

Cruising Route 789: My First CHVA National Tour

My first CHVA national tour started early on a warm, sunny Saturday morning in northern California at the home of my parents, Joe and Cindy Kelman. The '69 Mustang was carefully packed with luggage, snacks, and whatever spare parts my dad thought we might need. After a quick picture and hug from my dad, Mom and I were off.

We started on Highway 44 through Lassen National Forest on our way to Winnemucca, NV, where we would be meeting with the caravan from the Redwood Region. That first day, I realized just how much we stood out, and not just because of the bright yellow paint. People waved as we cruised through small towns, asked us questions when we stopped for food or gas. Mom was always happy to answer and chat with anyone, but for those who know Cindy Kelman, this won't come as a surprise. She's the definition of friendly and helpful.

The next morning, we finally met up with the Redwood Region. Half of that little cafe was mobbed by friendly people wearing shirts of tours and car shows past, some of whom I knew already, most I didn't. I was introduced around, everyone cheerfully introduced themselves, and I promptly forgot all of their names. I'll take this moment to apologize to everyone I met on tour; I am *terrible* with names.

On our way to Pocatello, Idaho, Mom and I broke off from the group after lunch. The speed limit became 80 mph, I was in an old school muscle car, and my mom was handing me the keys. As I got behind the wheel, though, my brain helpfully reminded me that this Mustang had been in my family since my grandmother drove it off the lot in 1968. My father bought it from her when he got his license and has had it ever since. Panic immediately set in.

After a few deep breaths, the anxiety was overcome by the excitement, and off we went. We looked for interesting things to do and see from the highway as I had never travelled to this part of the country. Fun fact we discovered along the way: Battle Mountain, NV, has never seen an actual battle. We hoped Massacre Rocks in Idaho was a similar misnomer; neither of us wanted to break that illusion by checking.

Kemerrer, Wyoming, had a surprise waiting for us as we stopped in for lunch. We had run into the Redwood Region again! Completely unplanned, we cruised through town, and noticed our friends congregating in a supermarket parking lot. We struggled to find a restaurant that was open and large enough to accommodate a group as large as us in a town that clearly rolled up the sidewalks on holiday weekends. A taco chain that barely had enough tables for us was our only hope.

After lunch, Mom and I hung around the town a little longer, exploring what few shops were open. We walked by the first J.C. Penney store, but the shop that caught my eye had a velociraptor on the corner. One of the stops I was most excited for on tour was the Wyoming Dinosaur Center - of course, I was immediately intrigued. After a quick selfie with the dinosaur statue that was taller than I was, we ducked into a wonderland of gems and fossils. The shop that looked so tiny out front was huge, and filled wall to wall with every rock you could imagine. It took no small amount of effort not to blow all my spending money before we even got on tour. My six year old nephew was thrilled with the new additions to his rock collection, though.

Not all was perfect as we made our way to Wyoming. We noticed a whine starting to get louder and louder. It was the fuel pump, the same part that stopped working as Mom and her

friend came home from the last tour to Utah. Our mechanic, my brother-in-law Jon, had checked it before we left. But that was one of the spare parts Dad had sent us with, so I wasn't too worried.

We made it to Riverton, Wyoming, without issue, but the fuel pump was only getting louder. Jerry Gorley listened to it for a few minutes before confirming for us that it was, in fact, the fuel pump (thanks for your help, Jerry!). Mom and I tried to contact a mechanic, but on Labor Day, we weren't having much luck. After calling a few places, it suddenly occurred to us that we should ask someone who lived in town! One of our phenomenal tour leaders, Ken Watts, was completely prepared and ready to help us out. He set us up with an appointment that afternoon, and gave us a ride to boot. Thanks again, Ken!

The Wind River Hotel and Casino was jumping when we arrived. During check-in, I spotted a neat-looking gift shop that was closed at that time and a small museum dedicated to the Arapahoe tribe. I was introduced to plenty more people, and someday, I might remember all of their names.

Finally, the tour begins! Our first stop on Wednesday, Sept. 4th, was Red Canyon, a gorgeous overlook that was as colorful as the name implies. As everyone oohed and ahed over the pretty vista, Dick Hudson provided historical commentary that provided context to the trails I noticed only once he pointed them out.

