

The MIDWEST in 2016



EXPLORING



In 2011 we took the trip of a lifetime to Colorado and the Southwest. We were gone for five weeks, and we returned home with enthusiasm and good health. The enthusiasm remained, but other issues began to impact our lives. We were able to take vacations "closer to home" in New England and the Maritime Provinces; but the question remained - are we up to driving out West for a three+ week road trip?

We hesitated, planned, hesitated again and finally in the summer we decided to GO! Jim started making important reservations.... in Estes Park and Grand Lake, Colorado... in the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone. Once that was done we were committed!

We almost always take our vacations in the fall. The weather in September and early October is generally very good, and the summer vacationers have disappeared. This year we were especially fortunate because the autumn color in the midwest was early and at its peak. It was really cold for a few days, and we were glad we had packed our down coats. *(The one negative to autumn travel is the problem of ever-shortening days.)*

This book proves that we DID IT! We survived the long car rides and unknown beds. *(When all is said and done - where do we go on our next trip?)*



Ready to go on the road... September 13, 2016



We were only in Indiana, but our second night's stop was a prelude to middle America. Our motel was in an unfinished "big box store" shopping center; out the door of the motel was this scene of farmland with its vintage billboard.



These are some of the sights off Interstate 80 on the way to Colorado.







This roadside sculpture appeared as we neared the mountains of Colorado.









As we neared Estes Park, Colorado we had to drive through this stretch of narrow, dark canyon. When we came out the other side these Big Horn Sheep appeared next to the road; a greeting to us as we neared our destination.









Our cabin was on the Falls River. We could relax by the river with a scotch, some olives and cheese, but be in Rocky Mountain National Park a short time later.





On our first evening in Colorado we explored a nearby valley. There were numerous people lined up looking for “evening” wildlife at the area called “Sheep Lakes.” We moved on near the entrance to the Fall River Road... and had our own private view of a beautiful buck walking across the quiet field.



We returned to Sheep Lakes in time to see a very impressive sunset.







At the Alluvial Fan all of the rocks and soil were moved around during the 2013 flood. This small area looks more like a desert than the Rockies.

The Old Fall River Road was built in 1920, and was the only road across Rocky Mountain National Park when it was created. It is now a one-way dirt road that leaves from the eastern side; it ends at the Fall River Pass (11,796') and Alpine Visitor Center (on the Trail Ridge Road).

We drove across this bumpy, dusty road in 2011 on a day that was mostly overcast. Our experience at the Eastern end of the road was nonexistent. The sun came out as we drove to the summit, and we were able to take amazing photographs.

In between 2011 and 2016 some really destructive floods did great damage in areas of the Rocky Mountains; the Old Fall River Road was one of the places that had to be shut down. It was finally reopened, and we were again able to experience some of the back-country world of the Rockies.

This time the weather was gorgeous and we lingered in the lower areas of the drive. Our first stop was the Alluvial Fan (greatly changed after the 2013 flood). Then we stopped at the "Endovalley" area where the paved road ends and the dirt road begins. Beyond that we stopped at Chasm Falls on the Fall River. (From then on it was hair-pin turns and views.)









The area known as the Endovalley is really a Rocky Mountain picnic area. It is located near the Fall River. It is at the end of the two-way paved road and the entrance to the one-way dirt section of the Old Fall River Road. It was a sunny, colorful and warm autumn Saturday; everyone within 100 miles had decided to experience it in the Park. Many of them were picnicking and hiking in this easily accessible part of Rocky Mountain. We stopped and ate our granola bar, but we were here to experience the “real” Old Fall River Road (*in all of its one-way splendor*).



Dirt road from here on...

