

Fall 2011 National Parks of the West Tour

Tuesday, Sept. 20

Kirkland WA to Reedsport OR

I put Ian on the 6:20 am bus to Seattle where he will catch the Amtrak train to Eugene Oregon.

Grant and I left Kirkland at 8:30 am in our newly-acquired 2004 Chevy Express van, towing a small one-way U-Haul trailer containing Ian's stuff.

We arrived in Eugene at 2 pm and drove to the train station to meet Ian. I love the old houses, big trees, and hippie cafes in this town!

Ian's house is great. An old but well-maintained bungalow with 3 bedrooms, hardwood floors, a covered front porch, a big yard, and lots of sunlight pouring into the kitchen.

His housemates are Taylor and Caroline, both architecture students. Caroline is a bit older, perhaps in her early 30's, and is from Brazil. Both are super nice. They helped us unload Ian's things. We had planned to take Ian out for dinner, but it was only 3:30, and he seemed eager to start the process of settling in, so we said goodbye, returned the trailer, and gassed up. At around 4 pm we headed for the coast, only an hour away.

We camped at Umpqua Lighthouse State Park in Reedsport, in the heart of the Oregon Dunes. The dunes are beautiful and contain many lakes. The State Park is quiet and green. There are yurts and cabins for rent. We drove to the Umpqua lighthouse, up a on a hill a short distance from the campground, to watch the sun set. Below us were ORVs driving in the dunes - some sections of the dunes allow this. Beyond the dunes was the ocean, a mile away. The lighthouse cast red and white shimmers on the surrounding trees like a laser light show.

We had a fabulous dinner of potatoes, eggs, onion, red pepper, and cheese, and sat by a fire. We slept great - the bed we built is very comfortable! (Foam camping pads with an eggshell foam and a 1" memory foam on top.)

Wednesday, Sept. 21

In the morning we walked a beautiful 1-mile trail around adjacent Lake Marie and hit the road at 9 am.

We were surprised that there were few or no ocean views between Florence and Port Orford.

We drove a beautiful road into a vista at Cape Blanco State Park. It was extremely windy on the bluff, so we suited up and walked on a nice trail down to the beach, which turned out to be fairly sheltered from the wind. Once the other two people left, we were the only

people on the beach, and it was a wonderful place! Wild buckwheat grew in profusion along the trail, the seeds attracting some sort of sparrows. The beach itself had what Grant called "Creatures and Features." The creatures included oystercatchers, dowitchers, and a vulture. The features were haystack rocks, which sure make a beach more picturesque.

After a picnic lunch (sandwich wraps on whole wheat tortillas) at the city park in Port Orford, we finally started seeing the ocean. This part of the coast is fantastic!

We drove a short loop up into the hills to see the upscale Tu Tu Tun Lodge on the Rogue River. An idyllic place but very expensive.

In Brookings, we stopped at the Farmer's Market and drooled over the fabulous local produce. We bought corn for dinner and potatoes for stew.

We camped in Jedediah Smith State Park in Redwoods National park (yes, it's confusing). California State Parks now cost \$35 a night, do not provide soap or paper towels, and showers are pay. California has terrible budget woes. But it's a beautiful campground, with large, private sites, a nearby river, and towering, majestic redwoods.

Redwoods needs fog to grow huge. We saw some, but apparently fog is diminishing with climate change.

Dinner was hobo stew with ground beef, onion, carrot, celery, diced tomato, and potato - yum! - plus corn on the cob. Quick, easy, cheap, delicious, healthy!

It's been pleasant weather - warm days, cool nights, no rain.

Thursday, Sept. 22
Redwoods Ntl. Park to Willits, CA

In the morning we walked along the Smith River on a nice trail and saw mergansers. After taking a few short scenic drives in the park we started south on the highway and stopped to walk the 1-mile (?) Yurok Loop trail. Highly recommended - wonderful coastal views and trail scenery.

Lunch at Humboldt Wildlife Refuge just south of Eureka: pelican, egret, marsh hawk.

Lunches have been tortilla wraps with meat, cheese, pickles, olives, red pepper, mayo mustard, and assorted other things. They are delicious.

After driving through peaceful, rolling oak hills with little traffic, we arrived at Karen's friend Louanne's a little after 4 pm. We decided to skip the Fort Bragg loop back to the coast because we were tired of driving, and we didn't want to get to Louanne's so late. It's very warm now - in the 80's.

Louanne Rank is a Peace Corps friend I haven't seen in about 15 years. She is about ten years older than me. She lives part time with her elderly mother in a nice rambler on about half an acre of pine trees. She also owns a cabin in Depoe Bay Oregon.

She made us a delicious lasagne with a pesto cream sauce for dinner, and scones for breakfast. We slept in our van in her driveway.

Friday, Sept. 23
Willits to Shingletown CA

In the morning we picked pears, ate a Turkish breakfast, and admired her T@b trailer, a cute red teardrop.

