



Grand Junction and Colorado Western Wonders Hike Trip Notes April 24-May 2, 2015

I can't resist another hike and especially with my favorite hiking leaders Steve and Nola with PPH aka www.ParksPlusHiking.com. Disclosure: Please forget my past recommendations for the old company. It is not the same since the change of ownership. Steve and Nola (and the past owners, one since deceased) are the leaders I've always enjoyed, trusted, and promoted.

Hikes coming up with PPH will be Rocky Mountains early August and Mt Rainier and St Helens in late August, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon in September. Plus with Country Walkers: Isle of Skye in July, Croatia's Dalmatian Coast in September, and Basque Region in October.

Coming up even quicker with only 2 days between trips is Tom's big birthday bash in Europe.

Ten great scenic drives around the world

<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/apr/20/10-great-drives-us-switzerland-spain-norway>

Includes the Colorado National Monument 23 mile Rim Rock Loop and others that I know. I was in the one in Majorca last year and one my way to the Switzerland one in a few days.

Travel comments worth thinking about – from a special friend who says she thinks of Diana as “a wind in the skies flying somewhere in the planet courageously.” And another time commenting “We can always be together in our thoughts and imagination.” You bet I feel like I'm on top of the world!

Missives sent home. I gave up attaching the videos as they rarely worked but I generally send out one or two a day to family and those who requested.

On way to Grand Junction – yet I confess that it feels like I'm on my way to Europe via a Colorado hike. More on that later.

Damn TSA pre-check line is filled with folks who haven't a clue. TSA blames airlines and airlines blame TSA. I understand TSA and the government are trying to get more lax and therefore are selectively or randomly letting newbies go thru pre-check. Versus those of us who paid for it and know the rules. I suspect there will soon be another layer above to pay to get thru. Example: I've seen CLEAR in some domestic airports.



Great United club has hugely upgraded their food offerings. Hearty soup, breads, slaw salad, olives, humus, red peppers, cheese, good trail mix and M&Ms. Still all the fresh fruit. Espresso maker.

United planes now offering wi fi for movies and TV. Yet they don't all offer electrical hook up. Something is wrong with this picture. The new and smaller seats are at least nice leather. Can you tell that I didn't get first class?

Love TUMI suitcases and much appreciate my new carry on; so glad to get a two roller before they were discontinued. Until I'm incapacitated I want to avoid four rollers and handicap carts. I watched again those boarding in wheelchairs and well remember the Palm Beach flights with numerous wheelchair pre-boarders but very few deplaning needing the help. I've been known to inquire and been told "well, I'm in a hurry now". Those types might be hurrying up the disability process before their time.

Turbulence and more turbulence. Two days ago a delta flight from Paris couldn't land at any NYC airports due to turbulence. We were late out. We changed routes and even the hostesses were seat belted most of the flight. All of which caused me to land late and feel certain I'd miss my connection.

Why are most gates at the very end? And all jumbled together. I ran and then found that due to turbulence my incoming flight couldn't land. My gates couldn't have been farther apart so I got exercised and sweaty. Luckily it did land an hour late whereas some other flights were diverted to Colorado Springs.

It is a long travel day. I figured out that my (next) trip to Paris will take considerably less amount of time. I left my home at 9:30 AM and got into Grand Junction around 6 PM which was really 8 PM my body time.

Thrifty rental car is on my x-list. They are the only car company not located in the airport, their claim to get you within five minutes runs into 25, the transport person doesn't help in the teeniest bit even when I struggled with my luggage, a car was not available, only a friggin jeep, a huge sum of money was held against my credit card, the attitude was terrible, I had to walk half a block out in order to inspect my own car/jeep and then bring the form back, and when I want to return it they are not even open. I would have walked away had I still been at the airport for the pick-up but I was in the boonies and with my luggage and a bit over the barrel. I was very verbal about my unhappiness and it was clear that the agent did not care.

The hotel is part of Choice Hotels and called Clarion Inn. It is a very pleasant surprise especially when you consider that they also own Comfort Inn that I would do about anything to avoid. For a mere \$74 I get a quite fine room, separate sink area from the bathroom, real glasses and mugs, a writing desk, a refrigerator, and even a two sheeted comforter bed versus comfort Inn's brown blanket. The breakfast buffet is also more than I could have hoped for.

