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SUMMER 2015

By Highway and Byway

SCENIC SOUTHEASTERN UTAH'S RED ROCKS

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NATIONAL SEASHORES - 10 REFRESHING DESTINATIONS

SUMMER DESTINATIONS

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Hinckley, Minnesota

El Golfo Beach Resort
El Golfo, Sonora, Mexico

Smoky Mountain Premier RV Resort
Cosby, Tennessee

A UTAH ROAD TRIP

Driving Amid the Red Rocks

Photos and story by Emily Fagan

Clockwise: Camping in the red rocks of Utah, Gorgeous view of Hite Crossing Bridge in Glen Canyon, Thick and squat Kachina Bridge

With 27 officially designated National and State Scenic Byways, it's nearly impossible to drive any kind of distance in Utah without going through some spectacular countryside, no matter what route you choose. However, there is one drive a bit off the beaten path that is not nearly as well known as the other Scenic Byways and yet is truly worthy of a detour. The Bicentennial Highway is lightly traveled and easily driven—even in a big rig—and our eyes kept popping at the majestic scenery as we drove. Turning from that road onto the Capitol Reef Scenic Byway, I just couldn't stop taking photos out the windows.

Starting this 163-mile journey across southeastern Utah in Blanding, my husband Mark and I headed south on U.S. Route 191 and then took a right turn to head west on SR-95. This special road was named the "Bicentennial Highway" because the final yards of asphalt were poured in 1976—the year of the U.S. Bicentennial. It is utterly spectacular and very worthy of an RV road trip.

Eyeing it on the map before we started, we were a little nervous that there might be switchbacks or tight turns that would be difficult with our 36-foot fifth-wheel and long-bed truck. However, the grades and sweeping turns were very manageable and the entire drive was a sheer delight.

With every bend in the road, we found ourselves craning our necks to take in the stunning views out our windows. Enormous, patterned red rock walls lined the sides of the road, and mystical red rock formations rose up from the horizon and changed shape as we passed them by. The landscape was vast, open and colorful, and completely devoid of the human touch. Everywhere we looked, we felt inspired by the wondrous creations of a divine hand.

In Blanding, while inquiring at the Visitors Center about the difficulty of traversing this road with a big RV, we met Fred Johnson, a construction worker who had been part of the team that paved this highway in the 1970s. For two years, he and his fellow workers lived out in this magnificent landscape, enduring all kinds of discomforts and hardships while upgrading this beautiful road to suit the modern age of fast moving cars. What a place to work.

The road was first constructed in 1935 as a gateway from Blanding to the Natural Bridges National Monument and remained unpaved through the 1960s. It wasn't until the 1970s that portions of the road began to be paved. Yet, because it doesn't link any major towns or cities, we found that as we passed by one glorious red rock vista after another on our way to Natural Bridges, there was rarely another vehicle on the road. How isolated and scorching hot it must have been to work those asphalt machines on this gorgeous, lonely road. Yet what a stunning landscape to call "the office."

We arrived at Natural Bridges uncertain of what to expect. It turns out that this fascinating National Monument features three huge natural rock arches.

Clockwise: Mark climbs down a rough hewn wooden ladder to Sipapu Bridge, Sipapu Bridge at Natural Bridges National Monument, Glen Canyon was formed by damming the Colorado River to form Lake Powell

Clockwise: The Bicentennial Highway snakes through spectacular red rock vistas, the bare footprint of a "FiveFinger" shoe, the orchard and the antique farm wagon let us know we're close to the Community of Fruita

To make the experience even more breathtaking, each natural bridge is accessed by a steep hike down to the base of the bridge and then back up again. Luckily, we hadn't worn ourselves out with a workout yet that morning, so as we started down the trail to the first arch, called Sipapu Bridge, and arrived at the first rough-hewn Navajo-looking log ladder, we scampered down it full of vim and vigor.

The trail to the Sipapu Bridge hugs a massive overhanging rock wall that Mother Nature has painted in wide swaths of black and orange and pink. It is hard to believe that the forces of wind and water have shaped these rocks, and as we hiked along in the soft sand in the shade of these cliffs, I couldn't help but imagine the ancient people who once sought shelter here. What a surprise it was, then, in the midst of these musings, to look down and see bare footprints before us in the sand. It turned out they were footprints left behind by the new and popular "FiveFinger" shoes worn by a hiker ahead of us.

Sipapu Bridge is a grand sandstone arch that has the classic shape of an ordinary bridge. Although we were among a few dozen people who hiked to it on this particular day, the first American settler to come across it was Cass Hite when he was out searching for gold in 1883. After we admired the bridge for a while, we made our way back up along the striped rock wall to the wooden ladders and on up to the loop road that winds through the park.

