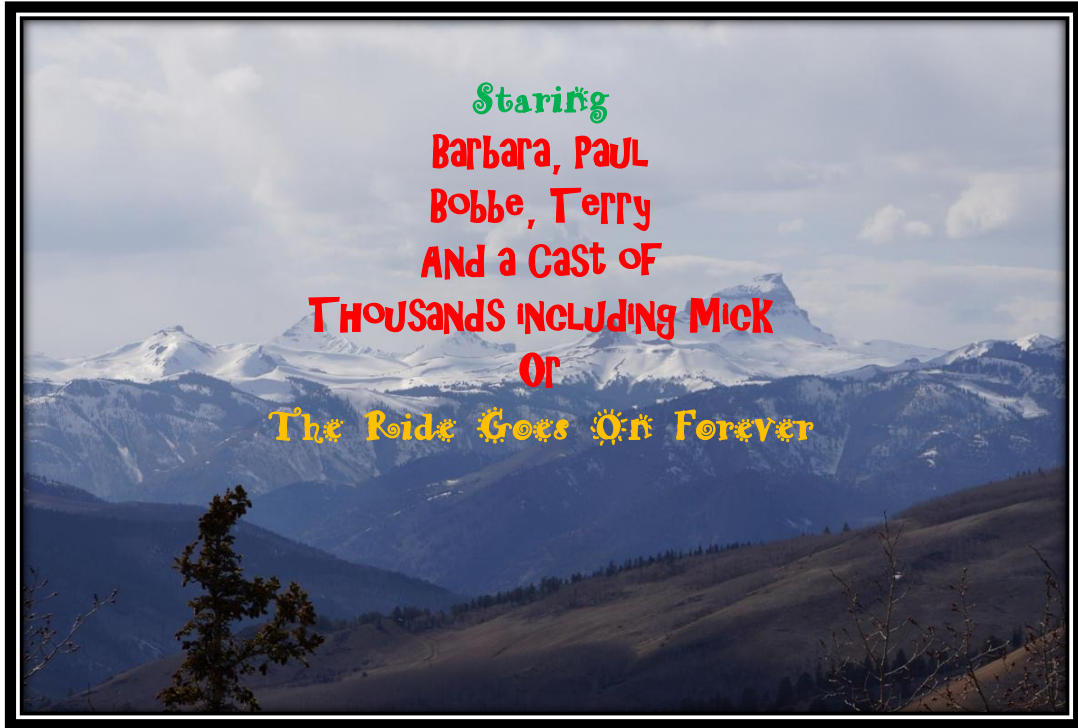


*Mother Nature Presents*  
*Springtime in the West*



Last year Barbara, Paul, Bobbe and I were going to take a nice ride up to Labrador and have a jolly old time. However, not all plans work out, and that was one of those. We all were disappointed but knew that there would be another time. After much planning, trips hither and yon, moving kids, jobs, etc. it worked out that we would get together in Denver the last of April and ride to Big Bend National Park via parts of Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. As a bonus, Mick would be joining us for a couple of days of the ride.

We were scheduled to leave on Monday the 21<sup>st</sup>. Barbara and Paul would ride down from Naperville and I would ride up from OKC. Bobbe had some chores she needed done so I rode up on Thursday, a nice part of being unemployed.



Along the way I stopped off at Raton to see the K-T boundary. Despite the letters, the K-T Boundary is the boundary between the Cretaceous and Tertiary geologic ages. The end of the Cretaceous is marked by a worldwide layer of Iridium laid down by the asteroid that ended the reign of the dinosaurs, among other things. Up a dirt road west of Raton you can actually walk up and put your finger on that layer. Way cool.



Other than that, it was the normal uneventful ride OKC to Denver. I did the chores. We got together with everyone, worked out plans and on Monday at the appointed time and with Chamber of Commerce weather we all headed south for breakfast at the Hungry Bear in Woodland Park. We have eaten there often and the food is always good. The Pot Store is a new addition however we all refrained and after a good meal loaded up and headed west along Highway 24.

The weather was clear, somewhat cool, but warming as we rode but there was still plenty of snow in the mountains. I had picked Highway 24 for a couple of reasons. One, it is very scenic, doesn't carry a lot of traffic, and by Colorado mountain pass standards is not all that high. One of the best parts of this section of the road is when you top Wilkerson Pass and get the view of South Park and the Collegiate Range. I have seen that many of times, and it always impresses and this time was no exception.