Dinner had been delayed due to my late arrival, so Steve and Nola went on to the restaurant. I had been thinking it would be good to go to historic downtown and find a restaurant but I learned that the hotel's restaurant has quite a nice reputation. Pantuso is said to be the oldest Italian restaurant between Denver and Los Angeles. It is featured in gourmet magazine as one of the exceptional restaurants in the Rocky Mountain region it was winner of taste of the valley award and I was happy. The hotel gift of a free glass of wine wasn't bad either.

For my only full day I hope to visit the museum of western Colorado and learn more about the UTE Indians and also go into historic downtown Grand Junction to see what a 100-year-old city looks like.

Heavy rain is on for today and tomorrow which is the first day of hiking. That just means that I won't be visiting their botanical garden.

As Tom says so frequently and we all believe he really believes it, life is good.

What would you do if you had a whole day in Grand Junction? Yeah, me too. I never thought of it.

Yet here I am, day two in Grand Junction, and there really is plenty to do. Were I not heading into the great Hills I would have driven farther out of town. The Grand Mesa was seen from a lookout tower I climbed up to and is said to be one of the largest flattest mountain tops in the world.

Why is it called Grand Junction? This is where the two rivers meet and one used to be called Grand. No maybe it can be called grand because the valley is filled full of several vineyards.

The Museum of the west along with the educational tower gave a history from prehistoric times to present. It was well done with artifacts and collections presented well for both children and adults. Especially the re-created rooms of history: an old bar room, a schoolhouse, and an old spooky mine.

Though it was raining I was told that the view still might be interesting so I climbed the lookout tower. I hate to miss a bunch of steps - they call my name. Then by the top I wondered why my chest was so heaving and I felt so tired until I remembered having come from sea level and this is about 5000 feet.

Somehow I missed that there was a bicycle race going on nearby and in town but I would soon weave myself over there and figure it out. I had found a walking tour of historic downtown but really didn't need it. It was interesting even without the brochure at background. Main Street was not only lined with cones to keep cars out but also lined with unique art work.

Since I had a car, I was going street by street to see what the town was like. I found Historic 7th avenue full of old nice homes. I found the huge campus of the Colorado Mesa University. It was about then I considered going on to the botanical gardens since the rain had ceased but I got diverted and thus the botanical gardens remain undone.

As is the Colorado River Trail undone. I kept seeing signs and I don't know if it is a trail for cars or for people but it is something to investigate. (Later learned from Nola that it's a bike trail.)

Steve and Nola were out investigating the trails in case those that were planned were found to be impassable. This is something I don't worry about because I know they do.

After turning my car in I had a little time to catch up on emails and some reading of local brochures before taking myself to happy hour at the hotel bar. After a little bit it became too happy, (that means too noisy), so I took my drink to the lobby area where I found some of our hikers.

Some of my favorite hikers are on this trip so it should be a good week. Weather or not. And weather - we should have some of everything. It will be cold and it will be hot.

So sad - the earthquakes and avalanches in Nepal. I just had a friend asking if I had done the Mount Everest marathon. Of course I have not and this reminds me that there are some areas that makes no sense to visit if you have any age on you or medical conditions. I have seen Asian medical facilities and they are not what we are used to.

And on that I will say good night

Sunday - Colorado hiking Day 1

We started from the hotel around 9 AM and drove about halfway to our hotel to stop for some hiking. It was the Devils kitchen area of the Colorado national Monument.

Our first hike took us a couple of miles along serpents Trail and a couple more miles through a canyon called no thorough fare and past two different waterfalls. I got confused and it wouldn't be until the next trail where we hiked up into Devils kitchen.

Our final stop of the night was the very cute and quaint Bross hotel bed and breakfast in Paonia. Yes that is almost the end of the world and it has a long Main Street about a block but it has an absolutely excellent restaurant called the flying fork.

For those of you who sometimes call me superwoman, and I appreciate it very much, I would like to put it in perspective. A marathon friend and in fact a past running coach suggested that now I'm doing hiking that is just one step off being in the nursing home. He may be right because I have really done a lot of huffing and puffing but part of that is because we are 8500 feet too.