The second stone arch in the collection is Kachina Bridge and, just like Sipapu, it requires hiking down stairways that have been carved into the sandstone by the National Park Service and clambering down log ladders as well. Unlike Sipapu, however, Kachina is a thick and squat bridge that crosses a large cool wash filled with brilliant green shade trees. Along the flanks of this bridge we saw the faint etchings of petroglyphs that were pecked out of the rock eons ago. We were intrigued to learn that some of the cliff dwellers from the Mesa Verde area 150 miles away in Colorado had called this place home around 1200 A.D.

We got our workout once again as we huffed and puffed up the ladders and staircases back to the loop road, and then drove on to the next bridge, Owachomo, where once again we scrambled down to the base. In contrast to its two sister bridges, this bridge is thin and soars high into the air, looking quite delicate from a distance. Up close, however, it is a massive structure as well, with trees growing under its foundation.

Driving the eight-mile-long rim road around Natural Bridges, we got an overview of the marvelous landscape of the area as well as great views of the three bridges. Many visitors to Natural Bridges skip the hiking part, but for us the highlight of this park was the four miles of walks through nature and the fun obstacle courses that we encountered as we hiked down to and up from each bridge.

Back out on the Bicentennial Highway, we continued our road trip. As we watched the various red rock formations go by, we were reminded that their shapes can be a lot like psychologists' ink blots—often they resemble something. We passed a pair of flat-topped mesas that Native Americans called "Bears Ears" and then another mammoth red rock configuration that the early Mormons dubbed "Jacob's Chair." Even though no one keeps cheese in a box any more, we instantly recognized the formation called "Cheese Box" when it appeared ahead of us.

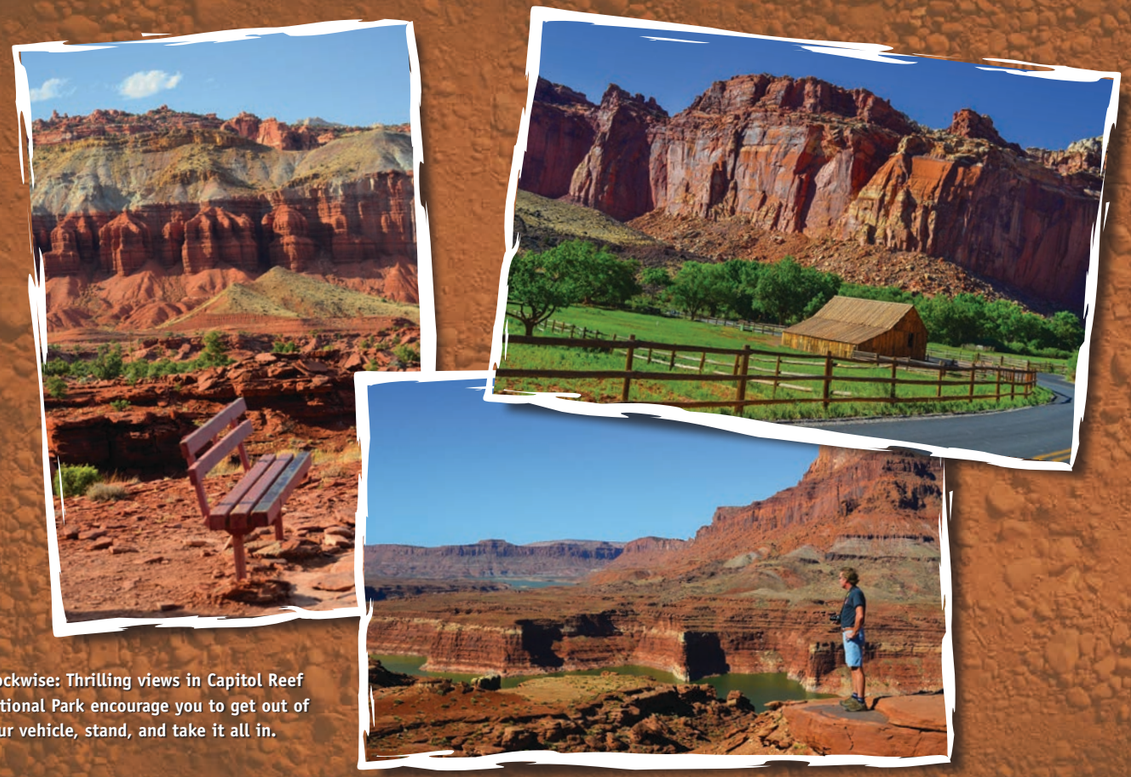
No sooner did these fanciful formations fade into the distance behind us than the Bicentennial Highway began a series of marvelous turns and descent as it carried us toward Glen Canyon Dam. This stunning portion of the road was so exhilarating that I could barely sit still in my seat. Much to Mark's surprise, at one point I practically climbed out the truck window so I could get photos of the magical landscape around us, especially as we approached the Hite Crossing Bridge at the confluence of the Colorado and the Dirty Devil rivers.

