

Zoo Traveler

I really like to travel (NO FLYING THOUGH!), and we were fortunate enough to do lots of it – before we had so many little kids, of course. We still try to make a yearly trip to Florida, especially while we can still fit the entire family in one car – something that soon won't be easily accomplished as the kids grow older. At each travel destination, I have to admit that my favorite tourist attraction is always the local zoo. I made a list of all the zoos and/or wildlife parks I have visited, and I hope to add to it soon! Here is the list by state, country, or territory, followed by the city in which it's located. An asterisk following the zoo means it no longer exists. I put notes about some of the places in *italics* as sort of a guide in case you're interested in visiting one of those particular attractions and want some info straight from a tourist's mouth.

California:

Sea World San Diego

San Diego Zoo

Canada:

Bird Kingdom Niagara Falls Aviary, Niagara Falls, Ontario

Marineland, Niagara Falls, Ontario – *this place is very cool. You can hand-feed deer, Beluga Whales or even Orcas (Killer Whales). You can throw food down to bears who beg and do tricks. There are also a variety of amusement park rides for the whole family. Look at me petting the Orca!*



Washington, DC

National Zoo

Florida:

Wooten's Wildlife Park, Florida Everglades – a cool, family owned place where you can see animals on display; including alligators, crocodiles, and Florida panthers. You can also hold and feed baby alligators! I wonder if they still exist; their website hasn't been updated since '06!

Sea World, Orlando

Gatorland, Orlando

Animal Kingdom, Orlando

Idaho:

Zoo Boise, Boise

Illinois:

Brookfield Zoo, Brookfield – this is the zoo I grew up going

to. In the 80's when I was a frequent visitor, they had many 'celebrity' animals, with interesting stories to match.

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago

Peoria Wildlife Park, Peoria

Cosley Zoo, Wheaton

Glen Oak Zoo, Peoria

Henson Robinson Zoo, Springfield

Miller Park Zoo, Bloomington – *yuck, not one of my favorite places. Their tiger exhibits consisted of teeny tiny cages, and they had a really scrawny, terrible looking tiger, at least in the late '90's when we lived in the area. Hopefully they've cleaned the place up.*

Scovill Zoo, Decatur

Indiana:

Ft Wayne Children's Zoo – *a perfectly sized zoo to visit with kids. They have a wide variety of animals and some nice exhibits. They just recently built a chair-lift type ride that will take you over the lion exhibit once it's finished – cool and scary at the same time!*

Potawatomi Zoo, South Bend

Fun Spot, Angola

Michigan:

Binder Park, Battle Creek

Minnesota:

Minneapolis Zoo, Minneapolis

Missouri:

St Louis Zoo, St. Louis

Nebraska:

Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha – *I know they've since rebuilt it, but when I visited back in 2001-2002, they had a teeny-tiny exhibit for the gorillas, which made them none too happy. I actually witnessed a huge male gorilla charge a kid and beat on the glass from his small exhibit – scary!*

Henry Doorly safari park, Omaha

Folsom Children's Zoo, Lincoln – *a very nice little zoo located in the heart of Lincoln. It's so well-laid out that you can forget you're in the middle of a capital city, and they have lots of animals in a variety of nice exhibits.*

Ohio:

African Safari Wildlife Park, Port Clinton – *I love this place! You can feed deer, elands, huge buffalo and a variety of hoofed mammals from the comfort of your own vehicle. In season, they have pig races, animals shows, and camel and pony rides for the little ones.*

Akron Zoo, Akron – *I was really impressed with the layout, exhibits, and the happiness of the animals – a very impressive little zoo!*

Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Cleveland

Columbus Zoo, Columbus – *a zoo no one had heard about until my favorite celebrity, Jack Hanna got ahold of it and made it a world-reknown facility. Huge zoo, and the only place to see my favorite animals, manatees in my home state of Ohio!*

**Sea World Ohio, Aurora – we actually lived in Illinois at the time we visited here, but I'm glad we got to see it before they sold it to Six Flags, who sold it to Cedar Fair. Any of the other Sea Worlds are quite a hike from IL or OH for that matter, especially for a non-flyer such as myself.*

Toledo Zoo, Toledo

Pennsylvania:

Pittsburgh Zoo – *very impressive zoo! Lots of kid-friendly playgrounds and interactive areas. The polar bear habitat looked really cool – people go through a tunnel that the bears can swim over – but we didn't see it since the bears weren't in the pool. I NEED a second look at this zoo and will definitely allow more time when I get back there!*

ZOOAMERICA North American Wildlife Park, Hershey – *We did not care for this zoo at all. We visited in the late '90's, so*

maybe they've added more to it by now. But at that time, they only had animals indigenous to North America, and let's face it, those are easy to spot in most areas of the U.S. And let's face it, the real star tourist destination in Hershey is the chocolate factory!