We were heading for Lake City and Creede so we had to ride over Monarch Pass which is a bit over 11,000'. As the photo shows, there was still plenty of snow there although it was not cold and the sky was beautiful. They were still digging this place out as it had only opened the preceding week end.



With no problems we rode though Gunnison and then picked up the road to Lake City. This is a very nice road. It is a secondary road, very scenic, curvy and carries very little

traffic. I remembered a very scenic pull out along this road. There is a very picturesque waterfall that I wanted to get a photo of. I thought it was before Lake City and guess what, it is not. Never the less, it was a very nice ride to Lake City where we gassed up, took a little break and then headed towards Creede over Slumgullion Pass.

While climbing up Slumgullion we pulled into a pull out and that is where we got the lead photo. I won't stick it in again, but like many things, photographs do not do that view justice. I checked my records and Bobbe and I had done this very same ride in May of 2009 and September of 2010 and the view was not nearly as spectacular.

As we rode along Bobbe and I were discussing the missing waterfall and my questionable sanity. Clearly it was not before Lake City and Bobbe was of the opinion that it was on a different trip over by Delta that we had seen the waterfall. I held out for a bit but as the miles wound down towards Creede I was coming to the same conclusion. And, then, there was the pull off. Oh happy days. Oh no, it was still closed due to snow. Oh well, at least my memory is still sort of working.

It was getting late so we elected to call it a day in South Fork. The pickings were a little slim but we checked into a clean motel with a nice restaurant next door and settled in for a good night's sleep.

We didn't get in a large hurry leaving in the morning. We wanted to let it warm up a bit as we were heading over Wolf Creek Pass, 10,850'.

The prudence turned out not to be necessary as it was a very nice ride across the pass, and the views both up and down were very nice as usual. The sliced off rock on left is one of Colorado's very own Half Dome, created the same way as the more famous one in Yosemite.



From Wolf Creek on down to Chama NM was a very nice ride with things getting greener the further south and lower we went.



We stopped for gas in Chama and had not been there 10 minutes when Mick pulled in. Talk about timing. As the photo shows, we drank some coffee and shot the bull for a bit and then headed south on Highway 84 towards the Ghost Ranch.

The Ghost Ranch is just a little north of Abiquiu. Back in the day, 1920s & 30s, it was an area of much interest to artists such as Georgia O'Keefe as well as others and it still is. Riding down the highway you can see why the artists like the area. There are all sorts of rock formations, colors and a beautiful blue sky with little if any pollution.



We stopped off at the Ranch, walked around a bit, took in a couple of small but nice museums and got directions to Chimayo.

There is a very old church in Chimayo and it turns out, a very nice restaurant. Dee Dee, Corbin, Kim, Cindy and I had visited the church back in the early 1980s and found it very interesting. People come from all over to get their physical ailments cured. At the time we were there it was remote, just the church and not much else.

Not so anymore. To say that it has been commercialized would be an understatement. We pulled in, took a quick look around, decided no, not this time, and headed south to Santa Fe and settled in for the night.

The



next morning we took the short ride down to the old town square, parked the bikes and became typical tourists. You can easily spend all of your money, and probably several others in the shops around the square. Nice stuff,

but pricy. We took in the Cathedral as well the Loretto Chapel. The chapel has a circular stairway that was built back in the late 1800s by someone who just showed up. It was built with no nails and after finishing it, the guy left and was never heard from again.

Bobbe was looking for, and found, the Nambe store. You talk about a good salesman. She went in just wanting to buy some polish and by the time she left, she had purchased 3-4 other items, enough she had to ship them home.

After a good look around as Barbara, Paul, Bobbe and I headed south Mick headed north as he had to get home. We had left the high mountains some miles back and now headed into the wide open spaces and found the place where they have wind, and this time, a cross wind.

When we pulled into Roswell Paul was getting a little low on fuel and we found out that we would miss the UFO Research Center as it closed at 5. It was a short ride south to Artesia where we made an interesting (sort of) discovery. Due to the oil and gas business, motel rooms are in short supply and what was available carried a hefty price tag. After a bit of fussing Bobbe and I wound up in one motel, with one bed and a hot tub, and Barbara and Paul across the street in another. On the plus side, we had a nice dinner at a local steakhouse.



