

## The Sisters Fondle Moab – March 2010 (Ellen), March 2015 (Allison)

*“Conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish” - Aldo Leopold (aptly quoted by G. Gordon in Landscape of Desire)*



Left to Right: (top) 2010 - Delicate, fin walk to Double-O, flight tour over Maze, Ellen & Needles, Ellen in Little Wildhorse/San Rafael; (bottom) 2015 – Delicate selfie, Maze - jeeping, Harvest Scene figures, Allison & Matt find the way; Druid selfie and ladder

In 2004, after four trips to Moab (summarized in the 1994-2004 Colorado Plateau collection), I vowed to stop leading unknown student groups over the always-risky spring break vacation week. After a LONG hiatus from fondling the Moab area, however, the opportunity to travel there with each of my sisters (Ellen in 2010, and Allison in 2015) eventually drew me back. In 2010, Ellen and I returned for a “best of” hiking trip, managing mostly old standards in Arches, Needles, Island in the Sky, Little Wildhorse/San Rafael Swell, and Corona/BLM. In 2015, Allison and I returned – ultimately focusing on new hikes and activities: most notably, hiring a jeep/driver/hiking guide to take us into the Maze for 4 amazing days, plus some old/new hikes in Arches and Needles.

### Ellen and I (2010): The Mostly Best-Of Hiking Trip

Before 2010, Ellen’s only prior Utah experience was a challenging, sloppy backpack in Grand Gulch (an unprotected area south of Canyonlands) with a bunch of college guys in the mid-90’s. Given that we both wanted to avoid camping and all-day driving, I planned this trip around my “best of” hikes, not to mention flying and renting a car. When we dreamt this trip up (T minus 2 months), flights to Moab were running \$900 per ticket (YIKES!). After some research, though, I discovered you could fly into Grand Junction (GJ, which also had cheaper car rentals) for \$500 and then drive 120 miles to Moab. Although I had general hiking and daily activity plans in my head, most were flexible because of weather and related road access issues.



Left to Right: landing in Salt Lake City, flying over Wasatch, Green River, along Colorado, Fishers Towers

### March 20-21 – Getting to Moab & Delicate Arch

Given that our flights were obscenely early, I made my way up the night before. Because Delta would not guarantee seats on the PDX to SLC leg, I visited the airport in person before retiring to my hotel. The first Delta agent’s response to me was that ALL spring break flights the last 3 days were oversold – BUT she still refused to issue me a seat/boarding pass. After asking to speak to the manager, I was issued a seat/boarding pass. Unfortunately, Ellen was not with me – but they said if she showed up later, she could also get her seat. Ellen reluctantly drove in to obtain her ticket an hour later – complaining that the agent she spoke to disputed everything said to me. My response: they are lying... mark my words: everything will be oversold tomorrow! Indeed, we showed back up at the airport at 5:15 a.m., the lines INSANE. Passing 6 gates for Delta flights, we noted EVERY ONE OF THEM (including ours) was oversold – attendants madly trying to goad people into volunteering their seats. But we were soon in the air and on our way to SLC - things finally looking like they may be going in the right direction. Landing in frigid conditions (deplaning on the tarmac, with snowy mountains in all directions), we promptly learned that mechanical problems would be delaying our GJ flight for an additional 90 minutes. And so we endured a nutty layover in this mega-gate room teeming with people (some delayed over mechanical problems, but – as with PDX - many gates calling for volunteers, owing to oversold flights!). After a disappointing lunch at some express Asian place, we boarded our

plane (a replacement for the one that was still broken) around 12:30. During our 50-minute flight, I chatted with this young art student who was uncertain about his path in life – although he did understand that sometimes, over time, you grow to hate your career and so maybe it was important to do something (career-wise) that supported your deeper passions (which you did on the side). We arrived in GJ around 1:45, easily obtaining our luggage and rental car from the dual National-Alamo desk. Having experienced rental problems in the past (albeit not with this company), we were 100% satisfied with our car – a Ford Edge with 3700 miles on it AND satellite radio (which saved us from the monotony of driving 800 miles during the course of the week). I then drove us to Moab, via I-70 and then the scenic byway (128) along the Colorado. The last and only time I'd driven this section before was in 1994 with John. For the first 80 miles, the landscape was brown, flat, and nondescript; then we dropped into the canyons and had to stop for a lot of pictures. Although many sections were familiar (e.g. Fishers Towers), there was a lot more development (e.g. a couple sprawling dude ranch style facilities – all weirdly empty). Indeed, where John and I pulled up and camped free anywhere along the river back in 1994, you are now restricted to camping in official pay-camping areas – most full. Even so, my impression of Moab and all the places we visited was that tourism was 30-40% lower than what I'd seen during previous spring break trips... presumably owing to the shitty economy.



Left to Right: (top) sidewalk, final cliffy trail, Delicate; (bottom) scramble to window, view to Delicate, heading down, pictographs

We arrived in Moab at 4:15, checking into what Ellen hailed as the non-environmentally-friendly Holiday Inn (no towel non-laundrying policies and soap replacement EVERY day). Hey - we weren't freezing our asses off camping! The hotel was full of families with small children (a common sight on many trails). Following a 45-minute nap (Ellen snoring immediately, as she did during most of this trip), we headed into Arches to hike Delicate (me for the 7<sup>th</sup> time). Although I relished having the big camera on this trip, I took only half as many pictures as Ellen (1000 vs. 2000). Looking up at the slickrock sidewalk from the parking lot, Ellen didn't believe this hike was 3 miles. Within 20 minutes, though, we were on the slickrock... 15 more minutes - the meandering rocky-sandy-bushy section... 10 more minutes - the cliffy trail to the final cirque. Although we never saw record numbers of gawkers in the amphitheater, the usual silliness was present... including Ellen, who has become obsessed with "jumping" pictures. According to Ellen, I'm not good at taking jumping pictures (I was not able – according to Ellen – to capture both her in the air and her face in an acceptable manner). Although we did our best to select a jumping spot out of range of the peanut gallery, after the 6<sup>th</sup> jump, I heard a guy behind me say: "I swear I'm going to kill that woman if she does that again." And so we went exploring... scrambling around bulbous sandstone towers above and beyond the arch. Even though we'd planned to stick around until sunset, we decided the light was never going to be great (because there was this low bank of thin clouds above/on the horizon)... and so we headed down. En route, we scrambled up to this famous window where you can see Delicate (and frame it in a photograph). Getting up there seemed easier than when John and I first did it. As we descended the sidewalk, the sun disappeared and the temperatures grew frigid. Near the trailhead, we visited some pictographs by the dilapidated Wolfe Ranch cabin. And then we were back at the parking lot, driving to Moab's always-great supermarket. Alas, it was so late that the usually-teeming deli/salad bar was closed, leaving us eating a weirdly assembled dinner (in my case – bread, salami, fruit; Ellen bought a pre-wrapped deli meal, which she heated up in the communal hotel microwave). I was usually in bed by 10 – but Ellen, who carried her computer because she had work to do, typically did not go to bed until midnight.

### March 22 – Debacle in Devils Garden

Today's plan was a repeat of the Devils Garden loop (featuring Double-O Arch - not to be confused with later-in-the-day Double Arch). Although I thought this loop was 90% easy in 2004, I did recall this crazy pool where we'd momentarily gotten lost before. Admittedly, too, I'd only done the whole loop once (like most people, I usually only hiked the scenic in/out fin trail to Double-O). Given that this loop is relatively short (6.5 miles and 750 feet – minus side-trails), we planned to hike Tower Arch (3.6 miles, 800 feet)... bus, alas, that hike would have to wait. After leaving the hotel at 8:30, we drove to the end of the Arches pavement: Devils Garden trailhead (adjacent to the campground). Here, we (I in shorts) were greeted by large piles of snow. Although there were a fair number of cars in the lot, it – once again – never felt insane. As in 2004, we set out through wide fins and hiked 10 minutes to Landscape Arch. Here, we headed right, down the sandy "primitive" trail towards Devils Garden proper. Initially, this trail is very easy: a meandering route that traverses brushy open areas and wide fin sections. After 20 minutes, we dropped into some washes – which were wetter than usual. Thus, I knew we were close to THE pool – and correctly predicted it was going to be large (twice its previous size)! In 2004, we managed to scramble the slickrock fin above to the pool. Today, that idea scared Ellen and I to the point we shoelessly waded through the muck.

While Ellen found the water freezing, I wasn't bothered by it. After drying our feet, we continued 10 more minutes until we came to this 12-foot fin-wall beast that – despite multiple attempts (all culminating in “sewing-machine leg”) – we could not climb. At some point, a couple guys hiking the loop in reverse slid down to where we were stuck. When they offered to haul us up, we declined because we were nervous there would be more challenging obstacles beyond. Even though I swear I could not remember this feature from 2004, I commented to Ellen that I did this hike with Terry and Bryan, who were known to haul me up crazy shit. After returning from this trip, I found a picture of our 2004 party on the wall of doom, working together on and up a series of slick, miniscule ledges Ellen and I missed.



