

A short trip to Carlsbad Caverns and Great Sand Dunes, CO
December 26, 2002 - January 4, 2003
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Dec 26, 2002 Thursday

Left Temecula about 3pm. A little late to get a road trip started. AAA mapped me to go up the 215 to I-10 to head toward Tombstone, AZ and Carlsbad Caverns. Well, why do that when the back way over the SR 79S -> SR123 -> SR74 to Palm Desert can chop off an hour of travel. Put into Palm Desert about 5:30pm. Tried to contact Wendy in La Quinta 'cause I was right there. The cell phone does have its use (I'd just received one for Christmas). Sadly, she was in LA at the time. Follow the desert highway SR111 east 'till the intersection of I-10 and began to head east. Nice to cover the anti-scenic trip portion at night. Hit Blythe a short time later and ate at Blythe pizza, off the exit with the most restaurants. I think the dude there hated me for some reason. He ignored me while standing right in front of his face for a minute or two before ordering. If I wasn't set on pizza, I would have been gone. Hick. For that, I enjoyed a pepperoni-less pizza and watched Dante's Peak. Finishing that, left. On the way out, caught Mr. Hick's glare and he quickly looked away. The visage must be pretty scary! Loser. On the road to Phoenix.

Great oldies show in Quartzite in the 94.x band. A funny Mexican station, the only one for 1/2 hour had a dude doing terrible karaoke to 80's music. Hilarious! Even picked up a Yuma country station this far up!

So these Michelin Pilot XGT tires feel great. Just bought them. Hopefully they'll work out okay farther down the road. Got into Phoenix and almost rammed a motocop going 30MPH. Semi-safely dodged him and fortunately he didn't notice. Had to get past the metro area to avoid traffic. Hit Chandler, AZ to fuel up. Whoa - 26MPG! Hmm...better check the oil. *!*\$@\$()!!! Way overfilled. Dammit!!!! 3/4" overfilled. I knew I should have checked it while at Discover Hyundai in Carlsbad, CA.

Drove real nice (like it mattered now) to a Super 8 motel, paid freaking' \$45 because I needed a place to drain some oil. The whole parking lot has video surveillance. Dang! Don't want to get caught.

The video piped to the front desk. Idea! I'm sure they won't allow oil draining. Wait for a customer to distract the clerk and watch the video to see where the coverage holes are and then ask an inane question when the customer leaves to alleviate suspicion. Park the car in a surveillance hole, wait a half hour for the engine to cool (12:15am!) and then use the room's ice bucket with a plastic liner to catch the oil.

There must have been a quart overfill. Freaking...!! <sigh>

December 27, 2002 Friday

A great sunrise, grand slam breakfast at Denny's. Funny note - at the Chandler gas station last night, I watched a couple lock their young son in the vehicle accidentally. They coaxed/begged him to unlock the door. Mental note - carry spare key on me and NOT in the car. Hit the I-10 after breakfast.

The beautiful sunrise was at 7am. Late! Running along the I-10 in the day isn't very exciting between Phoenix and Tucson. Boring to a car going 75MPH but not if you slow down... Passed a sign to Casa Grande National Monument. Oh, if I don't go and check it out, I'm sure I'll regret it. Off the freeway onto a little highway. Fourteen miles to Chandler, AZ and to the monument.

In the 1100's, a bunch of Indians dug a few feet into the ground and found a concrete like stuff called caliche. Mix in water, wait and scoop. From this, you can construct a 4-story building in the middle of the desert. Making a building that big would compel you to build miles of irrigation ditches. With sticks! Wow!

Guess the Gila river used to be just that big. It's all dammed up now, so that's not reality. Enjoyed the ranger talk about the Hohokahm people, or "Gone away". No one knows what happened but drought probably wiped them out. Early sunrise on the structure would have been great with large format. Too bad I wasn't there early and haven't even loaded the film holders. From there, drove on to Saguaro National Park. Quite beautiful, really. In the middle of the day, the light was pretty lame. Got to stop hitting these interesting places at high noon. Took a slow road to Tucson from there, passed and went to Besson, AZ-80 toward Tombstone. Nice country road.

First thing to see in Tombstone from that direction is Boot Hill Cemetery. Rather entertaining headstones. Took some photos finally! B&W seemed appropriate for this place. Grabbed some snacks for lunch.

Wandered around town a but and should have hit up the historic courthouse. BUT, I would have missed: a comedy gunfight (lame but funny), a short walk through the OK Coral and some fun people to watch.

The gunfight at the OK Coral was as close as it gets, maybe 20' away from each other. The town's slogan is "The town too tough to die." Perhaps that had something to do with the \$20 million in silver mined from the area. Biggest ever!