He did the same for the Pioneer Trail overlook we travelled to next. He even pointed out the cabin his family had once lived in! We were getting an in-depth look at history from someone who grew up with it. For those familiar with Joe Kelman, I got my love of history from him, so this was a real treat.

Some tour members will gladly tell you what happened that morning as my mother quickly pulled off to the side of the road as we dealt with a dangerous hitch-hiker. They'll probably laugh as they tell you how we quickly jumped out, and Mom immediately bent into the back seat to kill that evil wasp. They'll probably tell you we looked ridiculous.

Unfortunately, they would be telling the truth.

For those of you who pulled over with us to make sure we were all right (and weren't having trouble with that blasted fuel pump), thank you!

For those of you who took pictures of me freaking out while my mom killed the wasp, can you delete those, please?

After that was South Pass City. When someone says the word "city," it brings certain images to mind - and South Pass City did its best to dissuade us from that line of thought before we even arrived. The gravel road we slowly crept upon had my mother and I frowning at the dirt building up on our yellow paint (we had just washed it!), but South Pass "City" made us laugh as we pulled up. As we pulled into the well-preserved old mining town, a sign cheerfully informed us of the population of the "city": about 4 people, around 3 cats, approximately 3 dogs. I don't have a picture of the sign, so that wording is about as approximately accurate as their population.

We had a lovely picnic lunch as I got to know more club members, then it was time to start exploring the town. So many artifacts in so many historical buildings - I doubt my descriptions could do it justice. Next was a photo with the Mustang in front of the old buildings.

What a crazy juxtaposition! Our old Mustang, in front of a town that made it seem modern and futuristic.

Our club wasn't the only visitor the town had that day - I'm sure the handful of people who also visited that day were surprised to see it so packed!

The day ended with a tour of the mine. Our guide was friendly and incredibly knowledgeable; we would later learn his college major was anthropology, and it showed. He opened the hatch that led to the mine shaft, and everyone walked carefully around it. We watched in fascination as he turned various machines on, led us through narrow hallways and steep stairs, and explained what worked, what didn't, and just what had changed over the years.

And just like that, the first day was over. We had seen and learned so much! I couldn't wait for the next day.

So we rose again, bright and early (definitely earlier than I liked - I'm not a morning person). The drive to Thermopolis was stunning. First, we drove through Boysen State Park, which seemed so different from the high desert we drove through just the day before. Then came the scenic byway through Wind River Canyon. Gorgeous! Words could never do it justice, and the many pictures I took don't, either. We wound through colossal gray rock right next to a cheerful river, slowly making our way north. There were multiple times you couldn't see the blue sky on either side of you, that's how high the canyon walls towered over us. Signs started popping up, telling us how old certain rock formations were - some in the hundreds of millions of years.

Like I said, my words can't do it justice.

Eventually, we arrived in Thermopolis, driving through the main town to arrive at Hot Springs State Park. Our first stop was an overlook of the park, seeing just how the mineral water would flow into the river we had followed to town. The mass of white and yellow drooped down to meet the water - the smell of sulphur was impossible to escape, even from that distance.

It only got worse as we pulled into the park proper. Now we got to see the mineral pools up close - it was worth the weird smell. At that point, we were left to our own devices with a number of options for our day - a Choose Your Own Adventure day! I wanted to see it all.

Thankfully my mother was on board. First we walked along the Swinging Bridge, giving us another unique view of the river and park. We walked along the boardwalk (where plenty of signs were telling us to stay on the boardwalk lest we get burned by the hot springs!) toward the free mineral pool. Mom and I decided to only put our feet in - we hadn't brought swimming gear, and didn't want to rent. The smell only got stronger as we stripped off our shoes and socks, but when I dipped my feet in, oh boy, I could feel the warmth leaching away my stress. It was *heavenly*.

As we sat on the edge with our feet drifting in the water, perfectly at ease, more club members joined us, who were definitely better prepared than we were. Dick Hudson gave us a mini lecture on the springs, telling us how when the Native Americans signed the treaty creating the park, they insisted on at least one mineral pool being free of charge, so everyone could experience the healing properties of the water. I said a silent thank you to those who made it possible for me to sit with my feet in such bliss.