Left to Right: (top) trailhead, snow, Landscape Arch, primitive loop; (bottom) infamous pool, the wall of doom, dead-end cirque

Retreating, we initially tried to find an alternative route around the big fin; footprints abounded and so we started following routes I felt CERTAIN would take us where we needed to go. But after 15 minutes, we found ourselves in the middle of a dead-end cirque. HIGH above, we could see hikers on the fin freeway. Whatever route lay beyond the wall of doom provided the only way around the loop. And so we decided to play it safe and return to Landscape – and then make our way to Double-O via the freeway route. This decision soured Ellen to the point she spent a fair bit of time griping about how we could have made it if we had boys in our group. After sloshing through the muck AGAIN, I insisted we take a lunch break because we both seemed to be bonking (that we BOTH had our periods during this whole trip was likely equally to blame). After lunch - boys or no boys - Ellen shut up when we began climbing the fin freeway, the holds substantial to the point she felt more confident. Within 15 minutes, we were on the high fins – the views soaring (both over the fin garden we were just lost in, as well as towards the distant La Sal's). Climbing along the first big fin, we made a brief side-trip to Black Arch overlook and then continued over various high plateaus until we ascended another high fin that provided final access to Double-O. Although we initially skipped the longer side-trip to Partition Arch, we hiked that area on the way down.



Left to Right: (top) La Sal's, Partition Arch, big climb, upper plateau; (bottom); fin freeway, near Double-O with Dark Angel, Partition

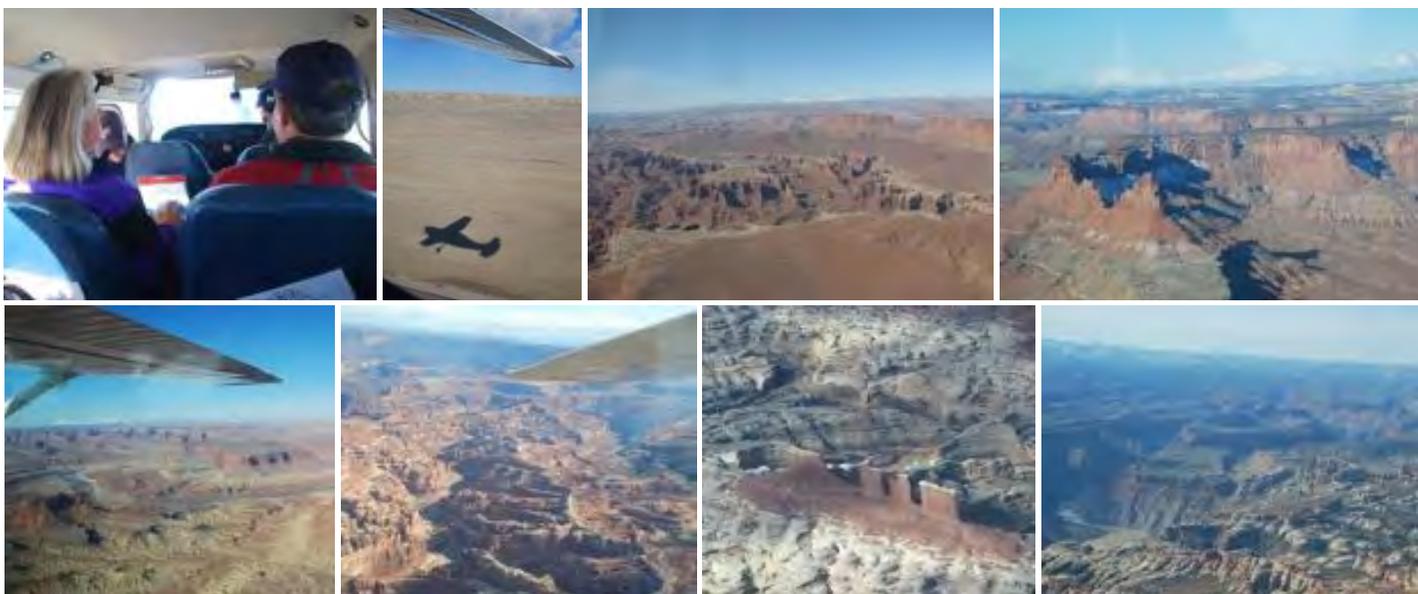
Of course, my greatest concern about this route has always been the dicey sloping slickrock RIGHT before you see Double-O. On all previous trips, I'd been nervous crossing this section – but today, it seemed like NOTHING. Initially, I did not plan to fully drop to Double-O... but then, watching Ellen, I decided I should – and so I followed her down the meandering, rocky drop to the arch area. We

spent most of our time at Double-O trying to shoot the arch, which is situated among other fins and trees in a way that is challenging to capture. Although we could see Dark Angel tower in the distance, we were still not into the idea of hiking there. After 20 minutes, we climbed back out and headed down. En route down, we hiked the side-trail to Partition Arch (skipping nearby Navajo) – which seemed longer than I remember it. On previous, hotter trips, we always enjoyed a break in Partition's shade; today, although it was sunny, it was not hot enough to appreciate lingering (even though we had the arch to ourselves). Back at the parking lot, we gorged ourselves on chocolate Peeps. Given that it was now 3 and we were tired (having hiked nearly 10 miles), we traded Tower for Windows.



Left to Right: Windows, Turret, Double, La Sal's and Windows from near Balanced Rock (which I chose not to show... shocking!)

To this day, Windows remains my least favorite section of Arches because there are too many people and the trails are too short. Thus, I sat out Turret Arch while Ellen scrambled through/behind it. But we did discover and hike a short, primitive loop trail that went behind the Windows and returned to the parking lot via a little pass. Then we drove 2 minutes to the Double Arch parking lot. I used to LOVE Double Arch... but then they used it for the third Indiana Jones movie (with River Phoenix, like, IN the arch) and it diminished the arch. After 2 hours dinking around Windows/Double, we were famished and headed back to Moab – making a brief stop near Balanced Rock (because the La Sal's were so impressive). Although we'd hoped to hit the visitor center, it was closing at 6:30 when we arrived. After cleaning up at the hotel, we headed into town for a VERY BAD spaghetti dinner at this new Italian place. Afterwards, I needed ice cream from the grocery store – and Ellen needed to visit the touristy downtown shops (although I ultimately bought more stuff).



Left to Right: (top) plane & take-off, White Rim, buttes & Henry Mountains; (bottom) Green River, Maze, Chocolate Drops, Doll House

### March 23 – Canyonlands Flight Tour and Island in the Sky

Today and tomorrow, Ellen and I focused on Canyonlands – which is divided into 3 regions: Island in the Sky, Needles, and Maze (which includes Horseshoe Canyon). In 2002, Allison and I rafted down the Colorado to Lake Powell and then returned to Moab by flying over Canyonlands - the most memorably impressive sight being the Maze. Because Canyonlands represents such a vast area and the Maze is inaccessible without some class III jeeping, I booked a one-hour flight tour devoted to this great park. Two companies operate tours out of the Canyonlands airport (16 miles north of Moab) and the going rate per person was \$140. For some reason, I thought Ellen had no issues with flying – but apparently I was wrong. Where I LOVED the flight, she was pretty terrified the entire time. Originally, today's weather forecast was the most questionable of the week. Although the skies looked promising when we awoke at 7:15, it was cold and extremely windy during the drive to the airport (group meeting time = 8:30). Even I was concerned that I was not going to fare well because the ride would no-doubt be turbulent. We arrived at the airport at 8:15 and Ellen spent most of the remaining 15 minutes hiding in the bathroom, which perhaps concerned our guide and pilot (even though they insisted MANY people who do this trip are terrified of small planes). Our group consisted of all guys – which, given Ellen's philosophy regarding boy-motivation, should have cured her. Anyway – our pilot was a retired ranger. In the co-pilot's seat was our charming guide, a pilot and ex-river guide who did all the talking. Prior to hitting the tarmac, he presented an overview of the park using a couple large visual aids – with an emphasis on the different regions, the geology, and the flight pattern. There were 5 passengers, us plus all solo male travelers (including one from Japan, with whom Ellen conversed in Japanese). And then we were on the tarmac, heading for our small plane – which Ellen later described as having an engine/propeller that sounded like a small lawn mower. Ellen and I sat together in row 3, wearing earphones

(but no microphones). Although take-off was bumpy, once we got up to 4000 feet, it was pretty smooth the whole way around. We flew over Island in the Sky and then veered west, following the Green River to the central canyon area where the White Rim is the prominent feature. Unfortunately, Ellen had better seats for this area – but didn't take pictures because she was upset (actively contemplating how she could get the pilot to turn around because she thought she was going to pass out... to which I later said: so... then you'd just be lying there). We then headed over the Maze, which - while impressive - was not as impressive as the Needles. I think this was because we spent more time over the Needles detailing the major canyons and arches. Anyway – the two things we did detail in the Maze were a brown-red butte featured called the Chocolate Drops, and we did a good fly-over of the Doll House near the Confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. The maze-like canyons in between, while impressive, reminded me a lot of the adjacent Needles. Even so, while researching this flight tour company, I was given good information regarding a group that does 3-4 day jeep/camping tours in the Maze... and so that is on the future list for the Moab area, given that I will (no-doubt) be back again. **RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT:** this is exactly what Allison and I did, albeit somewhat by accident, in 2015... motivated by these memories, no doubt.



