle he was butchering and (in 1856) bought-out Johnny Grant.

Starting with Grant's 30,000 acres, Kohrs eventually grazed his cattle from Colorado to Canada. Much of the land was open range that Kohrs shared with other cattlemen. He became immensely wealthy. In the early 1900s, his annual cattle sales topped \$500,000---a huge sum in those days---and not too modest in these more modern times.

Take a look at the right, bottom part of Figure 2. He even had his own railroad for shipping cattle to market. Eventually, Kohrs entered politics and helped draft the Montana Constitution that led to statehood.

Augusta Kohrs represents what we like to think the pioneering western American woman was all about (see Figure 4): Tough as nails, but tender as they come; a beautiful, dutiful mother; a proud and resourceful female.

After Conrad had begun building his empire, he brought Augusta over from Germany. Upon her arrival, she encountered a grimy house, full of filthy hired-hands, sleeping in beds infested with bed bugs. To make matters worse, her husband had employed a full-time cook (but obviously no housekeeper), *who was a man*.

⁷ Kohrs' biographies and Augusta's picture, National Park Service, "Grant-Kohrs Ranch" (GPO 2005-310-394/00412).

Her first action was to fire the cook and take over these duties herself. She announced to Conrad that no self-respecting wife could countenance a male cook in her kitchen. How times have changed! Some of my modern friends beg their male spouses to do some (if not all) the cooking.

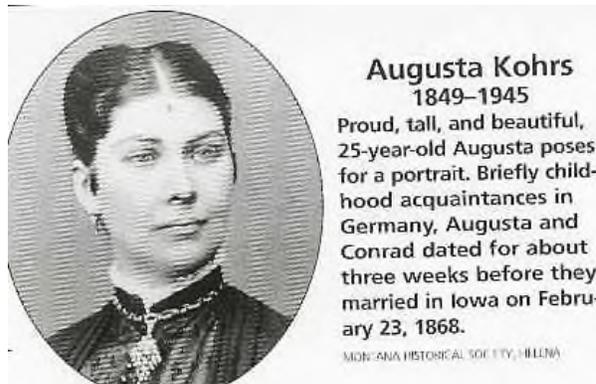


Figure 4. Augusta Kohrs.

Augusta's job description reminded me of my mom's work on my parents' modest spread in New Mexico in the 1920s and 30s: Cooking for a large family; washing clothes in a wooden tub; churning butter; tending to the house; mending clothes to extend the threads' precious time on the ranch hands' bodies.

One major difference between the Kohrs' and the Blacks' life style was their homes. My dad's first home in New Mexico was a one-room mud hut, dug into the earth on New Mexico's almost barren plains. The place resembled a cellar more than a house. As my grandparents added to their children inventory, dad and some of his brothers had to sleep outside the house. They composed their dreams in the wagon beds, which made for firm mattresses.

It is amazing to consider this Spartan life was experienced by folks only one generation removed from you and me. We have it pretty easy now-a-days.

Moving On

I would like to stay at this ranch for a long while. I would like to tell you stories of my times on a ranch that were very much like this one. But these reports are just that: reports, not books. For the readers who would like to know more about a working ranch, logon to Amazon.com and purchase *The Light Side of Little Texas*. Read the chapter titled: "Shearing, Branding, and Breeding." I also have some short stories about this aspect of America that I may publish someday. (Thanks for reading this advertisement.)

For now, it is time to move south a few miles. In so doing, we will visit some old cattle trails. Before we leave, one more shot across the bow of modern America. A country I love but a country in need of self-assessment:

For three decades, and perhaps longer, the drift [in America] has been...a downward spiral into blame, finger-pointing, pessimism, self-pity, and litigiousness. It's been a slide into a culture of whining and rationalizing. It hasn't been classic American can-do-ism. And it ain't been cowboy either.⁸

⁸ Etling, 41, in Jesse Mullins, *American Cowboy*, September/October, 2000.

Traveling America (VIII) Report Two: The Cattle Trails and an Old Prison

September 24-28, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. For report two, we continue our journey through southwestern Montana and reminisce about the old West, cowboys, and famous cattle trails. Later, we visit an old prison. For starters, Figure 5 is a National Park Service photo of the major trails used to move cattle to railroad trains or to other grazing areas.⁹

Here is an update to this essay, written in 2007. Some of the trails appearing in Figure 5 have been redrawn and documented in an extraordinary book, titled, *Finding the Great Western Trail*, written by Sylvia Gann Mahoney and published by the Texas Tech University Press, 2015.

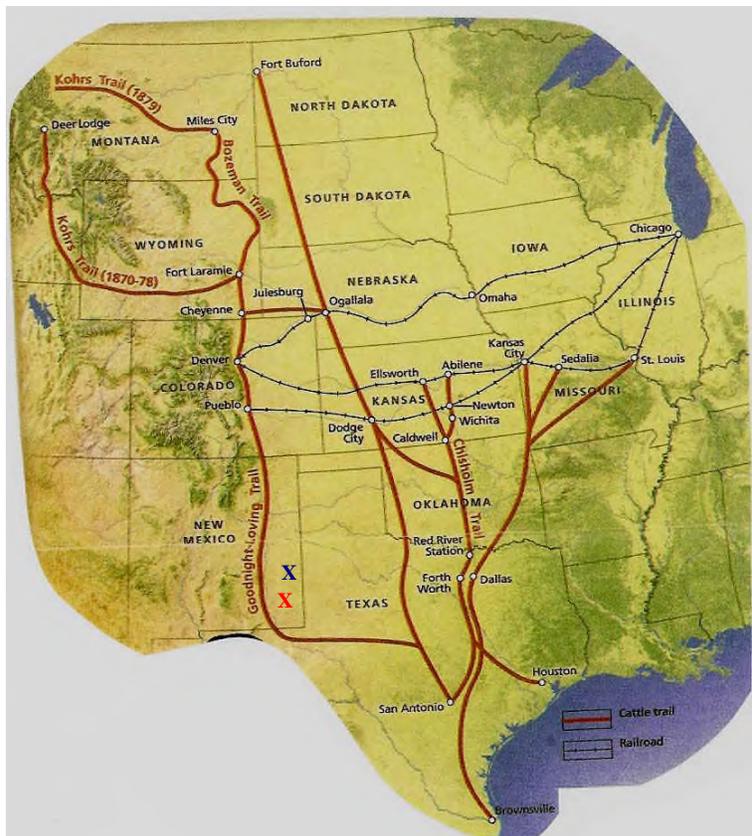


Figure 5. The cattle trails.

The two Kohrs trails and his private rail line gave Conrad Kohrs a near monopoly on the cattle trade in his part of the country. For good reason, he was called the Cattle King of Montana. By the 1890s, the Park Service guide told us his cattle grazed on more than 10 million acres of public land in the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Public land. Public welfare. And it still exists today.

⁹ National Park Service, "Grant-Kohrs Ranch" (GPO 2005-310-394/00412).

My brother Jim was a rancher in northern New Mexico. He told me of a government program that paid him *not to produce anything* on parts of his land. So he did not and he was compensated accordingly. An interesting approach to free-market capitalism: The Bureau of Land Management paid Jim to produce no capital.

My father's and step-mom's ranch was located in southeastern New Mexico, marked with a red X in Figure 5. Dad never used any of the cattle trails. In his time, trucks were brought-in to take our cattle to nearby slaughterhouses.

