



MarkHitsTheRoad

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Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico Road Trip (T22A)

My last trip of last year took me out to Texas. I didn't expect to return so soon, except I found out that a family wedding would be taking place near Dallas in March 2022. The COVID-Omicron surge raised some question marks, but it receded in time (although I continue to mask up). I don't include family details in these public postings, but the wedding and reception were great.

Because I had a doctor appointment late morning Wednesday March 2 in Las Vegas, and the wedding was Saturday afternoon March 5, 1230 miles away near McKinney, Texas, I had only one possible sightseeing stop planned for the drive out. But because the wedding put me on the Dallas side of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, I decided to stick around for an extra day so that I could do some Dallas sightseeing. For my route back home, I planned on sites in northwest Oklahoma and in New Mexico.

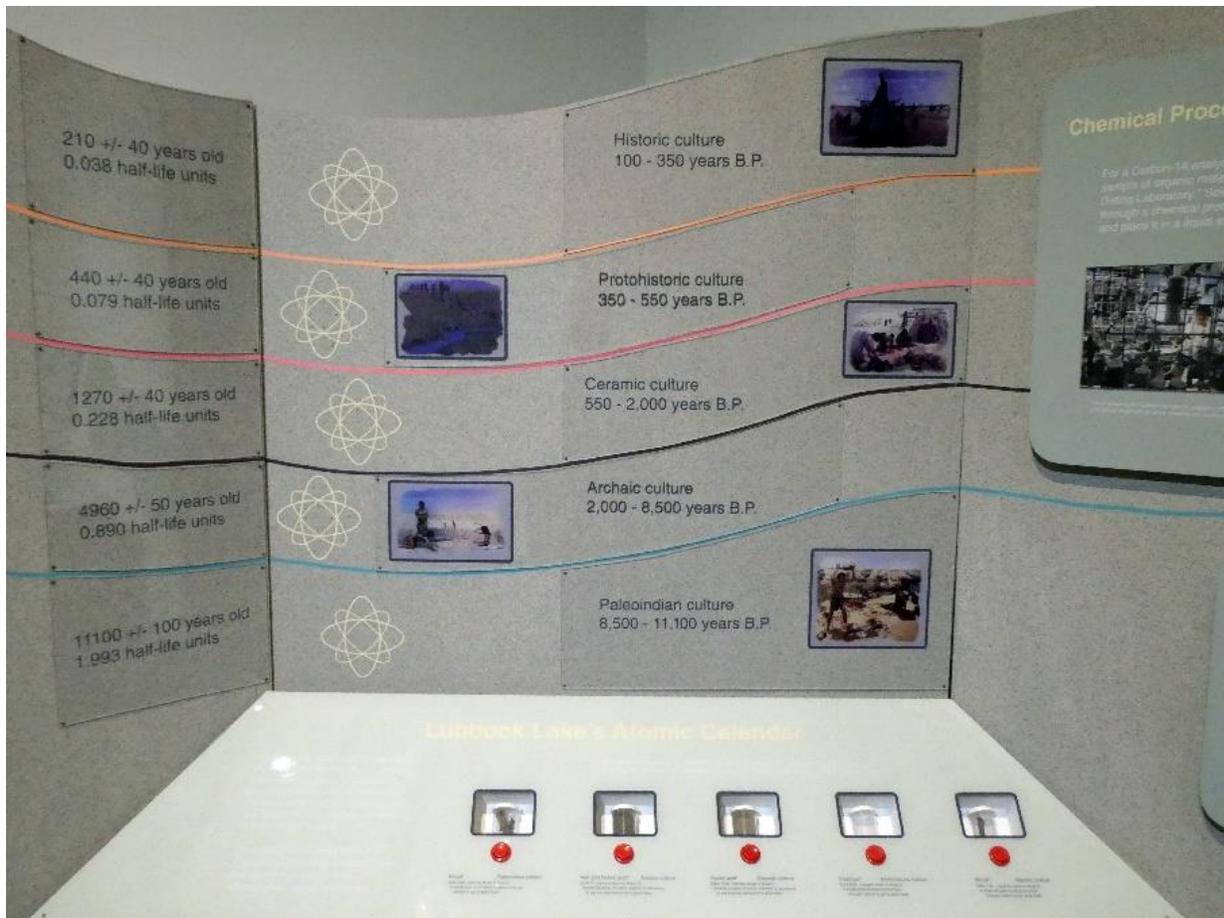
Shortly after I crossed the state line from New Mexico into west Texas, a road construction crew had put up a "Right Lane Closed Ahead" sign. Strangely, some cars ahead of me started shifting from the left lane into the right lane. I started shifting from the right lane into the left lane, but immediately saw that it was the left lane that was closed. Or so I thought.