South Dakota:

Great Plains Zoo and Museum, Sioux Falls – I visited here with my family when I was 15. This place was amusing to us because attached to the zoo is the museum, which has many taxidermied specimens. We joked that this zoo had more dead animals than live ones!

**Marineland, Rapid City – note the asterisk, this place doesn't exist anymore, thank goodness. When we visited in the summer of '93, they had dolphins and sea lions held in such tiny cages and pools, it was sickening. I haven't been able to find much info on this place, but I'm sure they were shut down because of poor treatment of their animals. I can only hope the animals found a better home.*

Bear Country USA, Rapid City – a cool drive-thru bear habitat experience – keep those windows rolled up!!! And check out the baby bear nursery – so adorable!

Wisconsin:

Henry Vilas Zoo, Madison

**Serpent Safari, Wisconsin Dells*

GRAND TOTAL AS OF 2009:

41 animal-themed places in 2 countries, 13 states, 1 district... and counting!

Ghost Towns

One of the coolest places we ever visited was a ghost amusement park. It had been in existence for 100 years before closing down unexpectedly one year, leaving everything behind: rides, paths, old vehicles, buildings, food stands, restrooms, and even part of a ferris wheel remained poking out of the trees that had grown up and around it during the vacant years. I would love to go back there and especially bring some friends, but it's not really a place for kids to run around, so I'll have to wait until they're older or I have a babysitter for a few days...

But CNN ran an article on ghost towns that reminded me of the place; check it out, then follow the link to ghosttowns.com – they have a state-by-state listing of ghost towns. Turns out, there are 6 in my corner of Ohio alone!

LAKE VALLEY, New Mexico (AP) – *The howling wind across a remote landscape, a creaky metal gate or a run-in with a rattlesnake or gun-toting local are the things that attract ghost towners. They are history buffs who take their outdoor adventures with a dash of mystery.*

Monument Peak, which some old-timers call Lizard Mountain, rises over what's left of Lake Valley in southern New Mexico.

Just as traditional outdoors enthusiasts enjoy mountaineering or hiking, and tech-minded gadget lovers enjoy geocaching, ghost towners have their own agenda: seeking out, documenting and photographing towns that one day will cease to exist.

"We are a subset of the outdoors culture," said Clint Thomsen of Stansbury Park, Utah, who writes newspaper columns about the ghost towns he visits. "If you're willing to drive around 200 miles along dirt roads and find something that's definitely crumbled, you're definitely part of the breed."

Ghost towns are prevalent in the West with 100 to more than 200 per state, but even states in the Midwest and several

Eastern states have between 10 to 100 ghost towns apiece, said Todd Underwood of Prescott, Arizona, who hosts a Web site for ghost towners, <https://www.ghosttowns.com>.

Underwood, a chemistry professor turned pilot who estimates he has visited about a thousand ghost towns, said the site has helped coalesce ghost towners into a group that logs millions of Web site visits a month.

And for those who think ghost towning is only a Western phenomenon, ghost towners are quick to say that even New York has 14 ghost towns. Pennsylvania has what one ghost towners calls a ghost highway, a 13-mile stretch of Pennsylvania Turnpike complete with overpasses and tunnels near Breezewood that was bypassed in 1968.

A ghost town is a place that is a shadow of its past glory. This can include everything from accessible historical towns – like Jerome, Arizona, or Calico, California – to the ruins of forgotten mining towns, abandoned farm settlements or railroad stops that disappeared when the trains stopped coming. Towns that are remote, hard to gain access to and have very little remaining are known as “true ghosts,” Underwood said.

Underwood said he began ghost towning in 1976 with his father.

“We were really fascinated as to how and why people would just up and leave towns. We were steeped in the mystery of that,” he said.

That mystery is palpable at the abandoned silver mining town of Lake Valley, New Mexico, which was founded in 1878. The Bureau of Land Management property has a renovated schoolhouse filled with wooden and wrought-iron children’s desks, an ornate wood stove and an old school bell. A nearby church holds wooden pews and ornate woodwork railings.

But along the dirt roads, the wind moans and whistles through the dilapidated wooden houses and around crumbling stone ruins. The town’s slow decline from a peak population of 4,000

people in the 1880s began with the devaluation of silver and was accelerated by a 1895 fire that destroyed its business district. Lake Valley's last resident left in 1994 at the age of 92.