We left Louanne's at 10:20 am and drove east on hiway 20 along a series of cool, blue lakes (that's why they call it Lake County). Vacation towns, grebes, blooming oleander.

Then we came down out of the hills and into the Sacramento Valley and miles of rice fields. A LOT of rice is grown here. We found a wonderful carniceria in Williams, where hiway 20 crosses I-5, and wished we needed meat.

Stopped at a really nice city park in Colusa CA, east of I-5 at the intersection of hiways 20 and 45, with shade for parking and eating. We were so appreciative that we made a note to send a thank you note to the city.

Hiway 45 goes north through vast orchards. We passed a Menonite church. Marshes and wetlands along the Sacramento River.

Hiway 99 north is dairy country. We love these agricultural roads! We passed a hitchhiker playing a Stratocaster! Lots of taquerias and BBQ joints.

From hiway 99 we took hiway 36 and then A6 to Wildcat Road.

We arrived at Karen's cousin Michael Gerlach's about 4 pm and visited with Michael until Linda got home about 6:00. Shingletown is very small, with a few stores, a gas station, and a restaurant. Its size doubles in the summer tourist season. It's about 30 minutes from Redding, which is where Linda works.

Their house is a three-bedroom rambler he has fixed up really nicely. He has a detached 2-car garage for his two motorcycles and quad and Linda's jeep. They're on a quiet half-acre in a pine forest. Michael grilled up some tri-tip and we all chatted until 8:30 or so. Linda is Cuban and gave Grant lots of great Cuban cooking tips.

We slept in their guest bedroom, but wished we had slept in our van so we didn't have to lug our gear in and out of the house. Seemed like I made 20 trips to the van to get things I'd forgotten.

Saturday, Sept. 24

Shingletown and Lassen Volcanic Park

Lassen Volcanic National Park is right in Mike and Linda's backyard and they spend a lot of time there. They call it "their" park. We spent a lovely day in the park. It turned out to be free day, so it was a bit more crowded than usual for this time of year. Linda says this is one of the least-visited National Parks. It's beautiful, with 10,000 foot Lassen Peak, an old cinder cone, as its centerpiece.

Sat Sept 24

A lovely day at Lassen National Park. Turned out to be free day so it was a bit more crowded than usual for this time of year. Linda says this is one of the least-visited National Parks. It's beautiful, with 10,000 ft. Lassen, an old cinder cone, as its centerpiece. There are fumaroles & boiling mudpots, lakes, rivers, streams, meadows, sugar pines, noble firs, hiking trails, and endless vistas.

We had yummy buffalo burgers for lunch at the lodge in Mineral, on the south side of the park.

Grant & I hiked partway to Kings Creek Falls while Mike & Linda waited by the car in the sun - Mike has a back injury that makes it hard to walk.

Cuban rice & chicken for dinner - basically a pilaf with chicken cooked right in it. All of us tired, and to bed early. ~~It~~ Didn't sleep well - bed a bit hard & tippy. Up at 6, on the road by 7. Overcast morning - Mike says the heat is over for this year.

Mid-80's in Shingletown yesterday, 69 at the 8500' summit.

Sunday Sept. 25
7 am

Shingletown to
Lassen Park nearly empty today
Hiway 89 is a great
road - quiet, scenic,
little traffic.

Quincy CA is an adorable
town. Quite a few historic
buildings.

Approaching Reno/LC Tahoe
there are more resorts &
traffic. Passed Squaw Valley,
home of 8th winter olympics.

Gas out here almost \$5/gal.

The last part of hiway 89
is a steep section over
8300' Monitor Pass.

Lake Tahoe west shore congested
due to marathon.

Now on 395 South - a bit
busier, but still pretty empty.

Bishopville looked like a
decent-sized town on the map,
but had only a small (and
very expensive) grocery store, unlike
much smaller towns we passed
through today that had big
grocery stores. But it was our last
chance ~~to~~ before Yosemite.

Big brush fire right near
town - they say it just
started about 4 hours ago.

Arrived Lee Vining turnoff to
Yosemite at 4:37 & there was a
visitor center, so we popped in
& sure enough there are lots of
campsites open in Yosemite, so
we're driving in.

Mono Lake - lots of
CA gulls - it's their breeding
ground - they eat brine
shrimp & alkali flies.

Weather not so great
now - very windy, overcast,
& sprinkling. Supposed to
get cold tonight.