You see, in rural west Texas, there is no "Left". Just "Right" and "Far Right". By west Texas standards, it was the Right lane that indeed was closed ahead.

Ba-dum Boom!

When I was planning last year's Texas route, I learned about the Lubbock Lake Site, an archaeological and paleontological site located on the north edge of the Lubbock metro area. It didn't fit into that trip's itinerary, but I noted it for future reference. Like for this trip – assuming that I'd get to Lubbock in time to see it. Which I did.

Lubbock Lake is a major archaeological site. A source of water in the relatively dry west Texas plains, it drew both animals and all five established cultures of man, including Paleoindian (Clovis, Folsom et al.), Archaic (hunter-gatherers, early basketry), Ceramic (pottery makers, for both practical and artistic purposes), Protohistoric (increased civilization, use of metals such as copper, bronze and iron), and Historic (modern tribes and European settlers), 12,000 years of human history. Some evidence found here suggests an even earlier sixth culture.



There was a small museum at Lubbock Lake that provided a brief introduction to the site, but I was disappointed at how few artifacts from the work there were on display.



Mastodons still roam the plains of west Texas.



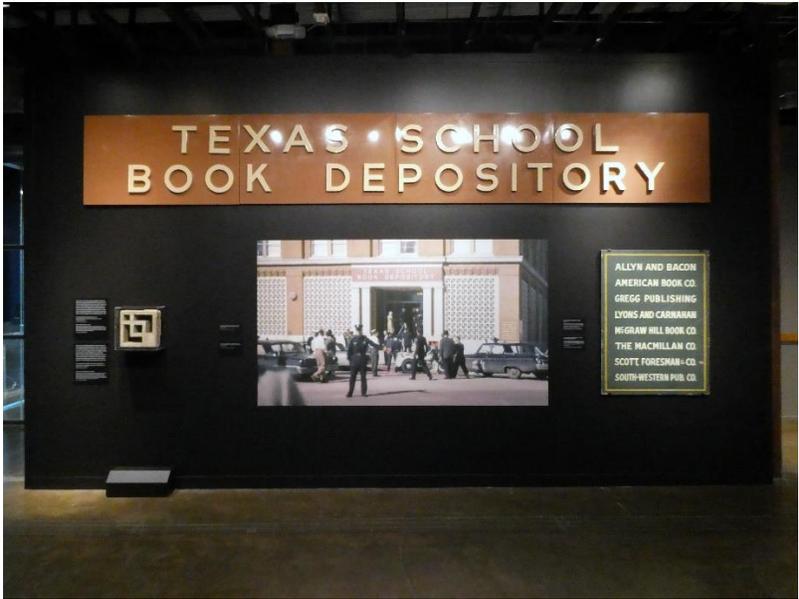
While I was at my Lubbock, Texas hotel, I found out that early rocker Buddy Holly was from Lubbock. The Buddy Holly Center is a small museum dedicated to Holly. Across the street at the Buddy and Maria Elena Holly Plaza is this statue of Buddy Holly. Behind him is the West Texas Wall of Fame, which honors artists from the region, including Holly, Waylon Jennings, Mac Davis, Jimmy Dean (music and sausage), The Gatlin Brothers, Roy Orbison, The Crickets, part-time Cricket Sonny Curtis (theme to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*), a couple actors whose names I recognized, and lots of people that I had never heard of.

