

## Trains across Colorado

This is the start of a new chapter in my life. Since my wife Sally passed away a few weeks ago, I decided that I was not going to wear sackcloth and ashes for the rest of my life. Each of us grieves in a different way. I had always wanted to take this trip, but because of Sally's motion sickness, it was not possible before. The only times I have been to Colorado previously was to ski Aspen, Vail, or Steamboat Springs, and this trip gives me a chance to see the countryside not covered in snow, plus there are some really interested narrow gauge trains that run in Colorado

However, what started out as a simple trip got a lot more involved. I am still active in the brain injury chat room, counseling other caregivers, and when I mentioned my trip, a number of the ones in Colorado wanted to meet me. So, out of an 8 day trip, I am meeting people 4 days!

The trip started without a hitch, as I only had to get myself ready for the shuttle pickup. When I got to the airport, I got out of the shuttle and right next to it was an empty wheelchair, which sort of gave me a lump in my throat.

The flights to Denver were uneventful, and I caught the shuttle to the hotel. When I got there, Sharon (who's screen name was ghostwriter) was waiting for me. Since I was joining a group, the people at the desk told her I was already checked in! Fortunately, I had told her I would be there about 4, and she did wait. We had a pleasant visit, as we have been corresponding for a number of years, and it was nice to finally meet her.

Our group dinner was at 5:30 (ghastly), and we were briefed on the activities for the following day. We would be staying at a hotel in Colorado Springs, and visiting the Garden of the Gods and going up the Pikes Peak Cog railway to 14,000 feet.

### AIR FORCE ACADEMY

Our first stop was at the Air Force Academy, and other than for the chapel, which was spectacular, it looked like any other campus. Due to the security after 9/11, we were not allowed to roam around the campus. They had some jets on display, but they were too far away to get a decent picture. I went in to the chapel, which was really beautiful. The main floor held the Protestant chapel, and there was an organist tuning the organ. I wish he would have been playing, though.



I was fortunate to get in to see the Catholic and Jewish chapels, as they were closed, but someone let me see them anyhow. The Jewish chapel was dark, and unfortunately I had not brought my flash, so I could not get any pictures of it.



## GARDEN OF THE GODS

We then drove to a place called Garden of the Gods, where there were interesting rock formations. There was a short film on how these rocks were formed, and one was called "Kissing Camels"-if you used your imagination!



Driving through the site, we came on a place called Balancing Rock, and took the obligatory humorous picture!



## PIKES PEAK

From the Garden of the Gods, we drove to Manitou Springs, where the station for the Pike's Peak Cog Railway was. There was an old steam engine there that was used before they went to diesel.



There was one single cog track that went to the top, with passing tracks to let trains pass each other.



I got up to the top, and walked around a bit, taking it easy because of the altitude. Sleeping in Denver, which was over 5,000 feet, did help me acclimatize to the altitude. It did not hit me like it did in Cuzco, Peru where we flew from sea level to 14,000 feet in one hour. There was a plaque there honoring Catherine Lee Bates, who wrote "America the Beautiful" after being up on Pike's Peak.



We were going to spend the night in Colorado Springs, but were going to dinner at an Italian restaurant before we got to the hotel. I had met a lady (whose screen name was sequoia) on the brain injured chat room whose son was injured. I turned out she was going to be in Colorado Springs for a figure skating competition with her 13 year old daughter. I invited them to have dinner with me and to meet me at my hotel. While I was waiting for the taxi, one of the ladies on our tour asked me why I was waiting outside. I told her I had a dinner engagement with someone back at the hotel. The lady started to give me the third degree, so to leave an air of mystery; I told her I had never met the lady. I got to the hotel, and they were not there. Unfortunately, I forgot to tell them I was taking a taxi from the restaurant to the hotel, so when they asked for me at the desk, they hotel clerk told her the bus would be back at 9:30. They did leave me a message, and decided to eat at a restaurant around the corner from the hotel. I called her cell phone and told her what had happened there, and that I would be right over. I found a cute little bear with the daughter's name on it, and gave it to her as sort of an icebreaker. She was wearing gold and silver medals that she had won so far in the competition, and I was impressed. After dinner, we went back to my hotel lobby and chatted for a while. As I was walking the two of them to their car, the bus pulled up and the first one off was the lady who had given me the third degree! I bet that started tongues wagging!

#### ROYAL GORGE

The next day we took the Royal Gorge railroad through the Arkansas River Gorge. The locomotives, an FP7 and GP30, were diesel for this trip. The train took us beside the river for the entire trip, and we saw a number of people white water rafting. There were places on the gorge that could not have been more that 30 feet across, and the water was really running through those sections.