My older brothers and our hired hands sometimes spent nights away from our ranch house tending to the cattle and sheep. But they never had to experience the trials of moving hundreds of, "...thousand pound brute(s) [with] the intellect of a Bartlett pear" over hundreds of miles.¹⁰ The job was tedious ("The only way to drive cattle fast is slowly."¹¹), and on occasion, dangerous ("Within one second after an unusual noise, an entire herd of longhorns could be on their feet, dashing in some arbitrary fashion, trampling anything that got in its way."¹²)

Cowboys and Rodeos in the Old Days

My parents and older brothers told me about the rodeos produced in southeastern New Mexico before I was born. In comparison to modern rodeos, these events were primitive, threadbare affairs. Some writers claim the old-time rodeo "...was a formal and stately affair."¹³ Maybe later, but not in the early days.

Figure 6 (from our family album) shows one such rodeo, which was staged north of our ranch (the blue X in Figure 5). Notice the absence of grandstands and a corralled arena---a runaway critter could end up in Texas, a few miles to the east. Also, notice the rightmost cowboy (in the middle of the figure). He is wearing a tie. Yes, a tie, a sign of respect and self-respect.

One more point about this photo of the past: The man riding the bucking bull is not wearing a football helmet. Can you imagine this man wearing a football helmet!



Figure 6. A prototype rodeo.

Dad was a skilled horseman as were some of my brothers. They entered the calf roping, cutting-horse, and steer wrestling events. But there was not much money to be made in this sport.

¹⁰ Etling, 118, in Baxter Black, *Ranching Traditions*, 1989.

¹¹ Etling, 122, in Bix Bender, *Don't Squat with your Spurs on*, 1992.

¹² Etling, 125, in James Michener, *Centennial*, 1974.

¹³ Etling, 164, in Charles Nordhoff, *The Best of the West*, 1991.

Still isn't. A world champion calf roper might still have to live with his parents.¹⁴ OK, a bit of an exaggeration, but the rewards for rodeo winners are not very grand.

Just as they are today in bull riding contests, the horsemen next to the bull were available to assist the rider in dismounting from the animal and to keep him from harm's way. By the way, I cropped the picture for purposes of fitting into this text, but it still shows the flat, sparse terrain of southeastern New Mexico.

Role Models

Mom gave me the picture in Figure 7 when she was clearing-out some of her old belongings. She said the photo was made in the 1930s during a cattle trail drive in our part of the country. Impressive hombres. They exhibit essential qualities of a cowboy: sitting cross-legged, drinking whiskey, smoking, and playing cards. The only parts of the cowboy persona missing from this scene are the horse and six-shooter.

Later, I showed this picture to dad, who told me the photograph was made when these men (and others) were riding on an open range in southeastern New Mexico, rounding-up cattle for their trip to the pens. They had taken a break at the end of the day.

According to dad's story, a writer happened to be in the area. He came across the cattle drive and decided to write an article about the critters' sojourn to their final roundup. Dad told me the journalist asked the cowboys to pose for this picture for a magazine article about cowboys and cattle roundups. As seen, the men accommodated,



Figure 7. A cowboy image.

Like most people in those days (and today as well), cowboys wanted their occupations and themselves glorified. It may be they were as serious about their pose as the journalist was in setting it up. Anyway, the photograph is an interesting picture, and I treasure it as a fine reflection of the past. As with the photo in Figure 6, it is part of our family album.

¹⁴ Etling, 163, in Ehringer, *Western Horseman*.

Notice the men's hats are resting in a backward position on their heads, with their foreheads bare. On many occasions in my youth, I watched cowboy movies in which the movie star cowboy was racing his horse across a perilous unknown terrain with his hat perched on the back part of his head, similar to the hats on the men in Figure 7. I wondered how he kept his hat on. When I rode, I could not pull off this feat. My hat was clamped down tight enough to give me a headache.

I thought those cowboys possessed some mystical hat brim or had a knack for defying Mother Nature's winds. Little did I know, they were wearing bobby pins in their hair, which were in turn clamped to the hat. Bobby pins! No self-respecting cowboy would be seen with bobby pins in his hair. Next thing you know, they'll be making a movie about gay cowboys.

It is time to move on. We close this part of the report with one last quote from Ms. Etling:

The golden age of the real cowboy in the American West was gone as the twentieth century dawned. Yet cowboy culture was still growing brightly in the minds of Americans.¹⁵

The Old Montana Prison

Our next stop on *Traveling America (VIII)* was the Old Montana Prison in Deer Lodge, Montana. And old it is. The first part of the prison was built in the late 1870s. Its claim to fame: It was the home to at least one member of Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch.

The left photo in Figure 8 is a view of the prison yard from inside the prison (and the distant Montana countryside). The middle picture shows the huge wall surrounding the prison. The wall was built with convict labor, a fine example of a low-bid contract. The right photo shows one of the cell blocks.

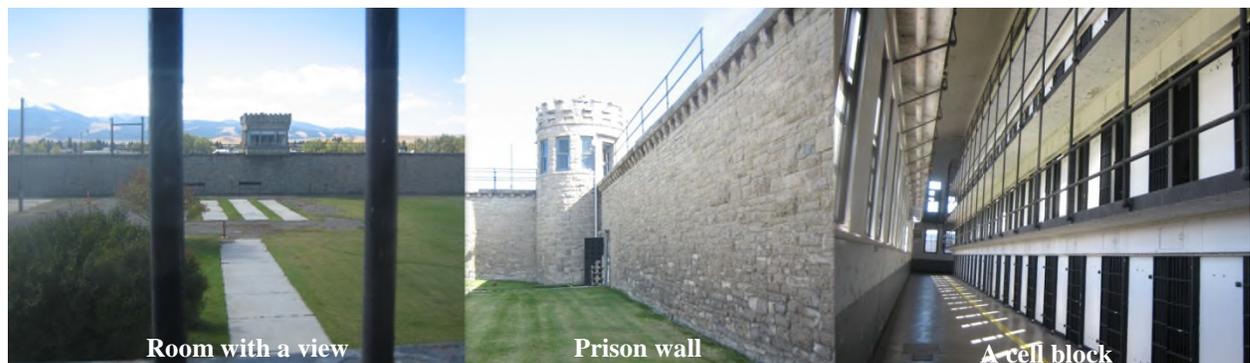


Figure 8. Prison scenes.

I have visited a number of prisons and jails, some to see friends or relatives who were inmates, others to tour the facility (Alcatraz, for example). I can say with assurance that with each visit, I have been motivated to remain a visitor and not an inmate. If you have a borderline relative or friend who is skirting the law, take him or her on a tour of a prison facility. Unless your pal is a closet idiot, the visit should provide the needed antidote to a life of crime.

The Old Montana Prison is no exception. It is a depressing place. For example, a cell block had no running water or sewer facilities. Each cell was furnished with two buckets, one for sewage, and one for water.

¹⁵ Etling, 199, in David Dary, *Cowboy Culture*, 1989.

Showers were scheduled. So were meals and exercise periods. So was just about everything an inmate did. However, the two-bucket furniture idea proved unacceptable to the Society for the Prevention of Punishment to Criminals. In 1979, a new prison was opened four miles away from this site, complete with a toilet and a wash basin in each cell. Ah, life is good, even if it comes late in life.