Monday - Day 2 the north rim vista trail

After a very hearty breakfast which included egg-based quiches here at the bed and Breakfast we were off for a maybe 45 minute drive to the north rim Vista Trail of Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

We had a lot of laughs over the innkeeper. We knew that she had had the bed-and-breakfast for sale for a couple of years. We didn't know she was about 300 pounds and one of the biggest grumps you can imagine. I don't know why because the bed-and-breakfast is the cutest little place. Very Victorian with homemade quilts on the beds and modernized efficiently. Maybe there are 11 rooms in the whole place.

We went through a few very tiny towns in particular Crawford. We went on to a small ranger station where they don't even have phone service so our leaders were not sure what to expect. It had been clear A few days ago, and then they had a huge dump of snow, all of which only made for muddy conditions for us.

We hiked rolling hills for a couple of miles before coming along an out and back called Exclamation Point. That is a name it really deserved and mostly the first time we could clearly see deep into the 4000 to 5000 foot deep canyon and into the river.

After a lot of oohs and aahs and plenty of picture taking, we continued on up and up and up for 2 1/2 miles to Green Mountain which is about 8600 feet of elevation. We only started at 7700 but there were a lot of rolling hills and a lot of muddy clumpy shoes to hold us back. (Or you might say, on the way to the nursing home.).

At the top of the peak after our Garmin specialist verified the elevation number, we had our usual picnic lunches that we carry.

The last hike of the day was a little bit more touristy but it gave us a view from the opposite side of the canyon and made it very clear how deep it was. We were on this half mile loop when we heard very loud thunder and really scurried back fast to the van.

I like very much the bed-and-breakfast having a big porch with white rocking chairs. Huge old trees surrounding. It was there that we did all we could to clean our shoes off before bringing them inside so that Mrs. grump wouldn't give us too much trouble.

Tomorrow we go to a resort that gives us some wine every afternoon. How civilized.

Hiking on transfer day - From Paonia to Palisades.

I think this was not going to be an 11 to 12 mile hike but we all got into it and we didn't have to turn-around until 1 o'clock and it was an out and back. I love these canyons. We saw some unusual animals and especially a very colorful collared lizard.

The weather has been odd in that we had to bundle up our first couple of days and tackle the rainfall and then today it got up to the high 70s and might be hotter yet tomorrow.

Remember my complaint about Mrs. Grump? Well I left dinner downtown Paonia early and came into the old historic Bross hotel bed and Breakfast to find Mrs. Grump eating her dinner. I could see why she weighs so much with a couple of ears of corn on the cob. But she was unusually friendly and chatty and I learned a lot of the history of the Bross hotel and how she and her daughter bought into it in the year 2000. It has very unique history dating back over 100 years. We discussed past ownership, renovations, and her involvement but not the fact that I knew that she has been trying to sell it for two years. I learned that room number two is still inhabited by the ghost of Mrs. Bross and will soon be added to a book about Colorado bed and breakfasts that have ghost stories.

Mrs. Grump does her own cooking and not only gave us delicious quiche the first day but had a French toast soufflé type dish today.

I even got a hug and lots of smiles. That after a few compliments.

We are now in another town in a place called the wine country Inn in Palisades. It is especially lovely for a hiking group and had a delightful wine tasting in the afternoon and a white tablecloth type restaurant for the evening.

Me, I have had a good time hiking but I need a little variety in my life not to mention a little rest of the hip joints. So I have arranged for a visit around town and some of the 17 local wineries tomorrow and will get to sleep in before my driver picks me up.

Wednesday in Palisades – no, not Paradise but pretty darned close

I took the day off. Sort of. I had a lie in and breakfast about an hour after the hikers left. I wanted to rest a fairly common hip issue and be sure to be well for Thursday's big hike.

My guide and driver appeared at the hotel at 10:30 to start a wine tour of some of the 17 wineries in the local area. It didn't take very many of them and very many of morning wine tastings until I decided I'd had enough. I had already purchased all that might fit into my suitcase too. So I asked to see some more of the historic sites which included downtown Palisades, downtown Grand Junction, and ending in my guide's home town of Fruita to include a Vietnam memorial.

