

A joint zine by Jeanne Gomoll & Scott Custis

© Scott and I took road trip for our vacation this summer—to Rocky Mountain National Park and the Grand Canyon. We camped along the way and had a wonderful time. This is the story of our trip. Mailing comments next time, we promise.

© Camping Out of a Car

[JG] Camping out of car is very different from camping out of a backpack, and I was surprised to discover that it's actually a less convenient style of camping than backpacking. We set up camp several times on our trip, and each time had to dig out the tent, the sleeping bags, the sleeping mats, and clothing out of the chaos that gradually took over the interior of our car. Cooking meals at our campsite required that we undo the jigsaw puzzle of cardboard boxes, suitcases, cook stove and cooler in the car's trunk, because the stuff we needed was *always* in the box at the very back of the trunk.

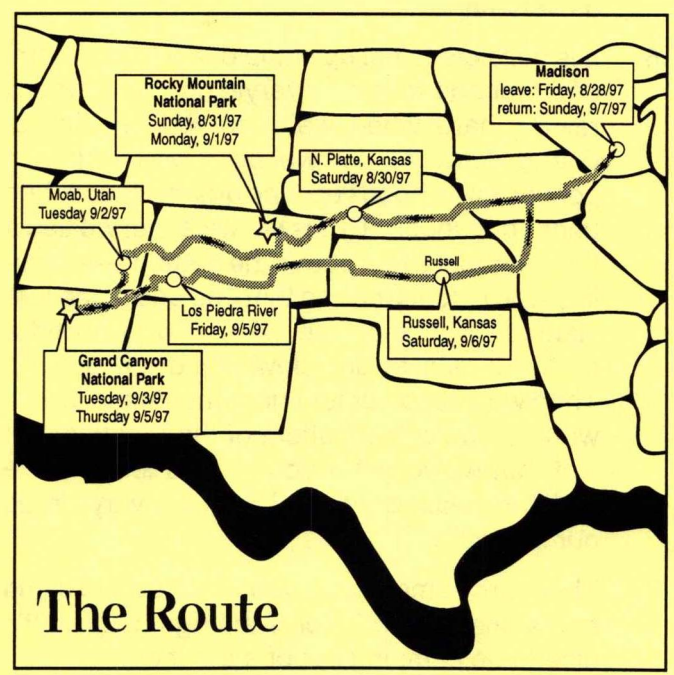
Whatever camping skills I've learned are in the specialized field of backpack camping. For many years, Scott and I have visited a little island in Lake Michigan every summer, which only provides backpack sites and no automobile access. We've developed an efficient system that I barely think about anymore. I don't even make packing lists; I just print out our standard Rock Island list from the computer and check to see what needs replacement. Once on the island, we set up the tent, stow all our clothes in the tent in one of the backpacks and use the other backpack as a sort of pantry near the picnic table. At night we lay that pack under a tarp next to some dry firewood beneath the picnic table. There isn't much stuff, but it's all easy to find.

When packing a car, it's much easier to pack too much, "just in case. We've got space. And we won't have to carry it on our backs." I didn't anticipate the chaos in the back seat, though. So I've learned

that the thing to keep in mind is that too much stuff no longer means an aching back but a cluttered car. Different reasons for the same rule: keep the packing list to a minimum.

Here are some other things we learned on this trip about camping out of a car:

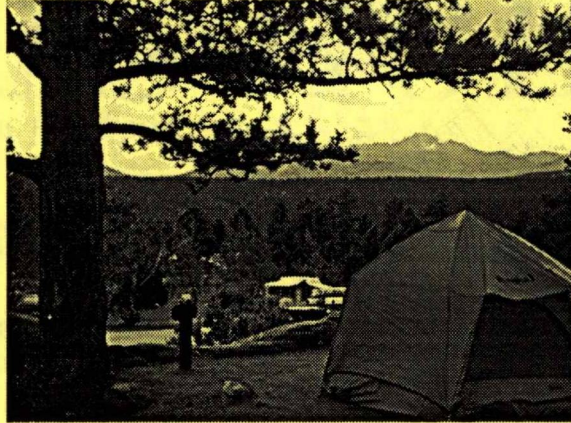
1. It is nice to be able to spend less time preparing meals. With a camp stove, it's not necessary to lug wood to the campsite. It's not necessary to build a fire for every meal. It's not even important to swab kettle and fry pan bottoms with dish soap (to prevent the fire from blackening the metal). Using propane is like using a gas stove. Turn it on. Turn it off. No need to douse the fire before leaving the camp site. We liked that a lot, especially since we wanted to spend more time exploring than puttering around at our campsite.
2. Pack stuff in plastic tubs with covers, rather than cardboard boxes. If we had used waterproof containers, we wouldn't have always had to pack everything away into the car every morning when we left our campsite for fear that the boxes would get wet.
3. Don't pack sandwiches in a Tupperware container and then set it on end in the cooler.



The Route

Melted ice will get into the container, burped or not. The sandwiches *will* get gross and soggy.

4. Most campgrounds for people camping out of cars are very big and crowded. For that quiet, peaceful, "getting-away-from-everything" feeling I have always treasured on Rock Island, big national park campgrounds don't do the trick. There's a quiet hour rule, but the kids in the campsite next door nevertheless have tantrums because they don't want to go to sleep so early, and other neighbors will think it's a fine idea to turn on their car radio full blast, and dance in the headlights with one another.
5. It *is* nice, however, when showers are available, which they frequently are at big national parks. Whenever Scott and I return from Rock Island after a week of wood smoke and the great outdoors, we head straight to a mainland hotel for a final vacation night with a shower, clean sheets, comfy bed and a restaurant meal. The extravagance is made all the more luxurious by its contrast to backpacking amenities, i.e., pit toilets, usually located a moderate distance from one's campsite. Grand Canyon Park had a shower and laundry facilities, which made us very happy.
6. It is possible to set up camp during a rainstorm and manage to keep everything dry. It wasn't raining hard when we surveyed our site at Grand Canyon, but we both wore our rain ponchos with hoods up. The ground squooshed under our shoes. This is what we did: we tied a tarp — about 6 feet above the ground — attaching rope to four trees so that one end of the tarp slanted lower than the other and provided a route for rain to drip down onto the ground. Then we set up our tent underneath the tarp. It worked swell. The bottom of the tent floor got wet, but we've got a good tent and very little moisture leaked inside. We were very proud our ingenuity.
7. There are some places you don't want to camp and sometimes a hotel is the right choice. It's nice to be camping out of a car then.



Getting delayed in Denver to get the car brakes fixed robbed us of four hours on Monday. Since Monday was Labor Day, we were incredibly lucky to happen upon a repair shop that was not only open, but willing to take care of our car immediately. Nevertheless, we lost four hours and had to race across northern Colorado on I-70 toward our planned destination — a camp-

ground in Gooseneck State Park in southern Utah. We didn't make it. It was 10 pm when we turned into a Super 8 parking lot in Moab, 100 miles short of our goal. The next morning we hurried to make up lost time, and at first we debated whether or not to make the little side-trip to see Gooseneck. After all, we didn't need to camp there, and it was going to be much later in the afternoon before we arrived at Grand Canyon. I'm glad we stopped. Not only was the view spectacular, but we discovered we'd made a very wise decision by staying the night in a hotel.

We drove off the highway for 4 miles on rough asphalt, over a desolate, flat landscape of rock and sparse vegetation to a small, oval parking lot with nothing around it but a single pit toilet and the edge of what appeared to be a cliff. There were only a couple, very low guard rails. The view beyond and below is visible only as one approaches closely, and it's quite a shock, because nothing in the landscape around you prepares you for the view.

Gooseneck is a serpentine stretch of the San Juan River that cuts deeply into the geologic feature known as the Colorado Plateau and is called (by the sign near the ledge), "the world's best example of entrenchment," that is, the San Juan River slowly cut through layers and layers of sandstone as the land underneath it slowly rose. As we looked over the edge, we could see the river 1000 feet below us, flowing through a canyon with almost perpendicular walls. The river traced a tightly serpentine course; we could see four loops from our overlook and yet I couldn't frame even one of those loops into a single panoramic photo. It was awesome.