Left to Right: (top) Confluence, Chesler Park, Druid Arch; (bottom) Angel Arch, bacon/more bacon, Ellen happy on terra firma

Anyway – we did a wild tilting circle around the Confluence so everyone could take a good picture. I have seen the Confluence at least twice before – once rafting, and once hiking to the overlook from the Needles (a TOTAL BITCH of a hike). From the Confluence, we proceeded immediately to Chesler Park, my favorite hike in the Needles and the place we'd be hiking tomorrow. Chesler, a distinctive open patch of scrubby meadow surrounded by striped towers and featuring a castle-like set of central towers, was unmistakable from the air. A few miles from Chesler is famous Druid Arch, which I've never hiked to before (**RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT** – Allison and I finally did in 2015). Even though our guide said we'd be doing an arch-focused tour of the Needles, I had no idea you'd be able to see them so well – especially Druid, which is famously tucked in amongst many other towers. On previous trips to the Needles, I assumed that we'd seen most of what there was to see in the region – largely because both of the hikes I've done in the area are monsters (12-14 miles EACH). From the air, though, it was more than apparent there was a WHOLE LOTTA Needles I hadn't seen... our pilot/guide going up MANY remote canyon areas, often with giant arches that require multi-day backpacking or jeep trips to access. Ellen was notably content during the Needles section, occupied and amused with the extensive "bacon" formations. After some freaky turns, we started making our way back to the airport – following the Colorado back up over the White Rim area, and Deadhorse Point (which we did not visit on this trip). Ellen became especially wiggled over the latter because the land, in her opinion, seemed to open beneath her; indeed, Needles is uplifted compared with the White Rim – and so it did seem like we gained a lot of elevation... even though it was the land that was falling beneath us. Back at the airport, Ellen hid in the bathroom some more and then we were off to Island in the Sky.

Given still iffy weather, I was conservative in what I thought we'd accomplish at Island in the Sky. My original itinerary was to start at Grandview Point and work backwards, hitting Aztec Butte and Mesa Arch. I had scratched Upheaval Dome, assuming it would be the least interesting to Ellen. In fact, Upheaval Dome had intrigued Ellen from the air and so – given that the airport was only 25 minutes from the Island visitor center – I changed things up. After a brief shopping and restroom stop there, we continued on to Aztec Butte. It seemed appropriate to begin with the hardest of the hikes so she could fully get her land bearings again. I had seen Aztec from the air and there was a LOT of snow on it... more than I'd ever seen before. I even asked a ranger at the visitor center whether it was doable and he basically said yes – but a few days ago it wasn't. As we approached Aztec and saw it towering on the horizon, Ellen – again – found it impossible to believe that this trip was going to be short and fairly painless (3 miles, 500 feet up/down). Although the sun was out, it was REALLY cold and windy – and we bundled up at the parking lot. I wore my new micropuff knock-off jacket during the entire hike. Initially, the hike drops to a sandy plateau – and then it skirts the first little butte. Within 10 minutes, Aztec is fully visible. Its lower slickrock sections are beautiful and very easy to ascend. Today, the middle sections seemed to provide the most trickiness – but the final move onto the top of the capstone seemed easier than I recall from my previous trips. Although we passed a couple in the sandy bottom section, we had the whole butte to ourselves. At the top, I took Ellen over to the sketchy area where you drop just below the capstone to the best granary; she seemed skeptical there was anything interesting down that crazy little chute. Unfortunately, there was a LOT of snow right at the base of the chute and beyond – to the point I was fully wiggled out. People had clearly stamped out some tracks but something about the hard-pack iciness of the snow in conjunction with the full-on exposure down the side of the butte made me turn around after exploring only the first (and best) granary. Ellen, despite her response to the plane, continued unfazed.

Meanwhile, I climbed back up, crossed the butte, and met her at the other end of the capstone granary trail. Here, there wasn't snow so I descended easily and hiked a fair bit, seeing all but 100 feet where the snow was the worst. Returning to the top of the butte, we visited the topmost granary, took some pictures, and then descended – just as a couple guys were coming up. I debated whether I tell them about the capstone trail (given that many people don't realize it's there)... but decided I wasn't in the mood to lecture. Within 15 minutes, they were right behind us, having only found the topmost granary – and so I regretted not pointing them down the chute. We screwed around in the lower slickrock area (i.e. taking dumb pictures) and then headed back to the car.



Left to Right: (top) all hiking to and climbing Aztec Butte (some fake/tilted shots of Ellen!) – to capstone granaries; (bottom) my favorite view, Ellen descending Aztec, fake tilted-camera climbing picture on lower Aztec slickrock, Upheaval Dome trail and viewpoint

We then headed down the road to the Upheaval Dome trailhead – 5 minutes away. En route, we passed “Whale Rock” – something I'm sure I've seen before but never acknowledged. Although Ellen was interested in this crawling-with-people feature, I refused to go near it because it looked like a big slab of slickrock with no redeeming view features... like some miniature Disney version of Ayers Rock. In general, I rank Upheaval as equal to Grandview (but not as great as Aztec) in terms of what I enjoy visiting at Island. Nevertheless, Upheaval's main/first viewpoint definitely requires elevation gain on a 0.75 mile rocky trail - almost as much as that to get to the top of Aztec. Consequently, much of the riff-raff (i.e. the Whale Rock crowd) gets eliminated. On all previous trips here with students, we have never gone past the first viewpoint. Nevertheless, there is a seriously difficult loop (the Syncline) that goes around the whole dome. Given that Ellen was completely taken with Upheaval, we decided to complete a 2-ish mile hike beyond the first viewpoint – on what turned out to be really scenic and soaring slickrock bulges that were fun to walk. Someday, it would be fascinating to hike the whole Syncline – although something tells me there are some scary cliff sections that I would NOT enjoy.



Left to Right: (top) Grandview Point & White Rim, Mesa - Washer Woman Arch & Monster Tower, Ellen washing

Returning to the main road, we headed for the pavement terminus at Grandview Point. I SWORE the Grandview Point trail had a parking lot on each end such that I could drop Ellen off at one spot and pick her up a mile down the way. Well – I was wrong... try as I might, I could not find the second parking lot/trailhead (because it didn't exist!). Eventually, we headed to the cliff edge and I walked a quarter mile before I decided I wasn't in the mood for cliff-hanging. Ellen walked the full mile out to the actual point – before returning via the same trail. Our final major stop for the day was 15 minutes back up the road at Mesa Arch. By now, BIG winds had carried in ominous-looking clouds and it was looking like a big dump (rain, hail, or snow?) could happen at any moment. Given the dynamic lighting, we hiked swiftly out to the arch (via a 0.5 mile loop). Moments before we arrived, both the arch and the adjacent features (Washer Woman Arch and Monster Tower) had all been glowing gold... but now everything was suddenly and dramatically in dark shadows, the winds high and cold. For a few minutes, a mix of light rain and hail spewed down – but then blew off. We spent 10 minutes at the arch waiting to see what the winds would bring. A couple people came through but, comparatively speaking, it was my quietest-ever visit to this crazy-popular feature. Once we'd had enough of the foul weather, we returned to the car and mostly started back. Our one planned detour was at the Shafer Overlook, the popular jeep route that people use to access the White Rim. Here, I was surprised to see big patches of snow covering many sections of the road – no tire tracks. Our other unplanned stop happened just beyond the park boundary where – off in the distance – weird clouds swirled against a black profile of sandstone, and the La Sal's

appeared above a sea of flaming redrock. Given some rain-made extra time, we also stopped at the Arches visitor center for a little shopping. Heading to the supermarket, we loaded up on soup, salad, and fried chicken, which we consumed in the hotel room (all were OUTSTANDING, particularly by comparison with the Italian place the night before).

### March 24 – All Around Chesler Park/Joint at Canyonlands Needles

Because most of yesterday's rain occurred to the west (in/near San Rafael Swell & Horseshoe Canyon), we headed to Needles/Chesler Park today. Even though I consider Chesler-Joint to be one of the all-time greatest hikes EVER, I had (in fact) only done it once – AND I managed to become shamefully, temporarily lost. During said trip here with students, I gave everyone maps, told them they were on their own (with a buddy) for the day, and they were to choose and execute a trip within their abilities that they could do within 6 hours. Some did a 2-mile hike, some 6, some the full Chesler-Joint loop (12 miles, 1600 feet up/down), and 1 guy managed the Chesler-Joint AND Druid trips (16 miles, 2000 feet up/down). Meanwhile, I set out with a former student intending to do the Chesler-Joint loop, which involves navigating a half-mile section of jeep road mid-way through. Long story-short: we missed getting back on the trail after hitting the jeep road... and by the time we figured our error out, we were too far along... AND still 3 miles from the trailhead via the Elephant Hill jeep road. In the end, several jeepers from Idaho drove us out. Coming down Elephant Hill was a MAJOR highpoint of the day. Nevertheless, all our teammates (visibly waiting in the parking lot below – as we were 20 minutes late) made intense fun of us... despite serious jeep envy. In light of that history, Ellen and I knew we had to be cognizant of the map and surroundings all day. RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: even so, riding down Elephant Hill no-doubt influenced my decision push some jeeping in 2015!