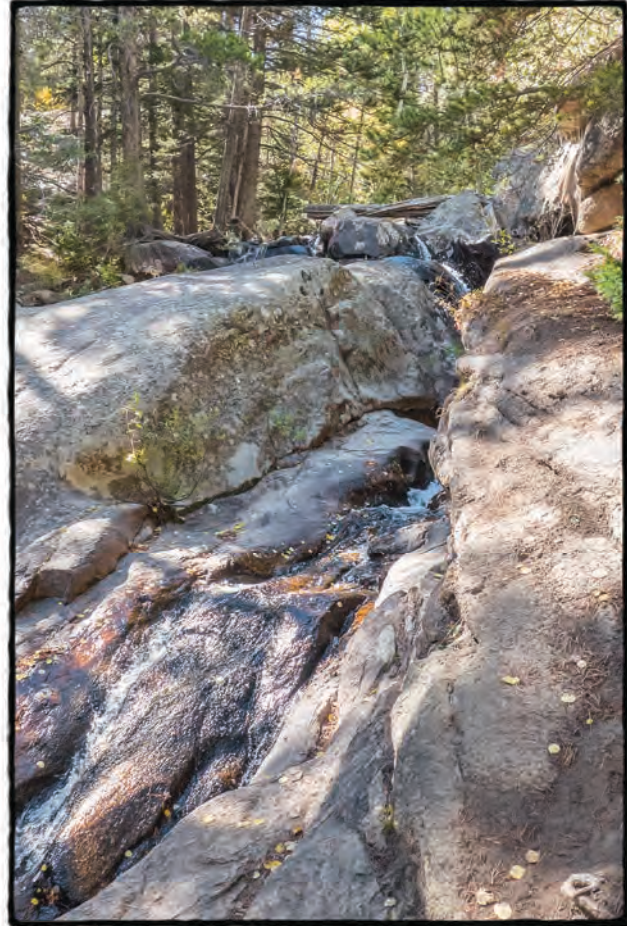




One of many hair-pin turns.







The Chasm Falls on the Fall River were new to us. We had ignored this side stop in 2011. Fortunately most of the people at Endovalley chose to NOT make this drive, so it wasn't crowded when we stopped at the falls. We were glad to note that the "Fall" River had a reason for its name.









Back to the dirt road and UP!





The mountains in most of the Rockies are covered with vast areas of evergreen trees. But, scattered throughout the dark green is the brilliant gold of the aspens.



This hair-pin curve has been recently fortified so that the road doesn't wash out in heavy rain storms.







This is a place we remembered from our last trip. The ground cover had turned a bright autumn red amidst the subalpine forests of spruce and fir trees.





A view of our destination - the treeless tundra of the high Rocky Mountains.





Nearing the end of the road - and finally above the tree line.







From here we can look up at the Alpine Visitor Center. This was (and still is) one of the magical places that we have seen on our travels over the years. We could fill a book with the exceptional photographs that we have taken here. This place was why Jim was willing to dodge deep pot holes on the hairpin curves of the Old Fall River Road. Even though the new road is just a little further up, there is no way down (unless you want to walk).













A view down the road (with an approaching car); and a view of the valley where we had just travelled. Though the first official road was built in 1920, this “trail” had been used by the Native Americans and early settlers for centuries (one of the few ways to cross the northern Rocky Mountains).



Marcia is standing at the crest of the Old Fall River Road as another vehicle comes across "the finish line." It is hard to imagine what this trip must have been like when the traffic was two-way. That ended in 1932 when the wider and straighter Trail Ridge Road was built.



The first view of the Alpine Visitor Center as you leave the Old Fall River Road.







A trail at Medicine Bow Curve on the Trail Ridge Road near the Alpine Visitor Center.





Views of the Rocky Mountains from the Trail Ridge Road.



Trail Ridge Road - September 19, 2016





On September 16, 2011 we drove across the Trail Ridge Road, which had been closed on the 15th because of snow. The snow made a great difference in the photographs that we took.



Trail Ridge Road - 2011











The Trail Ridge Road





Viewing the West Horseshoe Park from the Trail Ridge Road.











