

# Trip to Western States - 2008

## by Sylvia R. Gallagher

### Part 3

8:45 p.m. Sunday, May 4, 2008

Fool Hollow Lake State Recreation Area, near Show Low, AZ

After washing Toby and shopping this morning in Safford, we drove the 150 miles or so to the Show Low area, stopping for lunch in Globe. The last part of the drive was quite scenic and also quite precipitous—lots of ups and downs, especially the descent to the Salt River gorge and return to the uplands. The change in elevation must be several thousand feet, but unfortunately the road has no elevation signs. The grades were 6% or less, so we really had no problem, but Jim had to do a lot of shifting and it wasn't a fast or easy drive. We were glad to get here around 3:00.

Due to road construction on the road from the highway to the park, which incidentally was incredibly rough for a mile or so, some of the signage to the campground we chose was missing. We drove way past a turn we should have taken. We inquired of various people where the campground was and were told we had passed it, but no one seemed to know exactly where the road was. They kept telling us it was just a block or so back—or ahead after we turned around—but when we looked at those roads, they were either narrow dirt ones or had “dead end” signs on them. We always hesitate to turn down those roads for fear we won't be able to turn the trailer around at the end. We must have asked at least six people. Finally we got close enough that, when we asked a homeowner who was working in his yard, he said it was the next street.

The place is very nice and very large. The sites are mostly EWS; it's very unusual to have a sewer hookup in a public campground. The campground was built in 1994, so perhaps that's the reason. We have a nice site (#14 in the Redhead loop; all three loops are named for ducks; other features are named for other kinds of birds) with a lot of rocks and also lots of juniper and Ponderosa pine trees. It's farther from its neighbors than most. Lots of the sites are nice and long, and most were occupied, but we really like the one we have. Three Cassin's Kingbirds were quarreling for quite a long time after we got here, but I didn't try to record them—too much wind.

The park brochure explains where the recreation area got its name: “The tiny town of Adair has long since been covered over by the [150-acre] lake, but it was Thomas Jefferson Adair who was responsible for the name Fool Hollow. In 1885, Adair moved into the area with the intention of farming. The locals joked that only a fool would try and farm the place. The name stuck!”

8:00 p.m., Monday, May 5, 2008

Fool Hollow Lake State Recreation Area, near Show Low, AZ

This morning Toby and I took a long walk on the delightful shoreline trail beside the lake. It doesn't go all the way around, so we had to retrace our steps, a total of 2-3

miles, I'd judge. The lake level seems pretty high and there are emergent grasses all along the gently sloping shore. Spotted Sandpiper pairs were spaced about every hundred yards along the shore—probably more than I've ever seen on a single day. I looked for the ducks for which the campground loops are named and found the Mallard and Cinnamon Teal, but no Redhead. Canada Geese were present and apparently nesting on some islands, possibly manmade, in the lake. A pair of Ospreys were occasionally seen overhead.

Although the breeze got up as the morning progressed, the terrain was open with just scattered pines and junipers, so there was little to rustle. I did a little recording. Got a pretty good Western Meadowlark, but the bird of the morning was a Lark Sparrow that sang and sang and let me approach him rather closely. He was essentially doing a solo, with only a distant Mourning Dove audible. I discovered him when I flushed him up from the path in front of me. He flew to the top of a juniper and started to sing. After a while, he flew back down to the path and was foraging only about 12-15 from my feet. He'd have stayed there indefinitely, except Toby caught sight of him and lunged toward him. Then he flew back to his juniper and sang some more. We finally left the area and I saw him descend to the path again. Was he getting some food item or grit from the sandy coating on the path?

Walking and recording with Toby along is not without its problems. He whines when I stand still for any length of time. He knows "sit," although sometimes I have to push him on the butt to get him to do it, but he won't stay seated. He has to stand up and nose around, sometimes rustling the foliage. Then, of course, there are the problems of his whining and chasing my subjects. But I suppose the only way he'll ever learn to behave is for me to take him. I really miss my dear Charlie at times like this. Charlie would stand motionless for as long as I would. One time I was recording longspurs flying up and around and then resettling at a wet area, and we stood there for at least a half-hour.

After I got back, I finished editing part 2 of my diary, incorporating the suggestions Jim had made. He'd been working on it while I was out walking. Then we drove into Show Low and found the post office and mailed it to Nancy and also sent off a box of ten rolls of film to be developed. The town has certainly grown since I was last here. It was on a trip with Mother and it must have been at least 30 years ago. It has a population today of about 8,000 people, and from all the new housing around, it's growing rapidly. I suspect it's becoming a four-season retirement community. Although it has occasional snow in the wintertime, it's not the kind of snow that "snowbirds" come to Arizona to escape.

Jim's photography didn't go very well. Although I've heard Pinyon Jays calling in the treetops several times since we arrived, they didn't ever come down to his birdseed. He did get a few Pygmy Nuthatch shots and had the opportunity for Lesser Goldfinch, which we certainly don't need. Most of the time there was nothing.

3:45 p.m., Tuesday, May 6, 2008

Fool Hollow Lake State Recreation Area, near Show Low, AZ

This morning I took Toby along the other lakeside trail out from the Redhead loop of the campground. This goes mainly along the edge of pine/juniper forest. Based on my experience of being too warm yesterday, I wore only a sweater. Unfortunately the forest shaded the trail and there was a strong breeze from across the water, so I was cold the entire way. The only birds I saw were a small flock of Chipping Sparrows

feeding at the water's edge, then flying up into the trees. The trail isn't nearly as long as the one I took yesterday, so I was soon at its terminus at the boat-launch and fishing dock areas. No birds there either, unless you count a single pair of Mallards. I followed the road back to the campground.

At the entrance to the campground, I discovered one of the campground host couples was feeding Pinyon Jays and Abert's Squirrels (those tassel-eared beauties with huge fluffy gray tails). I was fortunate enough to encounter the people as I walked back down to our campsite and asked them if it was all right for Jim to go to their site and photograph. They were very friendly and said sure.

When I got back to the campsite, Jim was finally on a roll with his bird photography and didn't want to leave. Especially, he had photographed a strange warbler and didn't know what it was. As usual when he is trying to get a good picture, he wasn't able to look at it very well. His only impression was that it was pretty plain and light and had a yellow breast. I suggested Virginia's Warbler, which he looked up. However, he hadn't noticed any of the other field marks, including the eyering. So I guess we'll have to wait until we get home to find out what he got. He thinks he shot about five good images. (Digital would have given us immediate gratification, but I really don't mind waiting.)

A half-hour or so later, the activity in our site slowed down and Jim went up to the host site. The man threw peanuts wherever Jim wanted them and Jim shot "several dozen" images of the Pinyon Jays. He also shot the squirrel, but said he had the wrong camera, which had too long a lens—good for birds but not squirrels. It's a big squirrel and more than filled the frame. He's thinking of going back later this afternoon or tomorrow morning with a different camera.

The day has turned mostly cloudy with a 10% chance of thunder storms. It's too cold (63° high predicted) and breezy to sit outside, so I've spent the rest of the day in the trailer reading, working on embroidery, baking a batch of cookies—and monitoring the action out the window.

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Cottonwood Campground, Canyon de Chelly National Monument, AZ

No entry

Thursday, May 8, 2008

Cottonwood Campground, Canyon de Chelly NM, AZ

No entry.

5:00 p.m., Friday, May 9, 2008

Mountain View RV Park, Monticello, UT

The thunder storms never materialized where we were, but it was blustery.

Wednesday morning before leaving Fool Hollow, I accompanied Jim up to the hosts' site, where he used a shorter lens for the large Abert's Squirrels. I wanted to see them up close, and they are indeed attractive animals. A few Pinyon Jays came in, too.

The rest of the day was spent on the road—and what a road! From Show Low we took SR 60 east to St. John's, where we connected with northbound US 191. That's where the trouble began. The pavement ranged from bad to atrocious. Nearly the

entire distance from St. John's to Chinle, a distance of 134 miles, was extremely rough. Every few feet there was a deep groove in the pavement that went straight across from one edge of the road to the other. Some places had been "repaired," but all they did was put a thin veneer of blacktop over the old surface, and the grooves were still very evident. Jim slowed to around 45 mph, but still everything in the trailer was topsy turvy when we stopped. Fortunately nothing broke, but we have plastic dishes. The salt shaker (a big kitchen-type one) fell off the shelf onto the drainboard and landed upside down. About half the salt was strewn all over everything. We had to open every cupboard very carefully, with a hand up to catch whatever wanted to fall out.

We were very glad to arrive in Chinle in mid-afternoon. Even though we'd only driven about 180 miles, it seemed like twice that with all the jouncy-jounce.

Canyon de Chelly (pronounced "d'Shay") National Monument is on Navajo tribal land, but administered by the National Park Service. The campground is just inside the entrance to the monument and both it and the monument itself are free. Apparently it wasn't always that way, for there is an entry booth, which is no longer used. Most of the sites are very small and are outlined by huge rocks, so no portion of your vehicle can extend beyond their limits. Some of them even looked too small for an ordinary car. We succeeded in finding one of the longer back-in sites. There were a few longer ones, but they were really just wide places in the dirt road where you could parallel park. The literature says no site is longer than 41 feet, but we saw some much longer vehicles here and there, protruding out into the road at one end or the other. It's curious that there is no commercial RV park in Chinle for big rigs. There are three hotels in town, the national monument's Thunderbird Lodge and right outside the entrance a nice-looking Holiday Inn and Best Western, but no RV park anywhere near—maybe 50-100 miles, depending on the direction.

We went over to the visitors center in the late afternoon, but didn't figure on it closing as early as 5:00, so didn't have much time to look around. We did pick up the park brochure. We'd lost an hour because the Navajo reservation is on daylight savings time, while the rest of Arizona remains on standard time all year

Yesterday morning we drove the tour routes—two spur roads, one on the south side of Canyon de Chelly and the other on the north side of Canyon del Muerto. The creeks that created the canyons come together at the monument entrance just east of Chinle. Each road extends about 16-18 miles, with a number of stops and spur roads out to viewpoints. The roads ascend a thousand feet from where we started at the campground, but the creek levels ascend only a little. Thus very steep canyons are present. The rock formations on the walls and as occasional standing columns are extremely spectacular and colorful. The canyon walls drop as much as 1000 ft straight down.