In those days (as now), it was recognized a happy prisoner was a no-problem prisoner. Thus, this prison was eventually equipped with a gymnasium, classrooms, and a movie theater. In an astounding affront to local unions and other citadels of capitalism, Warden Frank Conley made the following moves:¹⁶

- He contracted inmates for construction projects throughout the state, thus providing income to run the prison. This project also alleviated overcrowded conditions at the prison as the inmates were housed at the job sites.
- Prison crews built 500 miles of roads around the area.
- Inmates built eleven buildings at the Warm Springs State Hospital and four buildings at the Galen Tuberculosis Sanitarium.
- He leased or owned eleven ranches, operated by inmates.
- In 1916, 50 percent of the inmates worked and lived outside the prison wall.

This prison was largely self-sustaining, and the inmates were doing something productive. I venture to say they were not happy campers, but they were at least gainfully occupied. Why import Mexican laborers? We have all the manpower needed to do America's menial jobs. Put those criminals to work!

Sole Mates

Speaking of which, we cut to a short play. At center stage, we find inmate Harold sitting in his cell, thinking about his next job move (Figure 9 (a)). Thus far at the Montana prison, Harold's employment opportunities have been rather limited, as he is restricted to his cell 23 hours a day. However, for his one hour of "freedom," Harold has taken-up the cobbler trade and thinks Warden Conley's free-market programs are well suited for him to prosper. One of Harold's products is shown in Figure 9 (b).

¹⁶ "The Old Montana Prison," visitor's handout.

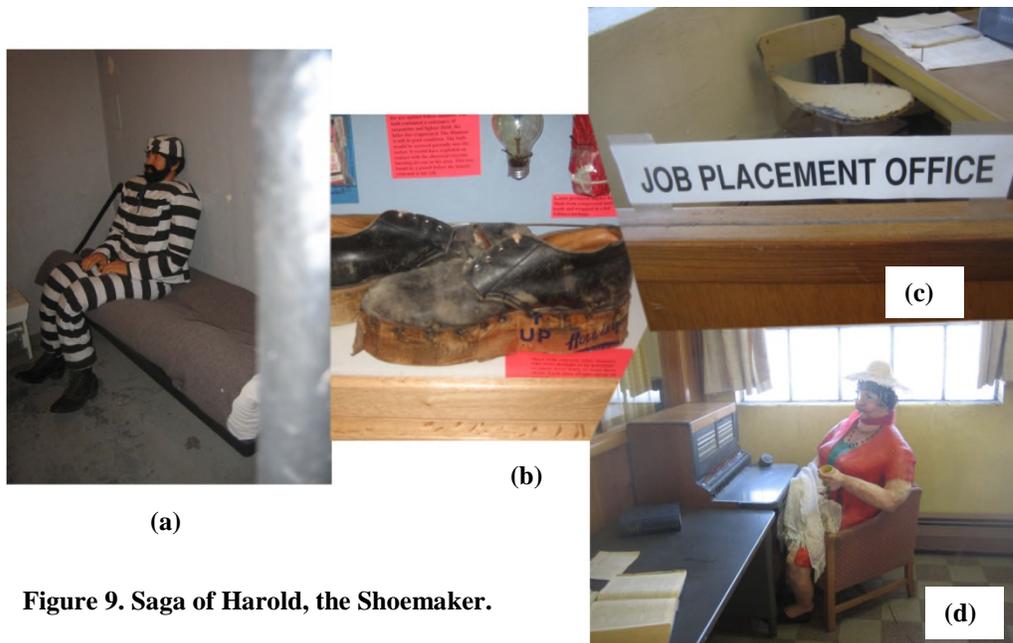


Figure 9. Saga of Harold, the Shoemaker.

Harold knows unbounded opportunities exist on the outside for shoemakers. After all, America's population in the 1880s is exploding and Americans need shoes! What is more, many shoeless immigrants arrive on America's shores, seeking freedom, wealth, and shoes---but not necessarily in that order. Thus, like any aspiring capitalist, Harold sees an opportunity. Granted, as evidenced in Figure 9 (b), he needs to hone his skill a bit, but one must begin somewhere.

Harold sets up an appointment with the prison's Job Placement Office (Figure 9 (c)). The staffing of this office is only one person, Mary, who also acts as the prison's telephone switchboard operator (Figure 9 (d)). Mary's multi-tasking skills are due to a lack of traffic through the job placement office. After all, most companies are reluctant to hire someone for only one hour a day.

The stage is set. The scene changes to the Job Placement/Telephone Office. Harold sits himself before Mary and her switchboard.

- Mary, "Good afternoon, Harold. You're my first job seeker this year. What's up?"
- Harold, "Hello, Mary. I've decided to try-out Warden Conley's 'work outside these walls' program. I've taken up the cobbler trade. I know I've only an hour a day to sell my wares, but I'm a fast shoemaker and a fast talker. I just need an opportunity to show my products outside."As Harold places one of his shoes on Mary's switchboard counter. As seen here:



- Mary, "Eh...that 'UP' sign on the sole. Don't folks know which side of a shoe is up?"
- "A lot of prison dudes don't know up from down. Anyway, I guess I should have written 'left' and 'right' on each pair of shoes. You know, some folks don't know their right shoe from their left shoe."
- Mary, "Harold, that would be, 'Some folks don't know their right foot from their left foot.' "
- Harold, "Sure, but if they don't know their right foot from their left foot, why do you think they can tell the difference between their right shoe and their left shoe?"
- Mary, "Never mind. Anyway, your shoes won't sell. Those soles are too thick. Nice try, Harold. Let me know if you come up with something else. Good day."

Harold is quite disappointed. He returns to his cell where he is consoled by this cellmate, a black dude from the remote land of Harlem, a man by the name of Horace. Horace has not had the opportunity to see Harold's handiwork, which Harold brings back to the cell.

- Horace, "Whoa, dude! That's one heavy shoe! Why the big sole?"
- Harold, "Why the big sole!? Horace, you yourself told me a man needs a lot of sole to make it through life."

I could not let pass without parody those two mannequins, the shoe with the UP sign, and the job placement office. Sometimes, a break, however soleful, is a tonic to the heavy walks in life. Speaking of walks, the next article takes us through walks in the Yellowstone National Park.

Traveling America (VIII) Report Three: Yellowstone National Park

September 24-28, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. In hopes the "Sole Mate" play did not result in too many lost readers, I clean up my act, and we pay a call on the Yellowstone National Park. Figure 1 in the first report places Yellowstone in Northwest Wyoming and Figure 10 provides a more detailed view.¹⁷



Figure 10. Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Jackson Hole.

I learned from a Trivial Pursuit card that Yellowstone--- established in 1872---was America's first national park. (I missed the question by answering Disneyland.)

Yellowstone's popularity led to more national parks and the National Park system. And what a treasure our national parks are. Perhaps one of these days, the winning quarterback at the Super Bowl might look into the TV camera lens and boast, "I'm headed for Yellowstone!" But probably not, as the National Park Service does not give-out endorsements, except to Smokey the Bear's heirs.

Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres make it larger than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Prior to the fires in 1988, almost 80 percent of Yellowstone was covered by forest, mostly lodgepole pine. Now, much of the park's terrain is covered with burned tree trunks. Still, the trip is worthwhile. The geysers, waterfalls, hot springs, fumaroles, mudpots, and wildlife are (to my knowledge) not found in one location anywhere else on earth.

The park draws millions of tourists each year. I recommend you visit during the spring or fall. Avoid the summer crowds. Holly and I traveled through the park in late September. The crowds were modest, but all Park Service lodges and hotels were booked.

If you cannot rent an overnight room inside the park, a good strategy is to spend one night in Gardiner, Montana, (north of Yellowstone) and another night at Jackson Hole,

¹⁷ *Yellowstone: The Story Behind the Scenery*, National Park Service publication, 14th printing, 2006, ISBN 08871440-4.

