

Colorado and Utah 2008

I went on a geological field trip to Colorado and Utah. Flying into Grand Junction over the Book Cliffs and mesas was awesome. And as the trip progressed, I appreciated the stark beauty of the canyons of those cliffs but was it ever hot! One day the temperature was 43 °C.

I had fun with the other participants on the course. The countries represented were Trinidad, US, UK, Egypt, Argentina, Venezuela and Indonesia. May, from Jakarta, was in the same car as me and the rest of our team comprised of Simon from the UK and one other Trinidadian, Natalie. May wore a hijab under her hiking helmet. She had got married the week before coming on the course but was very good natured about being stuck with us instead of her husband. One night my carload went to dinner together and we sat on the same table as an American couple. The husband remarked that we looked like the United Nations. When we told him that we were on a field trip, he brightened up as he was a retired geologist. Unfortunately, just as we were getting into an interesting conversation with him, we were moved to our own table.

Carlos from Argentina was a very distinguished looking man. But when we started talking, he surprised me by saying his wife had just e-mailed him to say she had bought Madonna concert tickets but was not going to tell him how much they cost. When I asked about other performers he had seen, and he said he really enjoyed seeing "Metallica" and the "Rolling Stones" live. Carlos' riding partner was Ricardo from Venezuela, who looked like a cast member of the Sopranos. When Natalie and I told him so, he acknowledged that it was probably because his mother was Italian. Over the years I have met a fair few Venezuelans with Italian roots.

Early in the trip, one of the safety officers pointed out, rather more calmly than I would have, a jade green scorpion running around on a rock near us. He told us in his clipped English accent that the small ones like that one were "much nastier than larger scorpions". Now he had served on a bomb squad during the Gulf war, so I expect next to bombs, a little scorpion was not a big deal to him. But I was super careful when climbing and look at any surfaces before touching them.

One memorable day in Green River, Utah, we finished in the field "early" i.e., 5:30 pm, so my group drove down to the Arches National Park and arrived at sunset which is the perfect time to see those red rock formations. I found them rather other-worldly and imagined that I was gazing at a Martian landscape. After visiting that park, we drove into Moab and had dinner at Eddie McStiffs. I am not making up that name, but the important thing is that the food was good.

Another day we were in a canyon with rocks that had horizontal, elongated holes and I was reminded of the painting "Enigma of Desire" by Salvador Dalí. Dalí's painting was inspired by the weather-beaten rocks along the Cadaqués coast.

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We were also fortunate enough to have a lunch stop in a canyon that had pictograms drawn by the Fremont tribe, who were contemporaries of the Anasazis. The figures had trapezoidal bodies and missing arms but one of them had such a big head and large eyes, I thought of the book "The Chariots of the Gods" that hypothesized that extra terrestrials may have visited native tribes early in their development and been incorporated into their folklore.

One evening after we returned from the field, May and I went to shopping mall and did some serious damage at Victoria's Secret. When we got back, Natalie could not believe that I took a good Muslim girl to that store, but May bought tons of body mist and announced she had her Christmas shopping wrapped up.

I did not get to attend the last day of the course, which was the only day taught indoors, just my luck! My office changed my plane tickets and left a message for me to fly back a day early. They were very concerned about Hurricane Ike as it was heading directly for Houston and one of my flights took me to Dallas. So, I traveled back home on 9/11. I was a bit apprehensive as I had been pulled out for special questioning by the Immigration officers when I first arrived in the US for this trip. But my return home went off without incident.

It was a memorable experience. Aside from all that I learn on these trips, a big part of the fun is meeting people from all over the world.

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