Arrive Tamarack Flat C.B.
to find the three mile road in
a torture of potholes. ~~Also~~
Also very gloomy with recent
burn. Abort & head to
Crane Flat to find the kiosk
closed & the availability signs
very confusing. Pulled into
an empty site & started
dinner in the dark - we were
both very tired & hungry -
it was about 7:00. Then
an RV arrives and says

it's their site so we have to
move. I'm practically in tears
of hunger & frustration at this
point. Grant was calm & kind.
We pulled into an "empty"
site across, ate dinner, loaded
the bear box, & climbed into bed
about 9:00. Just then another
vehicle pulls up & says they
have the site reserved! But
they were very kind & willing
to share. Luckily there was
space for two cars. They left
early in the morning and we
hurriedly packed & drove to the
kiosk, waiting for it to open at 8.
It was a pretty crazy night,
& I felt bad that I had mis-
interpreted the protocol so badly.
I don't like feeling so upset.
It wasn't a very positive way to
begin our stay here. Lesson
learned: don't be tempted to get
to camp so late. We should

have stopped at one of the
camps outside the park &
come in here early this
morning.

East entrance to Yosemite
is 9945' Tioga Pass,

Monday Sept. 26
Yosemite

Best Campgrounds: Lower / Upper Pine

Great place for bicycling in the Valley
Can rent rafts
Beach on Merced River

Hodgdon CG no soap in bathroom
25 mi to Valley
Better to stay in Valley

Torrential rain & hail Sat night -
so glad we missed it!

Tip - park & use shuttle! ~~!~~
Research before you come!

Got up early & waited for
kiosk to open. Ranger sent
us to campground reservation
office which found us a site
in Hodgdon Meadow, 25 mi.
from Valley.

Signage in park very confusing
- for driving, camping, trails, rules.
Signs only in English, but
most visitors aren't native
English speakers. Lots of
Germans.

Dinner: potatoes
 onions
Chili red beans
delicious! diced toms
& salad ground beef
 Lawry's chili seasoning
 mix
 sour cream

Today we spent the morning
settling into camp, then
drove down to the Valley.
Picnic near the river.
Park & walk to Yosemite Falls.
Small this time of year but

still beautiful. Walked
~~not~~ west of Mirror Lake trail
to beautiful meadow with
views of Half Dome. Then
shuttle to Mirror Lake
trailhead. Walked partway
up the trail but didn't
want to get to camp too
late. Left Valley at 4,
took 50 minutes to get
back to camp. Cooked,
did dishes, arranged van,
loaded bear box, built fire.
There's a fireside chat with
the ranger tonight, but
we're too tired!

Pine Temp vertigo
Camp RVs fires
Busses

Glacier Pt.
Sentinel Dome - bear, signage
Taft Point

Showers
Dinner
NA neighbor

~~Campground~~

grouse
hawk
lizard blue belly
coyote
deer

Tuesday, Sept. 27

Yosemite Natl. Park

A glorious day! Got up early, as the sun was beginning to slant through the trees. On the road at 9am. I drove because of my vertigo. It's about 1.5 hours to Glacier Point. You go all the way back down to the valley & up a 16-mile road. Fantastic views along the way, & from Glacier Point.

Then we hiked to Sentinel Point, 1.1 miles each way. It's a smooth granite dome with sweeping views of the valley. The people ahead of us had a bear run across the trail just a few feet in front of them! That had me nervous for a while. These bears aren't

aggressive, unless you startle them. We had intended to do a loop hike, but the signage was poor, so instead we walked back & then in the other direction to Taft Point, also 1.1 miles each way. It was through a lush forest with ferns & wildflowers, & then onto a rocky, fissured ledge with more amazing views! Unfortunately Grant got some blistering, so was tired when we got back, but he made it!

Back to camp about 4:30, where we had sponge baths (no showers here) and another chili dinner. Our neighbors had a "One Day At a Time" bumper sticker, so Grant went over to say hi & ~~we~~ later they came over & we chatted for a while by our fire. They

were really nice. Dick & Barbara

She's 73 & has a 52 year old daughter named Karen.

Today we saw a grouse (blue?), a blue-bellied lizard, a large Scoring hawk, several very tame deer, and a coyote.

The weather is cool at night, and warm during the day - perfect.

We found out that the large, reddish pines with bark that looks like large puzzle pieces, is Ponderosa - we love them.

The campgrounds here are not as private or scenic as the State Parks we stayed at. I think it's because they are staging grounds for day trips into other parts of the park, & no one spends a lot of time

at their camp. ~~We~~ ~~There~~
The campsites are clustered
around a restroom with lights
on all night. \$20 / night.

We can't believe some of the
enormous RVs that people manage
to jockey into these sites, ~~at~~
~~alone~~ & drive on these narrow,
winding mountain roads!

We were also dismayed to see
the tour busses that come here.

This habitat needs fire to stay
healthy, so some part of the
park is nearly always burning.
They've learned to manage fire
well. You see signs that say
"Management fire - do not report."

Lunch in Lone Pine

Wednesday, Sept. 28
Yosemite to Laughlin NV

Up at 6, just before daylight, on the road by 7 am. The drive out of Yosemite, via the east entrance, was gorgeous. All the splendor we missed coming in late & tired on an overcast, misty late afternoon. High alpine lakes & meadows reminiscent of The Enchantments - smoky sections where fires were burning, early morning sunlight, light traffic - glorious! Took about 2 hours, with a stop to wash windows.