To add interest, the canyon has seen nearly continuous human presence since 2500 BC. Evidence of five groups of people has been found:

Archaic (2500 - 200 BC)

Basketmaker (200 BC - 750 AD)

Pueblo or Puebloan - aka Anasazi, a Navajo word (750 - 1300)

Hopi (1300 - 1600)

Navajo (1700 - present)

The Puebloan people constructed cliff dwellings on ledges high above the canyon floor and their remains are found throughout the canyon and are visible from the various

viewpoints. It always amazes me how they ascended the canyon walls to reach their villages, some of which had up to 100 people.

The canyon has seen plenty of violence. First the Spaniards, then the Americans, fought the Navajos and for a while in the 1860s completely evacuated the area and incarcerated the surviving indians far from their home for several years.

Present-day Navajos have farms on the canyon floor, and we could see their fields from the viewpoints. There are supposed to be peach orchards, too. I looked for them, but never saw one.

It was a beautiful day, with high puffy clouds developing. Jim got carried away photographing the scenery and a few places I think he used every lens in his arsenal—his longest one, 1000mm, for a close-up of a cliff dwelling that was probably at least 1000 yards away across the canyon and ever shorter ones for its setting. I shot a few scenes, but finally sort of quit, because all I would have been doing was duplicate Jim's work.

We were out from about 7:30 to 1:30, then holed up for the rest of the day.

Jim had toyed with the idea of taking the 3 1/2 #hour "6-wheel-drive" tour down into the canyon this morning, but decided at the last minute that he didn't really want to do it after all. The tour was on an open-bed truck with no roof, which meant 3.5 hours of unrelenting sun and holding on to one's hat—it was very windy. I knew I didn't want to do it, because I hate heights. I had been planning to finish viewing the visitors center while he was on the tour. I still wanted to do it, so as we were leaving we went over there and I spent a half-hour or so inside. I decided to forego the half-hour movie, though.

We drove north about 100 miles farther on US 191. About a third to half of it was the same awful bumpy stuff we'd encountered farther south. Even after we entered Utah it was jouncy until another road came in from the west and it improved.

We got to Monticello around noon. The Mountain View RV Park is very nice and certainly lives up to its name. We have a beautiful view of the snow-capped Abajo Mountains. We were happy it also has WiFi and Cable TV. Jim could get caught up on his favorite CNN and MSNBC newscaster/commentators. After lunch I drove down to the local visitors center and picked up maps and brochures on Canyonlands National Park. This is a park we've never visited, mainly because I've always read that to explore it properly requires four-wheel-drive vehicles and I have no intention of taking such a tour. There are a few places where you can drive into the edges of the park and this time we intend to check out one or two.

6:15 p.m., Saturday, May 10, 2008  
Mountain View RV Park, Monticello, UT

I learned at the visitors center that they pronounce the "c" in the name of their town as in "center," not as a "ch" as in Jefferson's home.

Last night a cold front came through, dropped a few spits of rain on us and brought a whole lot of wind. The temperature got down to 38°, the coldest of the trip—but this is the highest elevation we've camped, 7000 ft. Today's high was 55° here, but warmer where we went sightseeing.

We drove out to the Needles area of Canyonlands Natl. Park, one of the few areas that are accessible by ordinary vehicle. It was a spectacular and highly varied drive. We took a road that went straight west out of Monticello for a few miles, then

north to meet SR 211, the road that most people take to the park. This road ascended to at least 8200 ft (where a couple of USNF campgrounds that aren't yet open are located), and I think higher. There was a dusting of snow on the grasslands from last night's front.

After its junction with SR 211, the road went generally west. The first stop was "Newspaper Rock," a roughly 18 foot x 18 foot rock face under an overhang right beside the road with petroglyphs, some of which are thought to be very ancient. I found the text of the interpretive sign quite interesting, so read it into my tape recorder. Here it is:

#### NEWSPAPER ROCK NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Newspaper Rock is a petroglyph panel etched in sandstone that records approximately 2000 years of early man's activities. Prehistoric peoples, probably from the Archaic, Basketmaker, Fremont, and Pueblo cultures etched on the rock from BC time to AD 1300. In historic times, Utah and Nevada tribesmen, as well as Anglos, left their contributions.

There are no known methods of dating rock art. In interpreting the figures on the rocks, scholars are undecided as to their meaning or have yet to decipher them. In Navajo the rock is called "Tse' Hane'," (rock that tells a story). Unfortunately we do not know if the figures represent story-telling, doodling, hunting magic, clan symbols, ancient graffiti, or something else. Without a true understanding of the petroglyphs, much is left for individual admiration and interpretation.

Newspaper Rock is listed in the United States Register of Historic Places and it was designated a State Historical Monument in 1961. It is here for your enjoyment. Please continue to preserve it.

There were lots of figures of animals, especially deer. Also human hands and feet. I was particularly intrigued by how many times six-toed human feet were depicted.

The portion of the road where the rock is located is along Indian Creek, a lush riparian woodland many miles in length. I'd have liked to bird the area, but off-road parking places were very few and I'd have had to bird from the narrow road. Besides, there was that strong wind which would have made birding difficult.

After a while the canyon widened and vistas of broad grasslands and sagebrush with huge cliffs with red (mostly) walls came into view. Finally the cliffs became lower and lower and more eroded away. These are the Needles, for which this section of the park is named.

A stop at the visitors center yielded an interpretation of the geology. Later I read more about it in *Roadside Geology of Utah* by Halka Chronic. In a few details the sources differed. The needles have alternating red and white bands, with the thickness of the bands varying with the location. The whole thing was once an ancient seabed. Underlying it all is a thick layer of salt, with limestone (Roadside Geology said it's gypsum and potash, which makes more sense to me as a chemist) on top of that. Over geologic time the sea rose and retreated many times. (Roadside Geology said this was because only a bay with a constricted entrance was connected to this area and sometimes the sea levels were too low for the water to enter the bay, which then dried up at least partially.) Periods dominated by red sediments washing down from the mountains alternated with those when white sand blowing up from the seafloor prevailed, producing the layers. Under the tremendous differential pressures of the various overlying sediments, the salts underlying them became somewhat plastic; bulges and depressions developed. The landscape cracked into large, roughly square-

topped segments. Water seeping into the salt underlayer slowly dissolved it. Sometimes huge chunks sank, producing grabens. The standing cliffs then eroded, both at the edges and in the cracks between segments, producing the needles. Actually, I thought most of them looked more like mushrooms with columnar bases and disc-like tops.

Jim took lots of photos of the formations. I concentrated on the plants. I was particularly fascinated by the cryptobiotic community of microorganisms that live on desert soil and protect it from washing away. When mature it forms a lumpy blackish crust. They warn you not to step on this very fragile surface and to confine your walking to the trails and flat rock surfaces. This is quite easy to do, since smooth rock surfaces are everywhere.

Later I got more information about the cryptobiotic soil crust from the Arches National Park visitor information literature. The following is from that source:

### BIOLOGICAL SOIL CRUST

In some places, the ground around and between the widely spaced plants appears to have large patches of dark, knobby, brittle crust. This same scruffy, apparently dead and dried out rind covers almost 75% of the ground surface of the 130,000-square-mile Colorado Plateau. It is called biological, or cryptobiotic, soil crust; it is very much alive and of great ecological importance. Soil crust, sometimes called crypto for short, is made up of cyanobacteria, mosses, soil lichens, green algae, microfungi and bacteria.

Cyanobacteria are the most prevalent and most important component. When filaments of cyanobacteria are moistened, they advance through the soil, leaving sheaths of sticky mucilage on their trail. These gluey filaments bind to soil particles and, over time, can create an erosion-resistant surface. Because cyanobacteria is able to capture nitrogen from the air and convert it to a form that plants can use, it serves as a fertilizer—a truly useful trait in an ecosystem notoriously poor in nitrogen. Calcium, potassium, and manganese bind to the sheaths and are made available to plants in usable form. When wet, the sheaths will expand to ten times their dry size, enabling the soil crust to retain moisture, to its own benefit as well as that of nearby vascular plants. .

Does biological soil ever recover [from damage caused by human activity]? Well, sort of. The thin top layer can grow back in a few years. Down where the dead sheath material binds sand grains together, the damage heals much more slowly. It is estimated that for a disturbed area of cryptos to become fully functional again, to do all the wondrous things it can, may take as long as 250 years.

Most of the roads are paved and very good, but one fairly narrow, winding, three-mile gravel one descends what's called "Elephant Hill." The woman in the visitors center recommended it as a way to get especially good view of the needles. That was true, but we never saw the "elephant" or figured out why they call it "Elephant Hill." There were a lot of cars parked at the end of the road. I guess this is a trailhead for backpackers. A four-wheel-drive road continues from there, too. I didn't even like the looks of the first twenty feet of it.

I walked Toby for the better part of a mile of the road down Elephant Hill. Up until then he had been fairly good, except for his usual whining whenever the truck stopped and he feared I might get out and leave him. But this time when I put him back in his kennel after his walk, he wouldn't stop whining the entire rest of the way down to

the end of the road and back up. Finally we got so sick of it that we let him come up front and ride between us.

We stopped for lunch at the Needles Outpost, a private facility right at the entrance to the park. It's on private land about a quarter mile off the road, and part of the access road is within the park. A delightfully friendly couple run the store/gas station/cafe/campground and have done so for twelve years. Although the menu was limited, the food was excellent. Jim had a cheeseburger and I had fajitas. We ate outside, but could have been seated at the counter inside.