I got to McKinney, Texas late Friday afternoon, and attended the wedding near there on Saturday. On Sunday, I headed into downtown Dallas, primarily to see the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, which focuses on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. It was on November 22, 1963, when Kennedy's Dallas motorcade turned from Houston Street onto Elm Street at Dallas' Dealey Plaza, passing the Texas School Book Depository, where assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was waiting for him at a window on the building's sixth floor.

Today, the building is the Dallas County Administration Building, but the museum occupies the sixth and seventh floors.



The old Texas School Book Depository building. Oswald was waiting for Kennedy behind the window marked with the red arrow.



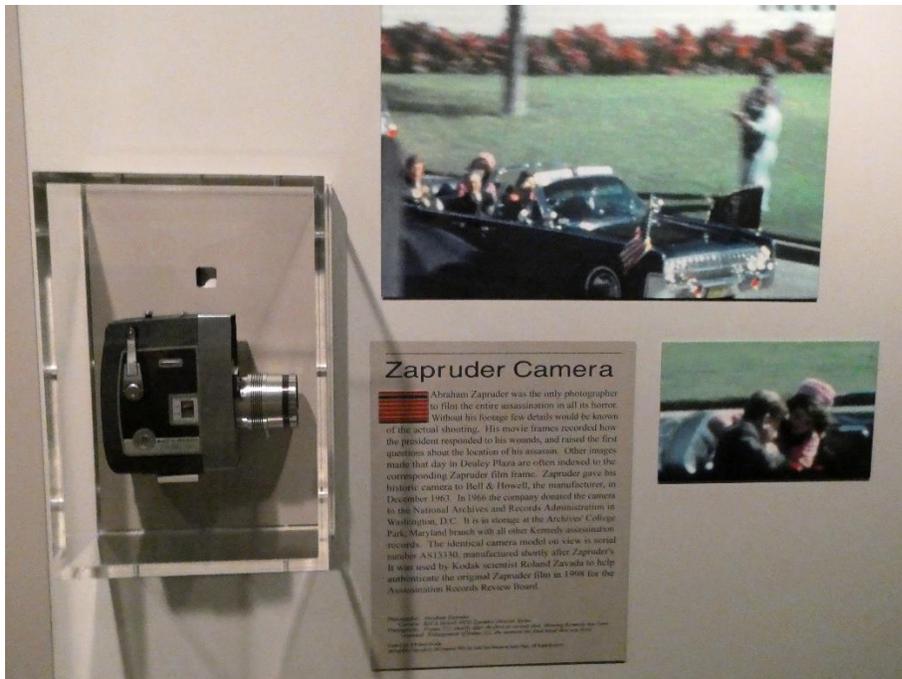
The museum preserves the Depository's original sign.



The sixth floor of the building had been undergoing renovations at the time, so it was generally deserted. Oswald used boxes of books to hide him from anyone who may have wandered onto the floor. The museum recreated his perch based on old photos from the day.



The museum mostly features photos and reading, and has relatively few artifacts from the time. Among them is this hat, worn by Jack Ruby when he shot and killed Oswald.



Another artifact on display is the Zapruder camera. Abraham Zapruder was the only person to film the entire assassination.



View of Elm Street from the 7th floor window directly above the window Oswald used. The Xs on the street mark where Kennedy was as Oswald fired his rifle. The red arrow marks where Zapruder was standing as he filmed the assassination.



A tribute to President Kennedy on Dealey Plaza. Dealey Plaza's original "claim to fame" is that it marks the location where the city of Dallas was founded.



John F. Kennedy Memorial Plaza is about a block away from Dealey Plaza.



The Eye sculpture is about another six blocks up the street from the plaza.



Those of you who watched the exploits of J.R. Ewing on the TV show *Dallas* will recognize Southfork Ranch, home to the Ewing clan. Southfork Ranch is actually a conference and event center in Parker, Texas. Some *Dallas* exteriors were shot here from 1979 to 1989, and later for some one-off movies and the reboot of the series in 2012.