But then we looked around to see where we might have camped. It would have been midnight or later if we had driven through to Goose-neck, and it would probably have been difficult to see where the road ended at the cliff. There were no lights. If we had survived the drive, we would have had to deal with the dilemma of where to set up camp, the gravel parking lot or the mostly rock desert beyond it. We'd never have been able to stake down the tent into the rock surfaces and could only hope for a windless night. There were no campsites, no water, no picnic benches, no fire grills. Just that one lonely pit toilet. We were glad to see the place, but just as glad not to have had to camp there. I can just imagine what it would have been like to wake up in that place, however. And what a shock it might have been to have realized just how near our tent had been perched to the abyss.



8. With a car, you aren't trapped at your campsite when it's raining. This turned out to be a very good thing at both Rocky Mountain and Grand Canyon National Parks. We escaped to restaurants when it was too wet to cook campside, and one night at Grand Canyon we went to town to take in a movie (IMAX). As we left the park, Scott stopped the car at the Ranger Station to find out if there was a curfew. We wouldn't want to be locked out of the park after all. The Ranger was very nice. "Oh no. We trust you. You can stay up as late as you want to. You're a big boy now!" You could see Scott blush even in the dark. I laughed almost all the way to town.

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### © A Close Call

[SC] The closest we came to a car accident was not in the mountains or in bad weather, but the very first day out. I was driving. We had just completed the 13-hour journey from Madison to our motel in North Platte, Nebraska. Despite our late start that morning, we made it to North Platte on schedule. It was early evening when we checked in, still light outside, so I decided to get the car

gassed up, find a Denver newspaper for a weather forecast, and maybe a couple bottles of beer. I should have stayed in our room. My driving karma had not been good all day, and I was about to push it too far.

I drove across North Platte's Interstate overpass to a bunch of gas stations and into a construction zone. Once I deciphered the path through the pylons, I had my first close call when I pulled in front of a car coming up behind me in the next lane. After filling the gas tank, but failing to find a paper or beer, I turned back this time noticing a truck stop a little beyond our motel. Our motel's parking lot merged into the big back parking lot for trucks behind the truck stop. I drove through this area on my way to the store and found everything else I needed. On the way back across the lot I followed a slowly moving semi which was signaling to turn right — probably to park, I figured. Not being in any great hurry I stopped well back behind him and waited for him to turn. When he started to turn right, I pulled around to his left side to get around him. There were only the two of us moving in the lot and I guessed he probably saw me. But it turned out that he was really making a left turn, despite that blinking right signal. I was halfway around him when he suddenly swung around back toward me. I hit the brakes and so did he. I looked across the passenger seat and studied the view of the tiny bugs flattened on his grill which filled my passenger side window. He hadn't seen me after all. I didn't wait around to discuss it, I gunned it out of there.

Oh yes, after parking behind the motel, one of the two bottles of beer I had purchased slid neatly out of the paper bag and smashed on the asphalt.

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### Mundane View Ahead

[JG] Some states should simplify matters by alerting us to mundane views, since they are so much fewer and so much harder to find than vistas of awesome beauty. "SO-SO VIEW AHEAD 1 MILE — FEEL FREE TO ADJUST YOUR RADIO NOW." Colorado is one of those states with an over-abundance of heart-stopping landscapes at every turn and curve of the highway. Colorado would go bankrupt if it had to produce two "SCENIC VIEW AHEAD" signs (one for each side of the roadway) for every gorgeous vista within its boundaries.

Some states don't have to worry about this problem. Kansas is one of those states. So is Nebraska. And surprisingly (to us), much of northeastern Arizona is another area of the country with unremittingly long, boring, driving bits, which is not helped by the fact that the Navaho Indian reservation that controls most of this territory enforces a 55 mph speed limit. It would be politically inadvisable

for me to mention Iowa in this context, so we'll just move on to the next paragraph.

As we poured over a Rand McNally Atlas and planned our trip, Scott and I talked about what we might do to entertain ourselves while traversing the boring parts of our route. We like to read books aloud to one another on long automobile trips. Earlier in the year — when I first read Karen Joy Fowler's *Sweetheart Season* — I read aloud the chapter to Scott which features the conversation between Irini and her father throwing high toss-ups to one another while Irini's dad attempts to explain the facts of life to her. We enjoyed that excerpt so much that we decided that *Sweetheart Season* would make the perfect reading-aloud book for our next long road trip. And so it was. I was glad to read it a second time, for I developed a special appreciation of the vast talents of a seemingly minor character, Norma Blandish. Also, some of Fowler's subtle comments about the politics of 1947 America came more sharply into focus for me in this second reading. But we both agreed that we would dearly love to hear Karen read from this novel someday. *Sweetheart Season* is first of all a gently and genuinely *funnystory*, and Karen's delivery could only heighten the bittersweet humor of the text.

So, until we sighted the mountains in eastern Colorado, we read to one another as we drove west. We read too, in the deserts east of the Grand Canyon, and through the monotonous landscape of Kansas, made more bleak perhaps because of how our eyes had grown accustomed to looming mountains, sparkling mountain streams and lush forests. We finished *Sweetheart Season* somewhere west of Kansas City.

We also brought along a couple books on tape for night-time driving and the more visually stimulating stretches. Since we were driving through the West, it seemed appropriate to choose a Western, and we did, sort of. We listened to the first two volumes of Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series, *The Gunslinger*, and *The Drawing of the Three*. No doubt my image of King's mythical tower will always be of the Watchtower which guards the southeast rim of the Grand Canyon.

The boring bits came suddenly and in a weird sort of way, *unexpectedly*, several hours west of the Nebraska-Colorado border.

"Let's see who spots the mountains first," I said to Scott, as the terrain began to get a little hilly.

"Are these foothills?" Scott asked. And we both squinted into the hazy western sky in front of us.

We expected that the mountain range ahead

would gradually grow out of the horizon, but it was just after we drove through Loveland that the mountains seemed to suddenly push aside the veil of mist and expose themselves, all at once, already startlingly tall — an intimidating wall of rock. I couldn't help but think of how this view must have taken the breath away from pioneers traveling across the plains in covered wagons. For months they must have felt like they were drowning in a never-ending sea of grass; the horizon a never-changing line ahead of them. And then, boom! Suddenly there's this enormous wall of mountains facing them, what must have seemed like an impenetrable obstacle, bigger than anything they had ever imagined, no matter who had told them about it before they left their Eastern homes.

I had that experience several times on our trip — a feeling that my mind was entirely unprepared for the reality of a mountain range or a canyon, even though I'd seen pictures and talked to plenty of people who'd been there before me. I guess that's why I like to travel. My mind doesn't really believe anyone but its own eyes.

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### © Scenic View Ahead, Part 1: Rocky Mountain National Park

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[SC] It's big and it's beautiful and well worth a week to see, but we had only scheduled ourselves to camp two nights there. I have seen mountains before. We drove through mountains when I was a little kid on our way to visit my mother's family in Los Angeles. I spent a lot of time with my head covered up in the back seat of the car afraid to look out over the edge of the road as we climbed. And I was especially afraid of tunnels (from watching too many cave-in movies, I imagine.) Jeanne and I saw mountains again from the train when we took a trip out west several years ago and again we drove through several mountain ranges on our way to San Francisco one summer. Somehow this trip was different. I never really spent any time in the mountains. Always before we were traveling through them, seeing them go by. This trip was about experiencing them up close.

Seeing them for the first time west of Loveland, Colorado emerge suddenly from the clouds and mist, lined up like a massive battlement, was startling. Then we began our first serious climb from Loveland up Hwy 34 through the Big Thompson Canyon to Estes Park. This was a beautiful, narrow, tightly winding drive along a mountain stream, between impossibly steep and rocky canyon walls. The drive took us up about 2000 feet from the nearly mile-high elevation we started at in Loveland.

We got set up in our campsite by mid-afternoon Saturday. The campground area was busy, but comfortable. We had a nice high spot behind a large boulder. The campground was surrounded by mountain views (as you are everywhere) with a particularly nice view of the looming, still snowy Long's Peak (elevation, 14,255 ft.) the highest mountain in the park. Time remained that first day to take a hike and we were lucky to notice on our way back, just as the light was fading in the evening, a large number of people lined up along the road to the campground looking down into an open meadow. Elk, a lot of them, were grazing nonchalantly, casually ignoring the onlooking campers. We joined the crowd and stared awhile, too.