Next we got back in the Mustang to view the herd of bison. The road led us behind the park, criss-crossing with other roads as we wound our way around the red hills. It didn't take us

long to find them - bison are huge! As we approached the herd, I couldn't believe how massive they were. The herd had a baby with them, and I can confirm it was one of the cutest things ever.

After such a busy morning, we were ready for lunch. The One-Eyed Buffalo Brewery sounded the best, and we weren't the only ones who thought so. We met up with Harry and Dolly Ozoll and had a delicious teriyaki bison burger.

Our next stop was one I had been looking forward to eagerly. The Wyoming Dinosaur Center was small but utterly fascinating. It was awe-inspiring, looking up at the huge skeletons and reading about their world from millions of years ago. I was slightly sad that we didn't get to go on a dig (over a dozen of the skeletons were found locally at the Center's digsite), but you can't see every single thing on a tour like this. I found the perfect birthday gift for my father in their gift shop, which was more than enough to soothe my disappointment.

After glancing through the binder and the many brochures our tour leaders had carefully arranged inside (so thorough! We can't thank them enough for their hard work), we decided to do a tour of the Wyoming Whiskey distillery just north in Kirby. I had never been to a distillery before, and the chance to sample some of their wares? You wouldn't have to ask me twice!

As we drove north, we truly came to understand just what Ken Watts meant when he said, "There are two seasons in Wyoming: winter, and road construction." So many roads were under construction, and the road to Kirby was the worst yet. Still, we soldiered on.

Kirby turned out to be a tiny little town right in front of the distillery. But, we were to be disappointed. While the brochure had stated tours went until 3 pm, the distillery had just switched to their Fall hours, which ended an hour earlier. We were too late to take a tour, but our disappointment was assuaged by free samples. That was some fine whiskey. Mom and I agreed that the Stargazer was our favorite (a special edition that was made to commemorate the US landing on the moon).

We made our way back to Thermopolis. The only thing left to do on the suggestions list was the hike to Legend Rock. After such an active day, we weren't up to it. We visited a few of the shops in town and made the long, but absolutely beautiful, drive back to the hotel.

The next day dawned bright and early (seriously, who let morning people set the schedule of the world?), but I was ready for an exciting schedule of events. This would be our longest travel day of the tour, but it would take us all the way to the Shoshone National Forest where we would be able to glimpse the Grand Tetons!

I should note that at this point, the weather of the tour had been stunning - clear, beautiful days with a bit of heat to them - and I had been wearing shorts the entire trip. I checked my weather app each day before getting dressed, and it said that on this day, the weather would be in the high 70s with a 10% chance of rain. This will be important later.

So we started our journey in high spirits, and headed northwest towards our first stop, the National Museum of Military Vehicles. The drive was beautiful, and I worked hard to get pictures of the exposed red rock that towered above us. When we arrived, it became clear that this museum was still under construction - there was no parking lot! We parked in a field next to a bunch of tanks and jeeps that were clearly twice as old as I was, if not more. It was a strange juxtaposition, that field versus the clean lines of the imposing gray building surrounded by construction cones and tape.

Thankfully, the disabled parking was ready, so those with mobility problems were able to park near the front door where we were meeting with our tour guide. It was clear that once the construction debris was cleared away, the building would be an impressive sight.

Our tour guide for the morning turned out to be the owner of the museum, who informed us that we were getting a sneak peek before it even opened to the public! Most of the exhibits weren't finished as we were directed through the building, walking through what would eventually be a munitions exhibit, towards an enormous room that was filled - and when I say filled, I mean, wall to wall, bumper to bumper, barely any room to walk between the rows - with boats, motorcycles, tanks, and any manner of military vehicle you could imagine.

The owner and his daughter told us a bunch of stories about some of the vehicles and how they came to start the museum - apparently, it started as a personal collection that grew so big they decided to open a museum for it all. As someone whose personal book collection is reaching "small town library" levels, I can relate!