The only thing that marred the experience was TOBY THE TERRIBLE. He wouldn't quit whining the whole time we were waiting for our food and eating it. We tried him in the portable kennel, then loose in the truck. The owners said, "Please let him out." They both petted him profusely, provided him with two MilkBones and a dish of water. I tried to get him to sit on the picnic bench beside me, but he whined there, too. So I put him back in the truck where the whining wasn't so loud. He's never been that bad before. We don't know what got into him. We let him ride up front with us all the way back to Monticello. On the faster road, he settled right down and even put his head down part of the time. He might have been OK in his kennel, too. I guess he just didn't like that slow, bumpy ride down Elephant Hill—or maybe *he* saw the elephant!

We got back here around 2:30 and did our usual nothing (naps, reading, emails, writing this, etc.) for the rest of the day. It's 7:00 now. After that huge lunch, I think I'll just open a can of soup for dinner.

5:00 p.m., Sunday, May 11, 2008  
Arch View RV Park, 10 miles north of Moab, UT

We did very little today except drive north about 65 miles to an RV park situated right at the junction of US 191 and the road that goes to the Island in the Sky portion of Canyonlands National Park. We got a nice back-in site (EW only; other sites are EWS). Out the back window and across the desert we can see a couple of arches (North and South Windows per brochure) in the distance, so it does live up to its name. Trailer Life Guide said the place has "mostly shady" sites, but the trees are pretty puny to give much shade and there are none where we're camped. Since it isn't too hot today, we went for the view and the larger sites. It also has WiFi, but only once was Jim able to connect to it. We must be on the fringes of the signal. [Later: Sometimes he could hook up, other times he couldn't. Late afternoon seemed to be the worst.]

The park is pretty quirky. When we first arrived, we had a hard time figuring out which site was which. The numbers were between the sites with no arrows pointing to the sites they referred to and *the utilities were on the right instead of the left*. This is totally nonstandard for RV hookups. [Later when Jim went to take a shower in one restroom, he said it was the worst-designed place he'd ever been in. There were two showers in there but a person had to walk through the first shower to use the second one. Instead of the showers being lined up with a separate entrance to each, you had to go through the first one, curtain and all, to get to the next. Only the second guy had any privacy. Furthermore, unbelievably, there were no hooks or benches to put your stuff on. You just had to put it on the floor, where it could easily get wet. Mountain View RV Park in Monticello had one of the best he'd ever used. Personally, I prefer the trailer and never use the public facilities.]

Monday, May 12, 2008

Arch View RV Park, ten miles north of Moab, UT

No entry.

4:45 p.m., Tuesday, May 13, 2008

Arch View RV Park, ten miles north of Moab, UT

I selected this RV park because it is just north of the spur road that goes southwest into the Island in the Sky section of Canyonlands National Park. The park has three sections, cut off from one another by the Green and Colorado Rivers, whose confluence is in the middle of the park. These rivers form a “Y” on a conventional map with north at the top, with the Green River the arm on the upper left and the Colorado the arm on the upper right and also the base. However, both are major rivers. The Needles is the portion to the right of the “Y”. The Island in the Sky is between the top branches, and the Maze is to the left of the letter. In the Needles district we had visited some very low-lying terrain (around 4000 ft elevation) not too far above the Colorado River and had meandered among the candy-striped formations.

The Island in the Sky is aptly named. It is a high, slightly undulating plateau 6000 ft above the two rivers. We approached it from the north via a slightly lower “Neck,” which was only about as wide as the two-lane highway that traversed it in only a hundred yards or so. The Island is chopped up somewhat by canyons, but those for the two rivers are the deepest. Many viewpoints allowed sweeping vistas far down into the river valleys. Unfortunately it was a somewhat hazy day, so we didn’t really get the full benefit of the views.

After our experience with Toby a couple of days ago, we left him in the trailer when we went out to the Island in the Sky. We mostly just stopped at the pullouts and walked out a short distance to take in the views, but we did take one 0.3-mile hike up to see the Mesa Arch. We took some photos of the arch framing spires in the near distance. Enroute I was enthralled by showy wildflowers growing in a sandy dune and took some pictures. One shot in particular I expect to be nice. It had yellow and blue flowers with an artistically situated piece of dead wood in the foreground. It was pretty windy, so it may not come out. However, it was also quite bright, so maybe I was able to stop the motion (1/250 sec at f11). Today in the visitors center, I peeked in a book of flowers of the Colorado Plateau and figured out what the plants were:

Silvery Lupine, *Lupinus argenteus* - a large perennial with blue flowers

Yellow Cryptanth, *Cryptantha flava* - much larger than the tiny *Cryptantha* plants I’ve seen in other deserts. This one was 12-15 inches tall. It had clusters containing both yellow and white flowers, with the white ones possibly faded versions of the yellow ones.

Birds have been few and far between since we left southeastern Arizona, but on that short walk, I did find Rock Wren, Cassin’s Kingbird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Pinyon Jay, and Chipping Sparrow. The habitat was mainly open pinyon-juniper woodland (Utah Juniper, Two-needle Pinyon).

I was disappointed not to be able to hike to the overlook of Upheaval Dome, but the trail was just too difficult for my meager hiking skills, fear of heights, and failing knees. It’s an interesting geological feature, and scientists haven’t decided for sure if it’s an unusual salt dome or an ancient meteor crater.

From the Buck Canyon Overlook in particular, we could look down on an intermediate-elevation mesa and then still farther down to the Colorado River level. The

intermediate mesa was criss-crossed with old roads left over from the uranium-prospecting frenzy of the 1950s. Not much uranium was found in this area, but the prospectors certainly left their marks. These roads have not been used since the area was made a national park in 1964. There's also a more easily detectable 100-mile 4-wheel drive road that encircles the Island in the Sky at that level. It's recommended that people take two days to drive it.

The day was rather cold, windy and increasingly cloudy. We got back to the trailer around 12:30. In the late afternoon the sky opened up and it rained fairly hard for about an hour. This was the first rain we've had on the trip—except for the few spits that dirtied the windshield of the truck in the middle of the night at Monticello.

It cooled off dramatically last night after the front passed. This morning dawned about three-quarters cloudy, but the clouds gradually moved southeastward all day. This morning was cold and very blustery. We hadn't planned to visit Arches NP, since we've been here before, but I've always loved that park and we figured we might as well take it in since we're so close. We drove nine miles south from the RV park to the entrance.

They have a new and very nice visitors center, which we spent quite a while looking at. The 15-minute video, produced by the Discovery Channel, was more bombast and drama than information, but some of the aerial video was fun to watch. I learned a lot more from the geological displays that illustrated how this area and the rest of the southwestern US have changed over geological time. The seas have risen and fallen, come in from various directions, etc., in a mind-boggling way. (Poor southern California was under water most of the time.) I was looking for a resolution to the gypsum/potash vs. limestone discrepancy I mentioned earlier, but they just said "salt," and of course it is mostly sodium chloride except the very top part.

The arches are in fins of Entrada sandstone. These are the result of the longitudinal cracking of the layer on top of long ridges of salt—up to 70 miles long. This is in contrast to the salt domes in the Needles District that broke up into roughly square segments. Erosion produced the windows and arches in the thin fins.

After leaving the visitors center, I thought it might be fun to hike to Landscape Arch, the longest in the park. I think I visited it years ago when I came here with Mother, who stayed in the car, but Jim had never seen it. It entailed a 1.6-mile round trip walk. Enroute to the trailhead we caught sight of the "Sand Dune Arch" pull-off and decided to check it out. It was only 0.2 mile away. To get to it we had to walk east, then south between some closely spaced fins. That turned out to be a mistake. The wind was out of the north and funneled howling through those fins at what I'd estimate to be 25-35 mph. The temperature was probably still in the 40s, possibly low 50s, making the experience extremely unpleasant. We did find and photograph the small arch, then beat it back to the shelter of the truck.

When we first got out of the truck at the "Devil's Garden" parking area, where the walk to Landscape Arch starts, it seemed tolerably calm and sunny, but we hadn't gone very far before we were again between fins with the wind whistling through. Some places there was even blowing sand. We didn't go very far before we decided it just wasn't any fun and turned back. The rest of the morning we just drove the roads and viewed the features we could see without walking very far—typical tourist stuff. And there were a lot of other tourists, far more than at Canyonlands.

We finished up around noon, drove into Moab for a so-so Mexican lunch, did a little shopping and got back to the trailer around 2:00, happy to spend the rest of the day

sheltered from the wind. I think it has warmed up to the 60s now and the wind has died down some.

Toby, who is a long-legged 12.5-lb poodle, is telling me he's been cooped up all day and wants some fun. (We've given up taking him with us when we tour national parks after his behavior the other day.) He's pawing at me, alternating with whining and scratching at the cupboard where he knows his toy box is. Guess I'd better take him for a walk. Then he can have his toys. He has a lot of them and we never know which one he'll select to chew, shake, or poke at one of us to be tugged or thrown—just the length of the inside of the trailer though. It's a straight shot from the couch in the front of the trailer to the bed at the rear, and with luck we make the shot. Sometimes he just crazily “zooms” back and forth from couch to bed several times and ends up puffing.

8:15 p.m., Wednesday, May 14, 2008  
Fossil Valley RV Park, Vernal, UT

I should add something more about the birds in the Arch View RV park we left this morning. The site we had was just bare gravel with hardscrabble desert behind that's used (legally) by ATVs. But Jim always tosses out a little birdseed just in case. The first bird to arrive was a House Sparrow, soon joined by 20 or 30 more. Big deal. A bit later in came a House Finch pair and a Common Grackle pair. The next morning, these were topped by up to 40 Brown-headed Cowbirds. What an uninteresting lot! But as we stayed there a bit longer, we started getting other species. By the time we left, our site list was up to 11 species; additions were Chipping Sparrow, Pine Siskin, Yellow-headed Blackbird (3 females), Lazuli Bunting pair, Black-headed Grosbeak pair, White-crowned Sparrow (*oriantha*), and just as we were about to pull out this morning, a Eurasian Collared-Dove. Quite a list for such a nondescript place. Must be a good migration route.