In between, we drove the 23 mile loop of Colorado Monument, stopping it every lookout where most of them had a very short hike. I say short, but the driver thought they were long.

On one of the lookouts I glanced across and made the comment that it looked like there were too many tourists and maybe we would skip that one, but the guide surprised me and said oh we have time, so down the hill we went. And who would we find but all of my fellow hikers.

Having hired the guide was a bit of a waste but I couldn't figure out any other way to do it. There were no ways to get to a rental car or to walk to anything of any interest. May be the best thing was

spending part of the day with a long term resident who was married to a four generation Grand valley girl. He had worked for Halliburton in the area for some years but much of the work in the area went away. While sad, some of his stories were interesting and told me some about the area that wouldn't necessarily be learned by a tourist.

Here attached is one video of the easterly side of the canyon. The westerly side is quite different and had huge hoo doos of balanced rocks and kissing rocks too. We will like among them tomorrow.

Dinner was in downtown palisades but not until we had met again for free wine to consume poolside in perfect weather.

It'll be hot tomorrow.

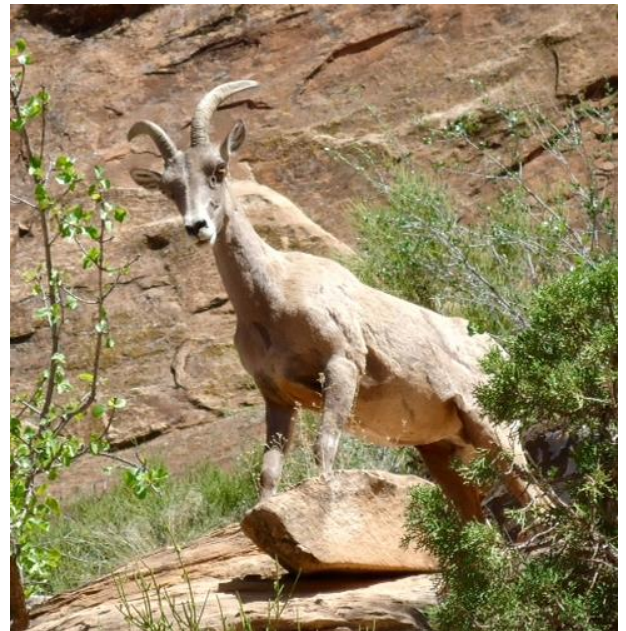
PS Look what I missed! It never fails. I leave a party and it begins. I took a car trip, was in the area, but THEY saw all the mountain sheep. They were also all around us in the second day's canyon but I didn't see them. Here is Nola's picture. They are very scrawny compared to those in Banff.

Thursday - Colorado national Monument

So I drove it one day and I hiked down below on my way up the next day. Coming from sea level the elevation here at about 6600 feet sometimes going up to 8800 feet is hefty.

This was the signature hike and what I rested up in order to be able to do. While 13 miles might not sound like very much, since much of it is in an upward momentum, it is. I had not intended to do the last stretch but after all, what's a hill?

We hiked from 830 until 330 and some of us had not much of a break. We ate lunch on the top, that is those of us who went to the top, and some of us got there late. But I was rather pleased with myself to have gotten there at all.



Friday - The last day hike to liberty cap

I seem to be setting a trend in this excuse that the devil made me do it. Just like yesterday, I had not intended to go to the top and every time I saw a huge rock that I had to scramble up and knew that I would be frightened to go down, I considered turning around. But then again if you don't continue on you've just got to sit and wait. So I went. And whined much of the way down.

This was our last day and now I go home tomorrow. The entire hike was an absolute delight to be in these two surprisingly lesser-known parks that really are spectacular. Such variety.

Saturday night late I'll be home. Tuesday afternoon Tom and I will be sailing (flying) across to Europe in celebration of his 80th.

Yet I do believe that he has been milking this 80th and having a number of celebrations. I would say that an 80th deserves plenty of celebrations. We shall do our best.

Some of my pictures, chronological



The Grand Junction Main Street is filled with art work of which they are very proud and should be. As they are of their famous author who sits famously in his bronze bathtub.



