

# Convention Log Preview

## Westercon 49

**July 4-7, 1996**  
**El Paso, Texas**

Last modified: 1 January 1997

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Sunday, 30 June 1996, I got up at the usual time to feed Christopher Robin and get ready to leave on our trip. We had engaged the services of a pet sitter to look after my cat and empty our mailbox. The Super Shuttle arrived early. Then at the airport, I found out Mike had got our departure time wrong by half an hour; we needn't have been there as early as we were.

At the airport, I finally had time to check my voicemail at work; because of a car accident the previous week, I hadn't been at work for five days. I had only two messages.

Our flight was on Southwest. They served snacks on the nearly two-hour flight. I got some sleep on the plane. One of things I had done on the computer the previous night was check the weather at our destination. It seemed fairly similar to home except for the possibility of evening thunder showers.

The skies were partly cloudy when we arrived in El Paso. Our luggage arrived safely, and we got our rental car without too much trouble. Right after we left the airport, we stopped at a MacDonald's for a late lunch.

The drive to Carlsbad was about three hours. The country was pretty flat until we got near the Guadalupe Mountains, although we could see mountains in the distance for most of the drive.

We reached Carlsbad toward evening. Shortly after we checked in, we had dinner at their adequate bar and grill restaurant.

The next morning, I got up at 7:00. We had breakfast on the hotel patio before heading toward Carlsbad Caverns.

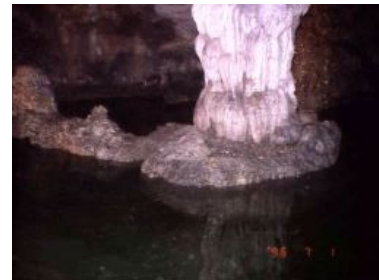
We arrived there about 9:00. After looking around a bit, we started on the Natural Entrance Route self-guided tour. This consisted mostly of a descent from the same entrance the bats come out of in the evening. When we arrived at the underground lobby, we went on the Big Room Route, another self-guided tour.

Image: Carlsbad Caverns



Then we broke for lunch, which we ate at the top. We also had plenty of time to look over the souvenir and book shops.

At 13:00, we started the Lower Cave Tour, which I had booked ahead of time. This is a guided tour. Our guide was Ranger Wadkins. He said this was the first time he had led the tour. There were a dozen in our group, including a couple of spelunkers. Most of us, though, were strictly tourists. The route is not paved but merely marked by strips of tape on the ground. Many spots are wet or muddy, and quite a few places were slippery. In many spots, we had to use our hands to help. We had been instructed to bring gloves to protect the cave, but they came in very handy to protect our hands from abrasion and dirt. We wore hard hats with lamps, for which we supplied our own AA batteries. The tour started by going off one of the paved trails. Just off the trail are ladders that are invisible from the trail. The ladders were the worst part of the tour. At the beginning, we went down the ladders; and we had to come back up them at the end. There was one spot where we could take a detour to do some crawling on hands and knees. Mike elected not to do that, so he held my camera while I did it. The passage was large enough that I didn't have to crawl through a lot of it; I sort of waddled, instead.



When we finished this tour, I went on a shopping spree in the book and souvenir shops. In the book shop, I bought postcards to send to friends and family and a videotape of Carlsbad and environs that was accompanied by a souvenir book. In the souvenir shop, I bought a sweatshirt, earrings, and lapel pins for myself; a gift for a pen pal; and a couple of items for my sister.

Then we drove down to White's City, which is near the entrance to the national park, for dinner. We ate at the Velvet Garter Restaurant, which was quite good. Its best feature was that it was totally smokefree.

We drove back into the park for that evening's bat flight. After a long wait and a lecture by a ranger, we saw the bat flight begin about 20:15. We were told it could continue for as long as two hours but were urged to leave before it was completely dark due to mountain lion sightings. However, as Mike and I lingered to take pictures of the full moon rising, it was completely dark by the time we left.

An extra treat while we waited for the bat flight was seeing two black-tailed deer above the cave entrance.

