

Conservation Corner

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March 23, 2016

Last January I challenged everyone to “Find Your Adventure” at a national park, monument, landmark, or trail during 2016 to help celebrate the 100th Birthday of our National Park Service. The second week of March, Jill Hubbell did just that. Doc and Jill’s middle daughter Jessica had moved to Phoenix over Christmas, and so Jill along with daughters Michelle and Shannon went on a road trip to deliver her car while Doc and Jacob held down the farm.

March 5 was spent driving across Nebraska, a long trip I’m sure many of you have taken before. They spent the night at the Glen Eyrie Estate near Colorado Springs and on Sunday, March 6, worshipped at the Garden of the Gods. These ancient sandstone, conglomerate, and limestone beds range in color from deep red to pink to white. The motionless and silent rocks pay tribute to the effects of geological upheaval and erosion. Favorite formations of the Hubbell girls include the Kissing Camels, Balanced Rock, and Three Graces.

The future National Natural Landmark was first called Red Rock Corral. In August of 1859 two surveyors, M.S. Beach and Rufus Cable, explored the area. Beach suggested it would be a “capital place for a beer garden.” Cable, however, was awestruck by the rock formations and responded, “Beer Garden! Why, it is a fit place for the gods to assemble. We will call it the Garden of the Gods.”

Long before white men admired the scenery, many Indian nations including the Apache, Cheyenne, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pawnee, Shoshone, and Ute also worshipped here. The oral tradition of the Utes includes their creation at the Garden of the Gods. Both a dinosaur and a honey-pot ant are named after the park. Today mule deer, bighorn sheep, fox, and 130 species of birds call the park home.

After “church” they headed south on U.S. Hwy. 160 through the Rio Grande and San Juan National Forests. The Rio Grande National Forest features large Ponderosa Pines, the headwaters of the Rio Grande River, and up to 400 inches of snow each year! The San Luis Valley, the world’s largest agricultural alpine valley, lies between the Continental Divide to the west and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east.

They crossed the Continental Divide at Wolf Creek Pass. Perhaps you’re familiar with the “37 miles of hell – which is up on the Great Divide” from the 1975 country song “Wolf Creek Pass.” Fortunately, unlike C. W. McCall’s 1948 Peterbilt, Shannon kept Jessica’s car under control in the fog and snow as they quickly dropped 5,000 feet in elevation. Even so, they welcomed the quiet drive that followed through the San Juan National Forest, created by Teddy Roosevelt in 1905, before spending the night in Cortez.

Early Monday found the Hubbells at the Four Corners marker, holding hands across Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, before traveling the last leg of their trip to Phoenix – from the tall pines to the desert. After a day of R & R, Wednesday brought a day trip to Sedona and the Grand Canyon. We’ll save those spectacular national monuments for next week.