We got an early start with 200 miles to drive and a visitors center to check out enroute. We took US 191 up to I-70, then east to State Route 139 in western Colorado. The map showed an 8200 ft pass, but only one squiggle, so we didn't think much of it. However, when we got there, the road went up and *up* and UP, switchback after switchback—narrow, winding (10 mph curves), steep (20 mph max. in low gear). And Colorado has always been cavalier about guard rails; this had more than some, but could have used more. I was very glad to be off that 11-mile stretch. Even Jim didn't like it very well, and he usually takes such roads in his stride.

At the end of SR 139, we cut west to Vernal, stopping in the town of Dinosaur to visit the Visitors Center for the Colorado portion of Dinosaur National Monument. I wanted us to view the orientation film, but they were having a staff meeting in the theater. I wanted to take the nature trail, and walked it a few stops until it descended into a wash on a series of steps, the last of which was three feet down! So much for that. Then I read a sign on the bulletin board that said the main paleontological interpretive feature in the Utah section is closed. It's a slope with various fossils partly excavated, but still *in situ*. I asked the ranger at the desk what the reason is and she said the building over the top is falling down. It's been that way for two years! There's a temporary visitors center, and we'll see tomorrow what it has to offer. What a disappointment. I remember loving that other display. Comment: There's plenty of money to fight Bush's wars, but none to keep up our homeland infrastructure. Roads are falling apart, too, as I've noted. We drove over lots of bad ones today—but not as

bad as what I described in northeastern Arizona a few days ago. We got to Vernal around 3:00 p.m.—pretty late for only 200 miles and a 7:30 a.m. start

Saw gasoline for \$3.999/gallon in Colorado, but it's as low as \$3.599 in Vernal. Vernal prices range from \$3.5999 to \$3.7999. It's nice to see a town where there's a range of prices. All too often in our travels, it's obvious that all the stations in a given town have agreed what to charge. The next town may have a different agreed-on price.

There were no RV parks in the literature for Rangely or Jensen, which are closer to Dinosaur NM than Vernal, but as we drove through the towns, we saw there were some. However, Jim wanted Wal-Mart and WiFi, which Vernal offered. (It turned out the WiFi doesn't work. Wal-Mart was there.) There are two RV parks listed in Trailer Life Guide in Vernal. We stayed at the KOA once before and weren't too crazy about it, so we selected Fossil Valley this time. It's not that wonderful either, but the location is better for shopping. And there's a Golden Corral right across the street! Jim selected a more reasonable assortment of menu items tonight than he did in the GC in Safford. I think he was embarrassed that I put his choices in my diary—but he could have edited that part out if he had wished.

Thursday, May 15, 2008  
Fossil Valley RV Park, Vernal, UT

No entry.

9:00 p.m., Friday, May 16, 2008  
Green River Campground, Dinosaur National Monument, UT

Despite the fact that we knew we couldn't visit the quarry with fossil bones *in situ*, we decided to see what was in that portion of the park anyway. There's a rudimentary covered, but otherwise open to the elements, visitors center with a few odds and ends of displays and a ranger at a desk to help people. It was really cold yesterday morning—in the 40s with wind whistling through. She must have been pretty cold standing there all that time.

The ranger told us the superstructure over the quarry is falling down. Later we learned that it's due to natural movement of the Morrison formation on which it rests. It's made of chemicals that expand and contract with the amount of moisture they contain. We saw a few snapshots of the damage—cracked walls, walls off their foundations, etc. She said that it'll probably be at least five years before the displays are open to the public again.

We asked her what there was to do in the park now. She suggested an "easy" 1.5-mile nature trail that goes by some fossils that are partly protruding from the ground. I asked her if there were any steps or steep places and she replied that it was pretty easy. Her idea of easy and mine don't agree. The first part was a steep walk up the road that goes to the closed quarry. That was OK. But then the trail took off as a narrow ledge on the side of a hill. And it did have steps—only one foot wide with drop-offs on either side. I had to hold on to Jim's jacket collar to negotiate them. There were also some steep gravelly slopes where I was afraid I'd slip. Worst of all, the side trail across the Morrison formation was especially steep and precipitous. I took one look at it

and told Jim, “You go. I’ll look at your pictures.” He went about 50 yards on a very narrow and steep rocky trail until he found a barricade blocking further access, which the ranger had apparently not known about. I think one of the places where there are protruding fossils was on the corner of the main trail and the spur, but there were no signs pointing to them. I had looked at photos in the office, but couldn’t find anything at all. We continued on down a gully, and the trail gradually got easier. At one point it passed some petroglyphs (chipped into rock) and pictographs (painted on), which we almost missed, too, because there was no sign. (Other hikers did miss them, we noticed.) We both concluded that if we had it to do over again, we wouldn’t!

The rest of the park road in the Utah section is only seven more miles, so we decided to check it out. We looked at some petroglyphs on a wall. They were quite elaborate, but very worn and hard to discern. Just the nature of the surface, I guess: not as much dark desert varnish to contrast with the chipped away portions.

There are two campgrounds. We drove down to the first one, which is a group campground next to the Green River right where it emerges from a canyon. An utterly spectacular display of multicolored rocks was right across the river. Many colors in close proximity: white, bright yellow, red, pale lavender and blue. The other campground is called the Green River Campground and is farther downstream. It doesn’t have the spectacular rocks, but has more shrubs and trees—mostly cottonwoods. There were hardly any people in it. We drove all the loops and decided to come back to it today with the trailer. We still had one more night paid for in Vernal and several more mundane things that needed to be done: oil change, hair cut for Jim, fix slow leak in a tire, pick up prescription and do some shopping at Wal-Mart, etc. All were accomplished easily.

On our way back to town, we ate lunch at a roadside take-out or eat-in place called “Country Grub.” It was very unprepossessing in appearance, but had lots of cars. Its menu was the usual hamburgers, hot dogs, fries, etc. But it was unusually good. We’d really recommend it. They advertized that they used local beef and no frozen potatoes for their fries.

This morning, after defrosting the refrigerator and bathing Toby—both jobs that require electricity—we spent a couple of hours at the Field Museum of Natural History, a state institution that interprets the paleontology of the local area, anything within 80 miles of Vernal. We had visited a museum in Vernal when we were here many years ago, but it was a typical old museum with dark, dusty-looking displays in cases, etc. This one, we learned, is only six years old and is the successor to the old one, which is now used for storage.

The displays were bright and highly interactive. Questions were posed. There were places where you could try to figure out how sets of bones fit together, what lifestyle a particular animal might have had based on its appearance, what habitat it might have used, and so on. There was a concerted effort to point out areas where the answers to certain scientific questions were not known.

There were walk-through recreations of the main two periods represented in this area, the Jurassic and the Eocene. A life-sized cast of the skeleton of a huge *Diplodocus* (accent the first “o”) was in the foyer. Life-sized models of many creatures were both inside and outside. Most of the outside creatures were hairless, but the mammoth had hair made out of hemp. The sign said they have to replace its hair every few years because the birds steal it for their nests. These life-sized creatures are visible from US 40 as it makes its way through town and must induce a lot of people to stop on impulse.

Although the emphasis was on the Jurassic and the Eocene, all eras and epochs were described as you walked a time line through the history of life on earth. Although we've both read about this, we were still overwhelmed. It would take lots longer than the couple of hours we spent there to really learn all it had to offer.

The museum is a popular place for school tours. Two were present all the while we were there—an unusually noisy and unruly lot in our opinion and also in the opinion of the poor docent or staffer who was trying to lead them. As we were leaving, another group trooped in, and we overheard that another was due in an hour.

It's really nice to see the state of Utah providing this scientific education for its youngsters. However, I noticed that the dreaded nine-letter "E" word was never used, and Jim agreed he had not seen it either. Although the place would probably be offensive to new-earth creationists, the old-earth variety might be contented; the time line was totally in accord with scientific thinking. However, very little was said about the process of change with time.

After that we went back and got the trailer and took it out to the campground we had scouted yesterday. There were almost no people camped here (fewer than yesterday) when we got here around 1:00. We selected a site with a fairly high hill to the west, hoping for late afternoon shade. It turned out to be well after 6:00 before the sun was off the side of the trailer. It got pretty hot inside (85°), but was pleasant outside in the trailer's shade.

A few sites are in the shade of cottonwoods, but all had problems, so we took a site in the open. Later I was happy it was. After lunch, I took Toby and walked up to the entry booth to pay for our two-night stay. When I got him back, I discovered his feet were full of the sticky blossoms or seedpods that are falling off the cottonwoods right now. I had to put him atop the picnic table, have a grumbly Jim hold him, and with my manicure scissors, clip all the hair out from between his toes. It was totally matted with those stickies. What a mess he was—and right after his bath, too. No more walks here for poor Toby, I'm afraid. . . . Later when it had cooled off, Jim took him out briefly to do his business and he didn't come back too messy. Maybe those things are only sticky when it's hot. [That turned out to be the case.]

The place is pretty birdy, but so far only one bird has found Jim's offerings: a House Wren came in and splashed around in Jim's bird bath. The park would be a wonderful field trip location for my recent Learning California Bird Sounds workshop. Cassin's and Western kingbirds and Ash-throated Flycatchers are all calling. Other workshop species present that I heard included Bullock's Oriole, House Wren, Mourning Dove, American Robin, Common Raven, Yellow-rumped Warbler. A few non-workshop birds included Canada Goose (flock of 50-100 by the river) and a Plumbeous Vireo. I'm wondering if we'll hear owls tonight. Haven't done much walking around. Will do that tomorrow morning when it's cool.

9:00 p.m., Saturday, May 17, 2008

Green River Campground, Dinosaur National Monument, UT

It's the weekend, and a lot of people came in yesterday afternoon. It was just our luck to have people come into the site right next to ours at 10:15, run their engine interminably getting backed in, then bang around doing various tasks until around 11:15. This is the first time we've had a noise problem on this trip. We were worried that a loud radio with a booming bass was going to bother us tonight, but I notice they've turned it off—a full hour before official "quiet hours" start at 10:00.

We didn't hear an owl in the night.

This morning I birded the campground and environs from 6:00 to 8:00. Only one campsite had any activity until almost the end of the period, and those folks were very quiet. It was cold last night, probably in the 40s, and there was little or no wind all day. We could have used a little more in the afternoon, but it was wonderful for recording this morning. The only extraneous sounds were the occasional airplane and the whisper of some minor rapids on the Green River near our campsite.

