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## ***Stop 21. Bryce Canyon***

Arrival datetime: Saturday, May 4, 6:00PM Mountain Time  
Sites visited: Bryce Canyon National Park  
Accommodations: Bryce Canyon Lodge  
States traveled: Arizona, Utah

The drive displayed much of the same scenery we had seen on the edge of Canyonlands, with the slight exception of staircase shaped mountains we took to be part of Escalante National Monument. We stopped at a rock shop and bought cube shaped paperweights made of rhyolite, the rock we had thought so beautiful in the Canyonlands,. The rock shop itself was in the shape of a rock.

As we drove on, it seemed as if the land itself turned red. It had. We were in Red Canyon. The roadsides sported tall cliffs of bright fiery red-orange. Rocks stood in 40-50 foot rectangular slabs, topped by 10-foot columns. They were close together yet each stood alone and was distinct. Two rectangular slabs crossed the road, and arches had been carved into them to allow cars to pass through. Later, we learned the columns were called hoodoos, and those in Red Canyon were mere foreshadows. Bryce was geologically similar to the Arches and Canyonlands, but it looked like all evidence of former arches had fallen away.

Even closer to Bryce than Red Canyon, we saw another landscape ornament that would become by far more familiar. A long slope of a mountain whose peak was a white cliff, topped with the

sheerest blanket of green, and rooted in a pink slope that tapered into a series of brown foothills. We later learned that this was the Aquarius plateau. We saw it from practically every viewpoint within Bryce Canyon.

Upon arrival at Bryce, we went to the Visitors Center and watched a film. But it did not adequately explain the formations we had seen. A Ranger geology talk was much better. We found out that, like Arches and Canyonlands, Bryce had been formed by an uprising of previously horizontal land due to rifts between plateaus. However, it had two other factors, an additional rift moving its horizontal slabs in a perpendicular direction to the first, and a climate that spanned the water freezing mark 200 times a year. Opposite forces created cracks that formed a checkerboard of the horizontal slabs. The water freezing then melting then freezing again in these cracks moved them apart and created the hoodoos. They were of all shapes and sizes.

We took an 8-mile hike into a small side canyon called "Fairyland." Immediately, we saw why. The red rock in Red Canyon had been set on bushy slopes and covered a few hundred square feet. Here, the deep red continued for as far as



*Red Canyon.*

the eye could see, with only the Aquarius plateau and similar multi-colored mountains in the distance. Tall spires on ornately carved rectangular and polygon slabs looked like fairy castles, both up close and in the distance. Smaller thicker formations looked like mushroom caps or Russian Orthodox church spires. Several structures were reminiscent of Roman and Greek architecture, palaces and stadiums.

We walked on soft sandy paths between the sculptures. The paths sloped up and down, never too strenuous on the uphill before gently sloping down again. As we grew closer to the bottom where the spires were not as thick, we noticed thin scraggly but hearty-looking pine trees and

brown brush that had looked like tufts of carpet on the palace doorways in the distance. The backdrop for the spires became a smooth rock wall whose gently changing colors made it look more like sand layered in a glass candleholder. On top of the wall, there were dark green trees poking up like turrets. They were rooted in white and golden dunes. The gold sloped down to yellow, which rested on sand, which sloped in curved patterns into a deep, dark rust. The rust blended into a light orange, which became pink, then gray-green, then white and sandy gold again. The patterns changed, but the colors were just as intense. The colors flowed from high overlooks all the way down the canyon walls to the grassy

brown floor, some in 3-inch layers, others in 30-foot stretches.

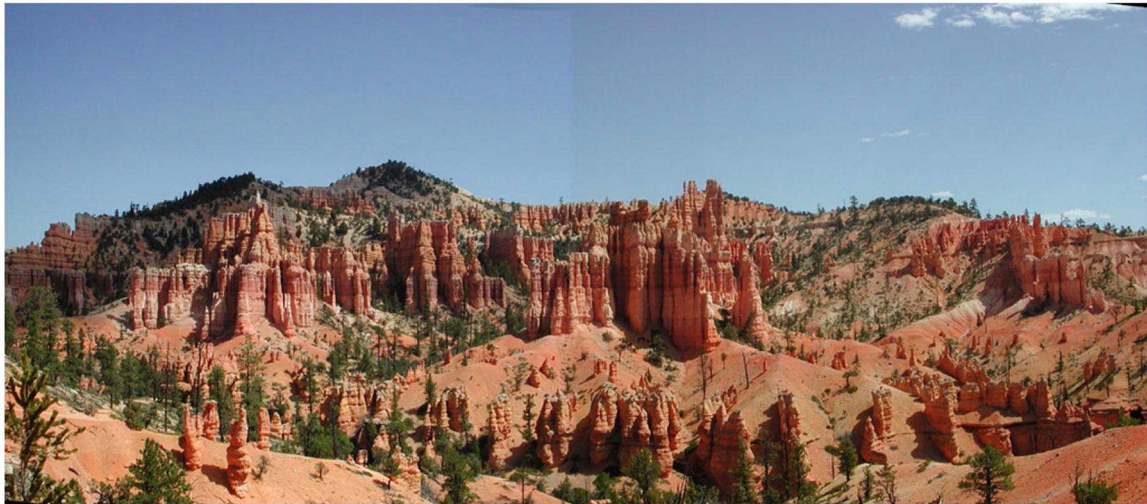
During our Ranger geology talk, we learned that all the tapestry was limestone, and the colors were minerals laced in it. We were told that the reds oranges and yellows were created by iron and the blues by manganese oxide. There was no blue that we could see so we figured the green was the manganese. At the base of the slopes were dry washes, debris-filled evidence that water had run through the bottom of the canyons, toppling small trees and cutting ridges into the hoodoos. Halfway through the hike, we reached the very bottom of the Canyon. There was a natural bridge called the Tower Bridge because it was formed between two