Sunday's agenda was to see as much of the park as we could in one day. The best way to do that was to take the 50-mile Trail Ridge Road drive to the other side of the park. This was a serious endeavor that we fully expected to take all day because of the sheer climb and many scenic overlooks along the way. The road winds up into the mountains, to an elevation of 12,183 feet at its highest point, and then runs along a ridge ("the roof of the Rockies") across the Continental Divide and down again to the western side of the park at Grand Lake. I was a little concerned that our car's midwestern tuned engine might stall at that elevation, but there was no time fool around, we had to give it a try.

Needless to say I drove. That is not to say it was an easy ride for Jeanne. The road was a nice wide paved two lane, but as we got ever higher the sheer drop-offs and lack of guardrails started making both of us nervous. Jeanne, being the passenger with nothing to distract her from the view, started squirming in her seat and complained that there weren't "enough handholds in this car." We stopped often. Taking in views that were breathtaking in the extreme.

We stopped at the Fairview Curve Lookout which overlooks the Kuwanchee Valley, birthplace of the Colorado River. The trip took on a very different and strange feel when we eventually broke through the treeline and stopped at an overlook situated on cold, exposed tundra. The ground — rocky and barren except for the hardiest, toughest looking scrub plants — was permanently frozen only a foot down from the surface. The weather was clear, the surrounding peaks seemed closer and somehow more real. It was cold, and both of us pulled out our jackets because the wind felt like winter. It was like stepping onto another planet, and as we looked down into the valleys below, we really felt we were standing on the roof of the world. It was magnificent.

Near the midpoint of this drive, close to the highest point, sits the very nice Alpine Visitor Center which consists of some displays in one building and a gift shop

and small cafe in another building. We took a little break there before continuing down Trail Ridge Road.

I remember thinking a lot about a book I recently finished — Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* about a disastrous 1996 commercial expedition to the summit of Mt. Everest. Our trip to Rocky Mountain Park enhanced the power of Krakauer's story for me because it helped me visualize the whole Everest scene. Here I was sitting, at about 12,000 feet elevation, yet I was still well below Mt Everest base camp (at 17,500 ft), the starting point of any summit expedition, which was itself well below four other camps on the trail to the summit. From the Alpine Center we could look around us to peaks rising to over 14,000 feet, yet they are less than half the height of Everest (at 29, 028 ft.) The desire to attempt such a climb now seemed even more insane to me than it did while I was reading about it.

I was tired by the time we got down the Trail Ridge Road to the other side, but we still had to drive back along the same route to our campground. On our return drive we stopped twice for short hikes, once at the Continental Divide at Milner Pass, around Poudre Lake. All the water in the Lake goes East to the Mississippi, everything that falls on the other side of the Lake goes West to the Pacific. Kind of a weird concept to be viewing the American continent as if you were standing on its backbone. It was a lovely place and I think I would have liked to take a longer break there and just absorb it all for awhile, but clouds were quickly moving in around us and we decided to hurry back across the highest part of the drive before rain made the rest of the return trip more exciting than it needed to be.

Rain continued to threaten us, as we got back to camp so we decided to eat dinner in town that night. We also noticed our brakes were making a troubling grinding noise. We resolved to get started early the next morning and find a mechanic to look at them. So our time in Rocky Mountain National Park ended. It was far too short a visit. I would love to visit again, with more time to spend.

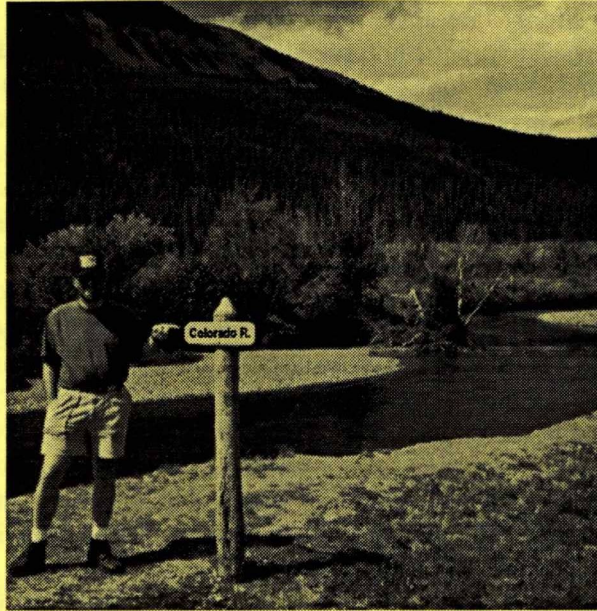
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## © Following the Water

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[JG] The river that excavates the Grand Canyon can be traced back to the meltwaters that gather for the first time in the northern part of Rocky Mountain National Park near Poudre lake. We hadn't realized that our route would end up following a mountain stream down to the Grand Canyon. In fact, I hadn't even thought about the fact that the name of the river is the Colorado River. But there we were, gazing down into the valley at a little trickle of a stream that is the source of the Colorado and the beginning of its long journey southwest to the Gulf of

California. It's been a long time now since the once wild Colorado river actually reached the ocean. Before the rash of American dam-building interrupted its flow at so many points along its course and diverted most of the water to thirsty desert cities of the southwest, the Colorado River surged all the way down into the bay between Mexico and Baja California. The story of the taming of the Colorado River is a fascinating though often depressing story. I recommend *Cadillac Desert* as a good history



As we traveled west from Denver on I-70 past ski resorts and strange *elongated* towns squeezed topographically into long urban rivers, we picked up the river again and drove alongside it through some amazingly beautiful valleys and canyons. I thought about how — in the Midwest — cities and towns are sited upon the banks of rivers for reasons of commerce. Roads link those cities by straight line routes and do not necessarily follow alongside a river. (Such routes are usually labeled “scenic,” and traveled when we have a little time to spare on our journeys.) The road we were traveling on through the Rockies was built where it was to take advantage of the passage through the mountains found/carved by the river. We were following what must have seemed to Native Americans and settlers to be a natural passage through a nearly impassable wall of rock. The network of roads in Colorado is far less intricate than a typical midwestern grid. With the exception of some amazing engineering projects like the roads that tunnel *through* mountains, roads go where they *are able* in Colorado, skirting mountain ranges and funneling through mountain passes. Midwestern topography, on the other hand, has had an artificial grid imposed upon it. Lakes are about the only physiographic objects that might be inferred by looking at a midwestern map which shows only roads and highways. A glance at a road map of Colorado suggests huge impassable areas, through which no major roads cross and small roads zig-zag and end abruptly in the middle of nowhere. This is obviously mountain country.

We followed the Colorado River. I don't know if this is something that most people feel, but my eyes are always drawn by the sight of water. Peering down into the Grand Canyon from a new point, the first thing I looked for is the Colorado River. It was never possible to see a very long segment of the river, since it's serpentine passage looped around and through the canyon walls, but usually one could find a little stretch, a short bend. I would squint at that little bit of brown trying to make

out evidence of a boat or rapids. As we drove west along I-70, I found myself always trying to orient myself to the river, gazing down at its rapids, or, sometimes, the vast, placid surface of a lake formed behind a dammed section.

We crossed the Colorado River for the last time in Moab, Utah, where the Colorado flows west on its way to join the Green River in the northern part of Canyonlands National Park. In Rocky Mountain Park, Scott and I had talked about how we could have happily spent our whole vacation exploring that one park. Now I think I might also enjoy a slow trip through Canyonlands, through Orange Cliffs Cataract Canyon, Glen Canyon, and a stop in Bryce Canyon on our way down, finally, to the Grand Canyon. In fact, in the course of this trip we ended up identifying several trips we might take someday. As long as I don't have to drive on the scary mountain roads, I'd love to return to this place.