The next morning we rode south through Carlsbad and further south to the Carlsbad Caverns where we toured the Big Room, always a nice stroll.

After the caverns, a meal and a gas stop we headed for Van Horn. Along the way we passed El Capitan, at left, which is an outcrop of the Guadalupe Mountains. It is also the

same reef formation in which Carlsbad Caverns were formed.

On the ride into Van Horn we were truly in the wide open spaces. From El Capitan south to Van Horn I doubt we passed half a dozen vehicles over 60+ miles. We were heading for Alpine as after the previous night we had called ahead for reservations. From Van Horn we did about 37 miles on I-20 and then turned south for Ft. Davis and Alpine on Highway 118 which has to be in the top 2 for motorcycle roads

in Texas. First off, the scenery is spectacular, the road goes up, down and around, and there is little traffic. The only downside for me was that it was a little rough in a few places. Paul got a workout getting the trike around the curves and up and down the hills. However, we all agreed that it was a very nice scenic road. Along the way we passed the McDonald Observatory. We would be coming back to it in a few days.

We made it to Alpine and found the motel with no problem. After checking in we went over to a quaint Mexican restaurant and from there rode out to see the famed "Marfa Lights" (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/lxm01>).

As I explained what the lights were, even the sensitive person, I got the impression that Barbara was somewhat of a skeptic. However, when we arrived at the location the lights were in full swing and easy to see. No colored ones this time but there they were for all to see. After viewing the lights for a while we headed back to the motel for the night to rest after a full day.

In the morning we headed over to Marfa. Along the way we stopped at the viewing location to look for an earring Bobbe had lost. No luck with the earring but Barbara did go for a daylight look at where the lights appear. She did agree that there appeared to be nothing out there that should cause the lights. I think she is still skeptical.

We gassed up in Marfa and then headed south towards Presidio. At Presidio we would pick up Highway 170 down to Terlingua, Study Butte and Big Bend National Park. Along the way Bobbe noticed some purple cactus and decided she wanted to take one home. She says she can get it to grow in Denver.

So, after gassing up we rode over to a grocery store so she could get a container to carry the proposed purloined specimen. We did collect one, but not on federal or state property. However, cactus is able to protect itself and collecting the specimen cost Bobbe a pair of gloves and a few stickers in the fingers.

That done we proceeded on down what is, in my never to be humble opinion, one of the top motorcycle roads in Texas or anywhere else for that matter. A large portion of Highway 170 runs through Big Bend Ranch State





Park, totally different than Big Bend National Park but is all worth a ride. I will admit it is desolate, but the road is a great ride and the scenes are not to be seen anywhere else.

This descendent of the dinosaurs was just hanging out looking for a quick snack.

We were unsure of the motel thing in the area and, based on an internet search, had made reservations at a

place about 15 miles north of Study Butte. In the e-mail updates I called it "unique", and it was. We rode up and checked in, it had a pool, and the rooms were clean. We all settled in and I rode back into town to do a load of laundry. I think kicking back under the AC was the tip as it was 97 degrees in Study Butte, slightly less at the motel. Not a temperature to be riding around if you are not used to it.

After the laundry and little rest we rode back into Terlingua to the restaurant where we had lunch. The sign outside said they had live entertainment. They did, and the food wasn't bad. They also had a patio where we watched the sun sink over Big Bend and listen to four folks have a jam session.



This photo is of the view we had from the patio. The play of the fading light on the mountains and plants was way cool. We rode on back to the motel and ended the day sitting around the pool watching the bats catching their evening meal of flying insects. My only complaint was that they had a big

light by the edge of the motel and it cut down on the stars but not by much, there were still a whole bunch.



We rode into Study Butte for breakfast and then into the Park where once again the best \$10 I ever spent got us in for free. The speed limit in the Park is 45 mph so you are not going to make any time, but why would you want to? We rode a long way to get here so we took our time and looked around.

One thing was very obvious. It had

rained fairly recently and all of the desert plants were getting with the program. If you have not seen cactus flowers you would be very impressed with their beauty. This is one of the purple cactus similar to the one someone in our group purloined. I hope that one has as pretty flowers as this one.



Anyway, once into the

Park we rode over to Castolon and Santa Elena Canyon, always a favorite ride. The



views are great and even though you go back the same way it is still interesting. We gassed up at Panther Junction and then rode up into the Chisos Mountain Basin and had a very nice lunch at the Lodge Restaurant.