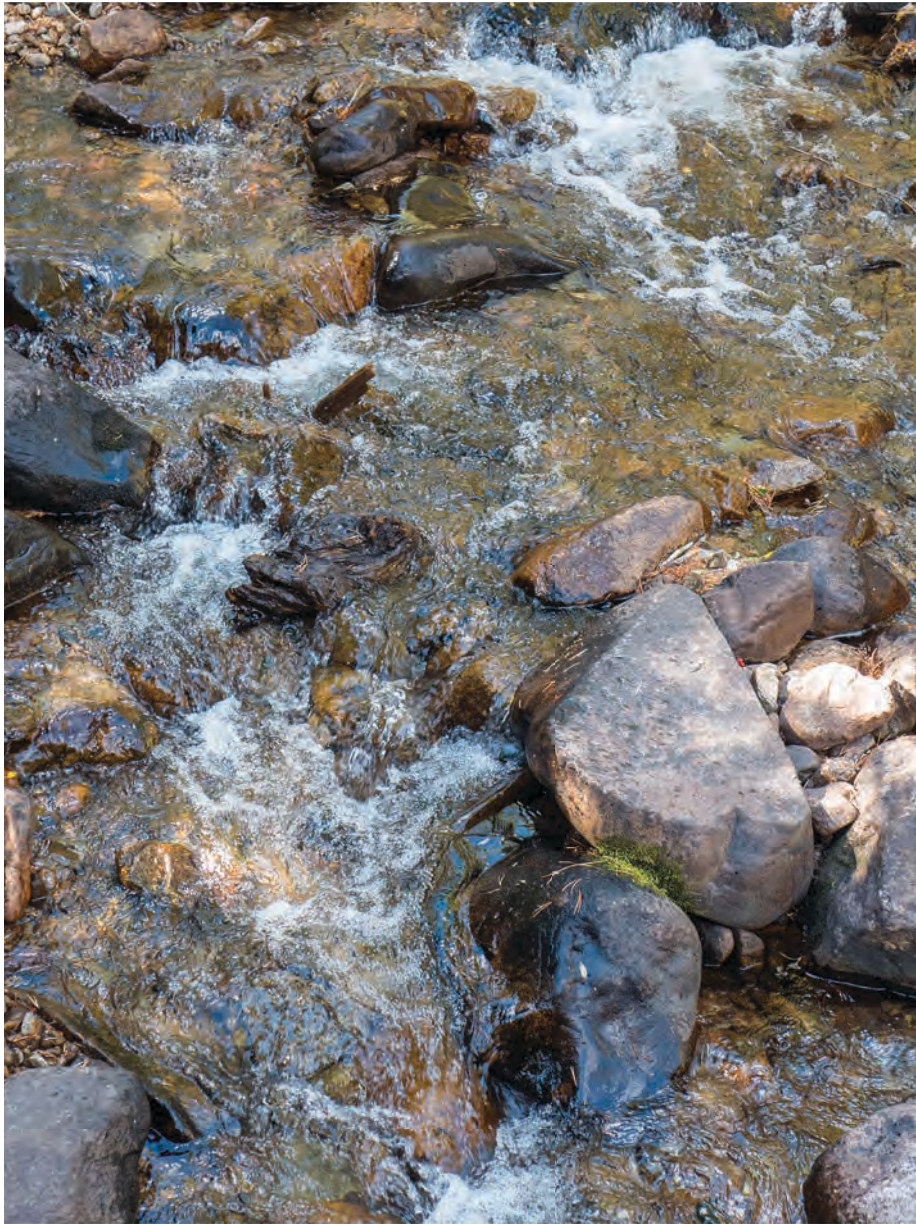
The next day we headed south towards a section of Rocky Mountain National Park that we had never visited. Our destination was Bear Lake, but there would be other interesting stops along the way.







A view of young hikers on one of the several short treks we enjoyed, this time along a mountain stream. The hikers were coming from a much more difficult part of the trail.











Bear Lake was our destination and we had a gorgeous day to hike the trail around the lake.



We were not the only ones taking photographs.



There were steep rock cliffs along sections of the trail.







Bear Lake is a beautiful mountain lake, especially with colorful autumn reflections.





Sprague Lake is not as spectacular as Bear Lake, but it was still a very beautiful place.









We drove to the southern limits of the park and visited the Long's Peak trail head. The sign on the building said that we were at an elevation of 9,405' and the hikers had much further to go. We were reaching into the limits of the park that excluded us, but is embraced by the young and fit.



Back to Estes Park and the end of our stay on the Eastern side of Rocky Mountain National Park.



Over the Trail Ridge Road -again - and on to Grand Lake on the western side of the park.







The Kawuneeche Valley runs along the western side of the park and is a very different world from the mountains that surround it. We stayed on this side in 2011 and loved it, which is why we returned for three more days.





Welcome To



Est. 1881



In 2011 we stayed at the Rapids Lodge in Grand Lake, Colorado. We loved the location on a tumbling mountain stream, and near the entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. It was inexpensive considering the very up-to-date condos. So we decided to stay there again. The price was the same (*5 years later*), but this time we were at the opposite end of the complex. Our stay here lasted for three luxurious nights.

It is amazing how different Grand Lake is from Estes Park. It is a slowmoving, lazy town with a miniscule grocery store and no doctors. Somewhere those exist, but at a distance in the vast wilderness of this part of Colorado. On the other hand, Estes Park is a popular tourist heaven not that far north of Denver. We love Grand Lake.