After getting pictures of some of the artillery cannons for my dad, we were back on the road, still heading northwest. At this point, the sky was cloudy and overcast, and starting to get a little chilly. I donned my canvas jacket with $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves and thought nothing of it. Is anyone picking up this foreshadowing?

The drive through the Shoshone National Forest was stunning. It seemed like the trees materialized out of nowhere, going from red rock and sparse vegetation to a green expanse that stretched from one side of the valley to the other. As we climbed in elevation, we started going slower - old iron in the front had a harder time keeping up the pace with such a steep incline. The Mustang, thanks to many modifications on my dad's part, seemed to be doing well enough. We were keeping pace with the cars in front of us, at least! I'm sure everyone in the back of the line in modern iron was cursing us for going so slow, though. If I remember correctly, we reached elevations of over 9,000 feet.

Before we stopped for lunch, we pulled up to an overlook that should have given us a beautiful view of the Grand Tetons... if clouds weren't in the way! The view was stunning regardless, with rolling fields, wildflowers, and the forests rising above it all. I got some phenomenal panorama shots.

Lunch at the Togwotee Mountain Lodge was probably the best buffet lunch I'd ever had. Fresh deli meat for sandwiches, warm tomato soup, plenty of fruits and veggies, and a dessert table with cupcakes at the center. The lodge itself was pretty cool, too, with all of that wood detailing. One of the employees waiting outside to help direct everyone fell completely in love with the Mustang. He asked to take a picture. Mom said sure. He asked if he could drive it. Mom said not a chance.

The rest of the afternoon was to be spent checking out the town of Dubois at our own pace (pronounced "Doo-boys", and not "Doo-bwah" as I had assumed). It started sprinkling as Mom and I made our way through the small yet informative Big Horn Sheep Museum, which had far more taxidermy than I expected. As a big animal lover, I was both terrified and impressed at the animals in every corner of the place.

But as we left, the sprinkle turned into a light rain. It was cold, but I was determined to see more of the town. We wandered through a few stores, one an old trading post, then a few gem and jewelry stores, and various others. By this time, the weather has decided to mock me

and the sky opened the floodgates above us. We ran back to the Mustang and called it a day (Mom, thankfully, was dressed more sensibly than I was).

On our way back, we notice the noise again - that stupid fuel pump! Dad promised to get to the bottom of whatever was going on, and ordered a new one with overnight shipping to the hotel. All else fails, he said, just put the old one back in. It technically never died on us, he reminded us. You know what, Dad? Fair. Our anxiety was mostly assuaged.

The next day started bright and early for most of the tour - I decided another hour of sleep was more important than breakfast. For those feeling sorry for my mother for putting up with me and my complete lack of morning-person abilities, this was inherited from my father. She's dealt with worse.

And for those few of you wondering, I learned my lesson and wore jeans for the rest of the tour.

Our first stop of the day was a car show and fly-in in Laramie. It wasn't a long drive, but we got caught in the "road work conditions" again. We also got to play the "Where do we put 40 plus cars?" game again. Most of us knew that if we entered into the car show, it might be difficult to get out with the rest of the tour group. The show organizers showed us where to park and generally got us all in the same area. It was a bit of a walk to the car show, but the organizers were prepared - a golf cart would help those who needed assistance.

As we walked along, I got a brilliant idea. We had seen these pretty yellow flowers all over the side of the roads since Idaho, and they would make a great flower crown! We asked Dick Hudson if people could pick those flowers, or were they like California poppies and protected? Apparently, they're weeds, and the locals would be grateful to get rid of a few! I decided to check out the show and then get to work.

The show was small but jumping. Car shows aren't a huge thing for me or Mom, though, so we quickly toured the grounds and then found a shady space to chill. I got to work on my flower crown. Ten minutes later, I admitted defeat. The stems were sticky with sap that made it impossible to weave together properly, and there was no way I would put it anywhere near my hair! Mom and I found a gas station and I washed my hands a dozen times to get it all off. I'm sure all the locals were laughing at me, but I'm glad I tried anyways.

