

THE BIG CENTENNIAL TRIP

by Fred Hobbs

By the age of 44, I could probably have been called “a travelin’ man.” I had been sent overseas to Berlin, Germany for my military service and took in Paris, London, Rome and the Rhineland on leaves. Our whole family had traveled together to such “exotic” locations as Disneyland and Yellowstone. My wife and I had taken a couple of cruises, one to the Scandinavian countries and another to the Caribbean.

None of us, however, at that time had seen the most famous and popular of tourist destinations right here in Colorado. And, I was a native son!

Consequently, in 1976, we all agreed on a family vacation to celebrate Colorado’s centennial and the nation’s bi-centennial by visiting these world- renowned spots. So, we packed up our fading red “69 Volkswagen bus and headed out on our two-week journey.

We visited Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserves, 35 miles northeast of Alamosa in the San Luis Valley country. The park contains 30 square miles of the tallest dunes in North America along with adjacent forestland, tundra and views of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. The summertime air temperature was relatively mild. Our daughter, ten years old at the time decided to romp on the gigantic sand pile in her bare feet. She had walked just a couple of yards when she screamed, “Daddy, help me, my feet are burning.” Obviously the sand was several degrees hotter than the air.

I rushed over and whisked her up and carried her back by the car. Just a little redness, but no serious burns on her feet. She was careful to keep her shoes on the rest of the trip!

In Durango, we boarded the famous narrow gage train to Silverton (9,318 feet in elevation) featuring not only the charm of the historic ride, but views of some of the most beautiful sites in Colorado.

We enjoyed a special “one time ever” treat in the town of Mancos. We arrived there on August 1, Colorado Day, celebrating entry into the United States on that date in 1876. The townsfolk held a picnic and parade celebration. Somehow, the fried chicken, potato salad and real homemade lemonade prepared by ladies of the small southwestern Colorado town, tasted the best we’d ever experienced.

We also witnessed a slightly humorous, but in reality very sad, spectacle while watching Mancos’ Colorado Day parade. The “princess” of the parade was a pretty, blonde, blue eyed little girl, perhaps about eight or nine years old, wearing a pink party dress and a shiny plastic tiara. Watching her from the curb was a line of kids from the nearby Ute Mountain Ute reservation whose poverty status was plainly apparent by their ragged clothes and bare feet. Somehow, the scene didn’t gibe with a true meaning of the celebration of America’s one hundred years of independence and our state’s birth.

We capped off the trip with our first visit to nearby Mesa Verde, wondering if those ancient peoples, the Anasazis, with their cliff dwellings and pottery creations, ever had celebrated an anniversary of their nation, held a parade or crowned a princess.