The *LMAO* (Laughing My Ass Off) ass sculpture in McKinney, Texas. Former McKinney city council member Don Day was fined \$44,000 for illegally cutting down trees on his property, the legality of which Day disputes. So, Day reportedly commissioned the sculpture, complete with a visual suggestion (red arrow) for those who might disagree with him.

I started my drive home the next day, following a planned route through Oklahoma and New Mexico. But I first had a few Texas stops to make before I left the state.



The first of these was just five miles east of McKinney in Princeton, Texas, at the J.M. Caldwell, Sr. Community Park. It was originally the site of a migrant workers camp, but late in World War II it housed German POWs who worked the local farms while “our boys” were over fighting Germany. The water tower is all that remains from the POW camp era.

Next up, I headed for Paris. And no trip to Paris would be complete without a visit to the Eiffel Tower.



The Paris, Texas Eiffel Tower is about one-tenth the size of the one in Paris, France.



My last stop in Texas was in Dennison at the Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site. President Dwight David Eisenhower was born in this house in 1890. The grounds were open, but the visitor center was closed, and no tours were offered.



At 77 feet tall, Turner Falls is tied for the tallest waterfall in Oklahoma. It is found along Honey Creek in the Arbuckle Mountains. The granite rocks of these mountains date back 1.4 billion years, making them the oldest known formations in the country east of the Rockies and west of the Appalachians.



The Milk Bottle Grocery (left) is one of a handle of stops I made along historic Route 66 in Oklahoma City. I've come across giant milk bottle buildings a handful of times in my travels, including a couple of them in Spokane, Washington. But if you'd rather see big jugs than big bottles, I'd suggest that you visit Pirate's Cove, a "gentleman's club" in Portland, Oregon. It is housed in a building that features a really big jug (right).



Much of Oklahoma was Indian Territory well into the late 1800s (the Panhandle Strip was generally outside of most jurisdictions and was regarded as “No Man’s Land”). But the federal government decided to change that, both to encourage Native Americans to adopt a family farm model, and to open up some prime land to white settlers. In April 1889, the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 took place when 2 million acres of Oklahoma land was opened up for settlement. The western boundary of this land passes through present-day El Reno, where a marker identifies the boundary at El Reno’s Canadian County Museum.



Later in the day, I’d pass a marker in the Panhandle that described its history as “No Man’s Land”.



Just outside of Weatherford, Oklahoma was Lucille's historic highway gas station. Both the gas station and Lucille were fixtures along the old Route 66, with Lucille earning the nickname "Mother of the Mother Road".



With gas at just 26 cents per gallon, it's no wonder so many people get their kicks on Route 66.



I was surprised to find out that in northwestern Oklahoma, there is a large salt flats of about 11,000 acres. I hiked a short stretch of the Sandpiper Trail at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge to get a better, but still distant – view of the salt flats.



It was also apparent that there was a lot of sand in the area, much of it stabilized with plants, but open sand dune fields could be found at Little Sahara State Park and at former-state-now-local-park Beaver Dunes Park.

Woodward, Oklahoma is home to a small “young earth” creationism-focused park. It is at least the third young earth creationism site I’ve been to that seemed to feel the need to account for dinosaurs. This one simply had signs saying that dinosaurs like those pictured below roamed the earth within the last 5,000 years.



In case you’re wondering, that supposedly is a teenage Jesus on the back of a stegosaurus.

I think that such efforts miss the point. The Bible was never intended to provide a complete accounting of what existed in biblical times, let alone all life on earth. Rather, it conveys a much different message, regardless of whether someone is an “old earth” or “young earth” believer.



If you think that it looks like Beaver, Oklahoma's mascot Big Beaver is holding a cow chip, you'd be right.

