



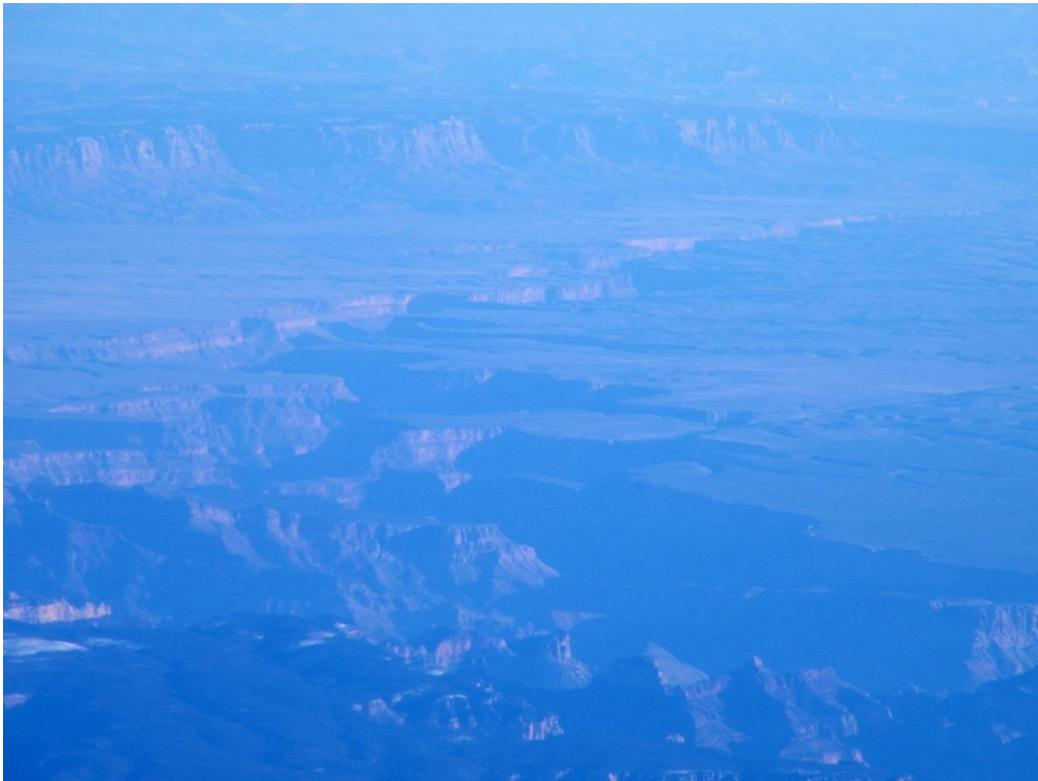
# MarkHitsTheRoad

Great Places. Cool Sights. Across America. Around the World.™

## Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas Road Trip (T19A-1)

I wanted to visit family in Fort Worth, Texas. I wanted to make a return visit to New Orleans after a 13-year absence. And I had some places in between that I wanted to see. So I decided on a trip where I'd fly to New Orleans, pick up a rental car, and drive to Fort Worth and back, visiting a number of sites along the way.

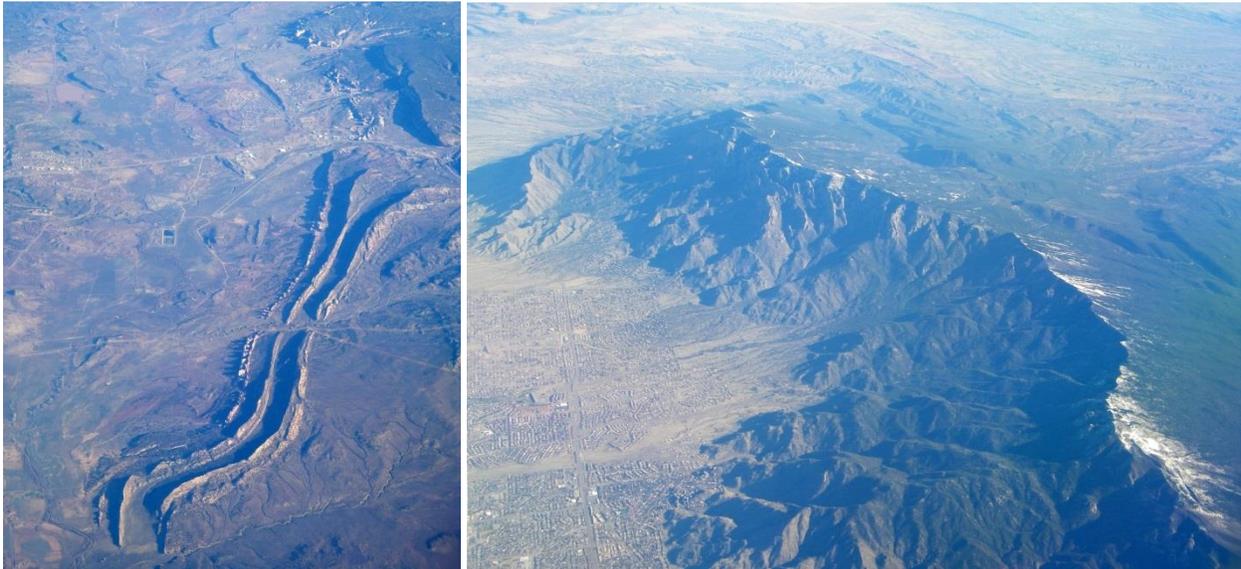
For my flights between Las Vegas and New Orleans I changed planes at Dallas-Fort Worth, so I perhaps could have structured the trip a bit differently. But given my sightseeing plans it worked out fine.