Wyoming, (south of Grand Teton). (In either order.) Then, an entire day can be spent driving through the park.

North Yellowstone

We entered Yellowstone from the north entrance via route 89 and through the famous stone archway (Figure 11), a structure dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, "...for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."¹⁸

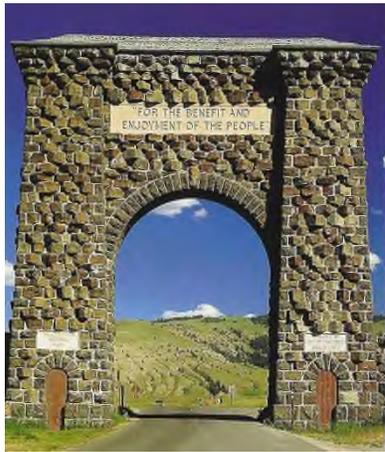


Figure 11. The Stone Archway at the north entrance.

The city of Gardiner, Montana, is located near this entrance. It is at this town where the earliest human artifact was found in this part of the country. In 1959, Otho Mack came across a portion of an obsidian point. This tool is estimated to be at least 11,000 years old and belongs to the Clovis Point class of artifact.¹⁹

Until white explorers and settlers arrived, the Crow, Blackfoot, Shoshone, and Nez Perce tribes roamed this land. In 1806, John Colter split from the Lewis and Clark expedition and is thought to be the first European to visit this fantastic landscape (in the winter of 1807-1808). Colter did not record what he saw, but historians believe he encountered the surreal thermal features of the park.

The **Albright Visitor Center** is near the north entrance. Here, you will find tour guides, libraries, gift shops, lodging, with sprinklings of the local wild life. For our visit, a large male elk had brought his "harem" (as it is known) into town. The herd was resting on a road median, just across from the Park Service visitor building. See Figure 12. A Park Service ranger was on guard to warn tourists to keep their distance from the elk. I recorded in my notebook:

- Ranger, "Stay away from the median folks. The bull elk will charge if you get too close. He's guarding his females, and looking for more to add to his harem."
- A tourist next to us remarked to his wife, "Better stay behind me honey; can't be too careful."
- The wife laughed.

¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹ Aubrey L. Haines, *The Yellowstone Story, Volume I* (Boulder, CO: University Press, 1996), 16-17.



Figure 12. Visitors at the Albright Visitor Center.

Shortly, the male started to move his ladies out of the area. Unfortunately, passing cars were blocking their exit. I took a video of his attempt to cross the street to a meadow. Two frames from the movie are shown in Figure 13. The bull appeared to be a cautious pedestrian because he watched the cars before moving onto the street. After viewing several vehicles pass-by, he seemed to grow impatient as he set his sights on a gray sedan, seen in the left photo of Figure 13.

The still pictures do not do justice to the episode, as the video shows him following the movement of this car. After the vehicle had passed, the elk gave the car an, "in your face!" raspberry---a strange high-pitched sound called an elk bugle (seen in the right photo of Figure 13). I asked the Park Ranger if the elk was as smart as he appeared. She responded that the elk in the area were conditioned to traffic, but on occasion, a bull elk was known to charge a car and attack it with its antlers. Road rage is not confined to us humans.



Figure 13. Trying to get out of town.

The northern part of Yellowstone has some of the more rugged terrain in the park. I snapped the two photos in Figure 14 from a location a few miles from the north entrance. The

left photo is a view to the north. I turned the camera around and shot a picture of Reporterette and Milli with a view to the south. Notice the distant terrain in both shots, all within the borders of this park.



Figure 14. A look at the Yellowstone terrain.

Thermal Wonders

If for no other reason---well, other than to watch an elk direct street traffic---you should come to Yellowstone to see its thermal emissions. I do not possess enough hyperbolic talent to describe how wondrous they are. When viewing them, they seem to have been transported to earth from a distant world. Photos or videos cannot profile them accurately, but I will try to give you an idea of their wonder. I took pictures of all the images shown in the remainder of this report, but my camera (and my photographic ineptitude) was not up to the task. Thus, the following pictures are courtesy of taxpayers and the National Park Service.²⁰ Before viewing these marvels, here are four definitions to help in understanding some of Yellowstone's features:²¹

Geysers are caused when underground chambers of water are heated to the boiling point by volcanic rock. When heat causes the water to boil, pressure forces a superheated column of steam and water to the surface. The initial amount of water released at the surface lessens the column's weight, which also lowers its boiling point. When the boiling point drops, the entire column of water vaporizes at once, shooting out of the ground in a spectacular eruption. **Fumaroles** are similar to geysers, but release bursts of hot gases instead of water. **Hot springs** are supplied by the same sources as geysers, but these systems are under lower pressure, which causes water to bubble and pool at the surface instead of erupting. The water in these naturally heated springs often exceeds temperatures 140° F.

²⁰ *Yellowstone: The Story Behind the Scenery*, National Park Service publication, 14th printing, 2006, ISBN 08871440-4.

²¹ "fumaroles," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005. 1993-2004 Microsoft Corporation, and *Yellowstone: The Story Behind the Scenery*, 20.

Mudpots: Where hot water is limited and hydrogen sulfide gas is present (emitting the "rotten egg" smell common to thermal areas), sulfuric acid is generated. The acid dissolves the surrounding rock into fine particles of silica and clay, which mix with what little water there is to form the seething and bubbling mudpots.

Figure 15 is a picture of Roaring Mountain. It was so-named because early visitors remarked the mountain "roared." The sound come from hissing steam vents, called fumaroles. Roaring Mountain has lost some of its roar, but in the early 1800s, people living as far away as four miles could hear this mountain's proclamations. Why go to Disneyland? Fantasies abound in the natural world. Walt's Magic Mountain is a paltry runner-up to Roaring Mountain.

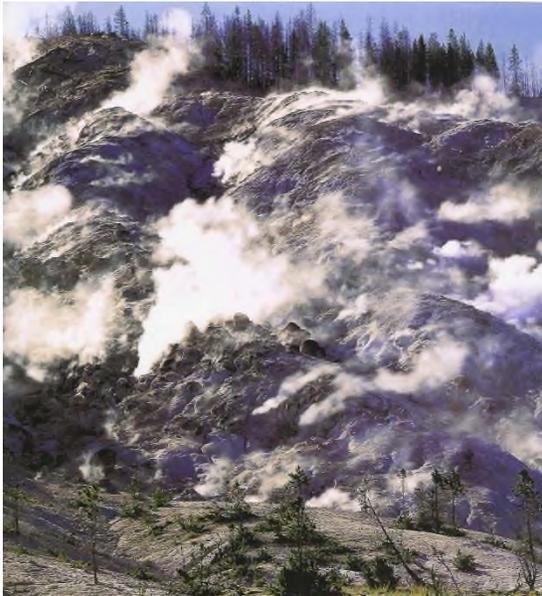


Figure 15. Roaring Mountain.

Next on our schedule was Canary Spring, seen in Figure 16. Canary Spring is unique to Yellowstone. It is the only hot spring where the hot water works its way up through limestone and not rhyolite, which results in the shape of its fountains.

What do you think of this thermal specimen? *Hit the channel change button? When does Tiger tee-off? Load the DVD, honey; let's see Jack Bauer kill-off half the Islamic population?* As I said earlier, to each his/her own, but here's what the naturalist John Muir had to say about Canary Spring and the other thermals at Yellowstone:

So numerous are they and varied, nature seems to have gathered them from all over the world as specimens of her rarest fountains to show in one place what she can do.²²

Yes, Mr. Muir. All in one place, in an extraordinary location on our planet.