Left to Right: (top) highway, jeep on Elephant Hill, near trailhead thumbtack canyons; (bottom) early junctions, pre-joint, the grotto

Given nearly freezing temperatures overnight, we left at 8:30 – knowing the drive to the Chesler trailhead requires 2 hours. Although our driving views were pretty and the skies were clear, it was extremely cold and there was fresh snow down to 300 feet above us. When we arrived at the Needles visitor center around 10, there were only a couple others there. Nonetheless, the ranger was excited to hear we were going to Chesler, adding that there had been a lot of snow in the park the week before but we should have a clear hike. We reached the Elephant Hill trailhead, at the end of a gravel side-road, in 20 minutes. Compared with the visitor center, Elephant was pretty busy – a dozen parked cars and 2 jeeps heading up the infamous hill. Given my previous foibles, we recorded our arrival time at every trail junction using a big Needles map (which I specifically bought to combat getting lost). Our first junction (1.5 miles) took us 50 minutes, owing to lots of photography and a leisurely pace. The trail climbs immediately out of the parking lot, cutting through a joint-like crack in dark gray rock. After this, we walked a mostly level route over brittle slickrock, passing many thumbtack formations and canyons. We then crossed more open land (needles and thumbtacks all around) with impressive microbial soil and scrubby vegetation. At 11:19, we arrived at the 1.5 mile junction: straight to Chesler and left to Squaw Flat. Our next junction was 0.6 miles away and we reached it in 25 minutes – mostly because we stopped on this big scenic slickrock slab to take jumping pictures.



Left to Right: big wash junction (Druid, notably, left), climbing, notch in last picture leads to Chesler proper

From this junction, we climbed through another joint-like crack, descended into this memorable grotto, and picked our way down a dicey section (both in terms of scrambling and staying on the path). For some reason, I had ZERO recollection of this drop and questioned

whether we were going the right way. At the bottom, we hit a big wash and our next junction sign (it was 12:05) – straight represented the most direct route to Chesler; left was 4.0 miles to Druid Arch (tempting!). **RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT:** Allison and I would hike there in 2015. After a bathroom break behind some trees in the wash, we began climbing up this complex thumbtack canyon. Although the trail was generally obvious if you were on it, it was one of those crazy things that – from above or from a distance – you would have a hard time imagining there was a trail. Eventually, we topped out on a sandy-scrubby plateau. Immediately in view: a GIANT towering wall of needles standing between Chesler and us, fresh snow along the flanks of tower sections still in the shadows. To the right, I recognized the little pass/notch I knew we'd take into Chesler. We reached another junction sign after 0.6 miles (left heading to Devils Kitchen) and continued straight for a solid 15 minutes of climbing - up the snowy, icy, or wet pass/notch for another 0.2 miles to ANOTHER junction. Indeed, within Chesler, there is a circular loop, meaning we could go right or left. Previously, I went clockwise – hitting the Joint in 2 miles... and then descended to the jeep road. Because I needed to redeem myself, we did the same route today. A large group of European hikers returning from a counterclockwise version of the loop passed us as we set out.



Left to Right: (top) in Chesler Park, first view of Joint, BIG junction at Joint; (bottom) heading down into crack system, in the Joint, including action shots at the obstacle, exiting the Joint

After 1.3 miles of flat, scrub-land hiking, we came to another junction around 1: straight went to the Joint, right went to campsites, and left went to Druid (joining the aforementioned wash trail 2 miles from said arch). Here, we met a father and his 2 kids (both in their 20's) – they had come via the wash/Druid trail. Here above the Joint: nothing but a sea of gray slickrock bulges – all bearing big fissures – seemed to define a barrier to moving forward. Ellen was particularly surprised to see me basically vanish into this hole – but that's where the trail goes. Although you can sort of call the Joint a slot, it is more of a crack system. It's exciting to be down there, but it isn't as aesthetically beautiful as, say, Little Wildhorse, which we'd visit tomorrow. The Joint represents maybe a quarter mile of variously narrow crack-walking between dark, mostly smooth walls. Today, it was FREEZING down there – the unforgiving rock retaining plenty of the overnight chill. There was one interesting obstacle mid-way through the hike: a big drop where you made your way down a single-log ladder that had three uneven steps hewn into it. Although the visitor center ranger had warned me to be careful about not following any confusing cairns near the end of the Joint, I didn't see what she was talking about. Near the end of the Joint is this funky cairn grotto. Previously, the cairns were WAY more elaborate – but Bryan, who hiked the Joint in 2007 (Allison was also on that trip) had warned me that the cairn grotto had been depleted... and it definitely was (to the point I didn't include pictures). Although I'd originally thought we'd have our lunch here, it was so damn cold that we high-tailed it fully out, desperate for a sunny, warm spot.



Left to Right: our lunch spot, main course, jeep road, ACTUAL footpath to Chesler

At this point, we were running a little late. I'd originally figured we'd be at the jeep road at 1... but it was nearly 1:45 now - and still NO jeep road. Hungry, we gave up and found a big, scenic slab by the side of the trail, spending 15 minutes eating. And then we were off again, studying the maps carefully for where the road would likely be. At some point, the trail crossed a BIG wash, obvious on the map. Even though the trail continued above the wash, we determined that the wash crossed the road very soon – and so we decided to just stay in the wash. After 10 minutes, we felt we should have intersected the jeep road and so we bushwhacked back up to the trail... which had, by this point, become the jeep road. And then, of course, we started questioning whether we'd missed the footpath.

Deciding to push forward, we found the well-labeled footpath leading back UP to Chesler proper. And UP is the key word in that sentence. Even though I never hiked this section before, Bryan definitely warned me that this section was scenic but challenging... and it was. Of all the thumbtack areas we scrambled today, this was the longest and the hardest. Looking down at it as we climbed, it was often impossible to imagine a trail. But the route was 90% straightforward – with only a couple funky spots where we had to crosscheck where cairns were. Although there were a few scrubby sections where we hiked on sand, most of the way was on slickrock, involving a fair bit of hand use... UP, UP, UP all the way. Even though the section between the footpath sign and Chesler proper was only 1.2 miles, it felt 2-3. Near the end, we found ourselves hiking into a seeming wall, both of us going: where the hell is the trail going now? We then walked between 2 closely-spaced towers via this notch-joint, which I distinctly remembered Bryan talking about. Looking back at the notch-joint from the other side, it was impossible to imagine the main trail went through this.



Left to Right: all - climbing back UP to Chesler through thumbtacks

Although I assumed we'd be home free by the notch-joint Chesler re-entry point, there were still 15 more minutes of hiking to get to the junction we'd last seen around 12:30. Given that we still had 3 miles of up/down hiking left, we did not dally – other than an extra-long drink, given a brewing headache. Our pace going back was significantly faster – plus, we were less interested in taking pictures. We also met a fair number of people: some backpacking in, some returning from backpacks, some returning from Druid. Memorable parties included a dad and his very young daughter heading to camp in Chesler, and this returning pair of dirty 20-something guys who took a cigarette break in the grotto. Given the number of joint-related trails, we agreed it would have been funnier if they'd actually been smoking joints... although we suspected they had depleted that stash while camping. Meanwhile, we stopped for a final Peeps break a mile before the trailhead. As we made the final descent to the parking lot, we sadly passed this little boy (who could have hiked all day) and his completely out-of-shape mother (who could barely walk one flight of stairs).



Left to Right: join-notch Chesler re-entry, heading down notch-pass, La Sal's from near parking lot, Newspaper Rock

Instead of using the trailhead pit toilet, Ellen insisted we make a “flush-toilet stop” at the visitor center. Our only other brief stop was at always-suspicious Newspaper Rock. Although interesting, I question what percentage of it is legit. Given that one of the food-related themes during today's hike had been beef (i.e. we passed a side-road to “Beef Basin”), we hoped to hit what had been this 50's style burger joint on the south end of Moab. Discovering it had been replaced by a new hotel chain, we settled for cheeseburgers with guacamole off the “Gringo Menu” at La Hacienda, a place Allison and I loved back in 2004. They were DELICIOUS.

March 25 – Little Wildhorse (LWH) & Bell Canyon Loop, Goblin Valley, and Sego Canyon

LWH, 2 hours from Moab, lies in relatively unprotected San Rafael Swell. When John and I first visited LWH in 1997, it was relatively unknown and undeveloped. In the past 10 years, signs have appeared, roads have been improved, and a fully-functional trailhead (parking lot, restrooms, kiosk) have sprung up... along with the latest molestation: graffiti in the canyon. Although I considered subbing nearby Horseshoe Canyon (with its legendary Great Gallery pictographs) for LWH this year, I felt Ellen HAD to do my favorite hike in Utah (plus, I was not convinced our car could handle the 50+ miles of dirt road into Horseshoe!). On most of my other trips, we have started with LWH, setting expectations high. Having LWH where it wound up on this trip was perfect because Ellen got to see Arches

first (appreciating weird slickrock), then the Joint intrigued her about hiking slots, and then LWH showed her how beautiful and complex a real slot canyon is. Even though I have photographed LWH a lot, going in with a big digital camera opened up new opportunities – although Ellen insists it got in my way during challenging scrambling moves. In fact, I didn't recall some of the more challenging full-body "rock-humps" (Ellen's word choice... surprisingly NOT mine). Today, I made a strong effort to document the scenery AND capture as much rock-humping as possible... preferably Ellen in natural configurations (as opposed to her constant need to pose).



Left to Right: (top) swell, cottonwood detail, Ellen after first obstacle, lower canyon; (bottom) first narrows section, first slot

We arrived at LWH around 10:30. Given rain tomorrow, today's skies were overcast with high, thin clouds – although it was warm. Thankfully, very few people were at the trailhead when we arrived: 5 cars – with a couple just signing the register. By the end of the day, there were twice as many cars. I am always astounded by how unassuming the swell looks from the parking lot; people who didn't know what was up there would have no idea there were any beautiful slot canyons. We hit the trail promptly – hiking 5 minutes of sandy, open wash. And then we hit the other thing that turns some folks away: a major chockstone. I have no recollection regarding how John and I dealt with this; I know I was completely puzzled by it on my first hike back here with students. Although it wasn't bad to scramble, that first climb-over seemed harder (camera? gut?). About 10 minutes past the chockstone, we hit the first set of narrows – which are beautiful but short. After narrows #1, there was a brief wide section – and then narrows #2 began.