Next we headed to Sinks Canyon State Park, only a few miles away. It was a much wider canyon than the one we drove through on our way to Thermopolis, and it was hard to see the river from the road. On one side of the canyon was beautiful, lush forest, and on the other side, it was completely dead. No trees, no bushes, maybe some scrub grass, but that was it. Such a weird juxtaposition!

We pulled off along the side of the road since there was no way for all our cars to fit in the visitor parking area (there was barely room for the two tour buses that were there before us). At this point, we could hear the fuel pump getting louder - again, which was frustrating to say the least. For those of us who could stand a little hike along rocky, uneven ground, we got to descend to a rocky cavern in the side of the cliff face to find where Sinks Canyon got its name.

It's difficult to paint an accurate picture of exactly what we saw there. After climbing over some rocks and descending next to the river, we were suddenly under an overhang of the cliff, where the river continued to swirl around some huge boulders and fallen tree limbs, continuing a descent until... well, it just wasn't there anymore! I tried climbing along the edge to get a better

look, but I'm no rock climber, and that was a river no one wanted to take a swim in! This part of the canyon is called "the Sinks" for a reason.

We travelled back up to the visitor's center, where a park ranger told us the story of Bam Bam, a big-horned sheep that used to live in the canyon and became domesticated by tourists - for the most part. Bam Bam apparently liked Cheetos and challenging cars on the road, ramming his horns against the vehicles. Everyone who drove their old iron said a silent thank you that that ornery sheep was no longer there. Let this be a reminder to everyone not to feed wild animals! If you do, they might start destroying your cars.

Next was a short hike down the canyon to see where the river returned to the surface, called "the Rise". Once again, it's difficult to describe - it was like a large pond that just... kept going and turned into a river. It was a clear, beautiful blue with hardly a ripple on the surface, a far cry from the wild river we watched disappear. It would have been a fisherman's dream if it were legal to fish there. I'm pretty sure some of those fish were almost as big as my leg (and I'm not short).

We were told how officials dropped dye into the water to see how long it would take to reappear in this pond/river. They estimated it would take 5-10 minutes to make the ¼ mile underground journey. It took over 2 hours! No one is quite sure what happens once the river is underground, what a mystery!

After pondering the mysteries of nature, we returned to the hotel to get ready for the Chuck Wagon dinner, taking place at a local park in Riverton. The new fuel pump wouldn't be arriving until the next day, and we were no longer in the mood to deal with it. Steve and Ba Lutz offered us a ride for the night and we were happy to accept. Thanks again, Steve and Ba!

I had never heard of a Chuck Wagon dinner and everyone told me, "It's barbeque." Great, I love barbeque! No one prepared me for how good this barbeque would be. I won't go into detail - I'm making myself hungry just thinking about it - but if you ever have the chance to go to a Chuck Wagon dinner, I heartily suggest you take it.

The next day would be our last official tour day, and the weather decided it had been too good to us the past few days (the debacle in Dubois notwithstanding). We woke to a heavy, overcast sky and a light rain. I looked at Mom. Mom looked at me. I took a moment to remember that day in Dubois and how windshield wiper technology had advanced since the 1960s.

We got a ride with Dug and Sonja Waggoner for the day. In their very nice, modern car with windshield wipers that actually worked. (Remember, everyone at home judging me: I'm not even 30 years old. I am not used to windshield wipers that get about half the windshield, and it doesn't really even get that half very well.)

On the drive to our first stop, someone on the CB radio told everyone about a tree growing out of a VW bug. Unfortunately, with about 40 cars on the road, we didn't really know where it was. Thank you to whoever posted a picture of it in the CHVA Facebook group page, because I wouldn't have thought it was real otherwise.

Our first stop was the gravesite of Chief Washakie, where Dick Hudson regaled us with stories of the Chief and why he was so important to the surrounding area. However, the Chief's grave was located in a graveyard that was still being used by the surrounding communities, and I wasn't comfortable wandering around such a place. I stayed back by the cars and watched.

The next stop was the gravesite of Sacajawea. Once again, it was a graveyard still being used by families of the area, and I wasn't comfortable hiking around the final resting places of their loved ones. I stayed by the statue of Sacajawea, a reserved yet lovingly crafted piece a few feet taller than myself. She had a small smile on her peaceful face. It was a lovely tribute. It was covered in small trinkets and jewelry that visitors had left over the years.