The drive down 395 was alternately pretty & dreary.
58 to Barstow then 40 to Needles.

Lone Pine on 395. It's hot!

By the time we reached the rest area near Needles I was tired & crabby. Heat, semis, ~~75~~ 75 mph, & 10 hours of driving took their toll. The rest area was out of the question for sleeping - very hot & very noisy & no shade.

The sign indicated a campground in Needles (not in AAA book), but signage was confusing. Then it occurred to us to try the GPS dad had handed down to us. I looked up "State Recreation Area" & bingo, it took us to Big Bend SRA on the river near Laughlin NV. Only one RV here - brand new place - empty & quiet, with covered tables & all amenities. Pricy at \$30/night.

Had eggs, feta, sausage for dinner (quick, easy, tasty).

Enjoyed our first showers in almost 5 days. Sweltering in the car to avoid bugs. Nice to have cell phone service again. (Little to none in Yosemite.) A scorpion joined Grant in the shower!

A roadrunner crossed in front of us today, and I saw a herd of elk. We also saw (I think - hard to be sure which one it was) 14400 ft Mt. Whitney, highest peak in CA.

Slept great with rear van doors open to cool night air & stars.

Thursday Sept. 29, 2011

Laughlin Nevada to Phoenix AZ

Up at 6 again, away at 7.
Mostly smaller hiways today.
93 was nice, angles down from
Kingman to Phoenix and goes
through a Joshua tree forest.

Arrived at mom & dad's condo
at noon. Mark met us there
& went back to work. Now we're
having the brakes looked at. We
thought we heard a funny noise,
but it turns out that the brakes
are pretty much brand new!
This is good to know. (The brakes
had smelled very hot in Yosemite
as well.)

It's so strange being in a
house again. I like living outside

better. Inside there is a sense of oppressiveness & it's too quiet. Outside one is never bored (out in nature, preferably).

I went walking about 4:30 and it turns out it was 102°! I returned very hot & sweaty. Phoenix is having a hotter fall than usual.

Had a wonderful dinner at Mark & Denise's. It was so nice to have some alone time with them - usually we only get to see them in big Vonder crowds. We'll see them again on Saturday.

Friday Sept. 30
Phoenix

Walking from 8-9 am - too hot!
We returned whopped. A bit
recovered we ventured forth in
the car - me to Starbucks to use
their wireless, & Grant to grocery
shopping. Our ancient laptop
was painfully slow, & by the time
Grant returned an hour later
I was practically in tears of frustration.
I got mad at him for buying
two large flashlights to replace
the small one he lost. I also
balked at the really gross
cheap lunchmeat he bought. So the
day continued cabbier. After
lunch we headed up to Prescott
& on the way we got behind
a large military funeral cortege
which had traffic snarled.
I got furious with Grant because
he was driving like a maniac &

really scared me. It turned out that his blood sugar was sky high. So I drove & he ~~sleep~~ slept in the back.

We arrived at Craig McConnell's in Prescott about 2:30. He is an internet business acquaintance I'd never met in person. He turned out to be a very tiny man, in his mid-60's, reclusive, with a comb-over & very short mustache. The visit was a little bit awkward, but we found things to talk about. He has an incredible collection of paintings & Navajo pottery.

We drove to downtown Prescott & walked around. There are some quaint old buildings & a nice trading post, Ogg's. It only took about an hour to walk everywhere,

and then Craig announced that he didn't like restaurants & didn't cook, but how did chips & salsa sound for dinner? We offered to cook & he offered to buy the groceries. So Grant made a nice chicken stir fry.

After dinner we spent about an hour looking at the photos he's going to include in the book he's writing (and in which I, as a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa, feature as a minor character).

The drive home took about 1.5 hours and seemed very long in the dark...

Saturday, Oct. 1

I got up early & walked from 7-8 am. Very warm, with a dry, hot breeze, but cooler than yesterday's walk. Distances feel longer here because of the heat.

Dropped Grant at a 9am OA meeting & went back to Starbucks to do email for an hour.

Back to the condo for lunch, then I went to get my hair trimmed, get groceries & gas, & get car washed.

I'll be ready to leave tomorrow. Grant is enjoying a down day. It's clouding over & has cooled off to the low 90's.

We had another great visit with Mark, Denise, Emma & Casey. Mark made his prize winning chicken tacos & we played Rock Band on the Wii, which was actually a blast. It was fun to talk to the girls about their interests in art, music, cooking, film.

Sunday Oct 2 7:30 am

Phoenix to Alamogordo NM
via 60E, a scenic road
through beautiful rock formations
& lush green hills. Miami is the
self-proclaimed copper mining capital
of the world.

Now we're on 70 east to NM.
I like this road much better than
I-10 - slower & no semis (although
it's Sunday).

Cotton fields around Stafford.

Lunch stop at a town park
in Duncan AZ - a rundown park
surrounded by rundown home
& trailers.