By the time the Colorado reaches the Grand Canyon, it has been strengthened by several rivers, and one of the largest of those rivers is the San Juan. We looked down at the San Juan River in Goose-neck State park and crossed it in southeast Utah in the midst of desert painted with bright red soil and contrasting, bright green brush. Just ahead of us was Monument Valley. We didn't really pay much attention to the river as we were busy remembering movies in which that butte or that spire or those peaks had appeared in supporting roles. (“Oh look, Thelma and Louise drove this way!”) John Ford's landscape made me think of islands stranded in a dry ocean. Even though we ignored it then, we would remember the San Juan a few days later while we camped alongside the lovely Los Piedra river.

"Where does this river end up?" I asked Scott. He handed me the road atlas. My finger followed the thin blue line south from Colorado into Arizona where it met . . . the San Juan River! The combined river flows west through northern New Mexico, crosses precisely over the four-corners intersection of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, and eventually meets the Colorado River in Glen Canyon.

Even at the end of our trip through the Rockies, we were *still* following the river.

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## © Scenic View Ahead, Part 2: Grand Canyon National Park

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[JG] No words of description can do justice to the Grand Canyon. There is probably no camera powerful enough to adequately capture a view of the Grand Canyon that two eyes perceive from its edge. I spent hours quietly sitting along the rim just gazing into the canyon. My eyes followed a raven gliding on thermals across the canyon, and strained to see the tiny dark dots that were hikers toiling up and down the Bright Angel Trail or the even tinier, but brighter dots on the surface of the Colorado river which were rafts surging upon its currents. I spent hours just gazing at the rocks, marveling at the different strata, each of which erode at different rates and produced such amazing, monumental sculptures. I thought about how the topmost layers — just a few feet of rock — represented the eroded remains of all of Earth time from back before the age of dinosaurs. The mile of sculpted, layered rock beneath that thin frosting of recent geologic history, is carved and laid open to view by the Colorado River, and reveals millions and millions of years of earlier Earth time. I gazed at the colors and never grew tired of watching how they shifted and flowed as the angle of light changed and clouds sailed overhead (and sometimes within the canyon itself), casting immense, rippling shadows over the complicated landscape. I spent hours gazing at the canyon, trying to grasp what a small part of the canyon I was actually looking at, and failed, because I couldn't even grasp how big the part of the canyon was that I was able to see. I peered through binoculars, just barely making out the lodge perched upon the high Northern Rim, and down again at Phantom Ranch nestled amid a tiny patch of green at the bottom of the canyon not far from the Bright Angel Suspension Bridge — a thin line across the river. I tried to make out details of the narrow ribbon of sand and rock along the Colorado river where, we was told, it was 30° hotter than it was

up on the Southern Rim (it is another world down there), but mostly I just gazed into the canyon. I couldn't find the right words to express my emotions about seeing the place as Scott and I stood together, and I can't find them now, as I try to write about the experience.

Some philosophers draw on just such an experience of awe to support their proof of God. Not surprisingly, Scott and I talked about that argument, as we were constantly feeling awestruck during the course of this trip of ours. We felt it as we drove for the first time through the pass in the Rockies that zig-zagged up and up and up, 2000 feet up to the town of Estes Park and then further up, to Rocky Mountain National Park. We gazed through the windshield at the sheer cliffs on either side of us and the rushing stream alongside the road; we experienced the ear-popping sensation of increasing altitude. I felt that sense of awe again one night at the Grand Canyon, far away from the canyon as a matter of fact, among tall pines in our very own campsite. It was the only clear night of our visit at GCNP and the stars came out in such quantity and clarity that I thought I'd never seen the Milky Way so well, nor as many stars. We sat on our picnic bench, leaning back, arching our backs and necks so that we could gaze upward, and I suddenly realized that the canyon and the stars provoked a similar sense of awe in me. Both views were so impossible to translate into mere words, both were too huge to really encompass, but both were ineluctably *real*. Even though I can't follow the line of logic that links this feeling to the existence of God, I can appreciate the impulse to try.

We arrived in the park on Monday afternoon in the midst of a thunder and lightning storm. The road wove along the scalloped edge of the canyon for 25 miles before we arrived at Mather campground. But we saw little of the canyon since the view was obscured by fir trees, rain and fog. Scott drove the car and I read aloud from the *The Guide*, the park newspaper that the Ranger had given to us at the entrance gate. Every once in a while I'd look through the side window and catch a glimpse of *something*, but Scott gripped the wheel tightly and leaned forward as he concentrated on driving safely through the downpour. After we solved the problem of how one sets up camp in the middle of a rain shower, the storm let up for a while and we wandered to Yavapai Point for our first real view of the canyon. Even shrouded in midst and hidden by veils of rain and distant cumulous clouds, the canyon made an amazing first impression. I didn't even notice the lady

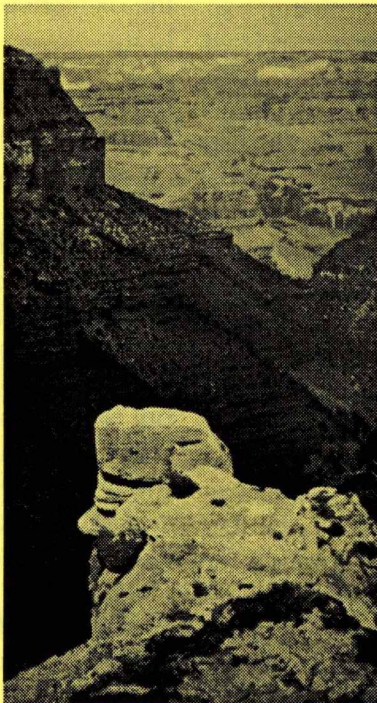
approaching me until she tapped my shoulder. I turned to her, expecting to hear her whisper something about how incredibly beautiful it all was.

"Where did you get that rain poncho, sweetie?" she asked. Scott noticed the dumb look of incomprehension on my face and answered for me.

"*Lands End* catalog," he said, but the lady looked confused. "Wisconsin," he amended. She sighed and wandered off, holding a newspaper over her head.

At that point, I looked around and realized that we were the only people in sight wearing rain gear. There weren't even any umbrellas in evidence. Later, a Ranger told me that they hadn't had this much rain in his memory. "Why, last year at this time, it was so dry, we had two fires going at the same time in two different parts of the park." Rain gear isn't something most people think to pack when traveling to a desert.

The next day dawned dry, but overcast. It had rained most of the night. Grand Canyon Park shuttles offer free rides along the western part of the canyon rim where cars are prohibited, which is an eminently reasonable arrangement that addresses the problem of the many hundreds of people visiting the park every day. If automobile travel along the rim were allowed, there would be constant traffic jams. You can also hike the trail, but since it is 8 miles long, most people take the shuttle to the 9 vistas along the western rim trail. We took the shuttle once, just to get an initial overview of the place and because threatening clouds were piling up on several horizons. Then we hiked partway along the trail. Between vistas, there are no barriers between the trail and the edge of the canyon. Often the trail is laid precipitously, only a foot away from the edge. The next day, I visited all the vistas and hiked along another, longer stretch of the Western Rim Trail, while Scott hiked partway down Bright Angel Trail. I spent part of my time sitting in a comfortable crook of a juniper tree gazing out over the canyon. But I told you about that already. All but two of the western rim vistas are located on points that jut into the canyon. One of the other two is called "the Abyss" because it sits in a horseshoe-shaped bay and looks straight down into one of the deepest and steepest portions of the canyon.



Other things we did and saw at Grand Canyon National Park:

- We attended a remarkable geology talk given by one of the Park Rangers, who explained the canyon's complicated formation that once mystified early explorers, because the canyon seems to have been created by a river that cuts into a mountain range, rather than simply detouring around the mountain like any reasonable river would do. General uplift of the Colorado plateau and entrenchment of the river explains some of it (that is, the land slowly rose and the river cut into the rock beneath it). But it turns out that it's quite a bit more complicated than that single-cause theory. Before the Rockies were formed and the Colorado plateau began to rise, the river had already carved away layers of easily eroded shale and had begun to create a modest canyon against the less permeable limestone layer below the shells. So, later, when the Kaibob mountain range began to rise out of the plateau, the Colorado River had already trapped itself in a path that eventually cut right across and into the highest parts of the Kaibob Mountain Range. At least that's the current theory. Modern geologists only recently refuted the long-standing estimate of the canyon's age. Only 10 years ago, we thought the Grand Canyon was an ancient 65 million years old. The current theory is that the canyon is a lot younger, a mere 4 million years or less.