I got recordings of a lot of birds I use in my introductory sound workshop. They were listed in yesterday's account. Some of them will be of excellent quality and solos or nearly so. Many of the mixtures will be useful, too, for they don't contain any sounds not covered in the workshop. It was hard to tear myself away from the experience and come inside and fix breakfast.

After breakfast we went prairie-dog hunting. I forgot to mention that yesterday as we were driving the park road to the campground, we saw an upright form in the middle of the lane we were driving in. Jim didn't realize it was an animal, so didn't swerve to the other lane, which he could have, there being no oncoming traffic. By the time he realized it was an animal, it was too late to do anything but straddle it. Besides, most small animals run away at the last minute—or run back and forth erratically. This one remained in position until it disappeared from our sight under the hood of the truck. Jim said he looked in his rear view mirror at the lane and didn't see it after we went by, so we didn't know what happened to it.

I thought about the animal the rest of the day. There was a White-tailed Prairie-Dog colony near the visitors center for the Colorado portion of the monument. It was on the trail that I was unable to complete because of the three-foot step. So I sort of had prairie-dog on the brain. I looked in Kaufman's Mammals book to see if there would be any other squirrel-type in this area. The only ones listed are Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, Rock Squirrel, and White-tailed Prairie-Dog. The animal we drove over had been fairly large and a light fawn color of rufous and was standing upright in the road as prairie-dogs do. Furthermore the nearby habitat was open sagebrush, one of their preferred habitats.

Today I couldn't remember exactly where we'd encountered the animal, but I did know it was shortly before the turnoff to the group campground. So we went to a bit past that corner and I got out and walked along through the sagebrush, looking and listening for "alarm barks similar to Black-tailed" or "greeting calls [with a] distinctive laughing sound," to quote Kaufman. After walking perhaps a quarter of a mile, I spotted an object on top of a dirt or rock mound. I didn't know if it was an animal or a small rock. (Rocks can assume almost any shape in this place!) As I got closer, it began to look like a rabbit with its ears down, but as I got closer yet, I could see that it was a White-tailed Prairie-Dog. What had looked like a lowered rabbit ear was actually the blackish vertical streak down the face through the eye. Having confirmed the identity of the creature, I called Jim on the radio and he drove as close as he could park safely, but was still a little bit on the road. He brought out his long lens and after stalking it a bit got a couple of shots. A bit later, he got several more. They were nice side views, sometimes of the animal crouched down and sometimes of it sitting up. They'll show the face pattern, the best ID feature, very well, but unfortunately its rear end was always hidden and the white tail won't show.

Once when the animal had disappeared from view, Jim made a few clicking sounds in desperation. Lo and behold, the animal started making similar sounds. They were a fairly rapid series—almost countable—of vaguely metallic clicks. They didn't

resemble either of the descriptions in Kaufman's guide. I suppose it's what he meant by "laughing," but that really doesn't work for me. Interestingly enough, this afternoon I happened to be reading a book I bought at the visitors center the other day. It's the journal and letters of Ethel Waxham Love, who taught graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Wellesley in 1905, then for adventure taught a country school near Lander, WY (*Lady's Choice*, edited by her granddaughters Barbara Love and Frances Love Froidevaux, published by U. Of New Mexico Press, 1993). In it she casually mentions, "Prairie dogs sit and chatter on their holes as we go by to school." That's the word, "chatter!" And I've never heard a Black-tailed make that sound. Furthermore, Black-tailed Prairie-Dogs are found east of the Rockies. [Later: I've now finished the book and really recommend it. There's more to the story than I described above.]

[Later yet: When we got to a place with WiFi, I looked up White-footed Prairie-Dog vocalizations. On the "Animal Diversity Web" from the Univ. Of Michigan Museum of Zoology, they said the animal has five different calls:

- "repetitious bark" - to alert others of a threat
- "laughing bark" - signal for group cohesion
- "snarl" - used as an intense threat
- "growl" - used as a mild threat
- "scream" - distress call

I think we probably heard the "repetitious bark," but I still like "chatter" better.]

Unfortunately, I hadn't carried my tape recorder out there with me. I went back to the truck and got it and was able to get some distant sounds. Then the animal quieted down. Eventually it disappeared down one of its burrow openings and didn't reappear. We returned to the truck and drove forward to find a place to turn around and discovered that on the left side of the road there was a turn-out, possibly one installed so people could view the prairie-dogs, but, as is true of lots of things in this park, there was no interpretive sign saying so. We speculated that, since we only saw one animal, they may be getting scarce and they didn't want to call people's attention to them and stress them too much. Anyway, for my readers who want to search for the animal, just go to the last turnout on the right before the road that goes left to the Split Mountain group campground. (The sign for the turn is visible from the turnout.) The prairie-dogs are on the left side of the road.

White-tailed Prairie-Dogs do not form vast "towns" like their Black-tailed relatives, but there were a lot of mounds and openings in the ground in the area where we were. Was the animal we saw the only one? Did we kill its mate yesterday? (We looked for road kill all along the road and saw none.) Anyway, we're going out there earlier tomorrow morning and try once more. Maybe Jim can get the white tail and /or I can get closer sounds.

There are actually three prairie-dog species with white tails. The others are Gunnison's and Utah prairie-dogs. The species has apparently been recently split, for the old Peterson series Mammals book shows only one White-tailed species. The one we saw is the only one in this area and also the only one of the four that has a strong dark streak down the side of the face.

It was a "life mammal" for both of us and one I've wanted to see for a long time. I guess it's because I've always enjoyed watching the Black-taileds and wanted to see the others. I think we may have seen Gunnison's many years ago (before the split) in New Mexico and that Jim may have gotten some distant shots of them, but my memory is fuzzy on the subject.

After that experience, which probably took an hour to an hour and a half, although we didn't keep track of the time, we decided to complete our tour of this part of the park by driving to the end of the park road—about five miles beyond the turn-off to our campground. The road becomes graded dirt near the end and ends at the abandoned log cabin and ranch lands of Josie Bassett Morris. She homesteaded in an isolated canyon in 1914 and lived there 50 years until just before her death. Her property is now part of the monument. A couple of short riparian nature trails (“easy,” it says) spur out from the house, but it was nearly lunch time by then, so we didn't do them.

It got really hot this afternoon—over 90° in the trailer by mid-afternoon. We stayed inside until there was a sliver of shade beside the trailer outside. There it was only 85°. We even took Toby's kennel outside, too. It's 10:00 p.m. now and I still have all the windows wide open, but it's now comfortable inside.

The reason our trailer got so hot is because we were parked broadside to the afternoon sun. Usually we try to avoid that orientation, but there was a steep hillside right outside our windows and we figured the sun would go down behind it fairly early. We were wrong. The hillside wasn't as close or steep as we thought and it was after 6:00 before it descended behind it. Then it took a while to cool off inside.

Off and on in our travels we've had trouble getting the trailer door open and closed. I always thought it was because Jim jacked the trailer up unevenly—and sometimes it probably was that, especially when he had to jack up the rear end to complete the levelling on an especially tilted site. This time we had the problem and the site was level. Jim raised all the jacks and we still could hardly get the door open or closed. Then it dawned on us that in the morning the door opened and closed beautifully, and it was just in the afternoon that we had trouble. The only explanation was that the heat of the blazing-hot sun was expanding the entire side of the trailer and/or the door itself.

While we were sitting outside, Jim discovered a Plumbeous Vireo that seemed to be starting to build a nest fairly low in a cottonwood tree by our site. He set up his camera on a tripod and waited patiently for the vireo to return. It did once in a great while, but it seemed to be more interested in singing from various perches all around its territory than in building that nest, so Jim never got a single shot despite waiting there for a hour. The camera was right out in that blazing sun, so Jim put one of his two identical broad-brimmed hats over it. Then when the bird came in, he just put the camera hat on his head atop the one that he was wearing. Occasionally he would forget to put it back on the camera afterwards and went back to his chair to resume watching. I wondered what passersby thought when they saw him with two identical hats on. I called him the Mad Hatter.

Tomorrow we're going to have to leave because it's forecast to be even hotter. I found a couple of USFS campgrounds at 7400 ft near Flaming Gorge Reservoir, the highest that are open this early in the season. We're at 4,700 ft here. It should be cooler up there. If it isn't, there's a KOA and one USFS campground with electricity in the area, too. They're at around 6,200 ft. Haven't been able to get Weatheradio here, but last forecast I heard was for two or three really hot days, then another cold front.

8:30 p.m., Sunday, May 18, 2008

Canyon Rim USFS Campground, Red Canyon area, Flaming Gorge Natl. Recreation Area, UT

This morning around 6:00 when I took Toby outside for his morning leak, the Plumbeous Vireo was up in the area of that nest. Jim immediately set up his camera and went outside to wait for it. I actually had to remind him to make the coffee, something he usually thinks of right away when he gets up. (He makes the coffee while I make the bed.) After about an hour or so, the bird had not come back and he told me to go ahead and fix my breakfast and he'd eat later. An hour or so later, the bird still hadn't come, so he came in and grabbed a handful of cookies and returned outside—to Toby's disappointment, for he always gets bites of Jim's cookies. Still no bird. Finally, he said, "If that bird doesn't come by 10:00, we'll leave." Around 9:30, he started packing things up, keeping an eye on the nest area. We drove out of there at 10:00, with the bird not having returned. This is just an example of Jim's patience when he thinks there's a chance to get a photo. I couldn't do it. I guess we'll have to wait a little later in the season and hope to find another Plumbeous Vireo that's more interested in nest-building than in defending its territory aurally.

We drove the trailer to the pullout where the White-tailed Prairie-Dog was. We looked out the window and there was one up—and a second one as well. He got out his camera and walked out into the area. I got into the trailer and set up my tape recorder so I could record out the window. There's less wind noise that way. Jim got several more shots of one of the animals, but it scurried for its burrow when Jim tried to move to a slightly different place in order to get the white tail in the picture. We both saw the totally white tail as it scooted into its burrow, but he didn't get a photo of it. However, as I mentioned yesterday, it's the face pattern that's diagnostic, not the tail.