Ate at the Longhorn restaurant and enjoyed "western style New York strip steak". Upon hearing the code phrase, "Would you like some steak sauce with that?", I knew it was going to be a bad steak. It was.

Left Tombstone in the dark. It seemed appropriate enough. I wanted to make Las Cruces, NM but at over 200 miles away, it wasn't going to happen. So, it was the town of Lordsburg instead. Motel #1 was booked so I tried another one. Motel #2 wanted \$40. No way! I negotiated them down to \$29. Much better. Bed. Shower. Sleep!

December 28, 2002, Saturday

Enjoyed a bad breakfast while writing in my journal. The very weak OJ cost \$1.10. Why did I order it? "Hot sauce" is code for vinegar with chili flavoring. Blech!

There were several Border Patrol agents at this place. Two guys in a booth next to me mentioned San Diego house prices and the Border Patrol mentioned San Diego many times. Don't know ya have it good 'till you see somewhere else. Went to hit White Sands NM and then to Texas and up to Carlsbad.

A fairly good day 'till near disaster in White Sands Monument. After the bad breakfast, travel to Las Cruces, NM. Didn't even realize I spent the night in New Mexico. Funny! Went to Napa and K-Mart to pick up extra batteries and flashlights for Carlsbad caverns as I signed up for a tour requiring them. Had a Mag light, bought a spare. What a sad little city, this Las Cruces. Off toward White Sands NM. But wait!

Passing the White Sands missile range and there's a museum there! Saw a mockup of Fat Boy, the Nagasaki nuclear bomb. Good info on the Trinity sight, the 1st nuclear blast ever. Missile park reminded me of something you might see in Moscow. Off to the White Sands NM. Dad makes better videos than all the ones at the national parks and monuments I've seen. Almost all the video looks hand held. Amateurs! Drove to the inter-dune walkway and wandered

west one mile to find untrodden dunes at sunset.

So-so success with some lame sides taken, realized it was getting dark quick and the gate closes at 6pm, me out in the field at 5:30pm! Basted. Fire up the GPS and see the car is 0.63 miles, ~15 minutes on GPS. As the crow flies. Over steep dunes. Crap!

Started jog walking with no lunch in me. Legs quickly turned to jelly. Not good with a large format camera on the shoulder, video and 35mm in the backpack. 0.2 miles - stumble. Oh no! The camera fell off the mount. Why can't I tighten it down?! No time, must carry it in the other hand. In the distance, the ranger on PA can be heard, no doubt telling people to get out before the gate is locked.

Augh! Jogging over dunes with gear is a challenge. Hopefully the camera is okay. Forgot to mention - couldn't find my focus loupe. Crap! Didn't remember packing it and discovered this as the first shot was set up. Is it in Temecula, 1000 miles away.

Get to the car, toss the gear in the back seat. Where's my wallet?! Did it fall out when I was out in the dunes and my legs buckled? Oh no!!! Whew, it's in the backpack. Got to get to that gate. Don't get popped for speeding or get locked in. Gun it!

Yes, made it to the gate. Stop inside to navigate. 1.5 minutes later, the ranger asks me to park outside the gate. I stall by asking the easy directions to El Paso & Carlsbad. Doesn't get much closer than 1.5 minutes to gate closing!

Now, at Pizza Hut, the reason for the camera falling off is apparent. The plastic nut blew apart due to the torque of the camera as I fell. It still seems to work, but it's weak. Crap. No Calumet dealers in Las Cruces, NM, 8pm Saturday night. Dangit.

What to do now? It still kinda works. Need parts and a smarter brain. "Don't carry your camera on the tripod." Ya, what's the big deal? Well, now I know.

Off to El Paso. The hike to the Slaughter Canyon cave (in Carlsbad) is rough (?) according to the guidebook and takes an hour. Better bust a move!

Discovered one of the standards (LF) is lost. How did that come off? Went to Lowes in Las Cruces and picked up some replacement hardware for the broken camera knob. Ha, found the cap in the LF box. How'd it come off in the first place. The spare knob part from Lowes seems to work! DAMN! I did forget my focus loupe, a critical piece. Well, it's not like forgetting the light meter but it's impossible to check critical focus.

Here's El Paso - Budget Hotel near exit 23A. Cute desk worker Lisa seems to avoid my questions. My approach sucks.

Dec 29, 2002 Sunday

Here's another Denny's off George Dietric road. Wonder who that is? Sent off email to most people to let them know this dog is still alive. Got to love Netzero. Still shaking the noggin' at forgetting the focus loupe and dropping the camera. The first can be solved with a simple check list. Easy enough. I'm the only Patron at this Denny's. Thought these Texas farm boys rose early. Although, it's Sunday. Probably no churches on the 62/180 highway toward Carlsbad.