Beaver, Oklahoma is The Cow Chip Tossing Capital of the World. And since 1969, it has also been home to the annual World Cow Chip Throwing Contest. The week-long festivities also feature a parade, a talent show, a concert, a carnival, a chili cook-off, an arts and crafts show, and various manure-themed souvenirs that you can purchase. You can also try cow chip cookies – just don't toss your cookies in the competition.

The world record distance for a cow chip toss is 188 feet 6 inches, set in 2015. That's no BS! Well, maybe it was.

Perhaps the good people of Beaver could draw inspiration from Buñol, Spain's La Tomatina festival to bring in even more tourists looking for some good old-fashioned cow chip fun.

I headed just across the state line to Liberal, Kansas for the night, making one sightseeing stop there. From the highway, I turned onto Yellow Brick Road, at the end of which I found Dorothy's House and the Land of Oz. The good people of Kansas decided that Liberal was as good a place as any to be Dorothy Gale's home town, and the state's governor rolled with it, signing a proclamation declaring it to be so.



Dorothy's house. Note the cellar door to the right, which would come in handy should a tornado ever approach the house.



A statue of Dorothy holding her dog Toto. I assume that the names on the wall behind the statue are some of Liberal's friends of Dorothy.



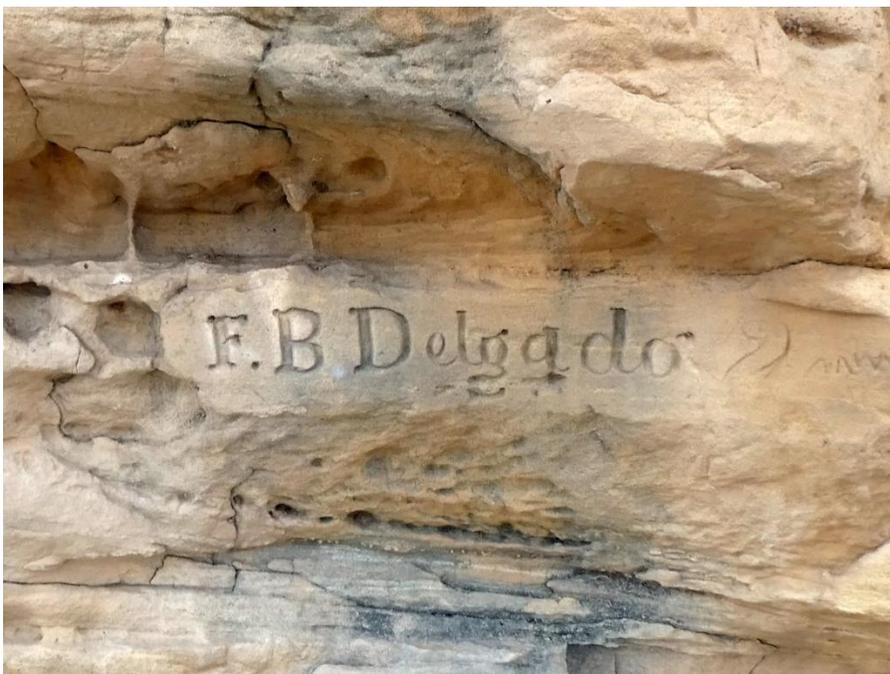
Serving the Straight, Oklahoma community in the Oklahoma Panhandle



Boise City is the county seat of Cimarron County, Oklahoma, the westernmost county in the Panhandle. It is located at what was the heart of the “Dust Bowl” region of 1935-1938. It also has the distinction of having been bombed by a U.S. bomber crew during World War II, when early on July 5, 1943, the crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress Bomber mistakenly took the lights around its town square as their target for bombing practice. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and damage was minimal.



The nearby Santa Fe Trail followed Cold Springs Creek in what is now the Oklahoma Panhandle. With year-round water, and a protective cliff, it became a popular camping place along the trail. While here, a number of people carved their names and dates onto the cliff face, now called Autograph Rock.



Some people at Autograph Rock demonstrated surprisingly good penmanship in their name carving. F.B. Delgado got a lot of practice here, however. He freighted the trail a number of times, and thus signed his name here more than anyone else.