²² *Yellowstone: The Story Behind the Scenery*, 23.



Figure 16. Canary Spring.

Figure 17 shows an example of a mudpot. Mudpots look as if they are made up of muddy, boiling water. But as mentioned earlier, the bubbling action is due to gasses and steam coming to the surface through the viscous mud.



Figure 17. Mudpots.

The Ultimate: Old Faithful

I cannot recall when I first heard the term *Old Faithful*. I suspect it came from a song I listened-to during the country and western times of my youth. I think the song was about two folks talking about their love life. The song title was, "My Dear Old Faithful. You're Old; that's Why You're Faithful."

Anyway, Old Faithful was so-named in 1870 because of its regular eruptions. Its output has changed little since that time, which led to another famous C&W song, "Honey, I Know You're Old, but Can't You Be A Little Bit More Like Old Faithful?"

Old Faithful. The climax of a trip to Yellowstone. We pulled into the Old Faithful parking lot. For the past several days, we had been on a sightseeing roll. Historic ranches. Old prisons. And for most of this day, thermals. All of which led to an empty stomach on the part of your reporter. How obtuse can a person be? I knew Old Faithful was faithful in its emission schedules. So, what did I do? Without consulting with Old Faithful, I made it to a nearby café---dragging along Reporterette and Milli---for a sandwich...during which time Old Faithful was performing a wondrous geyser ejaculation.

As we sauntered around the curio shop, stuffed with BBQ sandwiches, we chanced upon a notice that Old Faithful was in the process of fulfilling its faithfulness. No! There I was, looking for an Old Faithful T-shirt, when 200 yards away, the geyser was erupting.

We ran to the site and (luckily) did witness some of Old Faithful's final spasms. But it was anti-climatic. While we knew of Old Faithful's prowess (the left photo in Figure 18), we were witness to Old Faithful's post-emission emissions (the right photo in Figure 18). I asked Holly, *Was it good for you?* She replied, *No, but it was better than nothing.*



Figure 18. Emissions and post-emissions.

The Fires

Notice the sparse terrain behind Old Faithful in the left photo of Figure 18. This landscape is the result of the fires of 1988. The trees have begun to grow-back, as seen in the right photo. The *National Geographic* magazine has this to say about these fires:

By the time the conflagration—one of the greatest in U. S. history—was contained in autumn, the historic Old Faithful Inn and the towns of West Yellowstone, Cooke City, and Silver Gate had been threatened with incineration. Despite the efforts of some 10,000 civilian and military fire fighters, fire had invaded nearly a million acres of Yellowstone, or almost half the park's territory—45 times more than in any other recorded year.

To some the eight huge fires seemed catastrophic and disgraceful, the result of negligence or stupidity. To others they seemed nature's signature written with a grand flourish on an

awesome scale—and a reminder that humanity's powers have limits. For most, perhaps, feelings were mixed. Cannot we have our wilderness wild but keep it safe, keep it nice?²³

No, we cannot. Nice is not nature. Nature is not nice. Rousseau's Noble Savage and Thoreau's whimsical life in the wilds (a short walk away from an 1840's 7/11 store) would not make it very far in a Yellowstone wilderness.²⁴ Left alone, Yellowstone is a harsh world. America's early explorers---the John Colters of our world...and our mythical cowboys---would look askance at the pretensions of the world's Rousseaus and Thoreaus. Our American pioneers' life was living life. Rousseau's and Thoreau's life was writing about it.

Like snow and rain, fire is a natural part of nature's ecology. You want to build your cedar-sided, wooden-shingle home in the middle of the forest, say in *dry* Southern California? Go to it, my friend. And keep a heat alarm near your bedside. If you are lucky, you will have some of Uncle Sam's firefighters keeping Mother Nature at bay, as seen in Figure 19, a scene from the Yellowstone fires of 1988.



Figure 19. Brother, can you spare a hose?

It's been a kick. Elk as traffic cops. Geysers as Freudian fountains. Cedar homes incinerated. I trust no one was offended. If you were, anon would advise, "Lighten Up!" And for all of us, even jokesters, we leave Yellowstone with these thoughts:

Of all the reasons we have to get away from it all and to escape to these mountains from time to time, perhaps the one that is the most compelling is an unconscious reason. We sense that somehow our roots as humans beings are nestled into the floor of these

²³ Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004 Microsoft Corporation, in David Jeffrey, *National Geographic*, "Yellowstone, The Great Fires of 1988."

²⁴ Thoreau's *Walden*, a fine book with thoughts about slavery, for example, beautifully written. On my last read of *Walden*, I came away with the notion that Thoreau was a 19th century prototype of the 20th century Yuppie.

forests... We are from this wilderness, and we return to our yearning to know our history... For even though our wilder origins have, for the most part, been acculturated out of us, there remains a strong unconscious memory of our connectedness with the earth. We return for mysterious and unspoken reasons, as if on a pilgrimage to a sacred place.²⁵

²⁵ Paul Firnhaber, quote, *Yellowstone: The Story Behind the Scenery*, 45.

Traveling America (VIII) Report Four: The Grand Teton National Park

September 24-28, 2007

As Figure 1 in the first report indicates, the next stop on *Traveling America (VIII)* was the Grand Teton National Park, located a few miles south of Yellowstone.

Your reporter, Reporterette, and dog Milli offered our opinions about which of these parks offered the better views. Grand Teton garnered our votes because of its spectacular mountains. Milli did not care for Yellowstone because many of the trees were burned-down. On the other hand, Yellowstone has the fantastic thermals. All agreed both parks offered experiences that at least equaled a visit to Six Flags over Whatever.

Figure 20 will give you an idea of the terrain in the Grand Teton Park.²⁶ These mountains are new and rugged. They've not been worn-down by millions of years of erosion and time. Geologists tell us the ranges began forming, "...only 9 million years ago as the result of earthquakes along the Teton fault."²⁷

Initially, the total vertical movement along the fault was about 30,000 feet, but over time, the valley was filled with ash and glacial deposits. Today, only 6,000 to 7,000 feet separate the summits and the valley. Mother Nature strews a lot of debris on her floors.

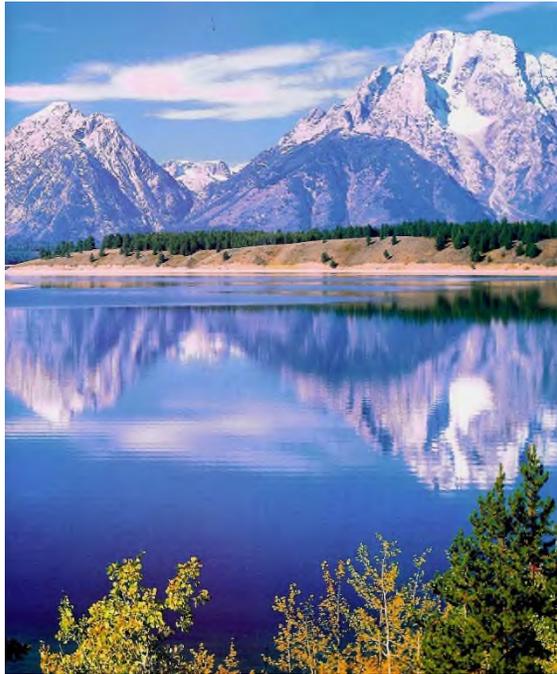


Figure 20. Typical scene in the Grand Teton Park.