So far New Mexico is flat
scrubland with brown hills on the
horizon & a sky full of
cotton ball clouds. Lots of

tacky billboards.

Arrive Las Cruces 3 pm.

Gas, groceries, & on to Alamogordo. White Sands Natl. Monument looks beautiful, but no time to stop. Arrive Oliver Lee St. Park 5 pm.

Beautiful! And only \$10. On a slope below a chiseled escarpment looking out over a vast green & brown plain, with distant mountains, ocotillo, a hovering sky of blue with white & grey clouds. Eggs with onion, potato & red pepper, & kielbasa.

It's very quiet here. Met a really nice older gentleman who lives part time in this campground. He said ~~we~~ he'd rarely seen the air so clear up here.

Delightful temperature, breezy. Saw mountain chickadee.

Monday Oct 3

Alamogordo NM to Dallas TX

Up at 5 our time (6 local?)
& on the road by 6 in the dark.
Drive from Pecos to Roswell
very pretty - pine forest, mountains
meadows. Roswell to TX border
featureless scrubland - sometimes
nothing but brown dirt & blue sky.
From TX border (on 70 east) gets
into fertile farmland - lots of
cotton & cows.

Arrived Kelly's 6pm central
time, so an 11 hour day, minus
maybe 1.5 hours for stops.
70/380 are great roads! Almost
as fast as the interstate, but
empty & peaceful with hardly
any traffic, trucks, billboards,
or malls. It's a trip through
rural America: farms, ranches,

of small towns. Yes, you have to ~~slow~~ slow down going through the small towns, but it gives you a feel for 'how much of America lives.

Lunch at a run-down small-town park. There were quite a few nice picnic pullouts, but none during our lunch window.

I drove twice, for an hour or two each time, & enjoyed it most when Grant was sleeping in the back & I had my music on & felt I was flying through a rural wonderland.

In some places the soil was a rich red color - very pretty.

Kelly made us tortilla soup for dinner. I sat in their

hot tub for a while & am
going to bed because even
though it's only 8 pm Pacific
time, it's 10 pm Dallas time,
& I'm tired. Didn't sleep
great last night due to the
heat & my sore neck.

Tues, Oct. 4
Southlake Texas

Slept in til 8:30 (6:30 Seattle time). Went for a long walk through the neighborhood & forest trail. Went to Levi's football game in the afternoon, & out to The Feedlot for BBQ.

Kelly, Rob, & Levi live in a beautiful house in Southlake, a suburb of Fort Worth. Levi is 13.

Wednesday, Oct. 5
Dallas to Comanche National
Grassland near Springfield Co
Trinidad Co

Up at 5:30 Dallas time,
on the road a little after 6:30.
A beautiful Texas sunrise -
big sky full of pink clouds.
Glad to get out of the city
& back into the country.

Clouds & sprinkles & wind.
Flat grazing land as far as
the eye can see. Stop in
Wichita Falls TX for groceries at
a Mexican store that we really
enjoyed - it ~~was~~ felt just like
being in Mexico.

When there's blue sky visible
it's kind of pretty out here,
but when it's overcast it's
bleak...

Lunch stop at Fair Park in Childress - windy & litter-strewn, but quiet. Big salad with bulgur, oaxacan cheese, avocado, tomato, garbanza, ham.

We're having trouble finding stores for groceries, propane, etc. They appear to have all been wiped out by Wal-marts, which we are trying to avoid unless we get desperate.

Heavy rain & semi's going into Amarillo - ugh.

North across Oklahoma panhandle & the wind is intense! If it's like this a lot, people must go a little bankers.

Comanche Ntl Grasslands in
run by USDA; it must allow
grazing but be managed
somehow. It's pretty, but
fairly ~~feature~~ featureless.
And the sidewind was
brutal!

Saw a herd of
antelope near Trinidad!

Although the internet said there is
camping in Comanche Ntl.
Grasslands (in southern Colorado)
we didn't see any, so we forged
on to Trinidad Lake St. Pk, arriving
about 6:30 (7:30 Dallas time)
just before it got dark. It was
a 13 hour day and we're
wiped. ~~we~~ I got scared when
Grant* drove over a curb and
rebar spike - I really thought
both tires would pop & the
van would ~~highst~~ get stuck.
I yelled at him to stop,
& he got mad at me for
yelling. ~~we~~ This sort of
thing seems to happen whenever
we get to camp too late after
~~a~~ too long a day.

Eggs & sausage again because
we needed something quick.

about 6000
ft elevation

It's a nice campground but very windy (we probably should have picked a more sheltered spot, but it's hard to know in the dark. \$27 a night but we have no idea where the bathrooms or water are - luckily we're pretty much self-sufficient.

Now we're sitting in the car reading by the light of our 12-v light because it's too windy to light a fire or sit outside, & we ~~we~~ probably can't stay awake too long anyway.