My early morning flight flew along the south side of the Grand Canyon, giving me a number of views of the canyon, including this one of the east end of Grand Canyon and of Marble Canyon heading north towards Page. It would have been a better-lit view with mid-day sun.



The canyon of the Little Colorado River on Navajo Nation land in northeast Arizona



(L) The Window Rock area of Arizona and the Navajo Nation  
(R) Sandia Crest on the east side of Albuquerque, New Mexico



Palo Duro Canyon south of Amarillo, Texas is the second biggest canyon in the United States (Grand Canyon is the biggest). I visited Palo Duro Canyon on a road trip to Fort Worth a few years ago.



Downtown Dallas, including the **Texas School Book Depository Building** and **Dealey Plaza**, where Lee Harvey Oswald shot President John F. Kennedy in 1963.



When the French controlled Louisiana, land allotments along the Mississippi River featured river frontage that included natural levees that provided some higher ground, and a long stretch of land moving away from the river that provided the landowner land for crops, grazing and wood. The French policy of forced inheritance meant that land allotments were divided among heirs, each getting a strip of the original property from river to trees. The Mississippi River has changed course over the years, but the impact of those French practices are still apparent today from the air above Louisiana.



Over southern Louisiana



The junction between Interstate 310 and Interstate 10; several miles of interstate highway are raised above the bayous of southern Louisiana.



This is the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument in Jackson, Mississippi. Medgar Evers was a civil rights activist in Mississippi, where he fought to overturn segregation at the University of Mississippi and elsewhere in society, and for the enforcement of voting rights for African Americans. He was the state's field secretary for the NAACP. He was assassinated at his home June 12, 1963. His widow would go on to become chair of the NAACP in 1995. Their Jackson home became one of the newest units of the National Park System on March 13, 2019 (no federal facilities yet).



When I feel like a nut, I'll go for an Almond Joy. But I still enjoy mounds. And Mississippi's Emerald Mound is one of the biggest earthen mounds in the country. It is a Plaquemine Culture mound from the Mississippian Culture period, and dates from around 1200-1700 AD. It is 770 feet by 435 feet, and 35 feet tall, and has two (of what used to be 8) secondary mounds on top of its flat surface. It is the second biggest surviving temple mound in the US (only Monks Mound at Cahokia, Illinois is bigger)



View of Emerald Mound from atop the taller of the two secondary mounds.



There are numerous Native American mounds in the region. In northeast Louisiana, I also checked out Frogmore Mound (Frogmore), La Salle Street Mound (Tallulah) and the Marsden Mounds (Poverty Point Reservoir State Park).

Frogmore is a small platform mound that dates from about 900-1050AD. It is from the Coles Creek Culture of the Late Woodland Culture.



Investigations into La Salle Street Mound and nearby Schicker Mound – 300 feet due east – have not turned up any artifacts that could help determine the age and culture associated with those mounds.



The Marsden Mounds site has elements in common with the Poverty Point Culture dating back to 1500 BC, and the Coles Creek Culture. There are five platform mounds and two segments of an earthen embankment, reminding me a little bit of a small version of Ohio's Fort Ancient site.