While the mood was somber, it wasn't unhappy. We left feeling reserved, but ready for the next adventure.

The next adventure happened to be lunch at the Wind River Trading Post, where we were served Indian tacos. The largest difference between Indian tacos and regular tacos was the tortilla - this tortilla was fried and fluffy, making it difficult to figure out how to eat it without making a mess. I tried eating it with a knife and fork - it didn't work. I tried folding it in half and just eating it with my hands - it made a mess still, but whatever, it was super tasty.

Big thanks to Judy Higday for letting me borrow a coat from her car. While I had packed for cold weather, I hadn't packed for *cold* weather, and I was a little chilly.

We wandered around the Trading Post after lunch. It was much larger than the outside suggested, filled with little treasures. I can't even begin to describe all of the things that were there, nor will I try, because this article is long enough as it is. Regardless, everyone had a fun time souvenir shopping.

The next day was the last day of the tour. I couldn't believe how fast it had gone! The sun was back in full force, we had received the new fuel pump in the mail, so Mom and I went to the main drag in Riverton to check things out while we waited for the club meeting. We ran into a lot of shops being closed on a Monday, but we still had a great time. But armed with the new fuel pump, I finally convinced my mom to take the long way home the next day - through Yellowstone! I had never been, and was hoping the whole week that the Mustang would hold so Mom would feel comfortable with the side trip.

What happened during the meeting has already been printed at this point, so I won't go into it - I'll just skip to the farewell dinner. We laughed, we cried, we ate delicious food and a good time was had by all. We profusely thanked Ken and Kathy for throwing a marvelous tour, we thanked Dick Hudson for his wealth of knowledge and taking the time to share it with us. We thanked the phenomenal photographer who followed us around all week and got amazing pictures of us and our cars. And then we all signed up for the next one in 2020!

I met so many amazing people during this tour and had so much fun. I had never really thought about going to Wyoming, but look at all of the amazing things we did! All of the fun we had, the beautiful things we saw, all of the good food we ate! This was a unique experience I'd been wanting to try for myself for years, and a big thank you to everyone I met, because you were all what made it wonderful!

That sounds like the end, doesn't it? But it's not, because we still had to make our way home!

We started fairly late the next morning (it wasn't late by my standards, but by everyone else's, it was probably late). We were riding solo, since almost everyone else was exhausted and had already been to Yellowstone on tour several years ago. The road to Yellowstone was the same as the one we had taken to Dubois and the Togwotee Lodge a few days previous, so we were travelling familiar roads at this point.

But a few miles before Dubois, we got stuck behind a truck that spilled black tar on the Mustang! A tragedy! We had to stop and wash it real quick before it ruined the paint. Thankfully, Dubois was ready and waiting for us, and we cleaned it up no problem. But right next to where we cleaned up was a sight we had somehow missed during our last jaunt through Dubois - an enormous stuffed jackalope! There was a gift shop dedicated entirely to the mythical creature. How ridiculous! I had to see it.

And ridiculous it was. There were t-shirts. There were stuffed animals. If you could put a picture on it, they had put a jackalope on it in this store. And in the back was a giant jackalope you could put your kids on and take a souvenir photo. I couldn't stop laughing until we got back on the road.

The day before, Mom had gotten in contact with one of her old coworker friends who now lived in West Yellowstone, asking if we could meet up for a meal. Finding a decent place to stay for a decent price had proven impossible for us (which was not surprising - most Yellowstone hotels sold out almost a year in advance for the summer months). Abby reminded us she works in the hotel industry in Yellowstone, she could try to get us a room. As we left Dubois, Abby messaged us with great news: she got us a room at the Gray Wolf Inn in West Yellowstone for a phenomenal price! Thank you Abby!

Finally we passed the Togwotee Mountain Lodge; we were officially in unfamiliar territory. I was a little worried, since the weather still wasn't great - would we be able to see the Grand Tetons?

As we waited in line to enter the Grand Tetons National Park, we ran into a few other CHVA members who had the same idea we had. We got on the CB to make plans for lunch with the Schneiders, Steve, Diane, Dale, and Eula. We just found one another in the line! How funny!