The Kawuneeche Valley is an equally low key part of the Rockies. There is not much to do here except walk trails across the fields, watch birds and other wildlife and enjoy the scenery. And, of course, there is one very important part of the valley that can't be ignored. The headwaters of the (*eventually huge*) Colorado River run through the valley.





At one time the valley was farmed.







The Colorado River prior to the Grand Canyon.







The beginning of the Colorado River.









One of our favorite stops in the valley was Beaver Ponds. This is how one of the ponds looked on September 20, 2016 with an overcast sky.





Here is how the same Beaver Pond looked in on September 14, 2011. There seems to be a lot more green.



This area of the valley had been enhanced since our last visit with nice trails leading out into the valley.







It was finally farewell to the Rockies; on to our next destination - Grand Teton National Park. This required a long day's drive, but we had to travel through some interesting country before arriving in northern Wyoming.







We drove to Wyoming and the Tetons by roads that were entirely empty of cars for much of the trip. The country that we went through was also empty of people. "Six-house" communities and scattered ranches were the norm. Cows in the road were not unusual, and when we did come to towns they didn't appear to be too prosperous. This was truly the "forgotten" (*leave me alone*) middle America.

For us, choosing this drive through northern Colorado and Wyoming was one of the better decisions we made in planning our vacation. (Taking a road trip is all about seeing the real country that we live in - not just skirting it on the interstate highways.)

We had been in the Tetons twice before. The first time was 1986 with Sarah and Rachael; we stayed in Yellowstone and made the Tetons a day trip. The second time we flew into Jackson, picked up our rental car and went north towards our lodging at Jackson Lake.

This time we approached the area on the Wyoming Centennial Scenic Byway. It was entirely new to us and a truly spectacular way to arrive in the Grand Teton National Park.









Views from the Wyoming Centennial Scenic Highway were spectacular. There was color everywhere. We will not forget, though, that it was a cold and very windy day.









We must never forget that this land was held in trust by the native Indian tribes before we ever knew it existed.





A first view of the Tetons.