JAMES DALTON TRUMBO
Dec. 9, 1905 – Sept. 10, 1976
Artist: J. Michael Wilson Dedicated Oct. 13, 2007

Dalton Trumbo was one of Grand Junction's most famous artistic exports. Of feverish work habit and temperament, he was an Academy Award-winning screenwriter, author, playwright, erudite firebrand, and blacklisted member of 1947's infamous Hollywood Ten.

His 1935 novel *Eclipse* scandalized Grand Junction with the foibles of its thinly veiled, real-life characters from his hometown.

His 1939 novel *Johnny Got His Gun* won a National Book Award. But it was in Hollywood where Trumbo found his enduring success. From the 1930s through the 1970s, Trumbo wrote dozens of films, including *Roman Holiday*, *Spartacus*, and *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*.

Ever the eccentric, Trumbo wrote for hours in his bathtub. This sculpture is based on a 1967 photograph taken at his California home.



The boy and daddy on the pedestal twirled around. The girl on a bicycle represented the day as there was a huge bike race ongoing. As you see the weather turned nice with puffy clouds showing off the blue sky, but earlier it had rained on me as I climbed the museum's tower and lookout.

We would return to Main Street on the last day for a lunch in their local brewery. It was a good thing I checked out the art work and sculpture on my own – these hikers couldn't be bothered.



Our first stay was in this lovely little B&B with great history (outlined above) with Mrs. Grouch who turned out to be not so grouchy. Nor were we hikers so long as we get fed often. Here's hiker leader Nola, our photographer, capturing some petroglyphs.



Butterflies and wild flowers, and even a few sightings of their colorful mascot the collared lizard.



This sculpture of a headless chicken is to commemorate what they insist is a true story – the chicken's head was cut off and he continued to live for some time and was fed through a straw in his neck. Do I believe it? They claim it's documented. Some of the lizards were not so colorful and a collection of them were black on black rocks. They didn't make for much of a picture.



Cactus blooms everywhere and one section had four different colors. This picnic is on top of the hill that I hadn't intended to climb. There were climbers on the Monument and we watched them at length.



Here's a real photographer, who was also a rock climber a few years ago. I like to think of her as my adopted daughter; she certainly has had a big impact on my hiking.

And with one last lizard, its good night. I'm a little bit burned out on doing trip reports or at least on getting the reports completed. It is not only because I only have two days between trips.

Off we go to Tom's Big Birthday Bash for his 80th. (That turned out to be another whole story.)

Itinerary

Fri Apr 24

11:55am Depart Newark EWR via UA#572
2:22pm Arrive Denver DEN for plane change – 57 minutes connect time

3:19pm Depart Denver DEN via Skywest dba UA#6332
4:22pm Arrive Grand Junction GJT

Rental Car Thrifty #G83CV6

Hotel Clarion Hotel – 2 nights
755 Horizon Drive, Grand Junction, CO 81506 Tele 970 243 6790

Sat Apr 25

<http://www.grandvalleywine.com/events.htm>

<http://www.grandvalleywine.com/wineries.htm>

<http://www.sunset.com/travel/rockies/grand-valley-guide>

<http://www.palisadetourism.com/>

<http://m.visitgrandjunction.com/spring-barrel-tasting-grand-junction>

8:00pm Turn in rental car and take shuttle to hotel

Hike - Summary from www.ParksPlusHiking.com - In our extensive travels to and from our home in central Colorado and the pickup points for our tours, we sometimes discover a hidden gem of one sort or other, be it a little-known yet amazing hike, a hole-in-the-wall culinary sensation, even a sophisticated retreat set in the middle of nowhere. With our new "Western Wonders of Colorado," we've combined a number of these unexpected finds located on Colorado's western slope. You may never have heard of Black Canyon of Gunnison National Park or the Colorado National Monument, but after this tour you will probably never forget them.

Sun Apr 26 – Day 1

9:00am Meet in hotel lobby for start of hike - ready to hike

Devils Kitchen, Serpents Trail - Distance: 6 mi Difficulty: 3

Western Wonders begins with several short hikes in the southeast corner of the Colorado National Monument. First, we head to the wind-swept rock promontories of the Devils Kitchen, then to the lower end of No-Thoroughfare Canyon where we'll test how well the small box canyon located there (aka Echo Canyon) really does reverberate. We conclude the day with an optional one-way walk up the aptly-named Serpents trail, followed by a drive around scenic Monument Road then on to Paonia for the next two evenings.