²⁶ My camera shots did not capture the beauty of this park. So, once again, I rely our tax dollars and other photos in this report. See *Grand Teton, The Continuing Story*, ISBN 0-99714-084-X, 2005.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29, "New Version." The underlying rock of these mountains was formed about 3 billion years ago.

Thank You, John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

This park was established in 1929 with the help of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who donated much of the land. Thus, the road running through the park is named the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway. I knew of the fine philanthropic work of this man because of visits to restored colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, but I had not realized this park owed its existence to him as well.

Here's to the Rockefellers, DuPonts, and Gates of the world. Long live free-market capitalism, as long as the capitalists pass some of their plundering of the masses to the masses. OK, just a joke, as I am a plunderer myself. Besides, what's the relevance of Darwinism if Darwinian principles suddenly become irrelevant when humans replace their moccasins for wing tips?

For myself, I intend to divert my modest, semi-plundered wealth into a fantastic tombstone for myself: Huge, ornate, and egocentric. On it will be my favorite epitaph, uttered by Epicurus. As I quoted in a chapter from *The Deadly Trinity*:

“Death itself is not bad for the dead, because they are dead, and not bad for the living, because no living person can be dead.”²⁸ Surely a testament to practicality, and a pragmatic approach to dealing with grieving relatives.

As you may have noticed, I have diverted this report to subjects other than those pertaining to Grand Teton. Why? I have exhausted superlatives about this part of mother earth. I have exhausted my inventory of adjectives about matchless sights.

Not wanting to be redundant, may I simply advise you to take-in this breathtaking part of America. It is a "...natural habitat of moose, bears, coyotes, and deer. As a wildlife sanctuary, it is the winter feeding ground of one of the largest elk herds in North America, as well as the home of bald eagles, Canada geese, great blue herons, osprey, and rare trumpeter swans." ²⁹

The high mountain ranges of America, far away from the smog of urban valleys, offer an escape from our skirmishes with traffic congestion and surly citizens. They beckon us to come out of our high rises and suburban tracts. They summon us to travel into America's wilderness to breathe fresh air into our lungs. These majestic mountains and lakes offer a respite from the musty space of our urban confines. If only for a short time, they offer clean space, rejuvenating vistas, and succor for our souls.

²⁸ David Papineau, general editor, *Western Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 71.

²⁹ "Grand Teton," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004, Microsoft Corporation.

Traveling America (VIII) Report Five: Jackson Hole, Wyoming

September 24-28, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This report will be short. Its brevity is not meant to demean its subject, which is Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The town is a delight, perhaps not worth a trip alone to see it. But if you're in the area, drop by for a while.

Many years ago, I visited Jackson Hole to ski a couple days with some friends. I recall the slopes were fine, the restaurants great, and the nightlife even greater. But that was a time when nightlife took on a time span from dusk to dawn---plenty of time for adventure. Now-a-days---in my older years---nightlife does not include anything pertaining to "life." Just sleep.

I bring Jackson Hole into this report because of four large arches on display at each corner of the town square. One arch is shown in Figure 21. As you can see, the arches are made-up of elk antlers. How did I know these antlers were from elks, and say not deer? Or antelope? Or moose?



Figure 21. The Antler Arches.

Even I know a moose antler when I see it hanging from the wall of the local hunting lodge. But admittedly, it was a tough call. First, I intuited elephants and big horn sheep out of the list of possibilities. Next, I eliminated goat horns, along with the horns of a rhinoceros (which is actually a very large hair).

Next, I cornered a local citizen walking through the square who informed me the horns came from elk. I am not a hunter of horned animals, so I do not know much about their horns. I occasionally watch TV shows devoted to marksmen downing a grazing gazelle at 100 yards with a semi-bazooka. But my experience with antlers is a distant one.

Yes, many antlers. But how many? Hundreds? Thousands? And hard to count, even with a close-up, as seen in Figure 22. Send a guess to TallyTheAntlers.org. The winner---most likely a gent who hunts and therefore grasps the idea of piles of antlers---will receive a large elk antler to place on his wall, next to the dangerous deer he downed with his modified Uzi.



Figure 22. Make a guess!

As you may have surmised, I do not consider hunting deer or elk with a rifle as being a sport, or the hunter as being a hunter. You want to hunt? OK, try stalking the critter with a bow and arrow. Or to make it fairer, try using a knife, or a slingshot. Even better, strap some antlers to your head and duke it out with your adversary. Now *that's* hunting.

Otherwise, you are not a hunter. You are a shooter. I realize shooting these animals is essential to population control. Just be careful of how you characterize yourself. And if I have offended anyone, that was not my intent. I am suggesting we call a spade a spade, a hunter a hunter, and a shooter a shooter.

Anyway my first thought was, "Where are the folks from the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Elks (SPCE)? Looks like fertile ground for some spirited protests about elk killings."

My local source informed me these antlers did not come from dead elk, but from live elk who shed their horns each spring at the nearby National Elk Refuge. Their discards are picked-up by the local collection society---who takes a busman's holiday for a field trip to collect defunct horns. In addition, the antlers are collected by the Boy Scouts who sell them to local Rotarians, who put them on the arches. A win-win situation for an amazing display in a cool town.

Traveling America (VIII) Report Six: The San Juan National Forest

September 24-28, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We continue our visits to parts of America's West with a drive through southwest Colorado and the San Juan National Forest. As with other locations in *Traveling America (VIII)*, I have chosen to write about this forest because of its spectacular scenery. You should take a trip to San Juan forest, even if it means a special trek to Colorado. For my older readers, don't delay for too long. Father Time's cataracts might obscure the visual magic awaiting you.

Figure 23 shows the general route of the highway through this land. The major towns for refilling your Cokes are Montrose, Durango, and Pagosa Springs. In between these burgs, you will find turnouts to stop and see the scenery, but no McDonald's or toilets. Be prepared to rough it, if only for a few hours.



Figure 23. The San Juan National Forest area.

As well, be prepared for a mountain road. It is paved, well designed, and safe. But the drive requires your undivided attention. Some parts of the journey are at 15 MPH. If you're an A-type and in a hurry to hurry-up your life, this trip is not for you. But that profile fits none of my readers. Else, why would you be reading this essay in the first place?

Congratulations. In spite of the frenetic and ugly goings-on around you---sound-bite TV, raucous freeways, drive-by shootings, Walmart clerks who no longer smile, and Judge Judy---you remain laid-back and cool.

Don't Even Think About It

I traveled this road two years ago, in the middle of winter, and in the middle of a brain-dead seizure. Holly and I were headed in the northerly direction on this route. We had the situation *somewhat* in hand, as the Weather Channel----in-between its vital reports on "18th Century Storms in the Bering Straits"---informed us we might be *somewhat* at risk. The channel showed a lot of white stuff over southwest Colorado. Who cared? On King!

Never again. I've reported about this winter episode in *Traveling America (II)*. For now, let's bask in the beauty of a fall season in the San Juan National Forest, some views shown in Figure 24.