Before lunch, though, we pulled off on the side of the road as we made our way through the park, and I got a phenomenal picture of the Mustang in front of the Grand Tetons with the cloudy sky roiling above. This would become my favorite picture of the trip.

We ate a fantastic bison burger at the lodge at Flagg Ranch with the Schneiders before finally entering Yellowstone at the South Entrance. With this feat, Mom had officially entered the park through each of the five entrances, which I thought was really neat.

We ended up separating from the Schneiders pretty quickly - we stopped to see Lewis Falls, they went on to see Old Faithful. We continued on through the park, stopping whenever something caught our fancy.

And sometimes we didn't even have to stop ourselves. Traffic slowed whenever something really cool was happening, like a bison sleeping right next to the road - or a bison straight up walking along the road, making all of the cars go around him. While stopped like this, we caught sight of some female mooses, chilling by the river.

After so much sightseeing, we were ready to head into West Yellowstone. We checked into the Gray Wolf Inn, as Abby's Aunt Cindy and Cousin Mary. We had plans to have dinner with Abby in a few hours, so it was time for one of the things I was looking forward to the most - The Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center. I absolutely love wolves, so visiting them was an absolute must for me.

Admission was good for two days at the Center, which worked out great for us. We spent a few hours there that evening, just watching the wolves doing their thing. We found out that

bear-proof containers are tested at the Center - if the bears can't get into them within an hour, they're given the bear-proof seal. They are the only grizzly center certified to do so. I have over one hundred pictures just from the Center alone. So many amazing animals! I could have spent days there.

We enjoyed a lovely dinner with Abby and her son, and got her recommendations on where we should go in the park with our limited amount of time. She advised the Artist's Paint Pots were a must see, including the new trail that gives a birds-eye-view of them. Apparently, so many people were just walking up this hill, that the park decided to make it an official trail.

The next morning dawned bright and early, and I was more than happy to get up early and check out the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center before heading into the park. This time, the wolf pups were active, and they were playing with some of the older wolves through the fence. It was so cute! I was thrilled we decided to stop by again.

We made our way back into the park and went straight for the Paint Pots. The Pots are a collection of springs, geysers, and mud pots that are so beautifully colored, they look like an artist's collection of paints. Some were bright crystal blue, some were orange and red, some were yellow, it was truly beautiful. And Abby was absolutely right; that trail above the pots was well worth it.

We made various other stops through the park, but the one that really knocked my socks off was the Lower Falls of the Yellowstone Grand Canyon. At 308 feet tall, it's almost twice as tall as Niagara Falls, and it was absolutely stunning. Tall, emerald trees decorated both sides of the multicolored canyon walls, with the steel-gray river snaking along at the bottom, it was truly a majestic sight. And when we returned to the Mustang, a few people were taking pictures of *it*.

As we left Yellowstone and entered Idaho, the weather decided it was done cooperating with us. It started pouring rain, and it didn't let up for hours. We were about an hour out from Twin Falls when Idaho tried its best to kill us. First, the sun was shining right in our faces as we drove directly west. Next, we hit a cloud of insects that peppered every inch of our windshield. Then, it started raining, just hard enough that we had to turn the windshield wipers on. You know, the ones that don't work very well? Everything smeared together, we couldn't see anything, and we had to roll down the window to follow the truck in front of us to the next exit so we didn't run off the road.

Despite Idaho's best efforts, we survived completely unscathed. However, I will now hold a small grudge against Idaho forever.

The rest of our trip home was mostly unremarkable (except for the phenomenal fish tacos we got in Reno). The fuel pump did fine - it turns out, all fuel pumps are loud, which is why most of them are installed inside the fuel tank. This fuel pump is much louder than regular fuel pumps, so combine that with it not being in the fuel tank, and it was just naturally going to be noticeable. An extra thank you to everyone who kept an eye out for us on tour to make sure we didn't have any problems!

The tour ended much like it began, with a hug from my Dad. Thank you, everyone, for welcoming me and for making this such an amazing experience. I have so many new stories, and I can't wait to make more in Michigan! See you all next September!