The second error - don't carry the camera mounted on the tripod. The major detriment is the loss of one free hand. Perhaps another way to carry the tripod? THANK GOODNESS I didn't bring the 3051 mega-tripod, otherwise this trip would be hell already. The little 3021 seems to be okay, though haven't blown away any Jackson 4x5 shots yet, so I don't know. Also busted a film holder

dark slide tab.

Gorgeous sunrise here, 1/2 hour ago (6:30am), beautiful pinks & deep reds, then gray, then standard sky. Seen that happen many times. To breakfast - original Grand Slam and on to the road. My soul seems to be with me again after a short hiatus. Also noticed I have white sand caked on the mud flap. "I didn't steal it. Honest!"

Interesting, White's City, right by Carlsbad Caverns, is privately owned by two families. Because most business work the summer only, they don't survive.

The main part of this morning was spent traveling to the NM area.

Huh! The dude who shot the other because of being dehydrated (then rescued an hour later) happened in the Guadalupe mountains. He got 2nd degree murder, 3 years, out in 1 year. Don't bail on life is the lesson! The drive out of El Paso takes you on the 68/180 past Hueco Tanks, one of the great climbing locations. Do I have my gear? Yes! :) Do I have time? No! :(

Keep driving. Passing the time, stopped by a picnic stop and blew up a firecracker. Cool! Haven't done that in forever. Bought them at a stop on the I-10 a few days ago in NM. I think. Passing the salt flats area, a sign indicated a private control war occurred in 1877. Exciting land. Ah! A way on to the salt flats. Hopefully don't get high-centered. And yes, I checked to see if the flats were too soft. Sweet. Just right. With a non-camera man, my Nissan commercial was thusly a little more lame. Fun anyway. Drove so far the camera was invisible. Augh! Follow the tracks back & viola, there it is!

After the film session, it was time to get going. Oh crud, another National Park to stop by. This one has a hike to the highest peak in Texas. Looks like a butt buster. Hmm, why wouldn't I take the LF camera. Oh, hope the weather improves for that. A tad on the windy side. Decision - El Capitan overlook or Guadalupe peak.

Big forest beyond the hills. Shocking! Even had a Butterfield stage station there. Had to film that for Dad. Midpoint. Cutting this close, get on the road to the caverns.

Hit the slaughter canyon cave (New Cave) turn off. The canyon can be seen on the highway. A 20+ minute drive out there, good butt busting hike up, ~25 minutes in cool weather. Had 25 people in the group and of course a blabber hammer. Always one. An excellent tour by a young lady from North Carolina and a dude from New Zealand. Sad that the cave walls and ceiling were covered with diesel soot from guano (bat waste) miners. They mined what turned out to be dirt rather than guano. After a time, guano actually turns to dirt. Haha! Bat skeletons could be seen inside the dirt. Neat! Well worth the \$15 to see a non-developed cave. An excellent experience in the total dark and silence. Even saw a cave cricket. No color. Wonder why? They also don't chirp because that'd be the dinner bell for a larger animal. The Christmas tree formation was truly impressive. Pictures in post cards done with strobe flash.

Back down the trail and off to White's city. A pretty good spinach lasagna at the Velvet garden. On the menu - seafood. Why in the world would one order a "special" of sea food in New Mexico?? Are you insane?

Now, got to figure out what to do about sleeping arrangements. Did find out that Whit's city was controlled by one family and you have to be hooked into them to run a business here. Period. Decided to drive to Carlsbad to see the options for sleep. There was a great turn off driving into the middle of no-where. That has potential. Passed an oil-pump - nice photo op.

Into Carlsbad. It was 5pm... No way it's bed time because wake up is then 2am. Cold and dark. Someone mentioned a movie theater in town when I asked. Good way to waste time without drinking.

Met a dude there, Mauricio and his cute coworker Judi. She was a bit young - 11th grade. Blabbed with them for a good half hour. Bought a ticket to the 9pm (ugh) Twin Towers Lord of the Rings. After standing around for a while, Mauricio came up to me and offered to show me the projection booth. He offered to me to watch Catch Me If You Can and again accepted. This time for free! :)

Watched that then Twin Towers. Better than wandering around the town in the dark! After that long and mostly boring movie, he offered to tour me around Carlsbad at night. He seemed pretty cool but kept a watchful eye just in case. Totally cool dude. Had to avoid being a technogeek, though. Worked just fine.

Found out that Carlsbad has the 2nd largest physical high school in the US in acreage. It looks like a junior college campus! He gave some great tour ideas, well worth pursuing. Even saw an oil well being drilled. His brother works for the drillers. The shack the workers hide out from the cold is quaintly called the "dog house". Hahaha!