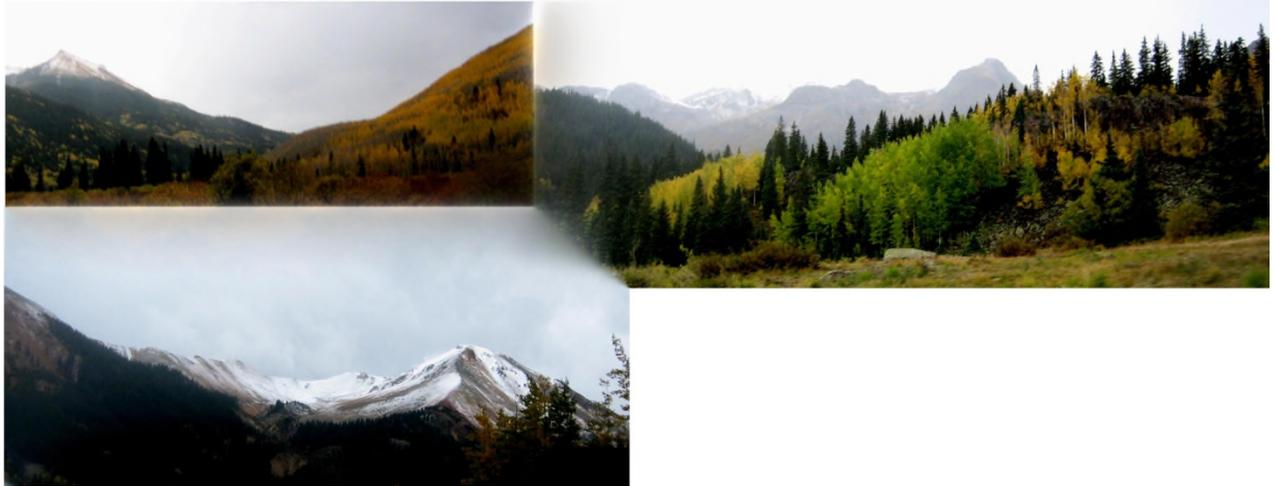


Figure 24. Scenes from the San Juan National Forest.

Who Owns These Lands?

Eleven national forests are located in Colorado. They are owned, maintained, and protected by the federal government. San Juan National Forest is the largest national forest in this state, covering two million acres. Not one neon light will be seen in these forests, nor one billboard. I suspect if these lands were privately owned, a huge sign---advertising a nearby curio shop with its mouth-watering taffy---would be planted in the middle of a meadow near the highway. When dealing with this subject, it is one of the instances I favor Uncle Sam's presence in my life.

Trees Galore. About 655 million acres, or some 29 percent of the land area of the United States are classified as forestlands.³⁰ Contrary to the claims of The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Trees, almost 1/3 of this country is forest. This writer, who grew up on the treeless, arid plains of southeastern New Mexico, remains amazed by the richness of America's lands. I prefer to live in places with a lot of trees and foliage because I had a tree-deprived childhood. I also love the rain, the snow, and the sun behind a cloud. I never grow tired of foggy days.

More than 1/4 (191 million acres) of this land, is owned by us taxpayers and administered by the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Here are some interesting statistics about America's forests:

There are 156 national forests. The state with the largest national forest area is Alaska (22.2 million acres), followed by California (20.6 million acres), Idaho (20.4 million acres), Montana (16.8 million acres), and Oregon (15.7 million acres). The forests range in sizes from about 684 acres in the Choctawatchee

³⁰ David L. Adams, "National Forests," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004, Microsoft Corporation.

National Forest in Florida to about 16.7 million acres in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. (*Where's Texas?*)

State-owned forestland totals 50.2 million acres in the United States, and each state owns some forestland. This total includes 27.4 million acres of timberland and 22.8 million acres of other forestland that is used for purposes other than timber, such as recreation or research.³¹

Therein lies the controversy between the so-called tree-huggers and the lumberjacks. The tree-huggers believe *any* cutting of trees will lead to yet more cutting of trees, eventually leading to the decimation of all Ponderosa Pines, the giant Redwoods, and the apple tree in your backyard. They claim private industry has no right to make its living on public land.

In contrast, the lumberjacks claim this great country has more than enough trees to provide each American with a wood-framed house and every Chinaman with a wooden toothpick. They claim public land is just that "public," and should be open to harvest. They also believe the reservation of 1/4 of America's land for the Spotted Owl is a bit excessive.

Wildlife Galore. Another controversial subject regarding America's protected forestland is the introduction of heretofore defunct wildlife back into a forest. It is a divisive topic because the 191 million acres of national forest is teeming with indigenous critters. The issue revolves around the animal-huggers wanting to restore an area to its "original" creature-oriented habitat. In contrast, others claim wolves and wildcats leave a forest for good reasons: Mother Nature and 30 caliber bullets.

A few days after traveling through the San Juan Forest, I talked with a man, a deer hunter, at a hospital waiting room in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I was there to have some stitches removed, and he was there to have some put in. We talked about the beautiful fall colors of the San Juan trees this time of year.

He brought the subject around to the re-introduction of the lynx into the nearby Sangre de Cristo Mountains as well as the San Juan forest, farther north. He also talked about the re-introduction of the wolf into some of the northern parks. He was not happy about this situation:

- Hunter, "As far as I can tell, one live wolf equals ten dead deer."
- Reporter, "That many?"
- "Just like us, a wolf has to eat."
- "Which means fewer deer to hunt. You're a deer hunter?"
- "Yep."
- "Do you eat the meat of the deer you kill?"
- "Sure. Keeps me and my family in meat for a good part of the winter."
- "So, it's meat on your table or meat on the wolf's table?"
- "Yep."
- "For fifteen years my wife and I lived in a place where the deer had the run of the area around our house. One live deer could eat all our rose bushes. We gave up and turned the outside over to the deer. We stopped growing flowers."
- "Yeah, and you don't need to eat rose bushes."

³¹ Ibid.

Good point. Still, I have not heard about any shortage of deer in this country, especially in my back yard. Anyway, our attempts at a flower garden resembled rearranging deck chairs on a tilting Titanic. As time wore on, those once beautiful, darling deer begin to get on my nerves. I did not mind the lack of foliage around the house, just the preponderance of deer droppings. Huge piles of the stuff, making a supposedly casual walk around our home not so casual.

I began to throw stones at the deer in my backyard. They paid little attention to my tosses. I tried a pellet gun, to no avail. Their fur and hide proved impervious to the small projectiles. They would look up from their grazing toward the source of the attack, casually viewing me with their limpid gorgeous eyes, then return to feast on the foliage.

Where are the deer supposed to go? Beats me. After all, as I said, they were here first, and they are doing nothing more than what they been doing for centuries. Eating and defecating in their backyard, long before it was mine.

But I have a solution. Let's put salt licks in our neighbors' backyards, surreptitious-like behind a tree here and there. There you are. The deer problem is no longer our problem. Another vexing issue is solved by Your on the Street Reporter. Send taxable donations to NotInMyBackyard@ButInYourBackyard.com

Let's move farther south for the final segment of this report: The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta.

Traveling America (VIII) **Report Seven: The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta**

October 10, 2007

Our last report for *Traveling America (VIII)* places us in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to attend the 36th annual Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. The word *international* was added to the title a few years ago when a balloon was blown away and landed in Texas. If you are a free spirit about where you are transported---without your control---hot-air ballooning is the sport for you. ...And Texas accepts U.S. passports.

During these articles, I have made references to the inadequacy of my camera and prose to capture the beauty of Yellowstone, the Grand Teton, and the San Juan National Forest. I make the same claim about the spectacle of hundreds of giant balloons---many six stories high---floating gracefully over the high desert country of Northern New Mexico. You have to witness this display to appreciate its magnificence.

For the readers who may not know about this event, or perhaps have not seen pictures of these balloons, we set the stage with Figure 24, a view of the Sandia Mountains at dawn---the scene for an upcoming spectacle. So far, there are no balloons in the air. But soon, there will be many.