My primary target for exploring Native American mounds in the region was Poverty Point – a state park, a national monument in the National Park System, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Poverty Point is a massive earthworks site that dates back to the period between 1700 and 1100 BC. The Poverty Point Culture is a Late Archaic Culture. The site consists of a number of mounds as well as six concentric C-shaped ridges that surround a large plaza space. It is the largest and most complex Late Archaic earthworks site found in North America. It is unusual for such a large site to be built by people who were primarily hunter-gatherers rather than agrarian.

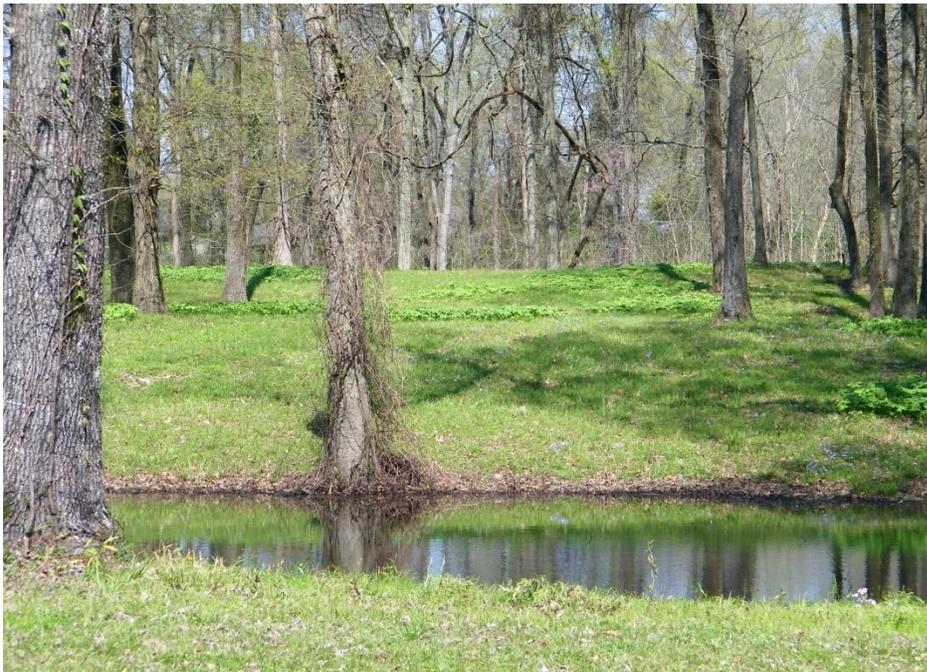
It is believed that housing was built atop the ridges. If the outermost ridge were completed as a circle, its diameter would be about 3/4s of a mile.

Pictured is Mound A, the largest of the mounds at the site. It is 705 feet by 660 feet, and 72 feet tall. Evidence suggests that it was built in just three months using about 8,400,000 cubic feet of fill, second in volume to Monks Mound at Cahokia – but Mound A does not appear to have been used as a temple mound, unlike Monks Mound or Emerald Mound.

(Nearby Lower Jackson Mound is believed to be as much as 2000 years older than the earthworks at Poverty Point. Alas, it is on private property and can only be viewed from quite a distance.)



Mound B is the oldest mound at Poverty Point.



Part of one of the C-shaped ridges is visible through the trees. Recent rain filled some barrows at the site with water. The barrows are believed to have been the sources of much of the fill used to construct the mounds and ridges at Poverty Point.



My last mounds site on the trip was Caddo Mounds State Historic Site near Alto, Texas. It's a Caddoan Mississippian Culture site, and it is believed to be the southwestern-most known Mississippian Culture mounds site. Most construction at the site, which includes two platform mounds and one burial mound, is believed to have occurred between 1100 and 1300 AD.

(The site was hit by a tornado three weeks after my visit.)



While at Poverty Point, a Southern Grinning Tree Monster wandered into the parking area. I've seen a few of these creatures from a distance while hiking in the Southern Appalachians, but never one of them up close before.

In spite of their name, these tree monsters are actually very shy, docile creatures. You could say that their bark is worse than their bite.



I spent the better part of a day in Waco, Texas. One of my targets there was the Waco Mammoth National Monument, established as a National Park System unit in 2015. Fossils from a couple dozen Columbian mammoths were found at the site. A guided walk leads visitors to the protected excavation site. Some fossils from the site are on display at the Mayborn Museum at nearby Baylor University.



Mammoth teeth

With first time visits to both the Evers and Waco Mammoth national monuments, I have now been to 383 of the 419 units in the National Park System. The remaining ones are mostly new or mostly outside the 48 contiguous states.