So who knows, next year there may be new evidence and a new theory.

I was entranced. Stories and mysteries of landscape are what attracted me to major in Geography in college. I love to know how the land around me may have come to its present form. The Ranger/Geologist told us about the canyon's volcanic past, when lava flowed through the canyons, stopped the Colorado river with a dam 3000 feet high, and created an enormous lake behind it, until (in a remarkably short time, geologically speaking) the river crested the top of the dam and in a few thousand years, removed the porous lava deposits.. What a flood that must have been when the dam was first breached! The glaciers too, had their effect on the



canyon, although neither snow nor ice ever touched it. The meltwaters from the northern glaciers flooded through the canyon, raising the Colorado River's level high up into the cliffs, so that even today, driftwood can be found in caves half-way up the sides of the canyon. I am fascinated by these huge events of the ancient past: Glaciers which plow mountains away and scoop out great lakes with their immense continental ice masses. Canyons carved into mountains. Mountains created by colliding continents. Crash! Boom! It's exciting to realize that all this is still happening around us, but in incredibly slow motion....

- The last thing we saw at Grand Canyon was the Desert View Lookout, a strange tower built on the east rim. Actually it's two structures, a tower and a lower, cylindrical building next to it. It looks, at first glance, like an Anastazi ruin with its rough stone exterior, weathered top, and wood beams thrusting out through the walls. It turns out that it is a fairly modern building, erected in the 1930s and designed by a woman architect who also designed several other interesting buildings on the canyon's rim. Inside the tower, you can climb to the top through 4 levels. The walls are plastered with dark adobe; the effect is cave-like. An Native American artist, another woman (Sorry: I forgot to jot down these two women's names), decorated its walls with Anastazi designs. It's a subtly beautiful place, not at all what you'd expect in a gift shop, but that's what is housed in the lower building.

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## © Time Zones

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[JG] We arrived at Grand Canyon in the midst of the rain storm, worried a bit that we were late. National Park rules suggest, "Call the Ranger Station by 4 pm if you haven't arrived by then to hold your campsite." It was 4 pm when we passed through Desert View, 23 miles east of the campgrounds. When Scott rolled his window down to speak to the Ranger handing out campground site numbers to new arrivals, it was 5 pm. I crossed my fingers, hoping he wouldn't say, "Sorry, folks. You should have called an hour ago. We just gave your campsite to somebody else." Although, frankly, as the rain poured down, we might not have been that unhappy to spend the night in a dry hotel. But the Ranger didn't say anything, he just handed us a Xeroxed map with our campsite circled with a green highlighter.

After discovering that campsite submerged in a small lake, we went back and asked if we could exchange our assignment with another.

"Hmm, #189. That one doesn't usually flood!" said our Ranger to his co-worker and they chuckled over the joke that must have been getting a little old by that time of day. Water isn't usually a problem on top of the canyon *ever*. They gave us another assignment for a site without a shoreline, and we went off and set up camp. No mention was made of our tardy arrival.

Later, during a brief respite in the rain, we wandered out for our first sight of the canyon. I checked *The Guide for its listing of sunset times* and told Scott, "Sunset is at 6:56 pm tonight — only 10 minutes from now." Even though the sun was mostly obscured by clouds, it didn't look dark enough. In fact, if I hadn't looked at that listing of sunset and sunrise times, I would have guessed that sunset was still an hour off. "Must be a misprint," we agreed.

Later . . .

The Grand Canyon Geology talk was scheduled for Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock and Scott and I were determined to hear it. We got to Yavapai Point five minutes early and searched for a Ranger who looked like he wanted to say things about rocks. No luck. Finally Scott walked into a nearby visitors center and asked a clerk about the Geology talk.

"It doesn't start until 10 am," she said.

"Yes, I know. We were wondering where the Ranger was," said Scott.

"He won't be here till 10 am," she said.

"Yes, but it's *past* 10 o'clock," protested Scott.

"No," she said. "It's just a little past 9 o'clock."

And they stared at each other for a moment. Then she said, "It's Mountain Time, you know."

"Yes, yes." said Scott. We'd turned our watches back an hour in North Platte, Nebraska, which helped make up time for getting a later start than we'd planned.

"And we don't observe Daylight Savings Time."

Later on, I asked another Ranger about this. "Nope, we just don't believe in it here so we don't pay any attention to that Daylight Savings stuff. That means we're really in the Pacific Time Zone half the year." But we were still confused. Doesn't Daylight Savings Time take effect in the fall and winter, when daylight needs saving? Wasn't that the whole point of Daylight Saving Time — to make it light earlier in the morning so that kids wouldn't have to wait in the dark for their school bus? I was hoping to have this straightened out by the time I wrote this trip report so I could say something authoritative, but I still don't

understand. Scott and I will be very happy if someone can explain it to us.

Scott and I waited around for the Ranger-Geologist, re-set our watches, and enjoyed the rest of our stay at the Grand Canyon. But when we left the Grand Canyon and headed east again, we had to turn our watches forward two hours instead of just one. That's the main reason we missed camping on the Continental Divide and found instead the lovely Los Piedra River campground. Good deal.

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## © Weather

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[SC] I grew up in the midwest where weather, though exciting at times, at least has a certain predictability about it. Weather here tends to follow fairly consistent patterns, even the storms. It usually blows in from the West or South and moves to the East or North. Rarely will a weather system come out the East or North. Most of the time a midwesterner can glance at the sky and fairly confidently predict whether he/she is going to get rained on or not.

The mountains thus proved highly frustrating for me. In the Rockies and at Grand Canyon, I couldn't begin to guess what the weather was going to do with any reliability. We had a lot of practice over the course of our vacation and I still have no idea if any predictable storm pattern exists out there. When we planned our trip, we anticipated that late summer would be deep in the dry season out west. We eventually found out that the rainy season at Grand Canyon actually starts in July, but even so, we heard from Park Rangers in both Parks that this was an extraordinarily wet year.

Rain in the mountains builds up quickly. At Rocky Mountain the routine seemed to be clear skies in the morning and early afternoon, followed by rain in the later afternoon and evening, then clearing at night. That much seemed consistent. However, once the rain clouds formed over the peaks, it was tough to tell which direction they would move. We were often rained on by clouds coming in from improbable directions, or battering down our campsite for "imminent" rain from a likely source that would ultimately blow inexplicably around us. The positive side to this was that the view was always changing. Majestic peaks towering into a bright blue sky might turn into mysterious mountains with peaks shrouded in clouds or clear snow-capped peaks shining in the sun against a dark threatening background. The view was dramatic in all its moods.

Grand Canyon weather was equally weird. Many very dark storm systems moved around or over us. I remember one afternoon looking up at the sky at two very dark but distinct storms to the Southeast and Southwest

with a patch of blue sky between them extending directly over me and wondering which storm would clobber us. We decided to eat at the cafeteria that evening, but it didn't actually rain until much later that night when a different storm system blew in. Sometimes light clouds would form in the canyon below, where we stood. One day we stood on the canyon rim and watched a storm move toward us from East to West following the canyon. Gradually a curtain of rain obscured more and more of the view as it moved our way. The one good thing about the weather we had there, was that we were treated to some spectacular lightening shows over the canyon and one lovely rainbow.

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## © People watching

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[SC] National Parks are popular places so it was easy to fall into the habit of watching other people. License plates, for example. I noticed in Grand Canyon there were license plates from all over the country including Alaska. But in Rocky Mountain National Park, the vast majority were Colorado plates. Rocky Mountain seemed to be a popular place for locals, while the Grand Canyon had a far wider appeal. If that is so, Rocky Mountain Park is a well kept secret. Don't tell anyone.

Outside of New York City, Grand Canyon was the most ethnically diverse place I have ever been. People from all over the world visit this park and more people spoke foreign languages than you'd probably find on a major university campus. It wasn't just student-age people. It was so common to run into people of all ages speaking other languages, that after a while when I rode the shuttle, I assumed that anyone I sat next to might not know English. That is a very weird feeling for a midwesterner, though not unpleasant. During our entire trip we were delighted to find so many genuinely nice people. Everyone seemed very friendly and helpful.