A typical ghost town visit usually begins with an offhand remark from an old-timer or a mention on a Web site, ghost towners say.

Before leaving home, they try to solve the mystery of why the town disappeared and, more importantly, how to get there by hitting the history books and topographical maps.

Ghost towners give only vague directions to newbies. They figure those who are willing to unravel their hints and work to find these places are more likely to respect them.

Then, a visit is attempted. Thomsen recalled arriving at what he thought would be the abandoned mining town of Gold Acres, Nevada, at 3 a.m., only to find from a surprised mining office worker that the old buildings had been bulldozed a few months before.

Other ghost towners described making a half-dozen trips before finding the town, but agreed the search is half the fun.

Though their motto is to "take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints," there are gifts to be found – literally and figuratively – at ghost towns.

David Pike, who grew up in southern New Mexico and now lives in Washington, D.C., has rated nearly 20 New Mexico ghost towns on his Web site.

He says ghost towning has helped him understand how his environment affects him and taught him to live in the moment.

"It's hard to ignore a metaphor when you're standing right in the middle of it," he said. "When you're standing in a building that was once something and now is slowly fading into

not being anything anymore, that's a stark reminder about appreciating what you've got when you've got it."

Pike said he visited a ghost town in southern New Mexico with his late father. He remembered his father had called out to him, but the howling wind blocked out the voice, which got Pike ruminating on the town's name, High Lonesome.

"He's been gone for a couple of years now and I still miss his voice," Pike said.

Laura Aden, who explores old mining sites with her husband mainly in Arizona's Tonto National Forest, says ghost towners are "the people who walk around with their heads down scratching the dirt, the crazy bunch of people who pick up nails and cans."

If she finds abandoned objects in the deserted towns, she offers them to local historical societies, which don't always want them. She's taken home some old tools to decorate her cactus garden, she said.

Ghost towners also compare notes on the danger of their hobby. They have to contend with rattlesnakes and other critters, running out of water or fuel, vehicle breakdowns and the hazards of abandoned mine shafts.

Underwood said he once entered a ghost town and sitting on top of a dilapidated house was a man with a gun pointed right at him.

"I turned around and left in a hurry," Underwood said.

Underwood encourages ghost towners to photograph the places they visit and post them on ghosttown.com as a way to document their historical significance and decline.

Often ghost towns are vandalized, they erode or are bulldozed over to make way for economic development.

"There is a time when this hobby will go away. You will not be able to go and appreciate these places anymore," Pike said. They are "slowly fading into nonexistence."

Ghost towns Worth a Mention

- 1. Lake Valley in southern New Mexico is a quintessential ghost town, said David Pike, who hosts a Web site that rates New Mexico ghost towns. The old mining town sits on Bureau of Land Management property and has several standing buildings, including a school house, general store and small church. "If a town is going to aspire to be a ghost town, that's the town that they should emulate," he said.*
 - 2. Carson, Colorado, is an abandoned mining camp that sits on the Continental Divide at about 12,000 feet elevation. "It's very remote. It's covered most of the year with snow. All of the buildings are left intact. It's almost like somebody just upped and walked away," said Todd Underwood, host of ghosttowns.com.*
 - 3. Frisco, Utah, is a favorite of ghost townner Clint Thomsen. The old silver mining town in southwestern Utah has several outdoor charcoal ovens that were used to make fuel for the smelter. There's also a cemetery and standing structures, according to ghosttowns.com Web site.*
 - 4. Spring Canyon in central Utah is home to several small ghost towns, abandoned mining camps and a ghost known as the "White Lady of Latuda," said Thomsen, who counted it among his favorites.*
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The Great California Scam

My parents returned Tuesday afternoon from their 2 week vacation to the Golden Gate State. Some of their highlights included: visiting San Francisco, San Diego (no zoo), the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and Grauman's Chinese Theatre. It also included a nine hour car trip to Santa Rosa where they visited my mother's cousin who owns and operates a winery ([Lauterbach Cellars](#)) along with her husband. I asked if they could not bring back some wine so I could share with friends... Probably not.

I would say that the most memorable tale concerned their "guided tour" of the walk of fame along Hollywood and Vine. My parents and my father's sister were approached by a gentleman offering to give them a personal tour of the stars for a grand total of \$50. Apparently, they thought this was a steal (read on). My aunt produced the fifty dollars. The gentleman informed them that he had to get something, said he would return, and left. I'm not sure how long the three of them waited but they came to realize that they had just been swindled. Surprisingly, they somehow managed to encounter the thief along the way (probably attempted to pull the same stunt on other unsuspecting tourists). However when they confronted the gentleman, he quickly denied ever seeing them. They really got "taken" on a tour. However, the trio did walk the stars.