This took maybe a half-hour. Then we were on our way to the high country. We stopped in Vernal for propane, but found no restaurants enroute and didn't want to go out west on US 40 where we knew there were some. So we stopped at a roadside viewpoint part way up the grade and I fixed it. US 191 is the road that goes over the Uinta Mountains to Flaming Gorge Reservoir and beyond. It ascends fairly gradually, passing a series of "hogbacks," each one a different geological formation. They were laid down over almost the totality of geologic time. Then the land was squeezed from the north and south, and buckled up along an east-west line (a syncline), forming the Uinta Mountains. The top cracked open due to the buckling and each layer eroded. This means that as you ascend, you are seeing ever-older sedimentary deposits, all tilted up diagonally. The top of the mountain range is fairly flat for maybe 20 miles. The nicest thing about the road is that it is an official Utah Scenic Byway and every hogback has a large sign naming the deposit and telling what kinds of fossils are found in it—everything from dinosaurs to plants to oil to coal to sea creatures, etc. Very interesting. One deposit has been mined extensively for phosphate (calcium phosphate?), which is ground up and mixed with water and sent as a slurry through a pipeline to Green River, Wyoming, to be processed. There has been a lot of overburden replaced and reseeded. It's still pretty bare, though, with just a hint of green grass.

We got here about 2:30. We looked over the Greens Lake and Canyon Rim campgrounds, which are both on a little spur road off SR 44 and not far apart. Both are on a gentle slope of open Ponderosa Pine forest. One has a lake next to it, but was pretty run-down. Also on the other side of the lake is a lodge. We selected Canyon Rim. It's right next to the gorge and the reservoir is visible far below (1700 feet a sign we saw later said) from a trail that runs along the rim. Tomorrow I'll have to take Toby and walk a portion of the trail. I saw some interpretive signs at one of the overlooks. There's also a "seasonal" visitors center 1.5 miles away. Don't know if it's open this early in the season.

This is a small campground with some sites very close together and others widely spaced. We selected one that's far from any neighbors. From here we can only see two sites occupied and they're quite far away. We love being by ourselves.

The temperature is indeed ten degrees cooler up here. Also, we got a site with the side of our trailer facing north, which also helps keep the temperature down. It was really pleasant to enjoy the cool breeze coming in the windows. The temperature probably didn't exceed 75° up here today. WeatherRadio is forecasting the warm weather to last through Tuesday, then cool off dramatically with rain and even snow likely up here Wed. night through Sat. We signed up for two nights and will probably go to another campground by the reservoir that's at 6200 ft before the cold front gets here.

Not many birds around. So far I've seen Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon, I think, but haven't seen them very well), American Robin, Common Raven. Off in the distance I've heard Cassin's Finch and Western Tanager. But I haven't tried very hard to find things.

8:00 p.m., Monday, May 19, 2008

Canyon Rim USFS Campground, Flaming Gorge Natl. Recreation Area, UT

This morning Jim and I went separate directions from the trailer. I decided to take the tape recorder and Toby and walk the canyon rim trail. I usually don't take that combination, but there don't seem to be very many birds here. I did get a nice Cassin's Finch solo, with only wind in the pines for background. I walked a little farther and thought I saw a small herd of deer through the trees, but as I got closer, I discovered they were Bighorn Sheep. That's the first time for those in a campground. There seemed to be a ewe with half a dozen teenagers. I walked a little closer, hoping to pass by them (didn't take my camera, darn it), but the ewe walked out onto the trail and stared hard at me and/or Toby. I felt intimidated and didn't dare venture farther, so turned back. Toby merely stared back, but when I turned around, he decided to yelp a little until I squelched him.

From the trailer window before breakfast I had noticed a nice fat snag (dead, broken off Ponderosa Pine) about 150 yd away. With my binoculars I could see something coming and going to a hole near the top. Our hope was that it might be an American Three-toed Woodpecker. Jim decided to check it out. It was the opposite direction from the trail I took. He got a glimpse of a dark woodpecker that seemed totally black-backed, which wouldn't be that bird, but he could have missed the dark streak down the middle of the back. The Three-toed is pretty dark on the head and back otherwise. He waited a long time for it to return. It still hadn't come in when I was turned back by the sheep (we kept in contact by radio), so I went out there to join him, leaving Toby in the trailer. We both hung around that area for a long time. Finally a bird came in and I was able to see that it was a female Williamson's Sapsucker. He probably had seen the male, which is totally black-backed. Jim has such great photos of that bird from other places, that he decided not to stay any longer. I hung around a little while, hoping for some calls or drumming, but heard nothing.

After Jim left the sapsucker tree, he went to where I had seen the Bighorn Sheep, but couldn't find them, despite walking much farther along the trail than I had. They had obviously wandered off.

By then it was 11:00, so we decided to drive to the end of the spur road to the Red Canyon Visitors Center. It doesn't open until Memorial Day weekend, but there's a short nature trail out to the point. Excellent signs interpret the biology, geology, and

human history of the area. In fact, those signs seem to be all along the trail from our campground to the point, a distance of about a mile. The nature trail went out to a promontory with spectacular views of Red Canyon, the deepest part of Flaming Gorge. Deep cracks several feet wide down through the rocks made us a little apprehensive that part of the cliff might break off at any time, but apparently the authorities thought it was safe, for the trail went across a couple of those crevasses to viewpoints.

One of the interpretive signs at the nature trail explained about the sheep. The population in these mountains had died out from a disease, so these animals have been introduced from elsewhere. They're doing fine, and the landscape is being managed for them, with occasional controlled burns to keep the understory open. We then went to the Red Canyon Lodge, which is back toward the highway from our campground. We were pleased to find a telephone, so we could check our Pocketmail. They also had birdseed and syrup feeders all around the headquarters building and in the lawn out front. That's where all the birds were! We saw a couple dozen Cassin's Finches all in one small bare tree, with almost as many on the seed feeder. They were accompanied by a few Pine Siskins and one male Evening Grosbeak. They're always a treat. Jim tried for photos, but it flew away. Also present were more mundane species like Brewer's and Red-winged blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, even Mallards eating the spilled birdseed under the feeders. The syrup feeders were attracting Black-chinned and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds.

The lodge office was closed with a note on the door to go to a particular cabin if you wanted to rent a cabin. They also said they serve dinner every night. They had a nice-looking restaurant that overlooked the bird-feeding operations. I could read the dessert and appetizer menus on the tables and it looked interesting, so we went back for dinner tonight. The food was pretty good, not excellent. I had to order everything specially prepared because they put loads of garlic in it all. The waitress knew I couldn't eat garlic in my main course, yet she blithely served me a pile of green beans that were so garlicky that even Jim wouldn't eat them. He did eat a garlicky steak, though. But we enjoyed watching the birds. I picked up a bird list for the entire Flaming Gorge area and it turned out it had been produced by Flaming Gorge Lodge itself. It's a very nice one.

8:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 20, 2008

Lucerne Valley USFS Campground, Flaming Gorge NRA, UT

This morning we decided to take a look at the Flaming Gorge Dam on the Green River. It was authorized in 1956 under President Eisenhower and completed in 1964. It floods 91 miles of the Green River plus unstated additional miles on its various tributaries. Its shoreline is over 350 miles long! I doubt such an environmental atrocity would be permitted today, but it came at the same time as Lake Powell was doing its number on the Colorado River. All the literature, of course, extols the advantages of such a structure-lake recreation, hydroelectric power, flood control, etc.

There is a nice visitors center right at the dam, with displays on recreation opportunities, the geology and biology of the area, as well as details of the dam construction. There's a little theater, where you can view a number of short videos about the area. We looked at a couple, but the color was badly washed out and they'd stretched a normal video to fit a wide screen aspect ratio, so everything was elongated horizontally. Loni Anderson narrated one of them, and it was a mighty fat Loni Anderson. The videos were interesting, though.

We've been concerned about where to spend the upcoming Memorial Day weekend. It's never a good idea to arrive in a new campground, especially in a recreation area, on a holiday. So after much discussion, we decided to stop by the KOA in the little town of Manila and reserved a site for Fri., Sat., and Sun. nights, then go to the Lucerne Valley Campground right on the shore of the reservoir a few miles north of town and sign up for tonight, Wed., and Thurs. nights. We were sure we'd not be able to stay over the weekend. Were we wrong! Not only could we spend the weekend, we could have our selection of the small number of electrical hookup sites through the weekend. Reasons suggested by the friendly woman in park office: foul weather predicted for the next week plus the high price of gasoline. Anyway, we decided three nights would probably be enough here.

Making the reservation at the KOA was an exercise in frustration due to road construction right outside the place. A pilot vehicle was escorting the traffic along on the left side of the highway. To get into the campground we would have had to turn right and cross a stretch of recently laid hot asphalt. They wouldn't even let us park on the left so Jim could walk across it. The first flag-woman said we'd have to go to the end of the short construction zone, turn around and come back. How that would have worked was never clear. When we did turn around at the end and were waiting to come back, we explained our predicament to another flag-woman and also the guy driving the pilot. He figured out that we could reach the KOA by going around the block on some narrow dirt roads. He also called the KOA on his cell phone to tell them we were coming. The owner wasn't in, but she was paged, so she'd be there when we arrived. When we did get there, she told Jim we should have stayed where we were and she'd have driven that back road and come down to register us! If you don't understand all that, it's probably not important, but it certainly illustrates how friendly the folks in that little town are. Anyway we're all set for the next six nights.