After we returned to the motel, we had an adventure with the vending machines. Mike went out to get drinks for us both. He put money in for his drink and chose Mountain Dew. Then he put in money for my drink; before he could make a selection, another Mountain Dew came out. He came back for more money. The same thing happened. He came back for money and went to the other vending machine. He put in money; but before he could make a selection, an Orange Sprite came out. Fortunately, there was also a root beer, which is what I had wanted, that had come down. So we had five drinks for the price of four.

On Tuesday we got up earlier; but due to using the computer in the morning to make up for problems experienced last night with the power source (wall outlet), we got started toward the Guadalupe Mountains later than we had planned. We also had problems finding an appropriate picnic lunch. The Walmart here turned out not to have a supermarket within. We went to two foodmarts before we found what we wanted.



We drove first to the information centre and picked up information. Then we drove to a viewpoint south of El Capitan peak to take pictures. After that, we went to the old Frijole Ranch, which is now a museum. It was in a cool spot near a spring with trees growing about. After we looked over the meagre exhibits, I talked to a ranger who was putting away one of their horses. He was an old-timer and had quite a bit to say.

Then we drove to the McKittrick Canyon station. Not immediately finding picnic tables, we ate on the porch of the station, which turned out for the best. We later found the picnic tables, but they were in direct sunlight. After we ate, we took a turn on the nature trail. It was nearly a mile, but the air was fairly cool there. We also saw several deer on the return leg of the loop trail.



At the station, there were also hummingbirds and lizards.

From there, we drove to the Living Desert State Park north of Carlsbad. It was quite a drive, and I kept nodding off. After we got to the state park, I had a drink and cooled off before we began the tour. It was interesting, but there were really not very many animals. It was also very hot. Afterward, I had another drink to cool off before taking a turn in the gift shops and looking over the exhibits in the building.

Then we went back to the motel. After a brief rest, we ate at the Ventanas Restaurant in the hotel. This is their fancy restaurant that is open only Tuesday through Saturday. After a nice meal, we returned to our room to shower and get ready to retire for the night. Preparations included getting ready to check out the next day.

On Wednesday we got up at the same time as the previous day. Breakfast was served indoors, because the skies threatened rain. After we left the hotel, we stopped at a gas station with a minimart. While Mike got gas, I got some drinks for the long drive.

The drive to Alamogordo alternated from pretty boring straight road to interesting scenery. It was quite interesting when we got to the Sacramento Mountains, especially after we got to the downhill side. We could see White Sands from a distance. The view after going through a tunnel was best.



Shortly after that, we reached Alamogordo. We headed straight for the Space Centre. I bought a calendar there for Mother. The exhibits were quite interesting; they were arranged top to bottom as at the Guggenheim and the Japanese building at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. After we left the museum, Mike showed me the house where he used to live. Then we had lunch at a Pizza Hut before we went on our way back to El Paso.



The drive was mostly pretty boring. The weather warmed up perceptively as we approached the fair-sized city. We returned the rental car at the airport then waited quite a while for the hotel shuttle bus. Two fans from Seattle also waited with us.

When we got to the hotel, they could not find a record of my reservation; but we had no trouble getting a room. The hotel is old and reminded me of the Biltmore in LA, although I've never seen the guest rooms there. Our room was spacious but very poorly lit, especially the bathroom. The air conditioner did not seem very efficient;

also, the room was warm when we checked in.

After Mike watched the news on TV, we went looking for convention registration. Contrary to the convention progress report, it was in the convention centre. We found the place without much problem and registered.

Then we returned to the hotel where I bought a few items in the souvenir shop before we went to the Azulejos coffee shop for dinner. Although there was a variety of food, the emphasis was on Mexican. I had a tropical fruit plate.

We slept in late on Thursday morning, since there was nothing going on till noon, when the dealers room and art show opened. We had brunch at the Azulejos; well, I had brunch; Mike only drank water. We met Julie Dickinson and David and Diana Thayer there.

On our way to the convention centre, we bumped into Neil and Cris Kaden and made a dinner date with them. Then we made a round through the dealers room. I bought the "Babylon 5" CD, a small book by William F. Wu from Bryan Barrett, and a T-shirt from the Dennises. Mike also bought a CD. Then we went around the art show.