Their return flight arrived in Indianapolis Tuesday morning at 10 following a five-hour layover in Atlanta. Needless to say, they were both exhausted and went to bed exceptionally early.

Did You Say MacGuffin Or McMuffin?

Perhaps in an attempt to cash in on the Indiana Jones craze sweeping the nation (not to mention this blog), a treasured crystal skull was stolen from a New Age store in Claremont, California.

Hunt for the Crystal Skull Begins Early

Let me just point out that I was nowhere near California on the date in question.

Perhaps authorities should begin by questioning the ~~two~~ three young men (?) responsible for grave robbing to retrieve a skull to use as a bong. I was surprised to learn of the laid-back nature of the store. Although they have never had any trouble with shoplifting in the past, it would seem that such a high profile item would draw considerable attention. As with the MacGuffins (the Ark of the Covenant, Sankara stones, and the Holy Grail) used in the previous 3 Indy adventures, the crystal skull does have its basis in reality perhaps just not as widely known as some of the others.

Skip the lines. [Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull](#) tickets on sale now!





Alpha Dog

Saw the movie [Alpha Dog](#) last night. It wasn't really my kind of movie, and the only reason I really enjoyed it is because it's based on a true story... and unlike many movies which claim to be based upon true stories, this one was actually pretty accurate.

It's about a spoiled rich kid named Johnny Truelove (based upon the real-life story of Jesse James Hollywood which is his real name, believe it or not) who is a drug dealer but because of his small size and tremendous influence, entices his friends to do his bidding for him. A former childhood friend of his owes him money for drugs, and they are now enemies because of this and some other incidents. So, Johnny happens across his nemesis' younger brother, and he kidnaps him for ransom of the drug money owed. Something goes awry, and the innocent teenager ends up dead, and after four years on the run and a few appearances on America's Most Wanted, Truelove/Hollywood is captured and now awaiting trial.

So-so action movie, lots of violence and graphic language, especially from the mouth of Justin Timberlake who

is surprisingly not a bad actor. But I cringe for the little girls and their parents if there are any who watched this movie just because he was in it because some of the things that came out of his mouth... whew!

And both my husband and I found it hard to believe that there is this kind of culture going on, whether in California or elsewhere, where entire families are caught up in the drug culture, parents and kids alike. At one point in the movie, a teenage girl goes to her mom for help because she is upset about the kidnapped “stolen boy” as they call him, and the mother turns her away, saying that she is x-ing (on the drug ecstasy) right now and can’t even understand what she’s saying if she wanted to. Does this really happen? Probably... but it’s probably not as widespread or as well-masked as this film would have you believe.

Hubby and I agreed that the movie was entertaining, but it wouldn’t be a re-watcher for us. And the only reason either one of us really enjoyed it is because it was so closely based on the true crime story what happened to the innocent 15-year-old victim Nick Markowitz.

Forehand to Forehead – And Then Some

And now for some youtube fun:

VIDEO 1: [Bloody Tennis Tantrum](#)

WHO: Mikhail Youzhny, a professional tennis player

WHAT: Tennis racket vs. forehead

WHEN: Monday, March 31, 2008

WHERE: Sony Ericsson Open – Key Biscayne, FL

WHY: ?????

COMMENTS: If you are bored by tennis, the real fun starts about 30 seconds into the video. Make sure you listen to the announcers' commentary on the incident – hilarious!

VIDEO 2: [Drunk Hamster](#)

WHO: Someone's poor (?) hamster

WHAT: repeatedly doing flips

WHEN: Not important

WHERE: The Hamster's cage

WHY: Is he really drunk?

COMMENTS: I don't condone cruelty to animals, of course, but this is so funny... And he seems to be doing it because he really LIKES doing it. He doesn't seem to be getting hurt. The theme song works well with the action.

Video 3: [The Price is Right April Fool's Day Joke](#)

WHO: Drew Carey and Rich Fields vs. a contestant named Lisa

WHAT: A contestant bids on a fake showcase

WHEN: April Fool's Day 2008

WHERE: Los Angeles, CA

WHY: April Fool's Day prank

COMMENTS: I can't believe the contestant didn't get the joke earlier... guess she was distracted by being on tv, that happens. Wish I could hear what the audience was saying during the prank! Were they giving her bids, telling her it was a joke, what?