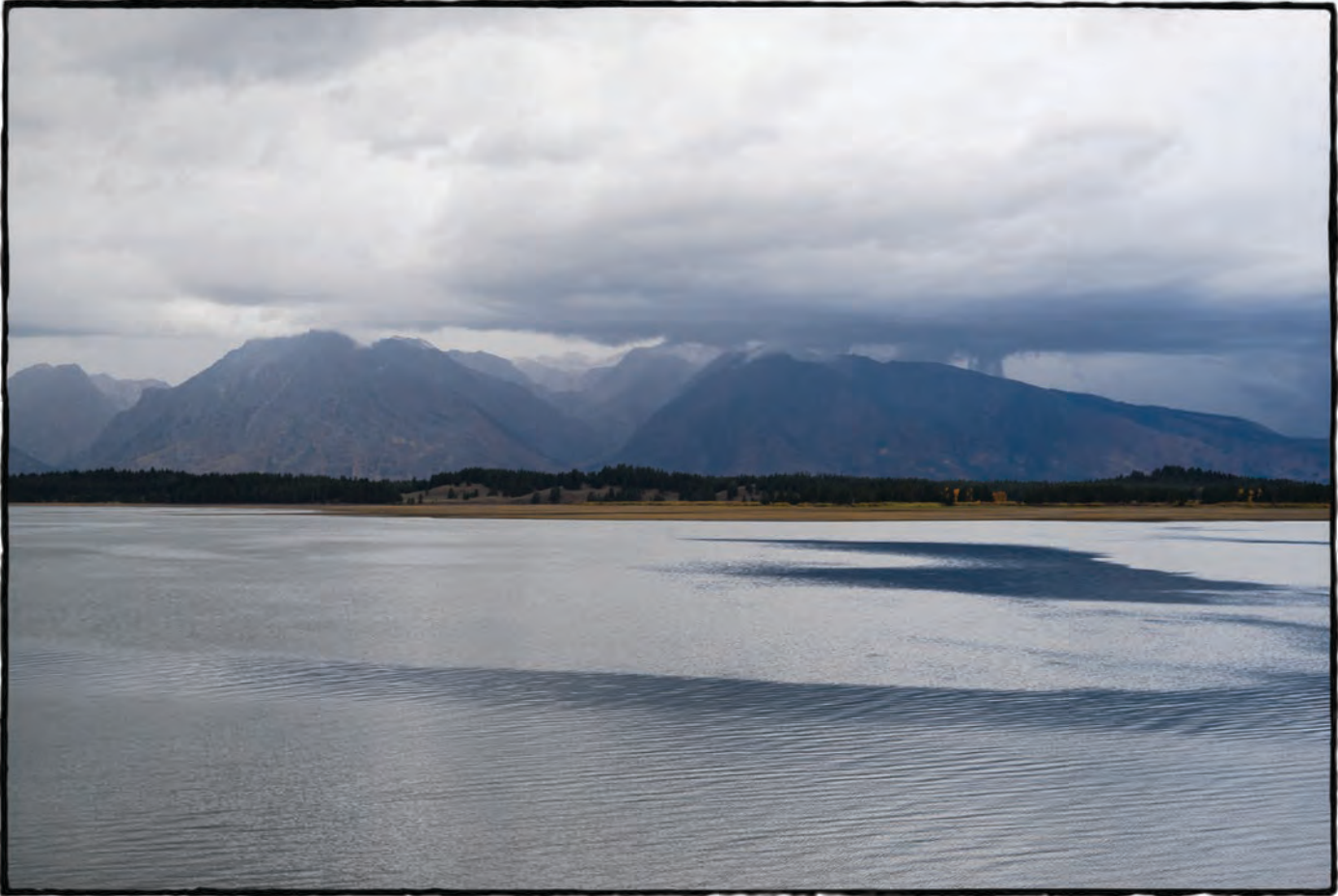






On our first evening in the Tetons the weather was in turmoil, giving us interesting photographs.







Jackson Lake under a stormy sky that soon turned to rain.



We stayed at the Jackson Lake Lodge. The last time our room overlooked Willow Flats and the mountains, This time our room was on the opposite side of the complex and overlooked a pleasant field. We had our dinner at the main lodge (*take-out one night*), and even had a trout breakfast one morning.

After a night of rain we woke up to a brilliant morning. The sky was filled with massive, rolling clouds. Our first stop that morning was in the *Willow Flats* area surrounding Jackson Lake. This ecology is a haven for wildlife (*we didn't see a single elk or moose*). Location and weather helped us shoot some of the most interesting photographs of our vacation.

We drove south along the Snake River and headed towards areas of the Grand Teton National Park that we had never visited. The first place was the *Cunningham Cabin*, where one of the early settlers lived. This certainly was primitive living, but gorgeous scenery. Then on to *Morman Row*, where the buildings are less primitive, but still have a lot of charm. (*The barn at Morman Row has become a symbol for the whole Teton area.*)





September 24, 2004



September 23, 2016







Willow flats with the mountains as a backdrop.













A view of the cloud covered mountains from the Snake River.



Entrance to the Cunningham Cabin Historic Site.



The Cunningham Cabin - imagine living here.









Pink farm house on Mormon Row.









This famous barn with the Grand Tetons in the background has become a symbol for the entire area.



From Mormon Row we drove closer to the mountains and the lakes of the park.





September 23, 2016



A view towards the Tetons taken on September 24, 2004.







String Lake connects Jenny Lake to Leigh Lake. This is an area we loved on our previous visit.





We again walked the trail along String Lake.





September 24, 2004



September 23, 2016







The mountains started to cloud over and our nice day began to disappear. Fortunately the rain held off during our hike along the lake.







Jim peering through the trees on our jaunt along String Lake.













For some reason we never take good pictures at Jenny Lake. By this time we were on the verge of rain.





A view of the Snake River from Cattleman's Bridge, where fishermen have good access to the river.



The next morning we woke to cold and snow in the mountains as we departed from Grand Teton National Park - drove up the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway - and arrived in Yellowstone National Park. But that's the next book.



On to Yellowstone....

EXPLORING - The Midwest in 2016 Book I

Photographs by Marcia & Jim Weikert



Designed using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom



I was not making books when we took our last big trip out west in 2011. Now that I am making books I realize that we have a purpose for many of our photographs that would previously have been ignored. I also realize that it is essential to “tell a story” with our books. This has led us to taking photographs “out the window of the car” in order to show the areas that we have traveled through on our way to reaching the great destinations of our trip. There is a limit to the size of our books, and we decided that this trip (like our 2011 trip) deserved two books. This book covers Rocky Mountain National Park and Grand Teton National Park. The next book will cover the conclusion of our 2016 road trip.