Left to Right: (top) MAJOR slot area, the crack thereto in the first shot... lots of rock-humping, puddles, chunks of snow, and spooky bony ghosts; (bottom) brief wider section, the WORST rock-hump (lots of bruises there)

Narrows #2 is 0.5-75 mile and, thankfully, we got to take our time in there (having been playing leapfrog with this pair of families for some time). There was also a TON of rock-humping, a surprising amount of standing water, and occasional chunks of hard snow that were almost a foot thick. Today, the colors of the rocks seemed pinker (perhaps the overcast light?). We then hit another big open section, the families having stopped here for lunch. We, however, decided that lunch would wait until we knew we were at the upper jeep road section (i.e. out of LWH proper). Continuing, we found the canyon closing in again... as did memories of hard scrambles to come. Indeed. In the uppermost parts of LWH, we wrestled at least 3 big obstacles – each representing the hardest moves of the day.

Two are shown above, the last being the hardest of all. Getting up into that curving chute was fascinating; once you jammed your body in there, you had to inch-worm a couple feet before the slot straightened and widened. One place where I didn't take a picture (because I had to protectively hide the camera in order to get up) was this impressive tall ledge that you had to basically body flop up onto. After multiple alternative move attempts, I honestly thought we were going to have to give up... but then I just committed and did it. Even though Ellen (behind me) could have done it herself, she ultimately asked for me to pull her up.



Left to Right: (top) upper LWH wall and tower, jeep road, Bell Canyon mouth; (bottom) all Bell, including me and "pubic hair ledge"

Soon, we were clearly coming to the top, the snow deep where the high walls shaded the trail. Once we were on the jeep road, though, the land was arid and warm. Worried we were still running behind, I insisted that we delay lunch until 1:30 – when, hopefully, we would be at the highpoint. We passed a couple (now eating lunch) who had been signing the register when we first arrived at the trailhead. Continuing, we followed a new footpath that took us off the road, shortcutting through a sandy, scrubby area. Within 5 minutes, we were back on the road – climbing towards this looming horizon I knew was THE highpoint. As we neared this pass, the winds picked up and we decided it would be prudent to lunch behind this massive, wind-shielding boulder right below the highpoint. As we ate, the aforementioned couple passed us – and, for the rest of the way down Bell Canyon, we played leapfrog with them. From the highpoint, the LONG-looking descent to Bell only took 15 minutes... which (again) surprised Ellen. A new kiosk with a map had been placed at the mouth of Bell, including the installation of huge rocks across the still wide trail – meant to block ATV's. Heading into Bell, I – as usual – had no great expectations because, honestly, this canyon has never struck me as holding a candle to LWH. But for some reason today, it was really beautiful... not in the same way, but worth all the effort of slogging over the jeep road to complete the whole loop. While there were no ridiculous slot areas, there were narrow sections that were more interesting and prettier than I remember... and there were 10 decent obstacles to down-scramble, including "pubic hair ledge" (an inside joke from my last hike in this canyon). We arrived back at the trailhead around 3, meaning it took us 4.5 hours to hike 8.5 miles (with about 1000 feet up/down).



Left to Right: Sego Canyon site and rock art – both etchings (thousands of years old) and paintings (hundreds of years old)

We promptly hit the road (given that 2 other parties had also just arrived and we wanted to avoid their dust), bound for nearby Goblin Valley. Although one of Ellen's friends insisted that Goblin was amazing, I am not a fan: I think it's over-rated and poorly run. My dislike for Goblin (a state park with camping facilities) began when John and I (after car-camping at the then-undeveloped mouth of LWH) used Goblin's showers and were chased down by angry rangers demanding money. After checking out Goblin's new visitor center, we headed to the main overlook where I briefly followed Ellen down to the hoodoo area but then retreated because I find the area sort of trashy. Even Ellen was shocked there were no official trails or obvious rules: anyone could go wherever they wanted, climbing all over the crumbling rocks. Needless to say: after 20 minutes, we were on the road and heading back to I-70. To slightly make up for skipping Horseshoe Canyon, we visited Sego Canyon – a site I'd never heard of (we discovered it using an error-laden Moon guidebook, which I've since recycled). To reach Sego, we took the Thompson Springs Exit off I-70 (187, NOT Moon-stated 185). Although Moon claimed that Thompson Springs was an operational railroad community, we found it to be a depressing ghost town. We drove nervously through the weird community, joking about gun-toting curtain-twitchers who might follow us up the blind canyon and do lord-knows-what to us. There were decent signs and the road was fully paved all the way to Sego (5 miles off the highway). However,

hand-made signs just outside of town stated that locals did not want you going past the gate beyond the rock art area (defining the reservation boundary for the Uintah and Ouray). The not-surprisingly-deserted Se-go site was decent: it featured a pit toilet, kiosk information, and a short trail below a sandstone wall with etchings (said to be 8000 years old) and red-hued paintings (said to be done in the 1800's). Unfortunately, the site is NOT well preserved and significant graffiti has been made among the panel drawings. While we walked the trail, a pick-up truck blazed by, making me skittish. Just beyond the main site, an open gate was installed (the pick-up had come from up there). Immediately beyond: a clearly-used corral and a couple more panels of paintings (with even more graffiti). Although we didn't drive through the gate, we ran through it and up to the panels, taking a couple shots... and then we HIGH-TAILED it back to Moab. Despite Moon's many errors, we decided to trust their high praise of Buck's grill-house for dinner. RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: Buck's is no more, which is not surprising given that Ellen and I felt it was overpriced, uncreative, and average.



Left to Right: trailhead, UGLY train tracks, WTF cable section, WTF ladder, Bowtie (a.k.a. Toilet) Arch, Corona Arch

March 26 – Rained Out Along the Potash (Corona Arch), But GORGEOUS Back in Arches (Tower, Delicate Again)

Given that it wasn't raining too hard come morning, we first hit Corona Arch (a new hike for me) because trail descriptions suggested there were steep slickrock sections with a ladder and a cable. The trailhead for unprotected Corona Arch lies along the Potash Road; RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: Corona is where several people have video-taped rope-swings, resulting in a few deaths. The only other time I'd driven Potash was when Allison and I put-in/rafted the upper Colorado through Canyonlands. Today, we drove Potash 10 miles, arriving at the nearly-empty trailhead parking lot around 9:30. Below, a drive-in campground looked half full, its otherwise scenic location blemished by RV's and train tracks. We set out, climbing steeply for 10 minutes. Near where things flattened out, we came to railroad tracks that emerged from a man-made canyon cut into the redrock... an interesting spot to photograph and contemplate. Here, we followed the obvious hiking trail across the tracks; as learned later, another couple on the trail got confused and decided that trail was along the tracks and UP the man-made canyon. After 10 minutes of less steep climbing, we hit another flat section that was scenic only because there were no man-made objects in view. As the sky began to get worked up, we rounded a corner and began climbing slickrock via the so-called cable section. We were, like: WTF? We'd already scrambled WAY harder stuff elsewhere – no assisting cables! And just beyond: a 7-foot ladder (also WTF?). The view from the top of the ladder encompassed Corona Arch, Bowtie Arch (which we called Toilet Arch, given everything about it – including its diarrhea-like stains), and more UGLY train tracks (which I NEVER could get over on this hike!). From here, we contoured slickrock – passing under both arches. We spent 5 minutes at Corona but, by this point, it was raining steadily. On the way back, we met some Germans who "couldn't dream of being in the hotel all day even with the rain." By this point, I'm not sure I felt the same... although I did have my pimp-umbrella!



Left to Right: (top) Potash rock art, Ellen climbing above Salt Valley/Tower trailhead, big fin section, Tower Arch; (bottom) me and pimp-parasol, Tower, hiking dunes back down, Marching Men

Arriving back at the car at 10:30 in now-steady rain, we decided to head back to the hotel to re-review the forecast and make some calls about the road to Tower. En route, we stopped at a well-labeled, roadside rock art pull-out. Now in an outright downpour, the notion of just relaxing at the hotel seemed like a great idea to me... but not to restless Ellen. Exacerbating our argument about what to do, officials at Arches (on the phone) could not advise or provide accurate information about the Tower road. Meanwhile, the sun was

trying hard to burn a hole in the thin and dynamic clouds. Ultimately, this was my sign to go for Tower. Of course, the Arches gate ranger had NO PROBLEMS telling us the Tower road was unsafe... but, by now, I was mad at Arches for being wishy-washy. Having driven to Tower 4 times, I knew 90% of the road would be fine. Clouds dissipated as we gained the higher interior of Arches; indeed, it NEVER rained... and the pimp-umbrella became my sun parasol. After leaving the paved road, we found the wash sections squishy (they always are) but there was no tire-sucking mud. Not surprisingly, we were the only ones at the trailhead at 1:30 – and we were the only ones there when we left. Although I don't consider Tower a difficult hike, I portrayed it as too easy and short to Ellen – who was surprised how long, sometimes steep, and challenging some terrain was. On paper, Tower is 7.2 miles and 800 feet up/down. From the parking lot, it is an immediate climb – with several rocky areas where you have to follow cairns. After 20 minutes, we reached this higher plateau of open scrubland. Here, I waited for Ellen so I could point out the route: dropping to the basin under the Marching Men, climbing this sand dune-y beast, turning right and hiking through fins to Tower. Again, Ellen found it hard to believe – looking at the drop and the distance – that this hike was under 4 miles. But I was at the top of the sand dune in 20 minutes, having jogged down and across the little basin. And 10 minutes after that, I was sitting in front of the always-scenic arch – under my pimp-parasol. Given our tiff that morning, I cannot say Ellen and I were very talkative... but she seemed happy with the hike and the serenity of Tower. After 20 minutes snacking and taking dumb pictures, we were back on the trail – and back at the trailhead around 3.