The Park Rangers and guides were always friendly and pleasant. And older guide who gave us a trail map at an RMNP trailhead told us brightly, "You can't get *properly* lost without a map."

Another Ranger explained about the overpopulation of elk in the park and the need to eventually thin the herd. He rolled his eyes as he recalled the complaints of Estes Park residents about the elk eating their golf course. "They like golf courses a lot," he smiled.

Sometimes patience was necessary. On one Grand Canyon shuttle trip, Jeanne and I sat in front of two women who fell into casual conversation. One was from Holland, and the other woman was from Wisconsin. It was difficult not to eavesdrop, but the conversation quickly became tedious. When the woman from Holland responded to a question about where she was from, the

Wisconsin woman replied, "I didn't think your accent sounded American." When the Dutch woman asked the Wisconsinite if she was religious, she responded that she worked in the paper mills. I thought to myself that the Dutch woman must have found it challenging to translate that response. A couple times I wished there existed a social rule or clause that allowed people to intervene in such situations, fire the dunderhead and take over the conversation for the sake of our international reputation.

[JG] Probably the most amazing episode occurred during one of my visits to a GCNP restroom. I observed a couple Asian women washing dishes in the restroom's little porcelain sink. There were a lot of dishes, pots and pans, and not an easy task to do it in the washroom sinks which were very small. It was necessary to hold the spigot down to keep the water flowing. The next morning, I used the restroom and again noticed one of these women clumsily doing dishes in the sink. While I was in a toilet stall, I heard another woman enter. She suggested that there was an easier way to clean the dishes at ones campsite and started to explain how, when the Asian woman sighed and interrupted her, saying that she agreed and had already suggested this to her husband. "But he told me if I wanted to do that, he would need to get another campsite so he wouldn't have to watch me clean up." The conversation ended there.

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## © Food and Drink

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[SC] Food is important on vacation. One of the things we agreed on when we began camping together was that the food would have to be good (none of this freeze-dried backpacker crap.) On this trip, since we were camping out of the car we could easily keep a cooler stocked with good stuff and replenish it along the way. We took along a propane camp stove as well.

Good food prepared outside is something to look forward to. Unfortunately the weather interfered with our campsite cooking plans frequently on this trip and we wound up eating at restaurants more than we expected. At the beginning or end of a long day of driving we often opted for the convenience of chain restaurants. But we did go for something more special occasionally. We were visiting the Southwest after all, we expected to find plenty of good local restaurants.

One rainy night at Rocky Mountain National Park, we drove into trendy Estes Park and ate at a steak place called the Grubstake. It was smack in the middle of the upscale, shop-lined main drag and turned out to be very good, though expensive. Everything in Estes Park is expensive. The whole town is the most extreme yuppie

shopping haven.

We ate a number of meals at Grand Canyon in the village cafeteria. There was a variety of food choices here, reasonably priced, with healthy portions (people hiking all day need lots of nourishment.) You could get pizza or fried chicken or burgers or opt for their main dinner meals like meat loaf or vegetarian lasagna or fish. And the beer was pretty good, a local small brewery makes a "Grand Canyon" lager and ale. I had many of these. The odd thing we eventually noticed about the cafeteria was that the main dinner entrees never seemed to change. Always the same fish, meat loaf, lasagna, etc. every night.

The best restaurant meal we had on the road had to be breakfast at a little cafe called Happy Days Cafe outside Pagosa Springs, Colorado on our way back. We had been lamenting to one another that morning that we had spent a week on the road in the West and Southwest and never managed to get any good, spicy hot, southwestern food. Happy Days was a tiny place, brightly decorated with 50s and 60s era TV memorabilia. But the menu was bold and we were delighted to find a breakfast menu containing hueveos rancheros and breakfast burritos. I ordered one and Jeanne had the other and they were heavenly, spicy hot and big. A great meal at the perfect moment.

Mineral water and even sparkling water largely disappeared after we left Wisconsin. Both of us have tried to minimize our intake of Nutrasweet, so we generally avoid drinking soda. But throughout our trip, plain bottled water in convenience stores could rarely be found. Coffee, on the other hand, was everywhere. I had a good cup of coffee at the Alpine Lodge at 12,000 feet elevation at RMNP. We saw roadside shacks with neon espresso signs, offering drive up service. I filled my 20 oz coffee mug with a flavorful decaf at a coffee stand in Moab, UT. Good coffee, it seems, is an American staple.

Beer was something we prepared for in advance. Jeanne had thoughtfully downloaded from the web a list of small breweries and brewpubs all along our route. Colorado, of course was riddled with such places, as they have been one of the pioneering regions of the microbrew boom. There were so many that we could have found a brewpub in almost every Colorado town we passed through. Time and circumstances dictated what we actually had time for, and the first place we tried was the Estes Park Brewery, where I tasted their award winning India Pale Ale. It was a very traditionally hoppy IPA. Faithful IPAs are often too strong for people, thus the rise across the country of the "American" Pale Ale, with the hops toned down for our taste buds. I was so delighted with their IPA that I bought several bottles to take back to the campsite. It was the single best beer I had all vacation.

The next brewpub we tried was on our way back home in Durango, Colorado, where we stopped in Carver's Bakery Cafe Brewery. A very odd place. Durango is a wonderful town and well worth a stop if you are ever in the area. Carvers obviously started out as a bakery that a pair of ambitious brothers bought from the original owners. Not satisfied with just being in the bakery business, they added more food and gourmet coffee plus a tiny brewpub operation. Once again, we were in something of a hurry to get to our next campsite and I didn't take the time to try out their full selection, but the hefe weizen I had was pleasant and refreshing. No bottles were available, sadly. Had we been able to stay for a while, I might have sampled beers at Durango's week-long microbrew festival.

We could have spent our whole vacation sampling brew pubs along the route if the scenery hadn't been so spectacular.

## ©Hiking Up Hill

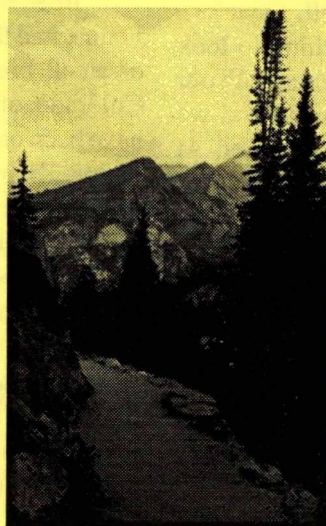
[JG] At Rocky Mountain National Park, all trails go up. And up and up and up. Unless you've got several months to explore this enormous park (which takes a whole day just to drive back and forth across), you must drive or hitch a ride on a park shuttle to a parking lot at any of the dozens of trailheads, park, pick up a map, and start hiking UP. On Monday afternoon, right after we set up camp, we decided to hike in the Bear Lake area, which was described in a park brochure as having "views of craggy peaks reflecting in glassy lakes." It sounded wonderful. We started up the trail to Nymph and Dream Lakes. I kept expecting the trail to go down to the lake, because isn't that where lakes occur — in basins? I had forgotten that lakes form in the cirques left behind by mountain-born glaciers. We never did go down, not until our return to the trailhead. The trail just kept going relentlessly up. I was feeling a little embarrassed at how easily I was getting winded. We'd walk along a couple switchbacks and then I'd have to stop and catch my breath. But it was completely worth it. The first lake, Nymph Lake, came upon us suddenly — a small pond, really, in Midwest terms, but a Lake according to Western definitions. Lily pads decorated its surface and a mountain reared up behind it and was reflected in the water. Scott and I scrambled down to the shore and

blissed out for a while on the postcard view, took a few pictures, and then hiked further upward past a waterfall to the next lake — Dream Lake, another lovely lake, this one filling a long, narrow valley, with a different peak reflected on its surface. The sun was inching close to the horizon by this time, and we turned around, not wanting to pick our way down the trail in the dark. In all, we only hiked about two miles that first afternoon and our first day in high altitudes. We climbed about 425 feet to 9,900 feet altitude — almost two miles above sea level.