The first programme item we went to was "An Author's Author: Writers Discuss Their Favourite Writers" with panellists Alex Apostolides, Eileen Gunn, John J. Miller, Susan Wade, Howard Waldrop, and Walter Jon Williams. I wasn't really familiar with any of these authors; but the panel was interesting, covering such topics as reading for pleasure versus reading critically and literary writing versus other types of writing. Then we heard a reading by Robert Vardeman. I had heard a reading by him years ago and had enjoyed it enough to buy a series of books by him and another author. This time, he read a piece he had entered in a writing contest and a story that was published as part of an anthology based on the Magic the Gathering game. He also announced a western historical novel of his that would soon be coming out under a pen name; I think I will buy it just to find out about that kind of book; it is called The Long Walk by Karl Lassiter.

Before the next item, which was the Westercon bid presentations, we voted for the next Westercon. I just wanted to see how the bids would be presented. While we were in the site selection area, I also spoke to the representatives of the Zagreb in 1999 bid; they are quite serious and will probably come as close as ever to winning.

The Westercon bid presentations were coloured by the choice of sites. Obviously, the San Diego people have a lot more to offer in their area than Palm Springs, where there are not too many things to do and the weather will be hot. Towards the end of this presentation, we got together with Neil and Cris. We had dinner at the San Francisco Grill, across the street from the hotel. Service was slow, but we got a lot of talking done. Unfortunately, we missed the opening ceremonies, which didn't last too long.

We came up to our room to rest until the Meet the Pros party. Just about the time that was starting, we noticed we could see fireworks out our window; so we looked at those. They weren't impressive. The only worse show I've seen is the one for Canada Day that I saw in Victoria a few years ago.

Then we went down to the Meet the Pros party. We hooked up with Neil and Cris Kaden and some of the other Dallas area fans and talked to them for a while until the smoking in the hallway started blowing too much smoke into the room. Then we went to the room parties. We started with the Palm Springs Westercon (1998) bid party. We got drinks but didn't stay too long.

The next party was the San Diego Westercon (1998) bid party. They had real food, which we didn't eat because we had just eaten; but I thought it was nice that real food was available. The last party was the Hawaii Westercon (2000) bid party; they are just launching their bid.

Friday morning we were up too late for a real breakfast, so I had a hot-dog at the convention centre. Then we went to Ctein's presentation about his [web page](#) to sell his dye transfer photographic prints. As relative newcomers (at the time, although our pages have been up since Christmas 1995) to the web, we found his presentation fascinating. I also learned quite a bit about photography.

Mike stayed in the same hall for guest-of-honour James Blaylock's interview by Tim Powers. I took a short break to pick up a book that Howard Waldrop had recommended on a panel the previous day, then joined Mike. I found the interview interesting. Blaylock seems like a nice person. Based on some things he said about his books, it seems they are not just straight fantasy but contain a measure of humour; I may be tempted to try them.

The artist guest of honour did a slide show in the same room. I had seen Brad Foster's line drawings in fanzines, but his slide show included much colour work and also wedding invitations he had done. I really liked that idea; you can get really unique wedding invitations. He is also working on illustrations for books that I hope he gets around to publishing. He told me he will be selling a number of prints and greeting cards at the upcoming worldcon in Anaheim. He is also working on a catalogue of his sale items, which he may put on the web.

I moved to a different room for worldcon bid presentations. Australia and Zagreb were there for 1999. Chicago was present for 2000. And Boston and Philadelphia made presentations for 2001.

From there, I went to a panel on "The Shape of Things That Came and Went" about how some predictions made in science fiction had not come about. The panel, which consisted of Alex Apostolides, Ctein, Kathleen Dalton-Woodbury, John Gibbons, Eileen Gunn, and S. M. Stirling, were just starting to talk about predictions they might make now about the future when I left early to change for the Locus awards banquet and Regency dancing.