Thursday Oct. 6 Chaco Culture
Trinidad Co to ~~Mesa Verde~~ Natl. Park

~~Woke~~ → "Slept in" today -

I got up around 6:45.
A beautiful sunny morning
with no wind. Into

Trinidad for groceries & gas.

Grant says this town is "cute
as a button." Walked around camp
this morning - lots of bumies.

Leave Trinidad 9 am.
Windy in town.

First hints of fall color.
Gorgeous fall color on 160.

25 north to ^{Walserburg} ~~Waserburg~~, then
160 east to ~~Durango~~, Great Sand
Dunes St. Park, a huge
collection of dunes piled against
the mountains.

A weather-front moved in
today & it's extremely windy.

A big dust storm is obscuring the sky. Mesa Verde is snowed in, & there's a foot of snow on the 10,550' pass we'd have to cross to get to Durango, so we're heading south into New Mexico. I guess we'll have to visit Southern CO another time, & earlier in the year.

Too windy to picnic - lunch in Alamosa at Subway. Surprisingly large town. So far we like the CO towns.

Stop at Ranger Station in Tres Piedras nm for road & weather advice - good place to get reliable advice. Now on 64 west through beautiful valley in the rain. Early fall color here. Ranger says these early Oct. storms only

happen every 5 or 6 years,
Normally the weather is nice
in early October.

~~Yellow~~^{Black}-billed magpie with
gorgeous blue-green plumage.

"Ask Jeeps" - we call our GPS
Jeeps.

Fire truck ^{threw a rock &} cracked our
windshield so we need to get
it replaced in Gallup.

Grant had to stop twice to
de-ice our wipers on Brazos
Pass. 10,000 feet, snowing heavily,
very poor visibility & thick slush.

Hiway 537 from 64 to 550
was wonderful. Good condition,
beautiful, empty, & saved a lot
of time getting to Chaco NHP
entrance.

21 miles to park, 13 of it on an unpaved road that was muddy, very slippery, and not fun at all. Arrived at campground around 6 pm in a light rain & it's cold. 6200'. Set up our canopy & cooked hobo stew (ground beef, onion, carrot, celery, corn, tomato, beans, spices). Now we're in the van hoping the weather is better tomorrow.

Took a long time to get warm under two quilts!
Got ~~into the mid-30's.~~
down to 39° but felt colder.

Friday Oct, 7

Chaco Culture Natl. Plk to Farmington NM

Up at 7 as it got light. A beautiful morning, with ~~no~~ half blue sky. It's gorgeous here, & very quiet. #

Ranger-led tour of Pueblo Bonito - long but interesting.

Drove the 9-mile paved loop, stopping at each site for short walks. Some nice petroglyphs.

Herd of elk on the way out - huge male with 6 point antlers!

Lots in bloom due to extra rain in Sept - 2" instead of 1".

Sunflowers look like black-eyed susan - yellow with black center

Leave park at 1:30, via north entrance. It turns out the south road is ungraded & requires high clearance.

The road today was much better than yesterday - the mud was mostly dry. The washboard wasn't much fun though.

The ranger said the main reason the road is unpaved is to keep out tour busses - which neither the park nor the local Navajo want, and I concur!

Some of the Navajo would like the road paved so they could get electricity - they live off the grid. We saw some solar panels.

There are no livestock fences,

so you have to watch for cows, horses, & goats in the road.

~~On the way out of the park we saw a herd of elk, including a huge male~~

I hated to leave the park so soon, but we have to be in Gallup tomorrow morning to get our windshield replaced & we couldn't have gotten there on time unless we left the park in the dark, which I didn't want to do. It was also threatening rain & the road could have gotten worse.

So here we are in Farmington AM, 1.5 hours north of the park. We got the van washed, as it was heavily caked with mud. They had to charge us \$10

extra just to get the mud off
before it went through the car
wash!

Grant is shopping at Walmart.
My goal is to never set foot
in one of them.

Camping tonight at the only
place near Farmington - Mom & Pop RV.
It's basically a parking lot surrounded
by busy roads & light industrial.
Our spot is fairly quiet. It's
alternating between sunny & not,
mostly not, with a cold wind &
occasional sprinkles - brr! Leftover
hobo stew for dinner. Hot
showers included with our \$15 fee.
The owner is a sweet old man who
takes pride in his business. He
also makes & sells toy soldiers
& train accessories & has quite
a collection.

Sat Oct 8

Farmington NM to Canyon de Chelly AZ

Up at 5:15, read in car with hot beverages, rolling at 6:30, still dark. Some rain in the night, but skies now clear. 38°.

Farmington is a sprawling, low-rise town. We didn't see much appealing, although there's a 5-mile river trail.

Huge Navajo parade in Shiprock! Wish we could stay. "100 years of healing & tradition" 100th annual Navajo Nation Fair. Several miles of chair-lined parade route, vendors (fry bread with spam) & beautiful Navajo people. What a treat to get to drive through it!

491 from Shiprock to Gallup goes through Navajo land.

