

## Exploring Western Icons – TT West 2021

TT West 2021 was the latest edition of this six day annual western cross-country driving adventure exclusively for ACNA members. Drivers came from all over the US ranging from Texas to Washington State. We pulled out all the stops with a 940 mile trip over 6 days composed of a bucket list of incredible National Parks and Monuments, and iconic vistas synonymous with the West. The National facilities we visited included Colorado, Arches, Canyonlands, Canyon de Chelly, and Painted Desert/Petrified Forest. We also visited other natural wonders and drove portions of historic Route 66.

We had a major shift in the demographics of the participants this year. It was the first year that the aging Mk 1 TT (2000-2006) was not the largest group. Of the 15 cars, 9 were Mk 3s (2016-present) and 4 of them were the TTRS model. It was the largest number of TTRS ever. Also it was the first year that coupes outnumbered roadsters.

To try to do justice describing everything we saw would take all of the pages of Quattro magazine, so we will focus on a select few of the icons of the West that we experienced. The first was Delicate Arch in Arches National Park. We started in Grand Junction, Colorado and Delicate Arch was our first major destination. Taking a route through Colorado National Monument and a stunning drive down the Colorado River gorge, we explored Arches and its best known attraction, Delicate Arch. Delicate Arch is featured on Utah license plates and U.S. postage stamps. It seems more imposing than its actual 46' high by 32' wide dimensions of the opening. Amazingly, Delicate Arch was not part of the National Monument when it was established in 1929 but was added to the park in 1938.

After spending a day exploring the expansive and scenic Canyonlands National Park, we headed south to our next American icon, Monument Valley. This majestic wonder was seen by few people until the middle of the twentieth century because of its remote location and poor access via dirt roads. A series of Western films by John Ford starring John Wayne were made there between 1939 and 1949 that put it on the map as a tourist destination and finally got the roads paved. Since then it has been featured in dozens of films such as Easy Rider, National Lampoon's Vacation, Forrest Gump, and most recently The Lone Ranger.

Monument Valley is best experienced driving from the north as the monuments slowly creep up above the horizon into view. We drove by the point where Forrest Gump ended his cross-country run. We then stopped at a roadside vista for group photos with the monuments as a backdrop. Finally, we entered the Monument Valley Tribal Park and had a leisurely lunch at the historic Gouldings Trading Post and enjoyed the Valley from a southern exposure perspective. Gouldings started operation in 1921 in a tent and the native stone building was constructed in 1928 and still stands. Gouldings serviced the Navajo people for over 60 years.

After lunch we ended our drive at Canyon de Chelly National Monument. We spent the following morning on an ATV tour through the canyon floor that is an incredible mash-up of ancient Native American ruins, petroglyphs, and 1000' shear sandstone cliffs. Then in the afternoon we drove our TTs on the rim drive to some of the vistas at the tops of the cliffs.

For our last day of the drive we headed south again to explore attractions along historic Route 66 and our final featured icons. First we spent the morning in Petrified Forest National Park. While the Park is named for the trees turned into stone, its most spectacular attractions are the multi-color painted desert vistas. We then went to the Wigwam Village Motel in Holbrook, the ultimate in Route 66 kitsch. The motel is composed of an array of 28' tall "wigwams" (actually concrete and steel teepees). It is easy to imagine folks in their 50s station wagons (the original cross-over vehicle) wanting to spend the night there, particularly if you were traveling with children who were fans of all the TV western shows of that era. The motel is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is still open for business. Sadly we had to leave to get to our final icon destination....

"Standing on a corner in Winslow Arizona, such a fine sight to see..." are the lyrics from the Eagles classic song "Take it Easy", and that is what we did. We took our final group photo on a corner in Winslow. Winslow itself has had its ups and downs. It is the Arizona headquarters of the Union Pacific Railroad and was a key transportation hub from 1930 to 1950 when DC-3 aircraft from the west coast had to stop in Winslow to refuel while some passengers transferred to the railroad station there to get to the Grand Canyon or Petrified Forest, or they met friends to drive Route 66. When I-40 bypassed Winslow, the town nearly died. It is now on the upswing as Walmart replaced the traditional Winslow trading posts for the nearby Navajos and Hopi to get their supplies.

Our final night and farewell dinner was spent in Winslow's old Santa Fe train station, La Posada, which was the most lavish of the Harvey Houses that catered to Route 66 and railroad travelers in the first half of the 20'th century. Costing over \$1 Million to construct in 1929, La Posada has been restored to its original grandeur. Its famous guests included Albert Einstein, Franklin Roosevelt, Amelia Earhart, Harry Truman, and dozens of actors ranging from Shirley Temple to John Wayne.