

August 20 & 21st -- Colorado Springs & Pikes Peak, CO

Well, the haze never did completely dissipate during my last few days in Colorado...which is really unusual. However, I continued to take the Highlander up for sightseeing, although with somewhat diminished visibilities. Now, mind you, compared to Eastern standards of 5-10 miles, the 40 to 50 mile view that I had in these western mountains was quite spectacular. On Wednesday, Roger Stout and I drove over to [Centennial Airport](#), for a noon flight. While taking a lunch break at the airport's "Perfect Landing" restaurant, (which is on the 2nd floor of Denver Jet Center's FBO building, and overlooks runways 17-35), Roger mentioned that Centennial is the country's second busiest "general aviation only" airport. (VanNys in California is first). I don't doubt this a bit, since I was able to count over two dozen jet aircraft parked on the ramp from my window seat, and there are about 3 other FOB's there on the field. Apparently it will get even more hectic this weekend when literally hundreds more will arrive at Denver for the Democratic National convention. Apparently all of the "limousine liberals" will be coming to town on their private jets, to tell us how wasteful our fuel consumption is, how big our "carbon footprint" has become, and how we need more "energy taxes" to lower our demand. It's now about time for me to "get out of Dodge".

Since Roger should have his plane completed by this year's end, I thought that it would be good for him to get the feel of the Highlander. I let him make the take-off from runway 28, where we climbed out to about 8,500 heading toward Colorado Springs. I wanted to more closely look at a small canyon that I had driven past on my way to his house. It is called Blackwood Canyon, and, no doubt, was formed many thousands of years ago. However, back in 1965 there was major rainfall in the area, and the resulting flooding caused a concrete dam that was holding back a small lake to fail. The rushing waters caused further erosion and deepening of the canyon. After a few more photos, Roger headed toward Colorado Springs and the Pike's Peak area. I was going to climb to the top of the Peak (over 14,000 feet) the next day, and wanted to scout it out. Well, actually I was going to ride comfortably in a cog rail car, while it made the 8 mile climb up this high mountain. Because of a poor radio signal, we never did get all the way over to the Colorado Springs airport, but I did manage to capture a photo of it through mid-day haze. After an hour of flying, Roger headed back to Centennial Airport, and I made what I would consider to be a really lousy landing, bumping back in the air twice, before the plane finally settled onto the runway. Roger, diplomatically, said, "Well, the 3rd one was OK".

Roger Stout is one of those rugged Colorado individualists who has helped to make this country tick. He has held many jobs, ranging from a construction crane operator, to carpenter, to farmer, to airport owner and flight instructor. I give him a lot of credit in taking on the task of building his first amateur built airplane totally on his own. At least I had a lot of help on mine from the factory folks. Those that take on this job by themselves are a special breed of airman, and I have nothing but admiration for them. On my last evening at Parker, Colorado I took Roger, his wife Pat and daughter Debbie out for a steak dinner, to show my appreciation for all of their hospitality. As I have said previously, the people that I get to meet and visit with along the way is what is making this whole trip so special.



Overflying the Blackwood Canyon & River



View of the Dam that burst in the 1965 flood



Hazy view of the Colorado Springs Airport



Viewing over the Colorado Springs mountains

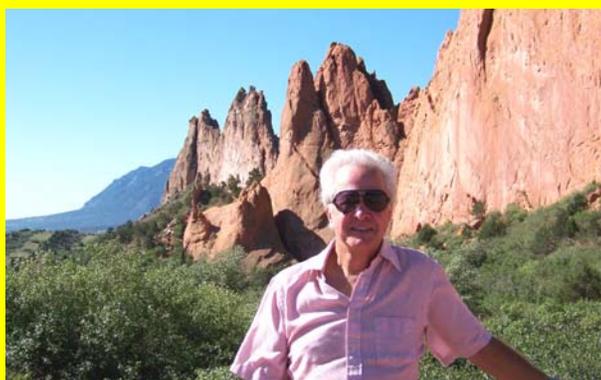


Garden of the Gods panorama with Pikes Peak beyond. On the right are some photos taken inside of the park.

On Thursday, the 21st, I took Roger's pick-up and headed back toward the same area that we flew over the previous day. My first stop on this day long sightseeing trip was over to Colorado Springs' [Garden of the Gods](#). I remember having toured it in 1963 while on my honeymoon trip around the country... which closely approximates my current route. Back then I did it with a Karman Ghia coupe, which was also a 2 seater with about the same amount of luggage capability as has my Highlander. Then the car broke down in Chicago, and we had to return to New Jersey by bus with me flying back 2 weeks later to retrieve the car...along with its one brand new cylinder. It's good having the Foretravel motor home along on this trip, as it's nice to sleep in the same bed each night.

The Garden of the Gods is a truly spectacular grouping of red rock formations that has pushed its way to the surface and which serves as an epilogue to Pike's Peak which can be seen in the background. It has taken millions of years for the earth to shift and buckle here, so as to form these beautiful western mountain ranges, and I never tire of viewing their beauty from both up above and at ground level. I sat through the multi-media film presentation showing how this geological phenomena formed; a history of the indigenous people that first inhabited the area; the arrival of the white settlers to the region and the eventual transfer of this privately owned tract of land to the City of Colorado Springs at absolutely no cost to the government. The only stipulation to the granting of this property was that the City had to maintain it as a park open to the general public, and would not be allowed to charge a fee for its entry.