Left to Right: (top) “upper-lower” Delicate viewpoint with arch details; Park Avenue, including Nefertiti

Because today was our last full day, we considered hiking back up to Delicate for one final hurrah. Given funky clouds amassing again, however, we decided to play it safe and just visit the lower Delicate viewpoint. While I know I visited this area with John, we only hiked the “lower-lower” viewpoint... not the longer “lower-upper” trail, which Ellen and I tackled... the whole thing a churned mess of sticky mud (what I feared the Tower road would be like, but wasn't). The final viewpoint is 0.5 miles and definitely climbs, ending on slickrock – glorious views up at the Delicate cirque. En route, Ellen “delicately” chewed out a little boy for gleefully kicking over rock cairns. Before returning to Moab for good, we made what was – remarkably - my first stop at the Park Avenue area... hiking 10 minutes down and back. Given that we were back at a decent hour (5:30), we ignored the Moon guidebook's lukewarm description of this crazy restaurant (Sunset Grill) on the hillside (originally the home of some uranium baron). Perhaps not surprisingly, it was FANTASTIC: great service, great views, great prices, great prime rib... only the 80's saxy MUSAK selections sucked (according to Ellen).

### March 27 – Getting Home

Given improving weather, we drove back up scenic 128 one more time. To our surprise, we arrived back at Grand Junction an hour early, giving Ellen time to work on her thesis-equivalent talk summary. Once again, Delta refused to assign our seats out of SLC. There, the gate attendant unsuccessfully attempted to talk us into taking a later flight because THEY OVERSOLD THINGS AGAIN. After landing at PDX 20 minutes, I would have enjoyed my shuttle ride back to Salem had these 2 college girls not been yapping the WHOLE time about relationship foibles. From what I gathered, the conservative one had taken 9 months to kiss her future husband but then they divorced a year after marrying (i.e. her spring break had been spent completing divorce paperwork). Unable to not eavesdrop, I was reminded of my first trip leading a Utah trip with students. It was our third night of car-camping along the Colorado and - not surprisingly - there was relationship yapping. Eventually, I offended a few girls by saying I believed one should metaphorically test-drive the vehicle before committing to it... or at least, given the title of this report, fondle it sufficiently.

### **Allison and I (2014): The A-MAZE-ING, Almost Everything New Jeep-Hiking Trip!**

This trip represented my sixth and Allison's fifth trip to Moab. Our original plan, booked in October, was to satellite with Bryan's student trip (i.e. we would fly and sleep in hotels on our own, joining them for the usual hikes). Six weeks before this trip, I was convinced there would be no Moab 2015 trip because both Bryan and Allison were each confronted by emergencies. In the end, Bryan canceled his/student trip but Allison decided she could handle being away. Now on our own, I resurrected the long-brewing Maze fantasy itinerary, which enticed Allison's imagination even more. Ultimately, we spent 4 days jeep-hiking the Maze with Navtech Expeditions and 3 days doing a blend of old and new day-hikes – including the hike to Druid Arch in the Needles.

### March 20-21 – Getting to Moab & Delicate Arch... Some Déjà Vu

One slightly expensive decision Allison and I made about this trip was that we wanted to fly in/out of Moab (not Grand Junction). At the time, we felt we were booking early enough (October) that the cost (\$600 per ticket – including Economy Plus seating, which guaranteed tickets/seats) was reasonable (i.e. it was not \$900 per ticket as Ellen/I were quoted in 2010)... plus Grand Junction tickets weren't that much cheaper (\$550) this time around. And so we purchased Delta tickets that departed PDX early afternoon, landing in Moab at around 3 p.m. The new problem: the ONLY car rental agency at the Moab airport closed its doors at 2:30 (SERIOUSLY). A taxi between the airport and hotel would run \$50 per person (SERIOUSLY). After a few pointed (but unsuccessful) complaints to Enterprise and Delta, we decided to ignore the problem for awhile. And then in January, it partially solved itself: Delta canceled the afternoon flight and moved us to a 6 a.m. departure, arriving in Moab around 11. One problem solved... but now we had to get a PDX hotel, drive up the night before, wake up at 3:45 a.m. (or, more accurately, be awakened at 3:30 a.m. by LOUD people banging around upstairs), and fight the usual airport bullshit (including OVERSOLD flights!). Fortunately, we had our tickets/seats and got to board the plane with the fancy people (thank you Economy Plus!). While the PDX to SLC leg was crazy/booked solid, we were surprised to find

the SLC airport VERY silent (including the crazy big multi-gate room Ellen and I HATED) and our teeny-tiny 20-seater Skywest prop-plane to Moab only half-full. While this flight was smooth, we felt like we BARELY made it up to 16K, the slightly snowy Wasatch Range RIGHT below. Although we learned that Skywest is about to cancel all its SLC-Moab service, we also learned that the Moab airport has long-term plans to expand its runway – the ultimate goal being to land larger jets. Landing in Moab 45 minutes EARLY, our happiness was doubly dashed by (a) Delta LOSING Allison’s luggage; and (b) Enterprise not being prepared or efficient.



Left to Right: landing in Moab, our rental mom-jeep, crazy crowds on the sidewalk, in Delicate Arch & viewing window

To make LONG story/day short, we eventually got an upgraded black rental Jeep Compass (which we dubbed the “mom-jeep”). Driving into town, we hit the market for lunch (tailgating IN the parking lot), stopped by Navtech to get our gear dry-bags (which would be loaded on top of the jeep), and checked in 2 hours early at the generous Best Western. By this point, Allison’s luggage had been located and would be arriving on the 2:30 flight... so we enjoyed a productive hour-long nap before returning to the airport. Despite LONG traffic lines at the Arches entrance gate all day, we completed our usual late-afternoon hike to Delicate – entering the park for free at 3:35. Today’s hike was easily the MOST crowded I have EVER seen Delicate: we had to park 10 minutes down the road from the parking lot and the number of people ON the trail (especially the big sidewalk section) was INSANE. Even so, the amphitheater seemed busy but not as nuts as the trail – although more people than usual (including us) were milling around the arch, and there were not as many big-camera photographers going out of their minds. Of course, there was the “kissing couple with the selfie-stick” who earned that name for a reason (GAG!). En route back to Moab, we did a short hike at Balanced Rock (mostly to admire the views of the La Sal’s... no pictures included) and then enjoyed a good dinner at the Thai restaurant in town... before packing like crazy!



Left to Right: Allison & jeep, Henry Mountains near Hanksville, scenic canyon road before Hite, vanishing Lake Powell

March 22 – Into the Maze... LONG Drive to Wall Camp & Short Chocolate Drop Saunter

Our decision to do a 4-day jeep-hiking trip in the Maze with Navtech was something I’d researched years before. While we were both totally satisfied with the experience, we didn’t get to do Navtech’s “usual” Maze starter: namely, entering via Horseshoe Canyon (including hiking the Great Gallery and some Robbers’ Roost slot canyons... basically – near Bluejohn, where Ralston was trapped) and then dropping into the Maze via the Flint Trail (including hiking the Golden Staircase and Maze Overlook). After exploring the Maze proper, we’d exit via Hite/Lake Powell... and we even booked a flight tour from Hite back over the Maze so as to avoid what is a LONG drive out. But all that changed the week before we arrived: a giant boulder came loose, blocking the Flint access road. For some reason, it didn’t occur to me that we’d skip Horseshoe... but, alas, we did – and so I have yet to see the Great Gallery. Instead, we fully accessed the Maze day 1 after a 7-8 hour drive (i.e. the drive I’d hoped to avoid!): Moab to Hanksville to Hite to the Maze proper.