Gave me his cell in case I wanted to hang tomorrow. Cool. Bid him farewell and found a rat hotel for \$25. Bed at 1:30am instead of 6pm. Ugh, I'm tired.

Dec 30, 2002 Monday

Another breakfast at Denny's. Not bad. Sadly no local interest #'s. Oh, stupid not to spend an hour and map those ghost towns out. Asked the waitress what day it is because I wasn't sure. Dang, need to get to the caverns 'cause daylight is a burnin'. Dang, the Tabasco wasn't stoppered and the eggs drown. Ugh. Daylight burnin', get on the road!

The caverns are about 30 miles out of Carlsbad. Rather, White City is. Then a 7 mile drive up to the mesa. Whoa is it windy here! If the weather is going to be like this, don't think it's a good idea to assault Guadalupe peak - if it gets bad I'm toast. Taken under advisement. Get gear, get tickets, get audio guide (an absolute must have!) and head to the natural cave entrance. Don't want to miss something.

The park descriptions for strenuous must be worded for 90 year old people with walkers. No problem. If you can walk two miles without passing out, you're good. There were some people who had a basketball for a stomach and sounded like they were going to pass out. Sad. Wait, if you look at the American tourists, they're almost all heavy to plain fat. Gross! Funny thing, the foreign tourists are almost all reasonable. Okay, we're all a bunch of fat-ass, TV watching, entitlement sucking (many additions) slugs. We have it too easy. Just like Rome. The first explorers of this cave were brave! This thing is freakin' steep. Only can go down it - one way route. With a lantern in hand, man people back then were tougher and braver. Period. Passed plenty of beautiful decoration. One dude brought his tripod. I should have asked, but it slows you down. Need a bean bag, non-slip grip. Used the railings and installed rocks (not part of the formations!) to steady the f1.4 @ 1-2 second shots. The 24mm wasn't very appealing for most so stuck with the 50mm most of the time. Besides, the 24mm is two stops slower.

There are several side trails closed off. Either they were guided tour areas or not visited any more. Sure wish the bats were here to fly away. That'd be so cool to have 200,000 bats coming out of the cave. Lechiguia cave isn't far from here but it's special access only. After seeing a picture book on it, it's easy to see why.

Hit the main loop trail in the caverns and took it around. Burned off 1 roll of 35mm. Only used the flash and cord once or twice because direct flash would ruin the lighting, dramatic at times. A theatrical lighting specialist was consulted to do the lighting. It was funny to note the audio guide indicated colored light wasn't used. Incandescent, metal halide & fluorescent ARE colored. That's why most formations are really - incandescent.

It will be worthwhile to take all the ranger guided tours in the future. Do it in the off-off season, not summer, Christmas, New Years or any other holiday. The crawling tours look awesome. I'll be back.

Finished the main room loop, checked out the amazing facilities down stairs and took the elevator up. Blasted out of limestone, 750 feet deep. Wow! Read all the exhibits in the visitors' center, read the Lechiguia picture book and hit the car. Went down to White's City and checked out the museum. It starts off looking like a rip-off but it's extensive. Okay, worth the \$3. Missed the sunset, but only a sky sunset behind the mesa.

May have been photographable with a horizon filter. Need to spend more cash at Sighn-ray filters. Drove into Carlsbad, fueled up and called Mauricio. Why not?! Went with him and his girlfriend Maria to Steven's, an overprices restaurant with okay food. Just like the girl at Wal-mart said. No place to go.

Chatted over dinner, paid for their drinks and took my leave. Nice dude, girl was stand-offish (read bitch). There's a shock. Went to the city make out point and overlook just past the Living Desert Museum. Missed that, though it does have live animals. Off to Artesia, about 1/2 hours of expensive rat hole motels (\$33). Heck no! Skip that refinery stinking town and off to Roswell.

Ended up paying more at Days Inn. Oh, it has free breakfast. Should have known. The "free" breakfast is for a bird eating TV watcher. Not for adventurers.

Dec 31, 2002 Tuesday

New Years, 27 degrees outside but feels good. Other than the UFO museum, not too noticeable that this place is pegged for weirdoes. Sedona had far more weirdness than here. Now to enjoy a bad breakfast burrito. Funny, at supper last night, Mauricio was amazed I could just pick up and head out for another place. Don't even wish to get into that. :)

The breakfast burrito started out okay but after eating it a bit, I found some of the most overcooked eggs ever. Blech. Nice waitress Martha. Super-slow. 20 tables, 2 servers, 20+ minutes turn-over to bad food. Dumb manager. Taco Bell is better. Blech.