I had my "affirmation photo" made in the park, and the hour that I spent there was certainly not enough. However, I had a 10:40 train to catch. While I took dozens of photos, I think that the three that I have on the right, and the large panorama which appears on the top of this page clearly shows the beauty of this "Garden of the Gods".



Pike's Peak - Colorado Springs, CO

Generally, there are 3 ways in which you can get to the 14,110 foot elevation of Pike's Peak. The 17 mile auto road can take up to an hour to drive, as it is dirt and has many switchbacks. I made this climb twice in my 1962 VW Karman Ghia. Once with my friend Steve, when we got out of our military service, and a year later with my new wife, while on our honeymoon. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I had to leave it behind in Chicago for a cylinder replacement.

The second way is to hike up on one of the numerous trails that take the adventuresome (not to mention, very fit) to the top. I found myself being short of breath just walking from the parking lot to the train depot, so this option was not for me. However, I was told that each year there is a "mini marathon" from the base to the summit of Pikes Peak, and that hundreds enter this foot race. More power to them.

My choice was to make the 3 hour round trip on the Manitou & [Pike's Peak Cog Railway](#). This \$30 trip was well worth the experience and left about 30-40 minutes at the top for me to enjoy the view and a cup of coffee with some of the famous "Pike's Peak donuts" that were made fresh and hot. On the way up we were treated to some commentary about the mountain and its discovery by Zebulon Pike in the 1800's. The railway has been in operation since 1891 when the round trip fare was \$5. Today's rail cars are modern, safe and comfortable, and even with the windows wide open to enhance the view, the inside temperature were tolerable (at least until we reached the beginning of the tree line when it reached the 30's outside). And, of course, I forgot to take the jacket that I had left on the motor home's sofa. We saw some wildlife on the trip up, including Mule Deer, Bighorn sheep and rams, a couple of Marmot, which seem to be a cross between a woodchuck and a beaver, as well as a couple of Golden Eagles. Once we got to the top of the mountain, where temperatures were 36 deg, I had a chance to wander around and capture a few photos, before heading inside for my coffee and donuts. Despite the cold temperature and the amount of snowfall that had effected mountains immediately north, I was surprised to see there was little in the way of snow cover on pikes peak.



The cog railroad train at the Summit stop



Bighorn Sheep & Rams were seen grazing



Marmot (not a bear) is the size of a beaver



Despite it being only 36 degrees at the Pike's Peak Summit, it was sunny with no wind, and pleasant.



Cold on the Summit, but not much snow

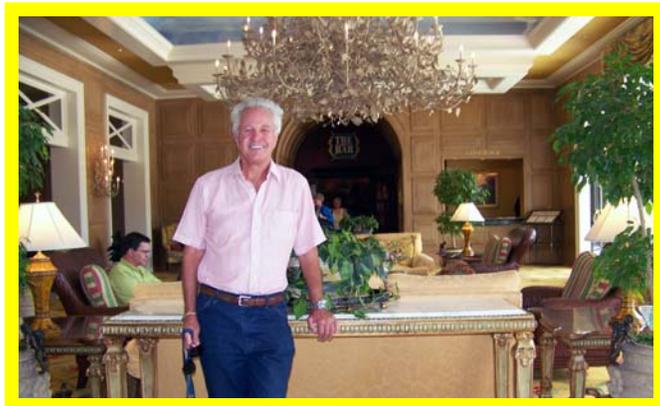


The historic Broadmoor Hotel's grand entrance

The [Broadmoor Hotel](#) is one of this country's limited number of 5 star properties. While we have been lucky, in the past, to have been able to stay a few of these luxurious hotels, such as The Grand Hotel, on Mackinack Island, MI, The Greenbriar, in White Sulphur Springs, WV, the Pinehurst Golf Resort, in NC, as well as Virginia's Hot Springs "Homestead", most of the time we will stay at a Holiday or Hampton Inns, and just use the facilities at these upscale hotels. This was my case with the Broadmoor, which was originally built in 1918. Located in Colorado Springs, this is truly a spectacular hotel. Nestled in a valley, and surrounded by scenic mountains, and with its own small lake, this is a beautiful old hotel with gorgeous interior woodwork and furnishings. The hour that I spent walking the grounds and sitting at its rear lake deck, while enjoying an afternoon aperitif, was a relaxing finish to the day.

On my ride back to Parker, I drove past another interesting attraction. However, because time was getting short and I had a dinner appointment in just a couple of hours, I had to bypass stopping in and touring through the [Miramont Castle](#). This 1895 built private home, located in Manitou Springs, has now been turned into a museum with a self-conducted tour available. This grand Castle, along with its Victorian Gardens, located behind the spacious grounds would be well worth the extra hour to visit. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, it was not destined for this trip.

Now it is time to leave the Denver/Colorado Springs area of this beautiful state, and begin the next stage of my trip. I will begin to drive almost due north, with stopovers in Wyoming and Montana. So, I guess that I still have plenty of mountains to see.



My affirmation photo, taken in the lobby



There is a beautiful lake just behind the hotel



Time for an afternoon drink by the hotel's lake



There was no time left for Miramont Castle