Left to Right: Henry Mountains near Hite, Colorado bridge, easy dirt road, lunch tailgate, one of the few signs en route to Maze,

But I digress: we arrived 10 minutes late, which was fine because it was just us and Matt. I was more prepared for this arrangement than Allison because I had done a weeklong trip with just me and a guide (i.e. llama Lucy in the Wind Rivers). Thankfully like Lucy, Matt was older, quiet, methodical, and a great cook and hiker. I can’t say we got to know Matt well – but that just means he was

professional. Unlike Lucy & the Winds, Matt had only done a jeep tour of the Maze once before; most Navtech business seemed to be Colorado rafting or Needles jeeping. Departing Moab at 8:30, we enjoyed fabulous views the Henry Mountains and made good time to Hanksville, a new destination for me. Other than the Hollow Mountain store/gas station (where perishable items were MONTHS beyond their use-by dates) and MANY rusty, grounded houseboats (i.e. retired after stints on vanishing Lake Powell), there wasn't much to Hanksville. Although the landscape to this point was mostly scrubby flatland, we headed into amazing sandstone canyons as we dropped to Hite. Not surprisingly, we never saw much water; the overlook where we briefly stopped showed how far Lake Powell has receded: old roads, pit toilets, and docks littering dry land half a mile or more from the current shoreline. We then crossed the bridge over the Colorado before dropping to the nearly empty Hite visitor center/service station. Although Matt said Hite has changed a lot since Allison and I took/flew out of there in 2003 (e.g. the airstrip entirely relocated), I was at a loss to recognize anything familiar as we filled up the gas tank plus a spare can. We hit the road again at 12:30, backtracking over the Colorado and then turning right onto an unsigned dirt road. Over the next 4 hours (including a lunch stop), we covered ~40 miles (most in the Glen Canyon Recreational Area). After winding in and around mini-canyons and orange buttes, we rounded a big formation and came into open pastureland – complete with cows and calves (which Allison found cuter than I did). Here, around 30 miles in, the road became class III, coinciding with the appearance of Teapot Rock. Often driving over wild sandstone hillocks, bowls, ledges, and mini-canyon edges, our mph's slowed considerably. I can't say I was nervous or impatient... but I don't think jeeping into the Maze is everyone's pot of tea (no pun intended). Adrenaline junkies who think jeeping involves flying over crazy shit at high speed, for example, will likely be out of their minds. Purist hikers could also happily out-walk the jeep for several miles in this section (although few could make it to this point without support given water issues). As someone who appreciates remote places and enjoys driving her Subaru on bad roads, I totally enjoyed this drive. Even so, it was sometimes hard to watch the hours fading away... knowing there would be little hiking time left.



Left to Right: (top) Teapot Rock and class III road; (bottom) entering the Maze, trail-less fins area, The Wall Camp... booties and all!

At 4:30, we finally entered Canyonlands/Maze National Park and, shortly thereafter, arrived at the signed one-party Wall campsite. Outside of a few places in Alaska/Yukon, the Wall was – easily – one of the most isolated places I have ever camped. There was NOBODY, the skies and stars were vast, and the Maze feels like it surrounds you. Although I intellectually knew there were parties camping 5 miles away at the Doll House, it felt like we were the only ones on the planet. Matt encouraged us to throw up our tents and head out for a self-guided hike towards Chocolate Drops while he prepared dinner. Said trail originated near the Wall camp, although it took Allison and I 10 minutes to find it because Matt said we could cross-country to it from camp (vs. back-tracking up the road a ways and finding the official start). Although Allison and I are experienced hikers (and Allison is the GPS queen!), being sent out alone in the Maze was intimidating until we found the trail... particularly given the low sun. Nonetheless, it felt GREAT to be walking!



Left to Right: Chocolate Droplets – Louisiana/Titanic, potholes, penis/candelabra/frog, little Chocolate Wafer; Horse Canyon

Setting out at 5:30, we agreed to be back at 7:30 (i.e. sunset) – knowing we would be unable to make it all 4 miles (one way) to the Chocolate Drops proper. The route – a cairned trail once we found it – was straightforward: traveling along the top of this straight, wide corridor between winding Horse Canyon (on the right) and the curvaceous canyon we'd hike tomorrow (with the Harvest Scene). While most of the route traversed a mix of white-gray capstone interspersed with red gravel or sand, many chocolate-y formations dotted the

corridor at regular intervals. I think these are the features that give this area the name “Land of Standing Rocks.” Unfortunately, none of them have names (based on my Nat-Geo map or my Falcon Guide hiking guidebook – which actually has several hike descriptions for the Maze). And so Allison and I gave them names like: Louisiana (but then turned into the Titanic as you went behind it), the candelabra (Matt said part of this complex was officially called the eternal flame), a standard penis rock, the frog... and the little Chocolate wafer (which resembled ¼ of the real Chocolate Drops), as far as we could make it. Based on Allison’s GPS, we made it 2 miles (half-way to the goal) – and promptly turned back. Knowing there would be ZERO water in the Maze, we brought a healthy supply of handi-wipes, tent-bathing each night. While Allison slept in a 4-man luxury tent rented from Navtech, I used my 1-man so she wouldn’t have to deal with my snoring; nonetheless, her tent was the spa/bathing tent. After a head-lamp dinner of steak, potatoes, asparagus, really great pan-fried onions/mushrooms, AND a Dutch oven brownie, we slept soundly under an amazing canopy of stars.



Left to Right: (top) morning view from camp, tailgate breakfast; (bottom) jeep tire, heading to Chimney Rock, Water - funky bacon

March 23 – Two-For-One Hike: Partial Shot Canyon Plus Harvest Scene Loop

Despite plans to rise earlier, we were not up and eating (cold cereal/almond milk, yogurt, and bananas) until 8... and not on the road until 9:30. Fortunately, today’s trailhead was 15 minutes away at Chimney Rock – and the driving was easy... across the flat openness of the Land of Standing Rocks. Passing Lizard, Plug, and Standing Rocks, we soon arrived at Chimney Rock. From here, the views over Jasper, Shot, and Water Canyons and beyond were amazing: variegated, irregular fin-like canyon walls... funky bacon. Our goal was a “difficult” loop encompassing part of the Pete’s Mesa trail, the Harvest Scene, and then this steep trail out. At Chimney, we saw 2 set of cairns (but no signs of any kind!) that were 50 feet apart and assumed those were the ends of the loop. Had we studied the map and terrain more carefully, we would have seen 3 sets of cairns: a couple RIGHT next to each other at the foot of Chimney, and then a 50-foot-away outlier. But we didn’t – and so we set out down the outlier path, which dropped through a series of white-gray capstone corridors (funky bacon all around), and then began to plummet down into this deep canyon – mostly via these scary-ghetto rock-pile stairs (one website I found after this trip suggested these were made decades ago by shepherds and cattlemen who actively grazed in these canyons). Dropping even more, we came to this balcony where no obvious route continued... in theory, there was one – but by this point Matt, who had been concerned we were dropping too fast, determined that we were on the trail into Shot Canyon (which linked with Water and terminated at the Doll House) and so we turned around. Retracing our steps (climbing ~500 feet), we debated what to do given that it was now after 11 p.m. and Matt had thoroughly conveyed to us that his previous time around the Harvest Loop took all day (albeit with a group of photographers - some seriously out of shape - who were trying to capture images at dawn and dusk). We also crossed paths with this fit-looking, rope-toting party (we learned later they were backpackers camped on the rim near Chimney) on their way down Shot; they concerned us by going on about some extremely hard Water Canyon route they did yesterday, and then speculating (i.e. trying to scare us) that they thought the Harvest Scene loop looked even longer and harder.



Left to Right: scramble down Water Canyon... those rockpiles in shots 2-4 are ghetto stairs... HOW do you get down from there?

For some reason (probably hiking with risky men for many years), I ultimately agreed with Matt: we COULD pull off the Harvest Loop... even though it was already creeping up on noon. Allison, however, remained skeptical – not to mention: from here on out, she was far more involved with her GPS and map crosschecking. Heading out across Pete’s Mesa, we motored 3-4 miles per hour across the

easy terrain – knowing we had a solid 3 miles of “flat” hiking before dropping into an unnamed canyon that ultimately links with Horse. Heading towards the Chocolate Drops readily made up for last night’s incomplete hike to this destination. After less than an hour, we began dropping into a relatively gentle-looking canyon (NOTHING like the daunting view or drop into Shot!). Although there was one ghetto stairwell mid-way down, the rest of the descent was via a pretty tame set of shelves, balconies, rain-carved bowls... all with very clear paths and good cairns. Once we hit sand, there was a little brush, rocky business where it seemed like there had been some rock-fall... but then the canyon-bottom hike was relatively wide, open, and scenic (but, at times, tiring in the sand).



Left to Right: (top) motoring across Pete’s Mesa trail, close-up of Chocolate Drops, starting to drop... (bottom) more ghetto stairs, dropping down sandstone shelves and balconies... finally at sandy bottom (I forgot how much I hate hiking sand!)

Once we hit canyon-bottom, we hiked 15 minutes before arriving at this big open area covered by some kind of cattail-pampas grass hybrid... the Chocolate Drops impressively visible on the canyon rim above. We discussed whether this was the first junction – where two canyons merge, forming a T-pattern – where we were to turn left. Although Allison felt it was (based on GPS mileages), I did not see a clear opening (i.e. the Harvest Scene canyon coming in) and Matt wasn’t ready to commit. After continuing straight 5 more minutes, Matt and Allison decided it had been our turn (comparing the map, the GPS, and the position of the Chocolate Drops)... and they were right. Heading back and then left, we took our lunch break under a juniper cluster 5 minutes up from the junction (the Harvest Scene canyon opening visible); it was 1:15 and Allison finally seemed more confident we’d make it out before sunset.



Left to Right: (top) near and at first junction (note Chocolate Drops), near and at Harvest Scene GIANT wall!; (bottom) Matt and Harvest Scene, main panel, detail, beyond Harvest Scene – interesting formations/towers... a little water!