We did some shorter hikes the next day from trailheads along Trail Ridge Road, and they too all went UP. Exhausting as this constant climbing was, the views at the top made them all worthwhile, and it was always a comfort to remember that the way back was downhill.

This comfort was non-existent at the Grand Canyon. The Western Rim Trail is mostly level and an easy hike — with a mere 200-foot elevation change along its 8-mile length. But the vast majority of GCNP's trails plunge steeply down into the canyon. A hiker that travels all the way down to Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the canyon needs two days: one day to hike down and another to hike back out again. And it's the trip back up that's the kicker. All written material about the canyon warns in big, bold lettering, not to over-estimate one's capacity, and to figure that the trip back out will take two times as long as the trip down. One is warned to start down or up no later than 7 am to avoid extremely hot mid-day temperatures in the canyon. One is warned to bring plenty of water.

I don't know how far I might have been capable of walking down and then up again if I had chosen to do a bit of the Bright Angel Trail into the Grand Canyon, but the thought that I might not recognize when I had gone too far down scared me a little. My physical capacity is certainly not good enough to go all the way down and since the steepest part of the trail is near the top of the canyon, I doubted that I could manage very much of that first segment. (Scott and I would both like to get into shape for another visit, someday, and next time, we'd like to reserve a couple bunks at the Phantom Ranch.) But after watching from one of the trail overlooks west of Bright Angel Trail at the little ant-people toiling up the many extremely steep switchbacks on that first stretch, I



knew I wasn't ready for it this time. I would have liked to have been able to start hiking going UP, I realized. Then, when I ran out of steam, it would have been easy enough to go back down... At Grand Canyon Park, if someone isn't able to make it out of the canyon they aren't abandoned on the trail, of course. A helicopter is sent to rescue people who collapse in the canyon. The park charges the rescuee \$3,500 for a helicopter rescue.

Scott couldn't resist hiking down the Bright Angel for a little ways, however, and so on Thursday, while I was hiking and meditating on the West Rim Trail, Scott set off down into the canyon to one of the first rest stops... That's his story though, and I'll let him tell it.

[SC] I went a little way down the Bright Angel Trail, which together with the South Kaibab Trail is one of the major trail routes down to the bottom of Grand Canyon. There are several other trails into Grand Canyon, but they are neither maintained nor publicized; they require a backpacking permit issued by the park to trek. The Bright Angel is probably the most popular route. It's about an eight mile hike all the way to the bottom. There are rest-stops at 1.5 miles, 3.0 miles and a campground area at about the 4 mile point. Also at that point the trail splits and you can choose to walk out another 2 miles to a plateau-overlook of the Colorado River or continue down another fork to the bottom of the canyon to the suspension bridge over the Colorado and another campground, or a little farther to Phantom Ranch.

I wanted to try going down just to get a feel for the level of physical strain. I decided right away that I would go as far as the first rest stop and, if I made good time and still felt strong, I might continue as far as the 3 mile rest stop, but under no circumstances would I go beyond that. The Bright Angel is also the trail the famous mules follow into the canyon, so as you begin down, it is necessary to step around and over large deposits of mule shit. This eventually diminishes, as the mules apparently decide to lighten their loads immediately.

The trail is very steep and there are many sharp switchbacks on the 1.5 mile portion of the trail. The total descent is 1,140 feet. I can tell you that is a steep descent for an Iowa boy. But as tough as I expected the walk back to be, I have to admit I was just as happy to not be riding a mule. Their tracks plainly revealed that they tended to walk on the very lip of the trail. Atop one of those mules, you could probably look down your pantleg to see a sheer drop of thousands of feet. I'd rather walk.

The sun was bright and hot for a change that day and I started down late in the morning. I reached the first rest stop in a little under an hour and thought carefully about

going on. The walk back already looked intimidating and I didn't want to spend all day getting back out, so I chickened out of going further and after refilling my water container and snapping a couple of pictures, I started back. The general rule is that it takes twice as long to get out as it does to walk down and that was about accurate for me. I took my time and rested frequently. The "walk" out was more of a climb. Walking up through the different layers of rock was interesting. At one point, I noticed the sudden change from limestone cliff above to a softer shale below; it looked like a knife had been drawn across the cliff dividing the two layers.

Almost as interesting as the view, were the other people. The trail was very busy and one could tell that the trail that so intimidated me didn't faze other hikers, even though they often looked like they had far less business out there than me. There were plenty of hardy, serious hikers wearing large packs, obviously returning from a campground far below. These people were deserving of serious respect; the climb from the river was over 4000 feet. But I also saw folks who obviously had no clue about what they were getting into. Badly dressed and/or not carrying water, they must have thought they were in Disneyland. As I approached the top, I met one older woman coming down who was wearing pastel polyester, bad shoes, makeup, no hat and was smoking a cigarette. Her partner's chest was bare and he was also wearing lousy shoes. Neither carried water. I never saw anyone else on that trail smoking a cigarette. There just wasn't any air to spare.

I was tired when I got back up, but not exhausted. I was glad I turned back when I did, but I would love to go further. I would have liked to have had a whole day to start early and go as far as the plateau overlook or even take a couple days to go all the way to Phantom Ranch and back. But for that, I would have to devote some serious attention to getting in shape. If I ever go back, it's certain that spending more time seriously hiking is what I'd want to do.

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### © You Could DIE!

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[JG] Gardner Dozois once delivered a very entertaining talk about the many hazards of everyday life, situations whose dangers, Gardner felt, lacked proper signage. That little label printed on the outside of a parachute for instance, "Warning, straps must be secured tightly. Incorrect belting methods may result in loss of parachute at dangerous altitude." (I'm making that one up, of course. I can't remember Gardner's examples, and I've never actually touched a parachute. But that gives you the flavor of Gardner's rants.) "SURGEON GENERAL'S

WARNING: Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide." Gardner thought that such labels weren't scary enough by half. He favored big, bold, blood red letters, screaming voices coming out of loudspeakers. Hysterical, panicky, shrieking warnings. The sign should not merely say, "For your safety, keep a safe distance from edge of cliff." Gardner thought it should say something like, "Don't Come Any Closer!! Dangerous, people-killing Cliff!! YOU COULD **DIE!!**" In fact, all of the editorial suggestions Gardner had for sign makers concluded with that same phrase, "YOU COULD **DIE!!**"

Gardner would have been positively appalled by the lack of appropriate signage at either Rocky Mountain or Grand Canyon National Parks. We saw only one sign warning people to stay back from the edge of the cliff at Grand Canyon, and almost as few guard rails. Whenever I got too close to the edge, my mind started shrieking at me in Gardner's voice, "YOU COULD **DIE!!**"

At Rocky Mountain National Park, the map we picked up on our way up one of the Bear Lake trails warned:

*The higher you ascend, the air thins and the sun's radiation intensifies...*

A large display in the lobby of the Alpine Visitor Center, at 12,000 feet, graphically described the symptoms of altitude sickness: nausea, headache, dizziness. Since I had, just moments before, swallowed three aspirins for a blazing headache and was beginning to feel like I was about to throw up, this was both worrisome and reassuring information. "I guess I won't try hiking a mile up that trail to the top of that hill," I said. I wondered if this was one of those "YOU COULD **DIE!!**" predicaments, or if it was just merely a "YOU COULD **VOMIT!!**" situation.

*The Guide*, the Grand Canyon National Park newspaper warned:

*...Deer expecting handouts can become aggressive, and have kicked, butted, gored, and bitten our visitors. Quite a number have had to be treated for their wounds. In other National Parks, people have been killed by deer. We don't want this to happen to you. Deer are not the only concern; bighorn sheep and rock squirrels will beg and will bite. Squirrels can carry bubonic plague ...*

There definitely should have been a "YOU COULD **DIE!!**" in that paragraph.