Pretty green due to rain.
No billboards or trucks.

Got windshield replaced
at a really nice place.
He drove us to the flea
market & we walked back -
maybe 2 miles.

We got to Flea market too early &
not many vendors were there.
No jewelry makers. Ate too
much - fry bread & corn.

Many vendors & people may be at
the Shiprock fair. Grant bought
a green ~~quartz~~ arrowhead (agate?).

Stopped at Window Rock where
Grant quickly perused its flea
market, then on to Chinle &
Canyon de Chelly National Monument.
The campground is free but has
no firepits, only raised grills, which
will hopefully work as a makeshift
firepit. The campground will ~~cost~~ be a
fee area soon.

We're at 5400' and it's cold, except for an occasional sun break. The windchill is high.

We drove the south rim road, 37 miles round trip. Spider Rock overlook was incredible: two spires of rock rising from the canyon floor 1000 feet below. Other overlooks provided views of ruins in the cliff walls, Navajo farms below, & spectacular rock formations.

Hobo stew & salad for dinner by a warm fire in the lee of the van, serenaded by RV generators ☺

Sun Oct 9 Canyon de Chelly to
Navajo Natl. Monument

Frost on everything this morning! Blue sky, sunshine, no wind. Drive south rim to white house ruins. Breakfast in the sun. Started hiking in about 9:00 & had the trail to ourselves. If it's cold, do this trail in the morning, as the sun shines on it & warms you up. If it's hot, do it in the afternoon shade!

It's a delightful hike, not too steep coming back up, only a few somewhat narrow spots. To our relief there were toilets at the bottom (clean). The white house ruins were beautiful in the sun. No hiking boots needed. This hike we highly recommend. It's magically beautiful down in the canyon.

I bought a beautiful pot from a Navajo potter. There are vendors at every viewpoint, which is a little uncomfortable, but most of them are very nice & not pushy. Most are selling their own crafts & jewelry & are very proud of them.

We stopped at every south rim overlook - most have a short walk to the viewpoint & all offer gorgeous views of the canyons & ruins.

After a nice lunch back at the campground, & an ice run to nearby Chinle (a Navajo town that has really boomed since we were last here about 10 years ago) we drove the north rim. There are three overlooks, of which Massacre Cave wasn't so interesting.

We left the park about 2:00, heading to Navajo National Monument. We'd never heard of it, but AAA said the campground was "a gem." It is! What a find! There are two campgrounds - we're staying in Canyon View, the most primitive. The only downside is that we can't have a fire. We're up on a ridge between two canyons, with gorgeous views. The sites are very private, and there are only a few other people here. The moon is almost full & the sunset was spectacular. There's no wind & it was a pretty warm day, so it wasn't too cold to be cooking.

The only thing to mar this perfect place was a phone call from my parents to tell us that Colleen Clifford's husband, Scott, who we were going to visit in Midway Utah in a few days, committed suicide yesterday ☹

Monday Oct. 10 Navajo Ntl. Mon.
to Zion Ntl. Park

It gets dark at 7:30 & light at 7, so it's kind of a long night. We read until 8:30 or 9 & sleep til about 6, then lie in bed & talk until it's light enough to get up. It's ~~was~~ frosty again this morning! Clear sky & a beautiful sunrise.

Short hike to Sandal Point to see beautiful ruins before saying goodbye to N.N.M. & heading for Zion.

Stop at roadside stand near Navajo Mt, on beautiful route 98, where I got to speak French with two nice couples who raved about their trip to the American west, & Grant

offered a jumpstart to a Navajo couple with a dead battery.

Kanab UT is a really nice-looking town!

Arrived at Zion around 2 pm and got one of the last campsites at the South campground. It's a beautiful spot with trees, near the river, with towering red rock cliffs on all sides. It's walking distance to the visitor's center & shuttle busses. It's 74° here! T-shirts & shorts for the first time since Dallas. It's busy here - I can't imagine what the crowds must be like in the summer.

We walked to the nearby market for supplies - expensive, but hopefully the park gets a lot of the money. Now a lazy afternoon in camp.

Sit by the fire, read, watch the setting sun set the red cliffs on fire. Sautéed chicken, onion, & potatoes for dinner with salad.

Tues. Oct. 11
Zion National Park

Chilly this morning - Canyon in shade & windy. Walked the beautiful Pains trail ^{1.8}mi. to Canyon Junction then hopped on the free shuttle. Great interpretive audio.

Rode to the last stop & walked the Riverside Trail, 2 miles round trip. Lots of people, & chilly due to shade, but very beautiful. Rode shuttle back to Big Bend for a picnic lunch & to watch climbers on sheer walls hundreds of feet above us. They say the Condors have made a comeback here, but we didn't see one, alas.

From Big Bend we walked an exquisite, short trail along the river to Weeping Rock & its 1/2 mile trail

to see the hanging gardens where the water seeps out of the canyon wall.