hoodoos that looked like medieval towers on either side. We sat on large rock and ate lunch of cheese and crackers while staring up at the Tower Bridge.

The trail looped back up to the Fairyland overlook. The walk back up the Canyon had uphill slopes even more gentle than those in the heart of the Canyon. The hoodoos were scarcer, but the long distance vistas more than made up for their absence. We could make out Navajo Mountain in the distance, though we could not see Lake Powell that we knew was just before it. We continued to see the Aquarius plateau, as it had become very familiar. In front of it, we now saw a smaller, similarly white and pink striped upheaval we later learned was called Sinking Ship. Lots of



*The Tower Bridge.*



*The hoodoos in Fairyland.*

interesting-shaped hoodoos commanded our attention, both right along our path and lining canyon ridges in the distance. A series of starkly white rectangular shapes was a city skyline. A rotund yellow oblong with round bulbs at wither end was a crouching cat. And of course, multiple spirals and spikes were one fairy tower after another.

The very end of the hike was along the Canyon rim. Gazing down at the spokes and spires, it seemed improbable that we had gone as far as we knew we had. The landscape looked scarcely passable. Only an occasional glimpse of a flat, sandy path satisfied us that we had actually gone to the bottom of the canyon.

We lounged and rested until dinner, after which we headed for Sunset point. We had thought that Fairyland was so named because of the multitude of densely packed spires. But this part of the canyon was even denser with hoodoos, separated in some spots only by the rifts of the canyon floor. We read on a poster in our lodge that Bryce, for whom the Canyon was named, had a farm at the base of these

ridges near the river, and had called the Canyon, a “helluva place to lose a cow.”

Though the sunset reflected deep rusts and oranges, the viewpoint did not appear to be named for its sunset view. We hiked along the rim to Inspiration Point, a bit higher up and still catching the last of the rays reflected on the canyon walls. Again, we saw Aquarius in the distance and Sinking Ship showing the same patterns. The cliffs directly beneath us were of the same mold. With now gradual yellow, sand, or gray in between, the white was startling in contrast with the deep orange hues just below. Row after row of orange hoodoos, like a 64-variety box of Crayola crayons, eroded to leave radically different shapes on the tops, and all subtlety different shades of deep orange.

We knew we would soon embark on a long horseback ride down the Grand Canyon, so we were trying to get some practice in. We had scheduled a morning horseback-riding trip down Sunrise Canyon. It was over 60° and sunny. The horses were tame and only stumbled a

little as we rode down the canyon. There were rainbow slopes and burnt orange hoodoos as before. The guide was not the best. He told us that the Aquarius Plateau was 12,000 feet high. The Ranger geology talk later in the day put it at 11,000. He did let us know that the thin scraggly but hearty-looking pine trees were called bristlecone pines. He told us they were 100 years old for every inch at the base. As that would have made several of the trees 1000 years old, we had trouble believing. He got us out 15 minutes late for our 2-hour ride and got us back 15 minutes early. We did not mind.

Back at the Lodge, we got our first package of mail from home. It took us two hours to sort out all the bills and other required replies. For the rest of the afternoon, we drove the rest of the overlooks. Directly below was mostly a washed out white or very light beige. At each overlook, we could see across to the top of the previous overlook. There were spiky trees with the rainbow of colors under it, ending in another slope with spiky trees again, another rim, and the rainbow rock again underneath it. It was no surprise that the final stop of the overlook had one called Rainbow Point.

We hiked the Bristlecone Loop that connected Yovimpa and Rainbow Points, the highest points in the park. The views extended for literally a hundred miles in every direction, still with Aquarius in the far distance at one and Navajo Mountain at the other, with Sinking Ship in between.

Back at the Lodge for dinner, we were not in the least disturbed by the customarily bad service because our next planned activity was to see the stars, which would not be out until late. It was still light enough after dinner to spec out a place to sit along the Canyon rim, which was just 500 feet outside our Lodge front door. But it was not dark enough to see stars. We came back an hour or so later. There was still a bit of twilight in the western sky, but plenty of stars and as we stared at the sky, they became more and more dense. Michael fussed with the tripod in an attempt to capture in photos the sky that we saw, but it turned out to be a definite case of “that’s why we are here.”

In the morning, Jennifer had a few minor crises at work to deal with via email. Michael called his sons, his siblings, and his Mom, just to keep in touch.

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Miles traveled: 195  
Departure datetime: Tuesday, May 7, 10:40AM  
Departure weather: 58° Sunny