A second Waco stop was the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute, home to a very good museum focused on my favorite beverage (diet) Dr Pepper. The museum provides a history of the beverage, its creation and distribution, and displays much related advertising and memorabilia.

Nowadays, for many people – especially HGTV viewers – mentioning Waco brings to mind the HGTV show Fixer Upper and its stars Chip and Joanna Gaines. Some episodes of that home rehabilitation show focused on the Gaines efforts to restore facilities at “the Silos”, that would become home to Magnolia at the Silos, which now sells home goods, and the Silos Baking Company, which features cupcakes and cookies based on Joanna’s recipes.

Magnolia at the Silos has become a huge Waco tourist attraction, bringing in as many as 50,000 people every week.

Beyond the Silos, visitors to the area can dine at their Magnolia Table restaurant in Waco or stay at Magnolia House Bed & Breakfast in nearby McGregor, both also subjects of episodes of Fixer Upper.



Magnolia at the Silos

Magnolia sign in Joanna Gaines' signature style



Magnolia at the Silos features a home goods store, bakery, Magnolia Seed & Supply, food trucks and a large open space... and thousands of visitors daily.



Chip's construction handiwork and Joanna's cupcake recipes come together at the Silos Baking Company.

Certainly a destination for fans of Fixer Upper. Or cupcakes. Or even subway tile.



The base hospital at Fort Richardson State Historic Site, northwest of Fort Worth. Fort Richardson was one of a number of frontier forts established to support American settlement of the west. Fort Richardson was active from 1867 to 1878. Only a handful of the original buildings survive.



On my return drive to New Orleans I stopped at Dinosaur Valley State Park, west of Waco. Fences help keep the dinosaurs away from tourists.



Dinosaur Valley covers a stretch of the Paluxy River, and is noteworthy for the number of dinosaur tracks found in some of the rock here, once mudflats at the edge of an ocean. Many of the tracks have been removed. Those that remain are often under water, given their location along the river. A sauropod track is visible in this picture.



Here's a theropod track.

My last Texas stop was at Big Thicket National Preserve, a heavily forested area in southeast Texas that is believed to be one of the most biodiverse areas in the world outside the tropics. I took a couple short hikes there while exploring the area.



Cypress trees along the Kirby Nature Trail



Some pitcher plants along the Pitcher Plant Trail.

Four of the five types of carnivorous plants native to North America grow in Big Thicket. In addition to pitcher plants, these include butterworts, bladderworts and sundews. Venus flytraps are the only exception.

A boardwalk trail leads visitors through an area filled with pitcher plants. It is recommended that you remain on the boardwalk – pitcher plants can get awfully hungry.

That wrapped up Texas for this trip. And for those keeping track of such things, I visited a number of east Texas counties for the first time, leaving me with just 44 of Texas' 256 counties and 6 of Alaska's 20 boroughs that I haven't been to yet of the country's approximately 3100 counties/boroughs/parishes.

Back in Louisiana I took a route across the state branded as the Acadiana Trail. Alas, most of the stops weren't anything special. But I did repeat a favorite stop in Eunice, which is in the heart of Prairie Acadian country. There I checked out the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve's Prairie Acadian Cultural Center, which tells the history of the Acadian people – French settlers in Acadia (present day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) who were expelled by the British starting in 1755 in Le Grand Derangement. Many of them eventually made their way to then-French-controlled Louisiana, where their descendants are today's Cajuns. I've been to number of sites related to Acadian/Cajun history, both in Louisiana and Nova Scotia. Alas, not much has been updated at the Center's museum since I was last there in 2006.



Model of an Acadian style cabin on display at the cultural center.



The old Liberty Theater at Eunice's Liberty Center is home to the weekly "Rendez-vous de Cajuns" Cajun music radio and television show.



The Cajun Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Eunice



My last Louisiana stop outside of New Orleans was the arbitrarily selected town of Marksville. Marksville was the home of the Bowie knife, a confederate fort during the civil war, and some Native American mounds.

And for some reason I just liked the name.

Photos from my New Orleans stay are provided separately. Some pictures from my flight home follow:



From the flight home, a picture of some New Orleans drainage canals and a pumping station on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain.



Downtown Fort Worth



The Rio Grande River north of Belen, New Mexico



The Puerco River in Arizona



The Painted Desert area Arizona that I explored on a Fort Worth road trip a couple years ago



Canyon Diablo in north central Arizona



The Colorado River below Hoover Dam at Willow Beach



Hoover Dam