This theropod dinosaur trackway site in the Carrizo Creek stream bed near Oklahoma's Black Mesa State Park & Nature Preserve once featured 47 tracks, but since they were exposed, about 2/3s of them have eroded away.



Black Mesa is home to Oklahoma's highest point, but it is a 4.2-mile hike to get from the parking area up to the high point marker. An ancient lava flow created a cap that prevented the mesa from eroding away.



A much more impressive dinosaur trackway site can be found at Clayton Lake State Park in northeastern New Mexico. The site features more than 500 tracks, including some rare examples.

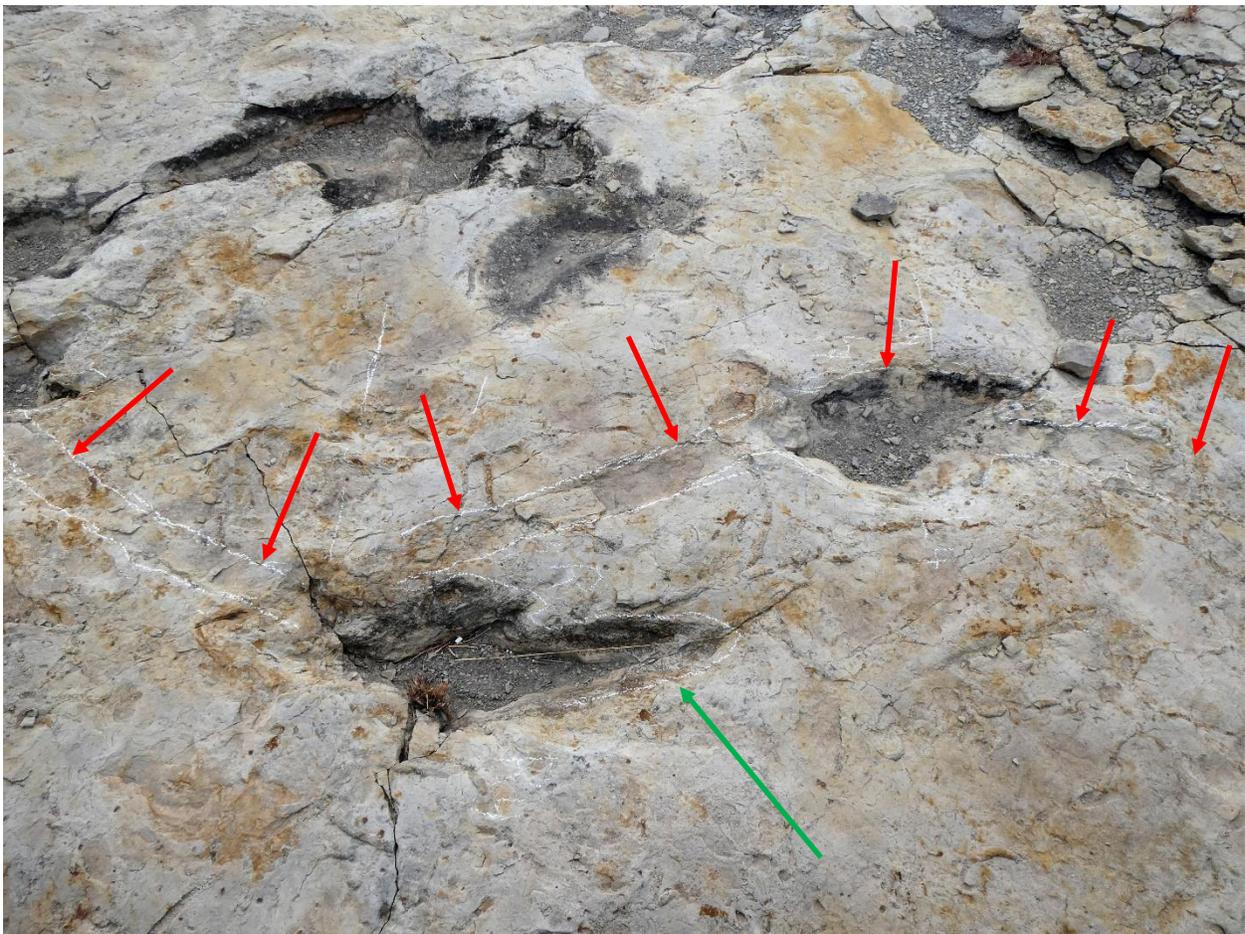
Workers were constructing a dam that would create today's Clayton Lake, work that included blasting away several layers of rock at this spot to construct a spillway. The blasting didn't expose the tracks, but later erosion from the use of the spillway removed the last layer of rock that covered these tracks.