Martha says there's nothing to do around here. She stays with the family and church choir. Respectable and safe. There's got to be something here to do, otherwise it's hit the road. There is a tiny pile of snow outside of my door. To pick a campsite, need to scope it in the daylight and hit it at night. Check around, look at the UFO museum and go from there. Lots of older folks around here. I'll be there tomorrow. Just look at the life chart. Scary. Faster and broader equals less depth. Okay, enough with the social commentary.

Found myself in Fort Sumter in NM. Small town, supposed to have the grave of Billy the Kid somewhere. It's a little dark to find it right now (9pm). Now eating 3 enchiladas at Tito's Burritos. Hwy 20 outside (North) of Roswell is very lonely and stretches into the distance.

Found what looked to be an old church and outhouse from 1938. I knew this because of a building marker. Fired off 4 B&W slides just at sunset. Light moves quick at that time and I naturally left my 67-77mm adapter in the car. Crap. Held the Yellow #12 up to the lens and hoped for the best. Drove on, stopped for the last rays of 2002 striking me. Glorious open] land. Hmm...where was I this morning? Okay, left Artesia and headed toward Roswell, checked out the UFO museum and "research" center. Weird but entertaining. Several food, coffee and sundry shops had alien signage.

There's enough to notice but not to be overbearing. There doesn't look to be much to do in Roswell, though there's a 7+ story Bank of America in town! Okay, done with that place.

Drove on and prepared to make the jump toward Albuquerque when a National Wildlife Refuge sign appeared. Bitter Lake. Hmm, it never occurred to me that there might be something other than the Elk Refuge in Jackson, WY. Dork.

You can actually drive around this one a bit. And not receive a ticket. Cool! Thousands of snow geese were wintering in the lake. Ran some video. Saw a hawk/eagle in a field and waited an hour to see if she was eating something. Read part of John Shaw's Close Up Nature Photo book to pass the time.

Eight miles off the highway, in the middle of New Mexico. In the middle of nowhere. Beautiful. Sat for a while, checked out a duck blind with an installed high power spotting scope. Free! Neat.

Didn't find anything inspirational to photograph. Drove back to the highway. A few miles and there were cows on a far ridge with] a mountain range really far off. Tried with the 500mm. Need mirror lockup! I had actually passed my scene so I turned around and passed it again just for good measure, then drove backward on the highway to a point I liked. Took a few shots. Drove on toward Albuquerque but saw a sign to "Billy the Kid's Grave". A mere 50 miles. On a VERY lonely highway. New years eve. Perfect!

Saw an abandoned building 100 yards off the road. Stopped 45 minutes before sunset. Perfect! At first it looked like a school house. Maybe in 1938. But the seats were theater style. Newer? The podium had a cross and Christian literature from about 1997. Kinda neat. Their outhouse faced west. Awesome to watch the sunset of the southwest plains doing the duty. 4 B&W shots then sunset. Gun it!

Well, only to 75mph - the road is rough and there are cattle out here. Passed 4 cars in 20 miles. Watched the twilight disappear on video. Go! Hmm, once again don't want to sleep at 6pm, otherwise I'll wake up at 2am. Yuck.

Hit Fort Sumter and now eating at Tito's Burritos. Tito runs the place (surprise) and is by himself on New Years. Cooking, register and all. Boy, everyone knows the owner. And many people know each other. Small town. Great! Motel or side of the road for camping is the next choice.

Jan 1, 2003 Wednesday

Stayed the evening in the Coronado, a motel next to Titos. Nice German owner. \$30. Once again, bed, shower, toilet. How can other places justify the same for \$60+? Dang, got to quit waking up after sunrise. What day is it? Must be Wednesday. I think. Need to watch that in preparation for heading home. Left the motel and went to Billy the Kid's grave. Pretty neat - creaky gate, deserted, wind blowing through the trees. Awesome cemetery in Ft Sumner. Fun!

Took off toward Vaghn because it's time to hit the Salinas Pueblo. On the way, stopped at an abandoned homestead. Scary being inside the house - it's big! But a good adventure. Something out of the movies. Shot with black and white and hit the road. Shot 4x5 in the middle of the road, the US60. You can see forever there! A road to the horizon. Stopped in Vaughn for fuel and a pile of French fries. Great lunch.

Was going to hit the highway to Santa Fe when the Salinas Pueblo showed up. Got to do it. Hit the little town of Mountainair, 6200ft elevation. Had a little trouble finding the visitor center and discovered it was closed as it was New Years Day. Followed the sign to Qu (unknown word). It's a Pueblo ruin. Closed. I went in anyway. Good dramatic lighting so I took some slides. A couple ranch dogs were running around pestering a dog in a car. I tried to avoid being mauled. That would've slowed me down. Hid from the dogs until they went home.