Since the next two events followed one another closely, I decided to wear my Regency dress to the banquet. I met Neil Kaden as I was leaving the convention centre, and we walked back to the hotel together.

Mike was already in the room. After I changed, we headed back to the convention centre. At the banquet, we were at the same table as James Blaylock and his family, a librarian from Carlsbad, and a fan from Austen. We had enjoyable conversations about things varying from movies to conventions. I didn't take notes on the awards, but the results will be published in *Locus*. After the banquet, I talked briefly with Connie Willis and told her about the fact that my sister's book group, who are not science fiction readers, had liked her *Doomsday Book*.; she seemed pleased that her books were being read by people other than fans.

We headed back to the hotel for Regency dancing. For once, we had a good chunk of time for this. John was able to teach several dances. I think I ended up dancing every single one, mostly with Mike. I danced one with Sean Smith, who is in the process of moving to San Francisco (from Santa Monica) for work. During the dance, we learned that San Diego had won site selection.

We were tired by that time, but we stopped by the San Diego party to congratulate them and to get soft drinks. We also chatted with Art Widner and Jon Stevens.

I got up early Saturday morning, so I decided to wash my hair. I went down to breakfast by myself. I finished eating so early that I returned to the room again and wrote postcards for a while.



My first panel was "Plotting vs. Plodding: Keeping a Story Moving" with Aaron Allston, Maya Kathryn Bohnhoff, Loren Coleman, John Gibbons, Simon Hawke, Tim Powers, and K. D. Wentworth. The discussion was mostly about how different authors went about writing and was quite informative. Then I went to a panel about "Learning from Others' Mistakes: Writing Errors to Avoid" with James Blaylock, Kathleen Dalton-Woodbury, Barbara Hambley, and Caroline Spector.

Then I met Mike for lunch, except that I wasn't hungry yet. We returned to the room until it was time to go back to the convention centre for another programme item.



We returned to the convention centre a little early to check about our membership status for the San Diego Westercon in 1998. With our voting fee and pre-support, we already had full attending status. While we were there, the Philadelphia people reminded me that I had pre-supported their worldcon bid. They have postcards that can be collected. If one collects twenty postcards, one will be able to convert for free if they win.

I went to the third round of the fan jeopardy game. Ed Green of the LASFS had won the first round. This round was won by Dave Clarke of the Bay Area. Some of the categories this time around were Roswell (UFOs), Oz (Australian) fandom, and comics crap. I was surprised that I knew the answers in the first two categories. I had

no idea I knew so much about Australian fandom.

I met Mike afterward and went to dinner at the Azulejo in the hotel. After that, we went to the small masquerade. The half time entertainment by Jordin Kare was very good. The masquerade ended early, so we returned to the room until the parties were scheduled to start.

There were a number of parties tonight. We didn't go to all of them. First, we went down to the lobby to check on shuttle times and make our reservation for the next day. Then we started up. The fourth floor had the San Diego victory party; when we were there, the room was nearly empty, so I did a bit of SMOFFing. The Philadelphia in 2001 party was also on that floor. The people running it seemed confident of having a good chance against Boston; I hope they're right. The Zagreb party had been moved down from the floor above. We didn't stay there too long.



The next floor with parties was the seventh. The Australia in 1999 party was there. It was a lively party. I found a stuffed wombat I just fell in love with. It belonged to one of the people working the party. She got it and a smaller one in Australia.

Then we went up to the eighth floor to the Spokane in 1999 party; they seemed to have a good bid site. We decided to skip some parties and went up to the fifteenth floor, where Colorado Springs in 1999 was holding its party. They also seem to have a good bid site. At this point, I have no strong preference.

We returned to the ninth floor, where we stopped briefly in the Hawaii in 2000 party before retiring to our room.

Sunday morning we packed and had breakfast, checked out, and left the hotel in its shuttle. We got to the airport in plenty of time. I used my leftover cash to buy a bottle of juice to drink while we waited. The flight home was overbooked. I didn't have much chance to sleep.

After we landed and got our luggage, we waited a long time for the Super Shuttle. When we finally got one, ours was the last

stop. It was probably around 17:00 when we finally made it home.

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