It makes one wonder how many more dinosaur tracks could be found under the layers of the rock just beyond this site.

This part of New Mexico once sat along the western edge of an ancient inland sea, the muddy coast of which later became a treasure trove of dinosaur tracks and other finds.



Rarely can researchers determine the species of dinosaurs that made the tracks. But this track was distinctive enough that they determined that it was made by the meat-eating *Acrocanthosaurus*.



One track (green arrow) was apparently made in such deep mud that it includes an impression of the dinosaur's dew claw on the back of its foot. Dinosaurs generally held their tails upright, but one dragged its tail through the mudflat here, possibly for balance (red arrows). Both are outlined with chalk.



Ancient worm borrows were preserved here (red arrows)



Ancient mud cracks ...



... and ripples in the earth along the ancient shoreline were also preserved.



This is all that's left of Pigeon's Ranch at Glorieta Pass in New Mexico. During the Civil War, the Confederacy took parts of southern Arizona and New Mexico, and attempted to take the whole territory. Although the Confederacy initially bested Union forces in battle here at Glorieta Pass, they exhausted their supplies and ended up withdrawing, eventually back to Texas.

Corona is a small New Mexico town southeast of the Albuquerque area, and the closest town to where the Roswell UFO weather balloon crashed in 1948. I was driving through Corona when something caught my eye, so I turned around to go back and get another look. Sure enough, there was an honest to goodness phone booth standing in the middle of town. With (almost!) everyone carrying cell phones these days, phone booths have become quite rare.



A rare sighting of an old-style phone booth

A winter storm with snow and single digit temperatures put an end to my sightseeing plans for northwestern New Mexico, figuring I'd save them for another trip. But I also figured I could still stop at some Route 66 targets along I-40 for the 2-day drive back home west out of Grants, New Mexico.



Some of New Mexico's red rock country shows through a pretty layer of snow.



Alas, I got to enjoy that red rock view for three hours. A bad accident blocked westbound I-40 (and the adjacent frontage road for those who thought they'd cleverly use it to get past the accident) for all that time. Lots of police cars and damaged vehicle removal trucks, but fortunately no ambulances.



I did make one of my planned Route 66 stops in Arizona at the ghost town of Two Guns. I stopped at Two Guns last year, but recently learned about the Apache Death Cave at the site, the entrance of which is pictured here. A band of Apache raiders killed local Navajo and stole from them, and then took refuge in this cave. Despite its deceptive entrance, the cave was big enough for dozens of Apache and their horses to hide in. When the Navajo found their hiding place, they originally tried to smoke the Apache out. But after the Navajo found out that the Apache had killed three young Navajo girls that they had kidnapped, the Navajo flooded the cave with smoke. The Apache killed their horses and stacked them up in a futile effort to block the smoke. In all, 42 Apache suffocated inside the cave.



The Colorado Plateau is a large oval-diamond-ish area surrounding the Four Corners region that was uplifted millions of years ago, resulting in the canyon-carving erosion common in the region today. Grand Wash Cliffs, seen here from an Arizona backroad that I took on the final stretch of my drive back home, mark the southwestern edge of the Colorado Plateau. About 25 miles north of this point, the Colorado River flows out of the Grand Wash Cliffs after having carved the Grand Canyon into the Colorado Plateau.

And then I was home.