Looked around the ruins more. Pretty impressive Church there. Church vs. military with Indians

in the middle of it all. Good old' Spaniards.

Went back through Mountainair and headed on toward the I-25. Saw a sign toward another of the three Salinas sites - Ano? Not as impressive as the Qu... site. Hopped out to touch the place anyway. Back to the road and headed out. I blew past the State 47 connector, backed up and did a map check. Score - a diagonal route to where I wanted to go.

Stopped at the super-Walmart to call Mom in Belen but the payphone wouldn't connect. Oh well, on to Albuquerque.

A big city is an annoying place to find a good eat joint. Doing Dion's pizza at the Cottonwood Mall, 10010 Coors bypass - the stupid road goes through the middle of the dark part of the city.

Sitting here listening to giggly high school girls talking about Texas football. Stupid giggling HS girls. The pizza was a passable 12" but it didn't have enough pepperoni and it wasn't cooked hot enough. Guess I'm spoiled by Pizza Factory in Temecula. Ironic.

Don't want a hotel/motel but want to camp. Have to get out of the metro area to do that. Down to \$38 out of \$400 for living and \$20 out of \$100 for gas. Not to freeze, stink or suffer and avoid the ATM. This is difficult.

I want to hit Petroglyph NM, maybe Bandelier NM and then off to Great Sand Dunes NM in Colorado. Dangers of camping - bad weather. Better check a newspaper so I don't end up living off of Pop tarts and Cocoa Blasts while stuck in a blizzard. My stomach hurts just thinking about that fate. Today is Wednesday, so it's going to be a tight squeeze to see all those places. Also want to hit Santa Fe. This is going to be an assault to get back home. Love it!

I asked the clerk what day it was. "The first." "Which day of the week?" A funny look from the clerk followed by a "Wednesday." Crap, this really is going to be tight. I've completely lost track of my days. I sure wish the weather was better so I could have hit the Guadalupe peak (tallest in TX) a few days ago.

Funny thing - most Carlsbad Caverns photos depict the "Christmas Tree" formation in Slaughter Canyon/New Cave and it's not in the main hall of the caverns! Guess King Solomon's Mines was filmed there. The "ugly troll/watcher" - a formation - scared the actress. Hahaha! Naturally, the actress kissed the wall and left a minute lipstick smudge. True to form, the NP Service tried to clean it and left a nice hand-sized smudge. The lesson - leave it alone!

Passed a junk shop named Petroglyph, so I must be close to the monument. Forked out the dough and stayed this side of the city so I could hit the monument early next morning. It's only a few bucks in the grand scheme of things. Besides, when will I be back here? Never, probably.

Jan 2, 2003 Thursday

Well here is me in the morning finally waking up before the wakeup call. Very happy. Again I've discovered I've taken too many pants and not enough shirts. There is ice on the windshield. I quickly discover that if there's frost on the windshield, don't use the washer and wipers to try and clear it off. A sheet of ice is far worse than a little frost.

I scraped most of it off with my spare pair of shoes. Left the scraper at home where it would be safe. Southern California brain. Enjoyed Denny's breakfast again. Good as always. Too bad the window doesn't face east as it appeared to be a beautiful sunrise. The plan is to hit the Petroglyphs at 8am, road it to Santa Fe, check out Bandelier NM, annoy the art snob people in Santa Fe and then head off to Colorado. It's going to be cold. Freezing! Arctic. Maybe Antarctic!

I'm doing better - I'm waiting for the park to open rather than arriving hours after the park has opened. Only when good times are about to end do you put any effort into it. Just like software development. Coast until the end and then go all out. Good thing travel isn't like software - virtually guaranteed bad. Hahaha!

Wait, I have been going all out this whole trip. Just spending more time on highways than interstates makes a huge difference in the experience. Staying out until 1:30am with Mauricio was a good example of going all out.

It's funny how you can be a world away from your home so fast. My little Elantra is in the 78k mile range now. It doesn't seem to like the cold as much. Southern California car. Good little car, even after the oil was overfilled a good half inch on the dipstick. Hopefully it didn't do any damage. Need to check with Discover Hyundai in case anything does develop. Competition between motels keeps prices down. With only a few in town, rack holes become obtrusively expensive. Slept well anyway, had a Denny's breakfast and it's off to the races.

Checked out Petroglyph NM. Pretty amazing all those markings survived this long. Hopefully no stupid person ruins them in the future. People always feel compelled to mess things up like that. Dumb.