Lodging: Bross Hotel – 1st of 2 nights
312 Onarga Street ~ PO Box 85, Paonia, Colorado 81428 Tele: 970-527-6776
email: brosshotel@paonia.com Yes WiFi free – take coffee pot

From www.paonia-inn.com website: The Bross Hotel was first opened in 1906 by Deputy Sheriff W. T. Bross. At the time it was considered "the only really first-class hotel in the county" by local authorities. Just one block from Paonia's main street, the hotel flourished for nearly 70 years. In the mid-90s this legendary structure was revitalized. It has the charm of an old hotel and the amenities of a modern bed and breakfast inn. The Bross Hotel is once again Delta County's premier hotel. In room #9 Czech.

Mon Apr 27 - Day 2

North Vista Trail Distance: 7 mi Difficulty: 4

Similar to the Grand Canyon, the North Rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison is more isolated, quieter, and higher than the better-known South Rim. Guess where we hike today? Of course the North Rim, specifically the North Vista trail. Here we'll enjoy yet another well-constructed National Park Service trail set in this case above the sheer 2,500' walls of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. The view from the trail summit atop 8,500' Green Mountain is simply jaw-dropping!

Lodging: Bross Hotel – 2nd of 2 nights

Tue Apr 28 - Day 3

Dominguez Canyon Distance: 8 mi Difficulty: 3

Today we transfer from quiet Paonia to elegant Palisades. Along the way, we stop at the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area for a historic hike up Dominguez Canyon. Our trail this day follows then climbs away from the Gunnison river, an important transportation and recreational waterway. While our destination on the trail is several petroglyph-covered boulders, we'll keep our eyes peeled for desert bighorn sheep on the rock escarpments above as well.

Lodging: Wine Country Inn – 1st of 3 nights
777 Grande River Drive Palisade, Colorado 81526 Tele: 970-464-5777
inquiries@coloradowinecountryinn.com <http://www.coloradowinecountryinn.com/>
WiFi, coffee, mini fridges and afternoon wine

Wed Apr 29 - Day 4

Horsethief Bench Loop Distance: 8 mi Difficulty: 4

An offshoot of the famous Kokopelli Trail, we hike the Horsethief Bench Loop today in the McInnis Canyon National Conservation Area. This trail, also popular with mountain bikers and equestrians, undulates between a rocky ridge line and low-cliffs along the Colorado River. Along the trail we'll keep our eyes peeled for early-blooming cacti and perhaps even a collared lizard.

Lodging: Wine Country Inn – 2nd of 3 nights

Thu Apr 30 - Day 5

Monument Canyon Distance: 13 mi Difficulty: 5

On Day 1 we teased you with relatively short hikes in the southeast corner of Colorado National Monument. Today we hike right up the heart of this jewel on the Monument Canyon trail. Highlights of the day hike include Independence Rock, a towering monolith and eroded remnant of a ridge that once divided Monument and Wedding Canyons, the Kissing Couple, and the Coke Ovens.

Lodging: Wine Country Inn – 3rd of 3 nights

Fri May 1 - Day 6

Liberty Cap Distance: 5 mi Difficulty: 4

Our tour concludes with one more visit to Colorado National Monument. Today we make the ascent to Liberty Cap, an eroded sandstone dome set on a large slick-rock plateau. The view from the summit provides a fitting overview of the Monument, including the Colorado River to the north and Monument Canyon to the south and west. After our return to the trail head via the aptly named Corkscrew Trail, we'll enjoy a final meal together before saying our goodbyes back in Grand Junction.

3:00pm End of tour back in Grand Junction

Hotel Clarion Hotel – 1 night

Sat May 2

9:37am Depart Grand Junction GJT via Express Jet dba UA#4890

10:45am Arrive Denver for plane change

12:50pm Depart Denver DEN via UA#1573

6:43pm Arrive Newark EWR

Note: Depart May 5 to Tom's BBBBB

Participants

Bill Peters

Karen and Bill

Vi Hoeffler

Steve Krakaur

Carol Mueller

Annie Iriye

Bernie and Betsey