This is the view from the Restaurant. The Chisos Mountains are actually



the remains of a volcano and the lodge is inside the caldera or crater. That V shape is where the volcano blew out the rim. The volcano, hopefully, is extinct.

After a very nice lunch we headed over to the visitor's center for a look around. And, of course stopping for photos every opportunity we got. Do this and you are thankful for the low speed limit.



After a look through the visitor's center we headed north towards Marathon, just a hop, skip and a jump down the road. In this part of the country 90 miles is a hop, skip and



jump. It was not as warm as the day before, but it was in the 90s so we elected to stop for a cool beverage in the Gage Hotel in Marathon at the 12 Gage Bar. The Gage is one of several very nice hotels in the area which were built back in the late 1800s by and for the Cattle Barons.

We sat outside in the covered patio area. This little fellow lived in the light sconce and did his bit to take care of any bugs the bats did not get.

Thirst quenched we mounted up and rode back to Alpine, kicked back a bit and then went to the Hoover Hotel, the Cattle Baron's Hotel in Alpine, for a very nice meal. An end of trip meal of sorts as the next day Barbara and Paul would head east and Bobbe and I would head north.

But, before the split happened we would be going on a tour of the McDonald Observatory. We were booked on the 11:00 tour and it is about 40 or so miles from Alpine so we got to sleep in. The ride up was very nice. The wind was not blowing hard, but that would be taken care of later. We arrived in plenty of time and got a little intro and then a tour of the 107 inch telescope.



And, this is what it looks like. Barbara and Bobbe both got to push buttons to make it do things. However, we didn't get to look through it.

By now, the wind had picked up. We stopped for a nice lunch in Balmorhea and that was about the end of the nice ride. From Balmorhea to Pecos we had a strong cross wind with blowing dust and all sorts of not so nice stuff. At Pecos we fueled up and shook and hugged our goodbyes. For the rest of the day Barbara and Paul would, mostly, have a tail wind. Not so Bobbe and I, we continued with the strong crosswind. We called it a day in Carlsbad and found the hotel merchants were still sticking it to the oil business as well as everyone else.

Once checked in to the motel I walk over to Wal Mart for a couple of bottles of wine and later we walked over to IHOP for dinner. My meal was OK but Bobbe had an experience. She ordered a BLT and when it came it had the B&L but no T. Both the waitress (Sarah) and the manager stated they had chopped tomatoes but not sliced tomatoes and seemed surprised that we thought they should have mentioned that when Bobbe ordered. Sarah's tip suffered.

What we didn't realize was that the crosswind into Carlsbad was just a warm up. As we left Carlsbad, not only did we have a very strong cross/head wind, it was very cool. But when necessary Bobbe and I can make time and we did. Not to say we didn't look around, we did. We found an interesting restaurant in Las Vegas. It seems the Northern New Mexico idea of a Chalupa is quite a bit different that what I am used to: still good just different.

The wind had not slackened and it was looking like it could rain and or snow anytime. We stopped for fuel in Colorado City and climbed into the electric gear and it felt good.

From there we made it to Littleton as forecast. The house was in one piece and the dogs were glad to see Bobbe. We unloaded the bike and went to bed early. Fighting that wind all day will take a tole.

I waited for the traffic to clear before I left for OKC. High wind was forecast and I thought I would get gone before that happened. The part from Littleton to Raton was a snap with a strong tail wind. From Raton to Clayton was not too bad but the dirt was kicking up. Clayton to Hartley again was a snap with a strong tail wind. After turning east at Hartley I quickly decided Dumas was where I was stopping. The crosswind was



at least 40 and with gusts to who knows. However, the real problem was blowing dust. It would drop visibility from  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to 0 right now. Not fun. I checked in and called it good. The whole bike was at least this dusty as was the inside of my visor.

I left Dumas at 6:30 the next morning and was in OKC by 11:00. I let no grass grow and made it before the wind got real bad.

So we end another ride. Like all, it had good points and bad with mostly good. I am glad Barbara and Paul came along. It is always enjoyable to share things you like, and for sure, I do like that part of the country, winds and all. From OKC to OKC was a little over 3800 miles with no problems worth mentioning. This Goldwing is proving just as capable as the black one.

Now to get to work planning the next ride.

*NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST*