Took several pictures of the glyphs and realized the camera was set for ISO 100 with ISO 50 Velvia loaded. CRAP! Now it needs a +1 push and the contrast will go through the roof, higher than it already is. So many photo mistakes on one trip. Just paying a little closer attention would solve this. Don't know how many times that's been messed up by yours truly. <sigh> Slim comfort that it happens to pros, too. I just haven't been burned bad enough yet.

I've become more of a fanatic after I had the incorrect flash speed setting while taking team pictures with my coworker's hockey team. That one was burned into my soul. Lessons are always learned the hard way.

The three short Petroglyph walks are great - you can see a ton of things in a short period. It was fun listening to the ranger tell all the different theories. Even an aborigine Australian native said that there were enough common markings there to perform a "Boy to Man" ceremony.

A paddle symbol with three tick marks above it meant something. Instead of everyone claiming a Petroglyph to be theirs, perhaps the common base should be investigated. Funny Texas family there. What a heavy accent. Not-so-smart son was wearing shoe skates and almost busted himself several times. Haha! Be dumb and pay the price.

Left the Petroglyphs and headed for Santa Fe. Dang, this area has the highest concentration of state troopers and sheriffs in Z-28s I've seen the whole trip. Two on I-8/10 and one sheriff in Ft Sumner. And they don't have light bars on them. The color markings and bumper gear are giveaways on the Crown Victoria, but the silver Z-28s are another matter. Need a radar detector. I bypassed the city on I-25 to S-599 to I-285 and headed toward Bandolier NM.

Drove through several Indian reservations, their requisite casinos and more varied landscape being in Northern New Mexico. Passed Los Alamos National Lab. Guess corruption is rampant there with people expensing jewelry, Mustangs, hunting equipment and more. Naturally, the two investigators were fired by higher-ups. The UC system can't run the place. Scum. Stealing money from people.

One steep turn in the canyon on the into the NM, a fire-blackened cave can be seen up on the cliff. Wonder if the park service knows it's there. Haha! Cute ranger at the entrance. Nice. Parking is extremely limited so you get there early or you have to wait. Lucked out.

Had an outrageously priced lunch as always at a NM or a national park. Set off for the cliff

dwellings. This place is very fun because there are actually ladders in place so you can climb into the caves. Gorgeous views of the facing canyon can be seen from the caves. Explored it a bit then did the 1/2 mile hike to the big cave.

Jogged as fast as my fat butt would allow. An adventurous climb to the top. My palms actually sweated it was so steep. And I climb! Funny? No - it's sad. You can even climb into one of the Kivas on the top. A kiva is a ceremonial pit for Pueblo peoples. The Anasazi actually mean "ancient enemy", not "lost ones" or some such thing, so says the Ranger.

Wandered around, climbed down and did the nature walk back. There was a bit of snow on the ground but it didn't cover the great signage explaining the flora and fauna. I've got horrible cracks in my fingers from the cold and dehydration - need Second Skin. Drove back to Santa Fe, wandered around a bit and parked. Chatted with an owner of a camera and clock repair shop guy for a bit and got directions to the galleries off San Francisco street.

Saw the Georgia O'Keefe gallery free thanks to my student id, otherwise it would have been \$8. Went to a small photo and watercolor gallery. Fun to see some gallery watercolor. It's good to get an idea of what's out there.

Next door was a B&W artist using a Hassleblad, B&W Sprintscanner and an Epson 3000 printer using expensive German paper at \$5 per sheet! He had one fascinating shot of a pile of grass in snow. It really looked like pen and ink. It would have sucked in color. We discussed the dark room versus Photoshop. Longevity of the Epson prints was a concern compared to the Silver prints. Fun!

Next stroll took me to the Andrew Smith (?) gallery. He had the best collection of old B&W masters I've ever seen. He even had two Carlton Watkins prints. Wow!!! Even got to handle them.

The most expensive print there was an Ansel Adams shot of the Tetons, 50"+ wide at \$75,000. Ugh. There were several other prints in the \$25-\$40k range. Cartier-Bresson was an entertaining genius. Very fun.

Finally headed to the Danuska jewelry gallery. She was an immigrant that got into jewelry and now sells 5 carat emerald rings for \$48,000. It was an estate piece. She could custom copy it if I so desired. I told the gallery weenie that price wasn't a factor in getting what I want. He had a funny reaction to that. Neat stuff there. Had dinner in the square and gave the cute waitress my phone number and email. Like I'll get anything out of that!

Took off towards Alamosa, Colorado in the dark. Thank goodness for GPS because street signs just don't exist in some towns. The S/I 285 is a good 65mph road so you can really cruise.

Came across a hare in the middle of the road trying to keep warm, off the snow in the adjoining fields. I spent a minute getting him to run back to the field rather than get squished. An empty highway allows you those conveniences. It's rather cold here, about 14 degrees at 10pm. Stayed in the Lamplighter Inn, \$29.

