

Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway

Trip taken on June 20, 2004 -- "We traveled portions of the Dinosaur Diamond on our travels out west in May 2004. We had just spent a week in Moab, UT and were driving up to Dinosaur National Monument along Highway 128, to I-70, to Highway 139 and Highway 64 to Vernal, UT.

Highway 128 was beautiful as we skirted along the edge of Arches National Park. While staying in Moab we explored some of the sites there, including Fisher Towers and the Dewey Bridge area. As Easterners, we spent most of the trip in awe of the amazing rock formations throughout the southwest. In Georgia we see plenty of red dirt, but none of it so grandly arrayed or brilliantly sculpted. We hiked part of the Fisher Towers trail with our small children; the heat of approaching mid-day and our kids' weariness prevented us from hiking the entire trail. Nonetheless it was a great family outing - the kids got to clamber over rocks and chase after giant (well, giant to us) lizards. We spied for jackrabbits and ground squirrels, desert wildflowers and ravens. I was constantly amazed to see beautiful green junipers and wild daisies growing straight out of sand and rocks, with no apparent explanation for them to exist, let alone thrive, in the hot, stark, arid land.

We picnicked later at a spot on the Colorado River near Dewey Bridge, just a little further east on 128. My husband and son enjoyed splashing their feet in the refreshing, cool, fast moving river. We were struck by the contrast of the shady, cool picnic spot to the rocky, dry cliffs and gullies we'd just left.

Later in the week, when we left Moab we continued on the Diamond through Colorado, climbing up to over 8000 feet at Douglas Pass - again, nearly as different from our desert sojourns as could be. Here there were grassy meadows grazed by open range cattle, occasionally competing with the traffic for use of the road. The road itself was steep and winding, making our passage tricky as we were pulling our camper along with us. But the view from the summit was amazing.

We arrived to make Vernal our base camp for exploring Dinosaur National Monument, which was truly as fascinating outside the quarry as inside. The kids loved the huge rock wall of fossils in the quarry, a site so completely filled with fossils that you are tempted to think "this can't be real, there are just too many;" but of course that is the whole point - it is real. Our kids enjoyed the dinosaur programs and paleontological exhibits; the adults enjoyed the driving tour through the monument, the ancient petroglyphs, and the views of Split Mountain and the Green River.

Probably the best kid-friendly part of this adventure was in the Uintah Field House of Natural History State Park. Here were hands-on exhibits showing how paleontologists dig for fossils, assemble them and learn from them. And the life-sized dinosaurs on the museum grounds were a big hit with the kids, too."

-- "Liss", Georgia
Submitted on July 1, 2004