Shuttle to the next stop, Grotto, & another half mile walk to the Zion Lodge. Along the way we saw many monarch-like butterflies.

~~The~~ The lodge looks like a nice place to stay, & has a cafe & gift shop.

Then we took the shuttle back to the visitor center & a short walk to camp. We're both tired after 5.5 miles & 4 hours of walking! Grant's knee is sore. It's now almost 80°, so we're sitting in the shade reading. Then we took our chairs & books down to the river for an idyllic, cool, shady hour in one of the most beautiful spots I've ever had the privilege to bask in, with the river swirling past & ~~the~~ tall red & grey peaks looming, sunlit ^{just} beyond.

Trails are rated easy, moderate, & strenuous. Grant dubbed them pace maker, cheese burger, & wheatgrass.

Wed. Oct. 12

Zion Natl. Park to Great Basin N.P.

Grant's knee is bothering him so he stayed in camp while I took the shuttle up to Zion Lodge & walked the 1-mile round trip paved trail to lower emerald pool. Then I walked a short section of the Palms trail back to camp.

10:30 AM - goodbye to Zion ☺

1-15 North to Cedar City UT - brutal to be on an interstate again with traffic & semis. Lunch in Cedar City next to cool Frontier Museum.

Then SW west into Nevada, through empty scrub hills & juniper forests. I love these roads - they feel so wild & free. At Panaca, north on 93 along a wide, fertile valley with prosperous cattle ranches, & views of 13,000

foot mt. Wheeler & its snow-capped range.

Arrive Great Basin NP about 3:30 Pacific Time (we gained an hour crossing into Nevada). Baker campground is great! No RVs (the rangers told us they stay in a different campground), firepits, very private, aspen trees, the sound of a large creek nearby, & a view of mt. Wheeler. We found some leftover firewood & we having a big, warm fire & reading by lantern light. Camp is \$6. Pit toilets, water is turned off for the winter. It's dark by 6:30!

The full moon was incredibly bright.

Thurs. Oct. 13
Great Basin N.P. to Crane, Oregon

Up at 5 am local time, on the road by 5:30. Long day ~~to~~ ahead - 10 hour drive. Light by 6:30. Stop in Ely for gas. 50 east to Austin, then 305 North to Battle Mountain - an empty scenic road, 70 mph & a joy to drive. Then a mercifully brief 50 miles on 80 ~~east~~ west to Winnemucca. Lunch at a quiet rest area near Valmy, in the warm sun.

After almost 10 hours of driving we got to Crane, Oregon, about 25 miles before Burns. I spied a "Crystal Crane Hot Springs" RV Park & stopped to see if we could pay to use their shower. It turned out to be an amazing place, with a geothermal outdoor pool, wireless internet, hot showers, camping, & other amenities, all for \$15. So here we are, getting ready to get in the hot springs! A beautiful sunset. Sausage, baked beans, & salad for dinner.

Friday Oct 14

Crane OK to John Day OR

A fantastic, sunny, warm morning
at Malheur Wildlife Refuge:

Yellow-headed Blackbird

White-faced Ibis

Black-crowned Night Heron w/ imm.

Pied-billed & lesser grebes

Great Egret

GBH

Bittern?

Sandhill Cranes standing & flying

ring-necked Pheasants 2m & 2f

We agreed that we'd love to come
back here & spend more time.

There's a lot to see & it's so
beautiful here.

Lunch at Subway in Burns.

The drive from Burns to John Day is
gorgeous, through pine forests
alternating with fertile valleys.

Arrived at our old coworker's, Mytch Mead, in John Day around 3:30. met his PT wife Jan, 8 year old daughter Rhea, & 8 month old son Cassidy. Had dinner ~~at~~ in town, & got to walk a bit & experience small town life. Sleeping in their driveway. Mytch makes beautiful metal sculptures.

Sat. Oct. 15

John Day to Baker City OR

Really fun Farmers Market in John Day - last of the season - a real - small town event.

Cider & curried butternut soup samples. Talked to a woman who shoots her own elk every year.

Along Hiway 7 saw a Great Grey Owl sitting on a fencepost & got a very close look. Magical! Larch trees are turning yellow.

Had a nice visit with Nancy & Andy at their house in Baker

City. Nancy & I went to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, which was wonderful. Powerfully evokes life on the trail.

Sun. Oct. 16

Baker City to home

Up at 6:30. Rained hard most of the night. On the road at 7:30 after a nice breakfast of homemade granola & applesauce w/ greek yogurt.

Heavy fog west side Blue mts east of Pendleton - scary driving! Hoping we come into clear weather - not ready to go back to rain & grey ☹

Lunch in park at Yakima
Farmer's market. Bought apples
to sauce plus corn. Prices high.
Take Thorp hiway to Cle Elum -
so beautiful! I also forgot how
beautiful Ellensburg is.

lots of fall color on I-90 -
vine maples brilliant.

I feel sad to be heading
home :- It's been an incredible
trip.