Not only does the Lucerne Valley Campground have the only electrical hookups in any of the USFS campgrounds around the reservoir, but our friend Terry Hill promised us "pronghorns wandering around the campground." Jim couldn't resist that. We didn't see any as we were driving around selecting a site (love it when we can do that), so when Jim went back to pay for the site, he asked the woman in the office where they were. She smiled and said, "Just turn around and look." There were a couple right across the road. Later in the afternoon we saw a group of about eight females and older juveniles off in the distance, but still in the campground, so Jim drove to where they were and snapped a few photos. Just before dinner time, he took Toby for a walk and found a male. He said it looked as though it were going to flee, but instead it just lay down. The woman in the office said she's really sorry they're so tame here, for they're more easily killed in the hunting season. Why do they allow hunting near this campground anyway? There should be a BIG pronghorn buffer zone.

Weather was clear this morning, but gradually clouded up in the afternoon. Dark clouds came over from time to time, accompanied by strong gusty winds for maybe five minutes at a stretch. Once we even had a few cracks of thunder and a few spits of rain. Now that the sun has set, the blustery periods aren't as strong and are supposed to end by midnight. It was very warm this afternoon—upper 80s, I think. We were happy to run the air conditioner for several hours. I don't think we'll need it after today, though. A cold front is supposed to come through about mid-morning tomorrow and cold temperatures (highs in the 50s, lows in the low 40s or even upper 30s), rain, small hail, thunder storms, wind, snow at upper elevations, etc., are all forecast for the next week.

While I was writing the previous paragraph, the wind has been getting stronger and stronger and is now as gusty as it was in the afternoon. It's totally dark, so can't see what the sky looks like. Looks like an exciting week ahead.

8:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 21, 2008  
Lucerne Valley USFS Campground, Flaming Gorge NRA, UT

The wind blew a good bit of the night, but the sky cleared and a full moon shone in the window nearly all night long. It was lightly overcast by morning. It was still fairly warm with a low of around 50°, I'd guess. This morning there was almost no wind the whole time, but from the very start we could see the front arriving from the west as a dark cloud on the horizon.

The habitat around this campground is open and desert-like. Lots of sagebrush, low cactus that you have to be careful not to step on—and other plants in more disturbed areas. I wanted to see what birds I could find and so we drove to several nearby areas, a group campground, a day-use area, and another camping area used for dispersed camping (State Line Campground because it's on the Utah-Wyoming border). It was a wonderful morning for recording—no wind, no people, almost no traffic or airplanes. The major “traffic” was a guy with a cattle truck and trailer who drove in, around, and out of every place we went. I quickly learned to get way off the road to avoid his dust and rocks. Was he lost or looking for a lost cow or ...? We saw no cattle anywhere.

I got first class recordings of Vesper Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, Western Meadowlark, and distant Brewer's Sparrow, but my prize was a Horned Lark. They have two types of song, a short song that accelerates and gets higher, called the “intermittent song,” but I was also aware of another song, the “recitative song,” that consists of a bunch of notes that go on and on for a while (length varies) seemingly without getting anywhere. That one I'd never recorded until today, and I think I got it well. The bird sort of jumped back and forth between the two types of song. It was a bird we flushed ahead of us with the truck, and I recorded it out the window.

Most of the time I walked and Jim tagged along behind me in the truck, hoping for something to photograph, but the dark day didn't make him try very hard. His main find was a badger, an animal neither of us had seen before in the wild. It came out of the brush and ran down the road with Jim in hot pursuit in the Suburban. It was carrying some kind of a prey item, but it didn't slow the critter down one whit. Before Jim came anywhere close to it, it dived into some brush along the road and disappeared. He had no chance to photograph it, but we thought he was lucky to see one. Kaufman's Mammals book says they're usually underground and dig their prey out of their burrows. There was a Common Loon in alternate (breeding) plumage at the edge of the reservoir, and he got a few reasonably good-sized pictures of it, but wished he had more light.

Along toward 11:00 it started to rain ever so lightly. I kept going until the drops got large enough that they made noise when they struck my microphone. Then I called Jim on the radio to come and pick me up. It was great to have the truck and Jim handy so I could stay out until the last possible minute. I'm really grateful for Jim to do that so cheerfully. I think he spent some of his time this morning writing emails to friends on Pocketmail.

We got back to the trailer around 11:15 with the rain gradually getting heavier, but I'd had four wonderful hours wandering all over the place recording. It was one of the best days on the trip.

It rained all afternoon, rather heavily at times, and always driven by a northwest wind. The temperature got down to 40° in the late afternoon while it was still raining, but is now up to 47°. Most of the afternoon we could barely see the ridge of mountains across the inlet from our campsite, but when it cleared up, we could see a light dusting of snow maybe 1000 ft higher than where we are at around 6000 ft.

This was the first extensive rain we've had on this trip, and we discovered it was leaking in around the window frame of one of our front windows. First we put a towel there, but it came in so fast the towel and its successor were rapidly soaked. How do you put a pan under a window frame. After a bit of experimentation, we figured out that all the drops were coming from just one place on the frame. So I had the idea of taping a square plastic food container to the glass, after first drying it carefully with the hair dryer. (Jim held a pan above the area to catch the drips while I was doing it.) I then inserted a second container inside the first to catch the drops. That way it could be removed frequently to empty.

[Whenever we have to rig up a solution to some problem, like that above, I always think first of black electrical tape, and Jim thinks of "Shoe Goo," which actually has lots of different trade names. We always argue which would be better for the task at hand. This time Jim agreed that the black tape won hands down, but lots of times either would do, and I use the tape and he uses the "Shoe Goo." ]

This solution was fine while we were available to empty it, but we timed it and discovered the container got a quarter full in half an hour. We didn't look forward to taking turns getting up in the night to empty it. So Plan B was to hang a little bucket from the raised Venetian blinds. That seemed to work pretty well, but we worried it would get too heavy for the blinds.

Jim really wanted a permanent solution to the problem. First he was all for getting out his roof-patching compound and smearing some on. I was afraid it wouldn't work on a wet surface. He brought it in and opened the can to see if it was still OK. It was nice and soft, but one whiff told me it had an organic solvent immiscible with water. He still thought it would work, but we read the label and it said it must be applied to a surface free of dirt, oil, and moisture. So much for that plan—at least right now.

Then Jim commented that he really didn't think the trailer was level; the left side was low. This made me laugh, for he's always kidding me about being picky and continually demanding a "board on the left," seldom the right, when we camp. This time we did have one board on the left, but really needed two. I'd told him to jack hard on the left and maybe that would do, but it hadn't. Jim got out the ladder and looked on the roof and discovered that there was a pool of water right over that window. We really had needed that second board, so Jim decided to do it right and hitched up the trailer to the truck and inserted another board.

This was all done in the very cold rain and wind. In his haste Jim made a couple of boo-boos like having his slippery, wet foot slip off the brake onto the gas, causing the front end of the trailer to clunk down hard, and forgetting to put the steps up and dragging them on the ground. Both of these sounded and felt like major upheavals in the trailer, but no damage was done. However, poor Toby was absolutely petrified. I've never seen him so scared. He tried to get into his kennel, but the door was closed. Then he tried to climb into the bathtub, a place he normally avoids. Finally he went to the far corner of the bed and cowered, trembling very visibly. I couldn't take time to comfort him because I was jumping up and down, going outside to put up the steps and standing at the sink with the leveling device helping Jim level the trailer. Finally it was all over and Toby came and lay beside me and gradually calmed down.

We think we got the problem licked, but the rain has stopped for now. Drops kept falling into the container for a while, but we think they were already inside the wall. However, the rain has stopped. We'll have to see what happens when it starts again.

I don't think I'll ever get any more "Princess and the Pea" accusations when I insist on that "board on the left" in the future. If I do, I'll remind him of this experience.

8:15 p.m., Thursday, May 22, 2008

Lucerne Valley USFS Campground, Flaming Gorge NRA, UT

It rained some in the night and, when I made the bed this morning, I discovered that the roof had leaked around the vent; the water came down around the screw on one of the four corners. This has happened before, but not for many years. It was a pretty slow drip, but it did soak through two blankets and the sheet. I put a bowl under the drip to catch the rest of the water and spread the blankets and sheet to dry for a few hours. I speculated that the upheavals when Jim was hitching up the trailer to put the second board underneath it yesterday may have cracked the caulking he did after we had trouble there several years ago. After we came back from our morning's activities, Jim caulked the area around the vent and the top of the window frame. (He decided the leak was around the window and not on the roof, for there was still a pool of water on top of the trailer and the leak had stopped.) I hope it did the job. There was a 60% probability of rain today and 40% this evening, but it looks like we're not going to get any. (Note: we always carry a ladder atop the truck so he can climb up and do these sorts of jobs. The ladder comes in handy when I try to find the truck in a big parking lot.)

This morning was just as calm as yesterday. We went back to the State Line Campground because I wanted to see if I could get more recitative songs from Horned Larks. I never heard a single one and the intermittent songs were mostly pretty far away. Furthermore, there was now a trailer there with a generator running all morning. It was at the far end of the campground, but still audible when I aimed my microphone that direction, and those dratted Horned Larks always seemed to fly right to a position where I had to do just that. I did improve my Sage Thrasher recordings, if that was possible. I got a little closer and recorded a longer piece. It should be outstanding.

After we came back, Jim discovered a burrow with five adorable Wyoming Ground Squirrel babies out and about. He never saw the mother and worried that something had happened to her. I thought his worries were unnecessary, but later in the day he found one lying dead near the burrow. So maybe something *did* happen to the mom. Of course, they still need milk, but Jim said they were eating a little bit of stuff off the ground. In desperation, he put a portion of magic meal (high fat) just inside the burrow opening. He felt he had to do something. He thought our camping here may have chased the mother off, but I can't really see why. I'm sure there must have been people in this site last weekend, it's such a choice location. Furthermore we've been camped near Wyoming Ground Squirrels before (Leadville, Colorado, two years ago) and they paid no attention to people. [Later: the next morning all were lying dead on the ground near the burrow. Something really must have happened to Mom.]

It was a gloriously beautiful day all day: puffy clouds coming and going, rainy spots visible off in the distance, mountains with snow down to 7000 ft (we're at 6000). The lowest snow melted during the day, but was certainly beautiful across the water on the nearest slope this morning while we were eating breakfast. Jim remarked, "Every

fifteen minutes, the scene looks different.” Temperature got up to 57°, but there was little or no wind and lots of sun, so it didn’t seem particularly cold at all.