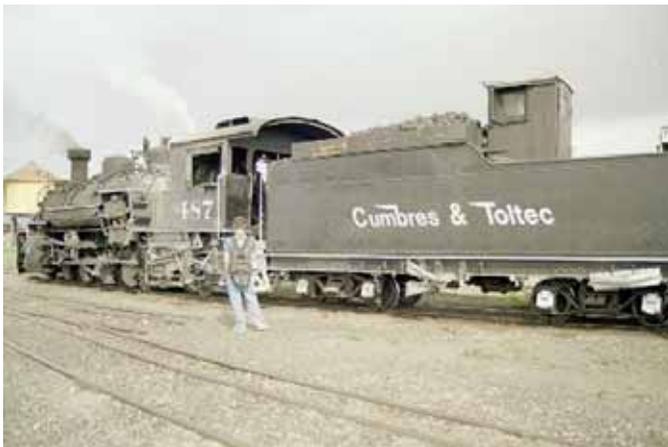


One of the engineering marvels was the “Hanging Bridge” which was a suspension bridge 1000 feet up spanning the gorge.



## CUMBRIES AND TOLTEC

After returning from the Royal Gorge trip, we drove down to Alamosa to spend the night. The next morning we were taken to Antonito to ride the steam train to Chama.



It was a really neat train ride, full of twists and turns-in fact we crossed between Colorado and New Mexico six times! There were coaches and open cars, but it started raining, and we had to retreat to the coaches until it let up. We went through a tunnel called Rock tunnel, and on the other side was a monument erected to commemorate the assassination of President Garfield



The plan was for the train from Chama to meet us at Osier where everyone would have lunch, but because it was raining, the train was running an hour late because of slippage on the rails. So we had lunch first, and then waited for the train to come. After a while, we heard its whistle and then saw it, as Johnny Cash said, "coming 'round the bend".



We boarded the train and headed for Chama, but because the train was late, we would have a problem getting into Durango too late to eat. The tour director called our bus driver, and told him to literally "head us off at the pass" at a place where the highway crossed the tracks at Cumbres Pass. On our way there, we crossed over the Cascade Trestle, and through a place called Tanglefoot Curve where the line doubled back on itself. We could see the little "speeder" following us, with its tank of water to put out any fires started by the sparks from the engine.



The bus driver took us on a tour of downtown Durango to spot whatever restaurants we wanted, because there was just a little mom and pop type place next to our hotel. As we drove around, my to my amazement, I spotted a sushi restaurant. I asked to be dropped there, and went in. It was quite busy, and I ordered my favorite kinds of sushi-soft shell crab and California roll with tuna on top. There was a couple sitting next to me and the man was drinking a milky looking drink. I asked him what it was, He told me it was unfiltered sake, and showed me the bottle. I thanked him for the information, and as I turned around, a glass appeared that he filled with some of the sake. I tasted it and thanked him profusely for his hospitality. After dinner, I wandered around some of the shops and found some gifts for the people at my office. I was chatting with the sales clerk, and discovered that she had lived on the same street in the San Fernando Valley as I do, but a mile away! Talk about a small world!

#### DURANGO AND SILVERTON

The next morning we were taken to the train station and boarded the car. The had open cars on this train also, but they were covered which protected us from both rain and sun.



We went under a bridge called "Hanging Bridge" where some highwayman was hung in the 1800's. Based on the height of the bridge, he must have been short! A little further along the way, we rode along a "shelf" that had been blasted out of the side of the mountain and built up so there was room for the tracks. As we crossed the High Bridge over the Animas River, the engine blew off water from the lower part of the boiler in a big cloud of steam



The engine needed two fillings of water, so we stopped at a place called Tank Creek to refill the tender. The scenery along the way was spectacular, and even though it was July, there was still snow on some of the mountains.



We arrived in Silverton, and found a really fun place for lunch. It reminded me of the Red Dog Saloon in Anchorage, with stuffed moose heads and all kinds of old saws and other tools. I wandered around and found an internet café and logged on to the chat room to say hello. We then boarded the bus and headed for Grand Junction for the night.

### GEORGETOWN LOOP

We left Grand Junction and headed east toward Denver, stopping for lunch at Vail. I had not been there since 1971 and the area was so huge you needed a map to find your way around! I had lunch with a lady in our group and our tour leader. The weather was nice so we dined al fresco and could watch the passing parade.

We got to the train station and watched the little switch engine change ends of the train by going on a parallel track and coupling to the train cars. The loop was built because the terrain was so steep that the trains could not climb the grade. The solution was for the tracks to be laid in a big loop so the grade was not too steep.



The cars were open, but were covered to keep the sun off. There was a neat trestle that the train went over, and I got some good pictures of it. Unlike my trip through the Taeri Gorge, I did not have to rest my arm on someone's head to get the shot!



## DENVER

This was a delightful day. I decided that after 7 days on a bus, the last thing I wanted to do was take a bus ride through downtown Denver to sightsee. I had made arrangements with the lady I met through the brain injured chat room to meet me at my hotel so I could see her daughter skate.

We drove to a rink about a half hour away, and her daughter went through her practice routine. For a young lady of 13, she was quite good, and I am sorry that Sally could not be there to see her and the improvement she had made in just a few short weeks.

After that we went to lunch at a funky diner, and then went to a local mall. If someone had told me 2 months previous that I would be in a Denver mall looking at young lady's clothes I would have said they were nuts!

All in all, it was a delightful day without,"bags out and on the bus".

The next day I flew home without incident and was glad to be home after seeing much of Colorado. This was a taste of what bus trips are all about, and after cruising where you sleep in the same bed every night and travel while you sleep, I think I will stick to cruising!

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