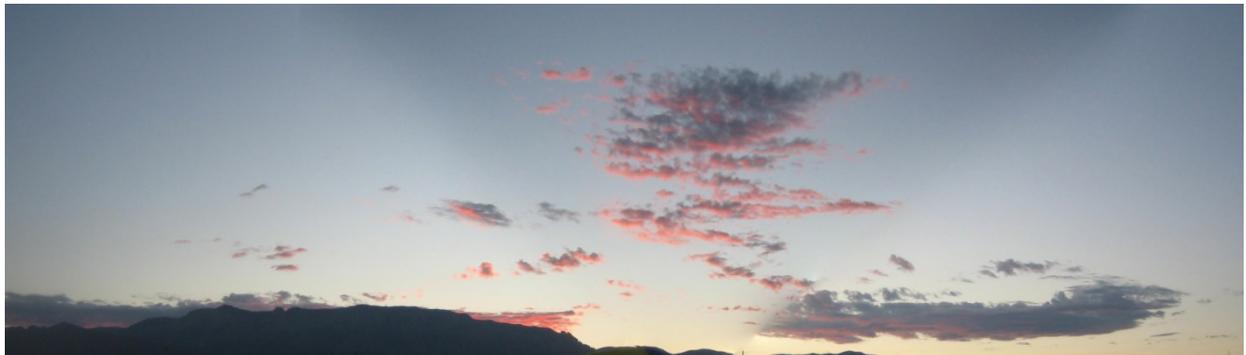


Figure 24. The Sandia Mountains and the sky above await the balloons.

If you decide to attend this festival, arrive early to avoid the crowds and find a good parking space. With this schedule, you will also have time to walk around the balloons before they are launched. Yes, you can meander among the balloons. No security gates. No grandstands. You can even assist the crews and passengers to put their balloons aloft. And what you will see, soon after the sun comes-up over the Sandias, are balloons of every imaginable shape and color; some shown in Figure 25.

A few details about the mechanics of hot air balloons: As hot air is blown into the balloon's cavity, the craft slowly leaves the ground. As we learned from "Watch Mr. Wizard" many years ago, hot air rises. The lift-offs are controlled by stripped-shirted "referees," but the scene resembles one of controlled bedlam. The balloons may bump against one another as they ascend, seemingly trying to establish aerial turf. But the jostling is more accidental than intentional, as hot air balloons are at the mercy of prevailing winds.



Figure 25. Four balloons.

As seen in Figure 25, the passengers in the gondola are dwarf-like in relation to the size of the balloon. By the way, the balloon is also called the envelope. It is made of nylon or Dacron and reinforced with strips of webbing---not visible, but inside the envelope. Also not visible, and at the top of the envelope, is an opening through which hot air can be released to cause the balloon to descend.

The gondola holds passengers, pilot, instruments, fuel tanks, hot air instruments, and bottles of champagne. The latter is consumed at the pilot's discretion, but tradition requires the balloon's passengers to offer champagne to the owners of the property where the balloon happens to land. My brother and sister-in-law, who live a short distance from this festival, were recipients of such an offer a few years ago when a balloon landed in their back yard.

Before the launchings began, we strolled among hundreds of balloons. We were allowed to mix with the crews, referees, and of course the balloons. No one seemed concerned that an awkward walker might stumble over a line or an envelope and tear a fabric. I was not concerned either, but I was not slated to take ride in the sky this morning.

The inflation begins as crew members hold open the bottom of the envelope and a large fan forces air into its cavity. Shortly, a propane burner is ignited, and hot air is directed into the envelope. The left photo in Figure 26 shows the burner in the gondola (resting on its side) spewing a hot blue flame into the envelope. The temperature of this flame is at least 100 degrees above the outside air temperature. The heat depends on how much weight the balloon is to carry for the flight and the temperature of the outside air.³²

³² These technical details are sourced from various people with whom I spoke this morning, as well as handouts available as part of the admission ticket.



Figure 26. Getting started.

The right photo in Figure 26 shows a partially inflated balloon, with the gondola now upright. Notice the other balloons surrounding the one in the middle of the picture. As mentioned, this part of the event is controlled commotion, as adjacent balloons gently bounce off one another. Notice the flames, shooting twenty feet into the air. Notice the absence of humans around these flames.



Figure 27. Airabelle, the Flying Cow.

I mentioned earlier that an opening at the top of the balloon allows the pilot to release hot air, which causes the balloon to descend. Crowd members joked that one of the balloons used another technique to release its hot air. This balloon was one of the more popular attractions during its inflation and attracted a lot of people watching its blowing-up operations. Figure 27 shows Airabelle, the Flying Cow, in flight. The designers of this balloon had a sense of humor about their creation. Under Airabelle's swishing tail is a mock-up of an orifice representing Mother Nature's escape value. Respecting Airabelle's privacy and her private parts, I decided not to show this part of the balloon's anatomy.

As we watched the balloons nearing the completion of their inflation, passengers who had reserved a place for a ride climbed into the gondolas. Then, each balloon left the ground and headed for parts unknown. Some would end up north of Albuquerque, some south. Some would land on nearby Indian reservations. Some would be unlucky enough to drift southeast and land on secure government properties and be subject to Homeland Security hassles. These landings brought forth derisive jokes from the balloonists. After all, how many Islamic terrorists are known to fly hot air balloons? How many Islamic zealots drink champagne while in hot air balloon gondolas? Granted, in these times, one can't be too-careful. But for this day, life's concerns seemed remote.

And what a day! For three hours, we watched hundreds of whimsical balloons decorate a majestic sky. As a bonus, we pigged-out on breakfast burritos. All in all, a fitting finish to *Traveling America (VIII)*.

We conclude these reports with one last picture. Figure 28 shows the gondola passengers' view from on-high, gliding over nearby Rio Grande River.³³

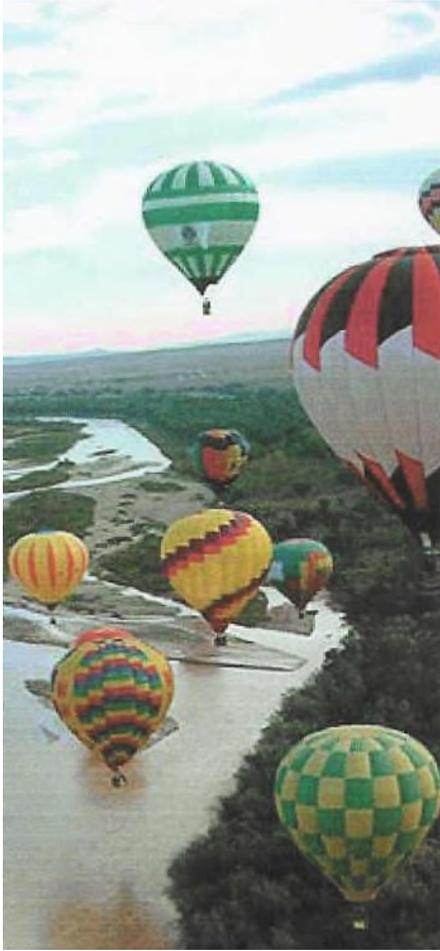


Figure 28. View from above.

I hope you enjoyed these reports on this part of America. I hope you will find the time to read more about this fine country in future *Your on the Street Reporter* reports. I have enjoyed your feedback.

Your on the Street Reporter

³³ 2007 *Guest Guide*, Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, 4401 Alameda Boulevard, NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87113.