January 3, 2003 Friday

Ate at Toby's next door. It's about 0 degrees this morning. Brrr!! Off to Great Sand Dunes. Oh no! I feel a cold coming on. Quickly take some zinc lozenges.

This was an assault of a day. Hiking in sand sucks. It's about a 40 minute drive from Alamosa to the dunes. Passed another wildlife refuge but didn't have time to stop and look. Forged on. Decided not to go to Zapota falls because the road up to it looked awfully rough for my little car. Found out later from a ranger that it's doable but you'll be missing some teeth from the bad wash

boarding. I need my car more than frozen waterfall photos. Wuss.

Took the 4x5 camera, both sweatshirts, water and tripod up to the top of the biggest dune. 35+ pounds of gear. Normally the walk would be an hour but with that much equipment, it took much longer. I left my gear in a protected cove while I made the final couple hundred feet to the top of the Great Dune. Good to have finally conquered a peak, even if it is sand.

It would have been fun to sandboard here. Saw a few people with the sandboard rigs but didn't get to see them ride. Steep slopes, too! Made some wonderful shooting mistakes, hopefully have a few decent photos. Mixing the ISO 50 and ISO 100 film is just a killer. Got another roll of Velvia at 100. It's like carrying similar ammo for one gun - a mistake. My Canon AE-1 doesn't have a DX reader, so it's up to me and I've been failing.

Left the dunes at 4pm and made Albuquerque in four hours, just like the AAA map shows. Stayed at the same motel - Budget 76. Same Dion's pizza, different location. Hope to get a hold of Leah this evening to get an opinion of travel between Flagstaff and San Diego.

Funny thing happened on the I-40 towards the Coors exit just past the I-25: a carload of girls matched my speed, yelled at me and I waved back and passed. They caught up again and the passenger raised her shirt and flashed me. Hahaha! I probably should have pursued them but I was intent on finding my motel. Their loss. Hehe. They were just playing around. Guess high school girls need a little excitement with out-of-towners here.

Just like other towns when the girls have flirted with me - either they're playing or I'm not killer enough. Need Danny for the kill. Definitely not Will (La Jolla "we'll be up there" incident). Sadly, only a smoking room was available, \$26/night with AAA. I fired up the external fans so hopefully the putrid smell is aired out a bit while I'm at dinner. Tomorrow is the final assault to home. What an odyssey! Glad I've got it all written down here. Need to map this all out and print it. Going to be almost 3,000 miles. Awesome!

January 4, 2003 Saturday

Eat at Denny's quick and get on the road. Will call Leah on the road so hopefully will be able to get the Flagstaff travel information. Funny thing this morning - I woke up an hour before the wakeup call and couldn't get back to sleep. That allowed me to prepare for the jump back home earlier. It was fun last night to hear the neighbor's wife barfing. Very attractive.

The cracks in my fingers have been painful for the past two days and today isn't an exception. Took the cutters and chopped them back as best as possible without creating new damage. Wonder if this is just a dry skin problem or a hydration issue? My lips cracking seems to indicate a hydration problem. Only dry climes like here in Albuquerque would it be possible to experiment with things like that. No thanks, though.

Home - I've arrived!!!

Epilogue:

Did the exploration of an empty house outside of Ft. Sumner. That was scary. Found a Centennial Coke can in there. Albuquerque to home - Just under 11 hours, supposed to be over 15 hours according to the AAA map. Excellent! Need a radar detector.

The whole trip - I left December 26 and returned January 4. Ten days. Did a total of 3,165 miles. Left Albuquerque at sunrise and got home at sunset. Good thing Sarah didn't come - she wouldn't have survived.

Even used part of Route 66 for the drive home through Amboy with its cinder cone volcano. It's a great shortcut through Essex and Amboy, much more interesting than a boring interstate. Robert

Persig (Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance) was right - take the state roads.

There was a 15 minute delay in Palm Springs due to a navigation error on my part. The slowest part of the drive was the last two hours. Funny. Didn't stop off to visit with Wendy because I wanted to meet my drive-time goal. It took two refueling stops and 4 bathroom breaks.

It was sad to come home. My soul seemed to keep up with me pretty well. Need to bring more socks and underwear, less pants. Need to memorize Grandpa's address so I can send him cards.

Funny thing - on the way over the hill to Temecula from Palm Desert, all the thoughts of my regular and work life came flooding back. Missed Nicholas and her antics. Missed the family even more. Even thoughts of work flitted across my mind.

The flashing girls taught that it might not be good to always be hung up on a goal as you never know. My travel is getting better but not good enough. Learn the lessons God teaches. I liked living on the road and meeting people.