



In Search of Eldorado



Hello to Family & Friends

Above is my destination for today, I should be there by noon. How long I stay depends on what I find to do. Since this is a National Park and not just a monument, there should be plenty.

My first stop was the entry gate. I reached over to grab the plastic tag that holds my National Park Pass and found it empty. Oh, oh. It could be that when I hit the brakes for the Elk yesterday, and my organizer flew off of the seat, scattering the contents all over the passenger seat floor, that it landed someplace that I had not seen. But the ranger let me in anyways. I still have to search for that tomorrow morning.

This time the visitor center was my second stop. Many very good displays inside; plaques, a diorama, dinosaur skeletons and a movie.

I read most everything inside then took the short hike out back to the Giant Logs. It was ok. I moved through it quickly, eager to get in some real hiking.

Day 53

Tuesday

February 26th

Springerville
To
Somewhere

Weather
50's and Sunny

Eldorado

By Edgar Allen Poe

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—
This knight so bold—
And o'er his heart a shadow—
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The shade replied,—
'If you seek for Eldorado!'



Not sure why they call this one Old Faithful, I didn't see the walking tour guides until I got back to the VC.





Before getting started I stopped for lunch. The photo below is my view while eating.



I get a real kick out of the designs that water/erosion make in these badlands type landscapes, like the one above. In fact, Badlands National Park is just about my favorite. I love hiking amongst the colorful mounds. I hope to get some of that here in the Painted Desert, although there is more snow than I expected.

Crystal Forest

WHAT DO THE COLORS MEAN?

Contamination. Mineral impurities within the quartz give the wood its various colors.



Iron oxides
Red, yellow,
orange and purple



Manganese oxides
Black and grey



Pure quartz
White

The first hike is at Crystal Forest. It's only .8 mile, but it's paved and should be a good warm-up.



I didn't see the plaque above about the colors until the end of the trail. Maybe I went the wrong way? So I didn't get a Manganese oxide photo.



This one is about four feet high. It looks like the petrified bark is peeling right off of the petrified trunk.



Above is a great example of how the pieces of petrified trees come to be. Believe it or not, 217 million years ago the area now known as the United States used to reside near the equator, about where Costa Rica is now. This, of course, is before the continents split apart and moved to where they are today. 217 million years ago the tree above was only one of thousands in a forest near a river. As the tree died and the water undercut the bank, the tree fell into the river and was quickly covered by sediment which prevented decay. Will that work for teeth? Volcanic ash, dissolved in groundwater, provided the silica which reacted with the tree's organic matter and slowly crystallized into quartz (not overnight mind you, it took about 75 million years). As the area now known as Arizona erodes away, the petrified tree is exposed. Still more erosion causes the now solid, not pliable wood anymore, sections to fracture, break away and roll down the hill. There is your geology lesson for today, and the basis of Petrified Forest National Park.

Back at the VC I picked up a binder with On the Beaten Path Hikes described in detail. As I looked this over I thought, geez, I may spend a whole nother (everyone says it but it's not a real word) day here with all this hiking to be done. The first of those hikes is the Historic Old Jasper Forest Road. This trail follows an original road that visitors to the park used back when it was just wagons and horses. It's about 2.1 miles and winds through an area that has the most petrified wood in the park. But I am concerned. Even the path out back of the VC was wet and muddy where it was not paved. This might be a very short hike.





My feet sunk in pretty easily. I had to keep to the snow where the ground was still hard underneath or hop from grassy hump to grassy hump. Sometimes there was no option but to walk in the mud or sink into the soft gravel. Sometimes my hiking poles sunk in up to four inches deep. I often heard those sucking sounds when you pull something out of the mud? Unfortunately, it was my feet or poles making those sounds

I made it about a quarter mile to the end of the red gravel as you can see to the right. After that it was just mud, and if I ran across a dry wash, which is incorrect right now since they are all wet with snow run-off, I was not going to splash through the mud and water to the other side. So I regretfully turned around.

Just as I got back to the trailhead another couple was starting down. I told them it was pretty muddy and dirty, that it was not a fun hike. She says "I like muddy and dirty. When I come back I want to come back as a pig."

Okey dokey. I let that one slide. I also did not stick around to see how far they made it. No age prejudice here, but they were older than me with no hiking poles. (I would have slipped and fallen at least twice without them)



Water Under the Bridge



Water created Agate Bridge and will destroy it. The fossilized tree that now forms Agate Bridge grew in a lush subtropical forest 217 million years ago. When this tree died, it washed into a river and its quick burial by river sediments prevented decay. Volcanic ash dissolved in groundwater provided silica, which reacted with the

log and slowly crystallized it into quartz. Millions of years later, rivers and streams eroded massive layers of rock strata to expose this fossilized tree. Inevitably, water now carving the small gully under Agate Bridge will cause its collapse. The supportive concrete span, constructed in 1917, is a tenuous attempt at preservation. Water will always have its way.



The Badlands of Petrified Forest





This is so cool!!

I thought the snow would really bring out the color of the different bands of sediment, but I guess it's just the opposite. You can see some light and dark, here and there, but not what I was hoping for.



Above is a panoramic shot of the two photos above. You can put them together if you try.

Below are the Tepees





This was another attempt at an off the beaten path hike called the Blue Forest Trail. It starts from the Tepees and goes into the hills to meet up with the Blue Mesa Trail, which is closed today. I may have made a quarter mile again before turning back due to the muddy conditions.



Above and below are Newspaper Rock. This is similar to the Newspaper Rock State Historical Park in Utah I visited on my Monument Valley Horseback ride trip. More of a description resides below.



Work of Generations



Step up to the railing ahead and you will see one of the park's largest concentrations of petroglyphs. It is called Newspaper Rock for the more than 650 images pecked, carved, or incised into the boulders below. This unique site is part of a larger concentration of images carved along the sandstone bluffs south of the Puerco River, earning it the distinction of an Archeological District on the National Register of Historic Places.





This is a panoramic shot of about 270 degrees. I wish these pages could be big enough to show the true expanse of the view here.

The Big Picture

San Francisco Peaks
elevation: 12267 ft (3739 m)
distance: 108 miles (173.8 km)

Turkey Track Butte
elevation: 6007 ft (1831 m)
distance: 22.8 miles (36.7 km)



I think my photo is better than theirs. Maybe I just had a day without the summer heat, but those San Francisco Peaks are 108 miles away. Incredible view!!



Hmmmm, looks like the Painted Desert is just a plain white canvas right now.

Well, I must say I am disappointed. Even though the crowds are non-existent, apparently February is not the best time of year to visit Petrified Forest National Park. It is nice with the snow, it just so happens there was a little TOO much snow, or else colder temps that would keep the ground frozen.

This is not my first time here, we visited on a family vacation to California. It may have been a little like the Griswolds; Vehicle breakdown in Eola, Iowa. Mom cutting her foot in Missouri (this was not all bad as she was in a wheelchair for Disneyland), vehicle breakdown in Utah, vehicle breakdown in Colorado, Mud slide in California, vehicle breakdown in Idaho. The list goes on and on. Of course they were not all on the same trip, but some cowboys have trouble with their four legged partners? Well Gops had his share with his four wheeled steed.

Getting back to the point, I don't remember all of the badlands type scenery. I do remember the petrified trees and I think a Ranger led talk, but I'm not sure. Of course the Park is about 2.5 times larger than it was back in the 60's.

More National Monuments tomorrow

Until next time.....