There is a fabulous viewing area where visitors can get a bird's eye view of the waterways and valleys from several different vantage points, and we wandered around these viewpoints for quite some time, reading the plaques that described the geology and history of the area.

Glen Canyon Dam was built in the 1960s, and when it blocked the Colorado River to form Lake Powell, the water not only rose above ancient Native American settlements containing artifacts, petroglyphs, and precious clues to the ancient human history of this raw land, but it drowned the more recent mining town of Hite City. After World War II, uranium was eagerly mined in this area, and the folks who created the subsequent boom town were said to have "uranium on the cranium." Naturally, a bust eventually followed, and the remains of Hite City weren't considered worthy of preserving in the 1960s compared to the power, water, and flood control that the new Lake Powell would provide to the region.

Once we left Glen Canyon in our wake, all these fabulous images and history gave us much to ponder and chat about as the sights along the Bicentennial Highway grew more ordinary and we settled back into routine driving. In the tiny community of Hanksville, we turned left onto SR-24 to continue our journey west on the Capitol Reef Scenic Byway. In no time we were craning our necks once again as exotic rock formations in shades of grey and maroon began to loom up out of the landscape around us.

This portion of the Capitol Reef Scenic Byway is characterized by pale, towering cliffs, and swirling rock patterns that look like the gods dipped their fingers in finger paint and smeared the colors on the rounded domes. After a while, these smooth, colorful surfaces gave way to bold, jagged red rock cliffs with flanks resembling cathedral buttresses. We had arrived at Capitol Reef National Park, a long skinny park, about 5 miles wide by 50 miles long, that runs on a north-south axis along a huge buckle in the earth's



Clockwise: Thrilling views in Capitol Reef National Park encourage you to get out of your vehicle, stand, and take it all in.

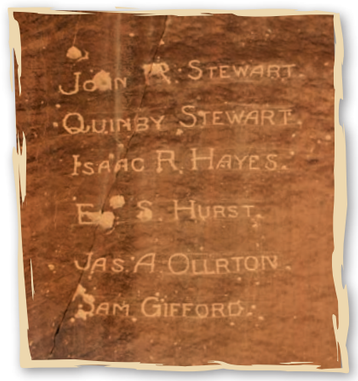
crust called the Waterpocket Fold.

The tiny community of Fruita is at the heart of this area. Mormons settled there in the late1800s, and by 1917 had built a lively village filled with orchards. Cherries, apricots, peaches, pears, and apples are still grown in Fruita, but on our visit we were a little too early to take advantage of the harvests. Driving the scenic road through the park, we saw remnants of Fruita's past, including an old plow standing in a field and an old pioneer schoolhouse.

This area was extremely difficult for the Mormon pioneers to reach, due to the rugged terrain of the Waterpocket Fold. However, there was one route into town via Capitol Gorge that ran along the bottom of a wash. Between 1871 and the early 1940s, Mormons arrived via this route, first by horse and buggy and then by car.

We hopped out of our truck to stretch our legs, and hiked partway into this wash, following the tall stone cliffs on either side. High up on the flat rock surface to one side, we spotted the etched names, initials and dates that had been carved by the arriving pioneers long ago. This antique graffiti is called the "Pioneer Register" today, and we saw names and dates from the late 1800s all the way up to 1942.

This hike was the first of many glorious hikes, bike rides and scenic drives we took through Capitol Reef National Monument during our week-long stay and was the perfect cap to our wonderful driving tour across southeastern Utah.



Utah's Bicentennial Highway and Capitol Reef Scenic Byway gave us a road trip we will never forget. From the unique stone arches of Natural Bridges National Monument to the jaw-dropping scenic vistas along the highways to the dramatic system of waterways and gorges in Glen Canyon to the Mormon register of pioneers arriving in Fruita, we had been treated to a dazzling array of sights. If you are planning a trip through Utah's more notable regions, consider a detour that includes these two awe-inspiring scenic byways in the southeastern part of the state.

For More Information*

Visit www.visitutah.com/plan-your-trip/getting-around-utah/scenic-byways

*Utah's scenic byways are a system of 27 routes statewide that offer outstanding beauty and are clearly designated with colorful highway signs. The byways are also indicated with dotted lines on the official Utah highway map.

Shore Leave

North, South, East, or West: National Seashores offer year-round fun

By Dave G. Houser

For most of us, there's no better day than one spent visiting the seashore. Our nation is embraced by nearly 12,000 miles of coastal shoreline, so we Americans are truly fortunate.

The U.S. Congress designated some of the nation's most important and least developed coastal areas as national seashores, based upon natural, cultural, and recreational attributes. Responsibility for preserving and protecting them falls to the National Park Service (NPS) that administers ten national seashores gracing the coastlines of ten states.

While no written description or static image can match the experience of a live visit, here's a summary of each of America's national seashores. Seashores are listed from west to east.