And, under the headline, "Heat Kills," we found this ominous notice:

*Hiking in the Grand Canyon during the summer months presents unique hazards, the result of extreme heat and some of the steepest and most*

*rugged terrain on earth. Every year, scores of hikers, lured by initially easy downhill hiking, experience severe illness, injury or death from hiking in the inner canyon.*

They said it! "YOU COULD **DIE!!**"

Scott and I got to thinking about all the lethal possibilities at Grand Canyon. One could fall off steep cliff into the canyon. One could wander off a trail and sprain an ankle and die of dehydration before anyone found you. A squirrel could bite you and give you bubonic plague. You could fall out of the rescue helicopter. You could drown in the rapids. A big rock could fall on top of you. "YOU COULD **DIE!!**" But, as Gardner pointed out in his speech, one rarely hears mortality statistics at a park; they want you to come back, after all, not scare you away forever.

We did finally hear some mortality statistics from an unexpected source — a shuttle driver. Without prompting, he told us that eight people had died at Grand Canyon last year. Three died of dehydration, two of whom were boy scouts who wandered away from their troop. Two committed suicide by jumping off the rim.. Two fell accidentally into the canyon, one by getting too near the edge while having his picture taken. And one person was crushed by a falling rock.

We were enjoying the view at Maricopa Point when we noticed a small sign at the edge of a huge sandstone slab that extended like a plank on a pirate ship out over the canyon. The sign post was only 6" high. The sign itself was a small metal plaque oriented at a slight angle to the ground, nearly horizontal. "Warning: stay away from edge of cliff. Extreme danger" it said. A young woman was standing closer to the edge than we were and as we watched knelt down in front of the little sign and carefully placed a small stone onto the corner of the sign. She looked very solemn and sad as she walked away from us.

Remembering the scene at the end of *Schindler's List*, both Scott and I wondered if this woman knew someone who fell down into the canyon.

I took a step closer to the edge of the dizzying edge of the cliff, trying to catch a glimpse of how steep it was. "YOU COULD **DIE!!**" screamed my brain. And I settled back to a more comfortable distance from the edge and shivered a little.

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## © Slowing Down on Curves

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[JG] Most people who know me have heard about my weird neurosis about driving on arching bridges and curves. I don't like it. Every rational bone in my body assures me that it's safe to drive over a bridge. Even though I can't see the other side of the bridge, doesn't mean it might not be *there* when I reach the top. Everything I know about road design assures me that a road that curves around a mountain will continue on a course with few surprises in the part I can not yet see. It will not zig sharply on the other side of the curve. It will not simply end in a chasm or wall of rock. I *know* this, I really do. But there is some part of my brain, a really deep, powerful part of my brain that does not believe it, not until it sees for itself.

And so, in mountainous areas, I am probably the kind of driver you hate to follow. As the curve approaches I am mumbling to myself, "it's OK, it's OK!" But my fingers are gripping the steering wheel with a grip of death. That skeptical, primitive part of my brain is screaming at me ("YOU COULD **DIE!!**"), and I am trying hard just to ride out the curve, trying to keep my speed steady and breathing rate normal, but inevitably my foot taps the brake peddle because for a moment, I am sure there is something wrong around on the other side of that curve.

If my life was a novel, this of course would all be an element of foreshadowing. Inevitably, I would meet my tragic end in a car, plunging down into a chasm in the road just opened by freak earthquake. "Isn't that *ironic*?" the audience would whisper. "She was afraid of just that happening all along."

Scott is a wonderful man. He does not ridicule me for my fears and bravely did almost all the Colorado driving himself. I volunteered to do all of Kansas, and in the end we divided up the driving chores pretty evenly, but I was very glad to be able to close my eyes occasionally in the passenger seat as we drove down those 9% grades that went on for mile after mile in Colorado with their "Runaway Trucks exit here" signs ("YOU COULD **DIE!!**").

"This car doesn't have enough handles," I said, as I gripped the arm rest to my right..

I think some of those miles were a little scary even for Scott, although afterwards all he would say was, "Well, *that* was exciting."

It rained early in the evening on our last night at the Grand Canyon and we didn't feel like crawling into our tent so early, so we decided to do something rather silly, and certainly unplanned that night. We

drove one mile south out of the park, to the town of Tusayan, where most of the park staff lives. We'd picked up a brochure earlier in the day which advertised an IMAX theater in Tusayan which was showing *Grand Canyon*. If the weather had been better, this probably would have remained pretty low on our list of priorities of things to do, but it wasn't so we did. Anyway, we rationalized, this park is so mind-numbingly BIG, and there is so much that we haven't been able to see — especially the canyon from river level — that it would be fun to see this movie

I have sat through countless scary movies with scenes that have caused friends to cover their eyes and whisper "tell me when it's over!" I have chuckled and kept watching. Murderers approaching heroines with knives don't get to me. Aliens slobbering over helpless victims don't cause me to avert my eyes. I enjoy movie shocks and I've been known to scream at unexpected scary parts, but I don't cover my eyes in reaction to mere suspense or blood. No, I cover my eyes when an IMAX camera shoots me up over a mountain top, skimming the slope, zooming up toward the edge of a cliff or the mountain peak, or when it swooshes seemingly a hundred miles an hour around the bend in a canyon. That's when that skeptical, paranoid, primitive part of my brain starts screaming and the sheer terror that I am rushing (up, over, around, it doesn't matter) to a place I can't see, overwhelms me and I have to turn away from the image. "Tell me when it's over," I whispered several times to Scott who sat next to me nervously wondering if it had been a bad idea to go to this movie.

But I am glad we went. There were some neat historical re-enactments of Anastazi life in the canyon, the first Spanish explorers, and Powell's expedition whose boat was the first to survive the rapids of the Colorado from beginning to end of the canyon. And I enjoyed the camera point of view when it was attached to a boat or raft. In fact, I am always more calm when the pathway around the curve is water. Water has always given me a sense of security which counteracts those primitive brain warnings. I also was just fine when the camera was watching something else swoosh around curves, or over edges, as it did several times when the object was a raven or a small glider. It's just when the moving camera point of view shots propel me at top speed over, and around and up that make me crazy. And I can't even put on the brakes! All I can do is close my eyes.

### © Scenic View Ahead, Part 3: Lower Piedra Campground

[SC] On our return trip from Grand Canyon, we planned to drive the scenic route through southern Colorado on Hwy 160 through Durango and Wolf Creek Pass. Our plan called for us to camp overnight along this route. It turned out to be a beautiful drive and we fell in love with the country east of Durango in a manner unlike anything else we saw on our whole trip. The mountains were beautiful and nearly tree covered. They were big, of course, but not as intimidating as the Rockies. The valleys were lush and green amid vast stretches of pine forest. On our drive between Durango and Alamosa, for the first time all week, we talked about a place we could imagine living. Beautiful as it was in the Rockies, Monument Valley and awesome Grand Canyon, those places were too hot or rugged or extreme for us to even imagine living there. The subject never even came up. But we talked about it a lot as we cruised along these gentler slopes and curves of the San Juan Mountains.

[JG] The most enjoyable camping experience we had during this trip was the night after we left the Grand Canyon. We drove through southern Colorado along highway 160, which twists and climbs through the San Juan Mountains National Forest.

Although we intended to find a campsite close to Wolf Creek Pass at the Continental Divide, we didn't make it quite that far that first day. The terrain was a lot more exciting than we expected and Daylight Savings Time slowed us down a bit (more on that later). Late in the afternoon, we stopped off in a Durango brew pub, brought out the Rand-McNally and checked out our options. There are dozens of campgrounds scattered throughout national forests along gravel roads originally built for the lumber industry; we had lots of choices. But we picked a campground not far off Hwy 160 located on Los Piedra River (Spanish for Stone River). It was already getting dark when we turned onto the one-mile, one-lane gravel road following the meandering bed of Los Piedra River, a beautiful mountain stream of clear water bubbling over rocks like something out the movie, *A River Ran Through It*. As it turned out, we were low on food in the cooler and the only store (a combination tavern/hunting supply store/grocery store) for miles around had already closed. So we improvised with supplies that remained. By this time, we had become experts at putting up the tent really quickly, and we had a lovely — though sparse — dinner. Millions of stars twinkled among the Douglas firs, the sound of water burbling over the rocks soothed us, and it was . . . peaceful.

We returned home to Madison late Sunday night, September 7, 1997.  
There were 157 email messages waiting for us.

—Jeanne and Scott, 20 September 1997

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