

Desert Trip May 2008

I write on the eve of our return to Missoula from a trip to the southwest desert of the Four Corners Region. We started on Sunday, May 11, and reached our destination of Los Alamos, New Mexico after two long days, and 1250 miles, of driving. On the way down, we stayed the first night in Moab, Utah, and hiked up to Delicate Arch in Arches National Park. On the next day, we pushed on to Los Alamos, stopping along the way at Mesa Verde, Colorado to see the famed Anasazi ruins there. Although the ruins are truly amazing, I have seen pictures of them so many times and found the place to be so touristy that I was left uninspired by the visit.

I had meetings at the Los Alamos National Lab on Tuesday and Wednesday. During those days, Jen and the kids toured the town of Los Alamos (where the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were developed) and Santa Fe, which is just 30 miles away and whose art galleries and art were an inspiration to Jen. Los Alamos is beautifully located, and I met some nice people (and hopefully future collaborators) at the lab. We all enjoyed our two days in the Los Alamos area.

On Thursday morning we woke early and drove seven hours to the Needles District Visitor Center in Canyonlands National Park (70 miles southwest of Moab). There we picked up our permit for a three night backpack. The ensuing 3½ days were the highlight of the trip. The kids absolutely loved it. The Needles District is great for kids because you can reach a back country camp after only a short hike and have a great deal to explore and discover without much walking. (The only downside is that water is scarce.) We had great camp sites, great discoveries hiking up out of Elephant Canyon and searching for the myriad and little-visited slot canyons, and our last night's site at Chesler Park was as beautiful as they come. In fact, it's hard to imagine a more beautiful place than Canyonlands' Needles District.

On Sunday, May 18, we hiked out and began our drive back to Montana, stopping in Pocatello, Idaho for a night along the way. It was a great vacation.

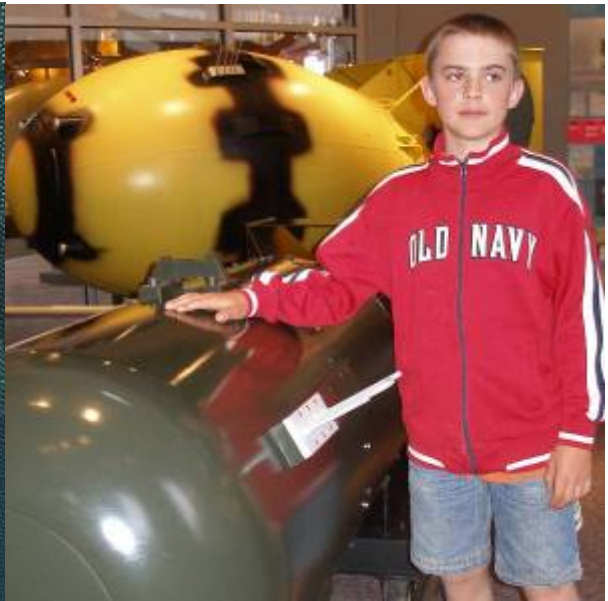
A Historical Note: Jen first took me to Moab when we were 18 and 19 years old (almost exactly 15 years ago), respectively. She had been there a number of times before during her high school years in Salt Lake City. After many trips to that area since then (mountain biking, climbing, and backpacking) the place has a hold on me. I just love it there, and after a multi-year hiatus, it felt so good to be back. Since the kids now love it too, I'm already planning next year's trip.



The kids and Delicate Arch in Arches National Park with the La Salle Mountains beyond.



Ellie at Mesa Verde



Ellie at the Santa Fe Children's Museum, and Alex at the Los Alamos Museum with a replica of the Nagasaki nuke.



Elephant Canyon 1 (EC1) backcountry camp site, where we stayed for two nights.



Jen and the kids hiking in and exploring a slot canyon later that night.



The La Salle Mountains (again) from a perch above our EC1 camp.



Exploring near EC1 on Day 2.



Our Chesler Park camp site (CP2) on the third night.



And the view from camp: to the South,



to the West over Chesler Park and the Maze District of Canyonlands,



to the North



to the East,



and finally, to the West over the Chesler Park and the Maze the next morning.



On the hike out the last day.