Friday, May 23, 2008  
KOA, Manila, UT

No entry.

1:00 p.m., Saturday, May 24, 2008  
KOA, Manila, UT

Yesterday morning dawned cold (43°) and windy with rain clouds looking like they were coming our way. It seemed like a good morning to sit indoors and edit the thirds installment of this diary. We’ll be leaving Utah Monday and that’s a good cut-off point. After I finished my preliminary edit, I turned it over to Jim for him to see what he could add or change. Then I took Toby for a walk. He doesn’t like the wind, thinks it’s going to blow his tail off, or something, because he’s forever sitting down. It turned out our site was the least sheltered from the wind of any and we soon got to where it was a bit calmer. I added three birds to my list, apparently migrants: Western Tanager, Cedar Waxwing, and Yellow Warbler. I also confirmed for sure that both Violet-green and Tree swallows are here. When they’re flying around, it’s hard to see the face and rump patterns. I finally found a little tree that had a mixture of the two species perched, apparently taking a break from flying around in the wind.

After lunch we left Lucerne Valley Campground just before its 1:00 check-out time and drove the 6-7 miles into the tiny town of Manila and its KOA, arriving just before their 1:00 check-in time. They let us in anyway. The campground is a typical in-town campground, but has a lot of nice big trees. It bristles with more rules and regulations than we’ve ever received. I just counted five pages, including the papers Jim received when he made the reservation. The pet rules are printed three times, and there’s a lot of other repetition, too. Most of them are fairly reasonable, but it gives you a bad taste to be confronted with all that regimentation when you first arrive. They’re not expressed in a very friendly fashion, either. Example: **Stop Sign**. You must make a complete stop each time you enter. It is a STOP sign.” After that the speed limit is 5 mph. Oh yes, there was a \$10.00 pet deposit, refundable if he follows all the rules—stays on a leash, doesn’t bark excessively, doesn’t walk on any grass, doesn’t walk on any campground roads except those between his site and the “dog walk area,” etc. The dog walk area is at the end of the next loop over from us, but to get there he would have to walk down the hill to the office and back up the other road. It is forbidden to walk through any campsite but your own, apparently even empty ones.

This place has WiFi, but the signal strengths varies, making it difficult to use. Whenever it goes off and on, it seems to make the entire computer reboot. I lost all of what I had written for today just a few minutes ago and I wasn’t even using the WiFi. Puzzling. This time as I’m writing it I’m saving my work at the end of every paragraph.

We don’t get a WeatherRadio signal here, but I was able to check the forecast on the internet yesterday afternoon. Today is supposed to have scattered thunder showers and tomorrow is to be partly cloudy. So I decided to do laundry today and take one last scenic drive in this area tomorrow. After I did the laundry, I did some grocery shopping. There’s one store in town, a general store. It’s food selection is rather limited in terms

of staples, but they have all sorts of convenience frozen dinners, specialty dips, snacks, beer (lots of kinds of that, and we're in Mormon country!) etc. I guess the locals have to drive the 50 miles to Green River if they want anything the store doesn't have. It's still a lots better store than the one in Portal, AZ, and those folks have to drive 90 miles for *everything*. At least, I was able to get milk, eggs, etc., there.

4:15 p.m., Sunday, May 25, 2008  
KOA, Manila, Utah

Last evening our little electric space heater quit. Those things only work for a couple or three years, so we always have a spare stashed away under the bed. We hate to use our propane when we don't have to. Since the spare got put into service, I decided to try the local general store for a replacement. (In the past we've had lots of trouble buying heaters in the springtime. All they have is fans for summer.) That little store I was complaining about yesterday actually had three models, and I got a very nice little quartz one. What luck!

This morning we took the scenic Sheep Creek Geological Loop. It starts out from SR 44 about five miles south of Manila, and makes a loop westward, coming back to SR 44 a few miles farther south. At the start of the route—actually on the east side of SR 44 just past the turn-off to the loop—there is a nice little nature trail through the riparian woodland along Sheep Creek. The interpretive signs are excellent, as are all the ones we've seen in the Ashley National Forest. The sign said it was 3/4 mile long, but it couldn't have been more than 1/4 mile.

Then we set out on the drive itself. We hadn't gone very far when we passed a lovely little campground, Carmel Campground. It wasn't totally full, even on this holiday weekend. We had been going to leave this area tomorrow and head for Idaho, but seeing it we couldn't resist this place. It also is in the riparian woodland, but it has lots of other habitats as well. So tomorrow we'll head down there for a few days. It looks like it would be great fun to walk the road with my tape recorder.

The road continued westward and the canyon got narrower until we were in a deep gorge with barely enough room for the creek, the road, and a bit of riparian woodland. (A Black-capped Chickadee was in one stand of deciduous trees.) The cliffs were several hundred feet high and highly varied, because they are the uptilted formations of all the different sedimentary rocks that were laid down over millions of years. I walked a good portion of the most spectacular portion with Toby and really enjoyed it. At the end of the Geological Area there is a small picnic area (Palisades Picnic Area, I think it's called) that used to be a campground. A family of six camping there were killed in a flash flood in the 1960s. I suspect that's why they're converted it to a picnic area. Although there were no details on the sign except the people's names, I suspect they were surprised in the middle of the night by the water.

Just past the picnic area, the road rises steeply, then circles back to the main highway. This portion of the road was very narrow and curvy and not particularly scenic—and the pavement was atrocious. I'd recommend that anyone touring this area not bother with this portion and just turn back at the picnic area and retrace their route. As we discovered a day or so later, it looks very different from the other direction.

When we got back to SR 44 we were much higher than we'd been at the start of the scenic loop. As we descended, we stopped at several scenic turnouts with fantastic views of Flaming Gorge Reservoir. (We had come that way several days ago, but

didn't want to stop with the trailer.) At one of these viewpoints, there was a geological interpretive sign. Some New Earth Creationist had crossed out the ages of the formations in a table and written in, "These are wrong." Wherever the text said something was 225 million years old or whatever, he'd crossed out the word "million." What are we going to do with all this religious-based ignorance?! Only in our country is it such a serious problem.

It has been increasingly cloudy and quite cool all day—maybe in the 50s. Forecast was for more sun than we're getting, although scattered thunder showers were forecast.

Monday, May 26, 2008

Carmel USFS Campground, Sheep Creek area, Flaming Gorge NRA

No entry.

8:15 p.m., Tuesday, May 27, 2008

Carmel USFS Campground, Sheep Creek area, Flaming Gorge NRA

Yesterday morning, Memorial Day, we hung around that KOA until late morning in order to allow some of the weekenders to clear out of the Carmel Campground, which is only about six miles from the KOA. We had seen one vacant site from the road on Sunday, and when we got there, that was still vacant and everything else was full. It's a nice long back-in site with a beautiful view of the high cliffs, which are the Carmel geologic formation. They were originally towards us, but have eroded back, so they look like an enormous pink drip castle made of wet sand. On the other side of the canyon is the same formation, which is of course leaning away from the road and looks very different. I looked up Carmel formation in *Roadside Geology of Utah* and it said it is sandstone with a high gypsum content.

As the day wore on, most of the campsites emptied out, but one tent site remained. Its occupants turned up around 6:00 and proceeded to turn on their radio with the usual penetrating bass rhythm that annoys the heck out of us. This went on for a long time, and around 7:00 this morning it came on again. Fortunately they left while we were out sightseeing. For a few hours this afternoon we had the place to ourselves. Then in came a trailer. As soon as they were backed into the very same site the radio-players had left, they turned on a humongous generator and ran it for a couple of hours. Then they they turned it off and went away for a while. But they came back a short time ago and turned it on again. Quiet hours in this place are only from 10 pm to 6 am, unusually short. Around 4:00 a caravan of vehicles—maybe ten—pulled in. When we looked at their vehicles, we discovered they were from the University of Wyoming. One of the vehicles also had a dinosaur decal all over the rear window on it, so we figured it must be a geology or paleontology field trip. There must be 30 or 40 students and they've set up tents in a great many of the campsites—but they're nice and quiet. Just ordinary conversation, which we can barely hear.

Carmel Campground has no drinking water, so Jim filled his bird-watering bag from the creek, which wasn't easy. It was pretty far down a steep bank here. We knew we couldn't stay more than three or four days on the water in our tank, but we think we'll be contented to leave tomorrow.

This morning the sun didn't come up from behind the tall cliff until almost 8:00. It was cold in this canyon, and I think a cold front came through yesterday, too. The temperature was 31° when we arose.

I waited until the sun was on the canyon floor and then had Jim take me a half-mile up the road and I walked back carrying my tape recorder. (I'd have had him take me farther except there was a cattle guard, and I don't cross them! I couldn't find a way around this one.) Got some very interesting sounds: (1) a piece with both Plumbeous and Warbling vireos singing at the same time (will make a good practice sound); (2) an unusual Spotted Towhee with a song that started with a loud "tang tang tang" followed by an almost inaudible buzz; sometimes I don't think it gave the buzz; (3) a Lazuli Bunting with one of those short songs that's easily confused with that of a MacGillivray's Warbler; it had long intervals between songs.

When I got back, we drove up the Geological Scenic Drive as far as the Palisades Memorial Picnic Area, where the road starts up the hill. I walked various portions of the road on the way back, but between the wind, the creek sounds, and the fact that it was getting along toward noon, I got little in the way of recordings. However, again I enjoyed walking that canyon between those stupendous steep walls, whose nature changes every quarter-mile to half-mile as a new formation takes over. The best part is that only a handful of cars passed us. This place is really a well-kept secret.

Tomorrow we leave for extreme southeastern Idaho, so this is a good place to close this installment.

[Next day: The people with the generator kept it running until well after 10:00. The next day as we were leaving the woman in charge of the geology tour came up and asked us if they had chased us out. I reassured her that her students had been wonderful. I learned that they're junior and senior geology majors taking a 6-week field class and travelling around Utah and Wyoming.]

End of Part 3.        Mailed May 29, 2008