The Harvest Scene was a mere 10 minutes up the canyon – a 12-foot wide panel of figures representing its centerpiece on the MASSIVE wall. Unfortunately, the light was probably terrible and we did not have great cameras... so I’m sure our pictures are nothing to write home about. But it was both a treat and a privilege to be the only ones on this hike, enjoying this 3000 year-old art. Continuing up the canyon, the route passed under many impressive and unusual rock walls and formations – the path sometimes traversing wet stream beds (although I cannot say any were exactly running). With Allison and Matt engaged in the route-finding process, I mostly

enjoyed the way – fully trusting that they were going to competently find final escape canyon junction. Although we did not have any guidebooks or descriptions about this hike before or during the trip, I did find this hike written up in a Falcon Guide later; quoting them: “this hike is not for beginners... there are several side-canyons quite capable of confusing the hiker... keep your topo map in hand all the way, constantly noting your location.” Being called the Maze, this is quite true... lots of side-canyons are dead-ends and it is hard to know what is going to go through. We eventually came to this HUGE sandy open area with towering walls on one side and a big wash coming down; although we spent a good 15 minutes here studying maps and discussing whether footprints/cairns were heading up the wash, Matt’s memory of the escape canyon (which he thought much tighter), Allison’s assessment of the GPS directions, and both their interpretation of the topo map said to keep going... and they were right again.



Left to Right: (top) the big open wash – NOT the escape canyon, though... final 3 shots are the correct escape; (bottom) the escape canyon becomes more technical – scrambling pour-over slabs, loose rocks on edges, making our way across slickrock

The actual escape canyon was less than 20 minutes away, though – although it took awhile to be fully confident; although I didn’t include any pictures, there was this odd lower section with rockfall and footprints leading in several directions that required careful scouting. After figuring out the correct path, though, the cairns became easy to follow – although the route became more technical and steep... basically ascending a series of pour-over slabs, sometimes via rudimentary paths up loose rock/dirt, sometimes on the slickrock itself (sometimes actively scrambling), and sometimes via a couple ghetto stairs – the first of which got me good (i.e. Matt gave me a hand but my left leg flailed on the lip of the pour-over, resulting in an impressive 3-inch diameter bruise).



Left to Right: (top) ghetto stairs just before bruise, looking down escape canyon from near top, scrambling final layers to top; (bottom) FINALLY back on the top... BUT another slog to Chimney, and good light over Water’s funky bacon

Thankfully, my leg never hurt (unless you pressed it)... which was good because we still had another 300 vertical feet to scramble. The final moves to the white rim were freaky because the layers were narrow with drop-offs. Once on the white rim, we still had another half mile to go to reach Chimney Rock. En route, we met the aforementioned rope-toting team returning to tents they had set up ON the rim. While I assume they had a permit for the designated Chimney Rock campsite (as there were no tents/jeeps along the road), I

remain uncertain how far/wide each Maze camp-zone is (i.e. is rim-camping legal?). Slogging UP loose red rock to Chimney proper, we enjoyed good light over Water, acknowledging dark clouds dropping rain in the distance. Fortunately, the drive to the Doll House was short and painless – 20 minutes. Because of the Flint debacle, we spent 2 nights at the Doll House, a place Allison and I had been waiting to visit since 2002. Matt rightfully said we had the best campsite of the 3 options: the distant one that looks not only at the Doll House but – more impressively – has this INSANE view of the Needles, which look like this endless amphitheatre of pinnacles (interestingly, you have no sense the Colorado is out there between). Despite some high winds pre-sunset, Allison and I erected our tents by 6:30 (this time on a set of sandy ledges below the jeep area with the dinner set-up) and cleaned up – our jaws no-doubt agape as the sunset colors changed every minute. Although Matt often evaded assistance, I did manage to slice vegetables for dinner, which we enjoyed at 7:30. Tonight's meal were these GIANT pre-cooked ricotta-filled pasta shells (2 per person... I could have eaten 4!) served with a red-sauce containing lots of mushrooms, onions, and zucchini (alas, there are no food pictures because it was too dark!). There was also bread/butter and a canned peach crumble for dessert. Overnight, it felt warmer and less windy – so we all slept well... despite Allison's accounting of animal poop around the campsite (which Matt assured us probably was not mountain lion!).



Left to Right: (top) tents, cloudburst over Doll House, sunset over Needles, next day - Doll House parking; (bottom) Doll House from scrubby section, Beehive (where we checked our bearings), and continued... more flat & scrubby!

#### March 24 – Colorado Overlook... a.k.a. Bizarro Chesler-Joint of the Maze

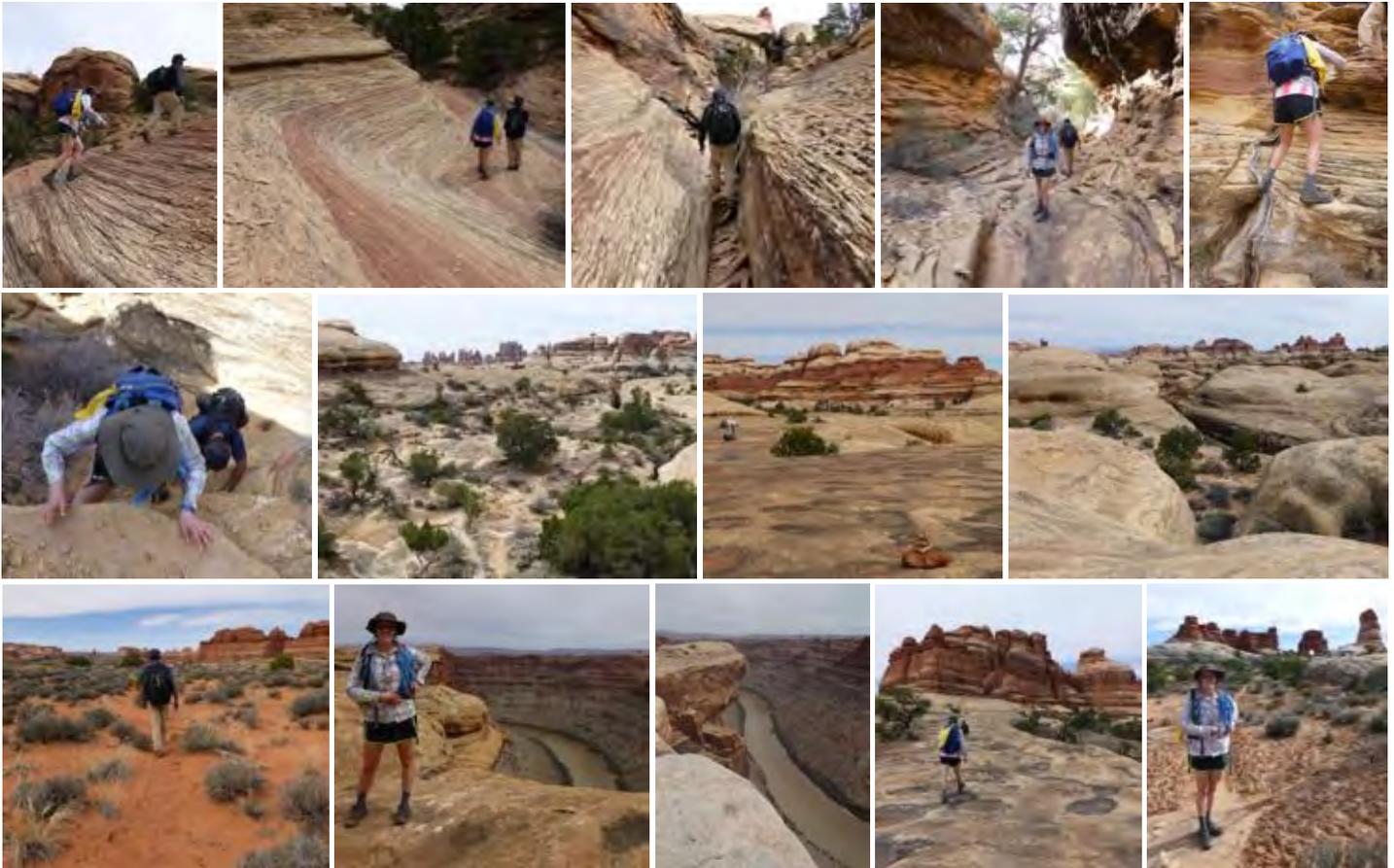
Given yesterday's LONG and late day, we slept in before enjoying hash browns and an egg-veggie scramble. Today's hike was a 9-10 miler from the Doll House which, based on our Nat-Geo map and Falcon Guide, SHOULD encompass a lasso-loop overlooking both the Colorado and Green Rivers. We – and other web-posts – dispute some of these assertions, however. After a 10-minute drive, we arrived at the trailhead parking area at 10 a.m. Although I was concerned about the heat, it was pleasant all day. We then headed up through the Doll House pinnacles, a short but impressive crossing that was challenging to photograph/capture given morning light. On the other side, there was a scrubby flat stretch, interrupted by stout Beehive Arch. At first map-glance, today's hike looked like it might be a LOT of flat scrubland – reminiscent of hiking across Chesler Park in the Needles. While there were sustained areas like this near each end (hence the title reference to this hike as Bizarro Chesler), the middle sections through/on rocks/fins were quite impressive. Although not as sexy as the Needles Joint section near Chesler, we did hike across the sidewalk-like tops of many Joint-like rocks... but there were also many other impressive rocks, some forming Wave-like formations with scrambly narrows. About 20 minutes past Beehive, we dropped into our first rocky canyon – this one filled with elephant sandstone – a gray-purple layer of pachyderm skin-like rock. Indeed, I never knew why the Needles' Elephant Hill is called that... but apparently the answer lies in the presence of said layer over there too. Although I swear I had never seen it while hiking Chesler-Joint before, Allison and I would definitely find elephant sandstone en route to Druid Arch – which is another option out of Elephant Hill (more about that in a couple days!).



Left to Right: into and in the elephant mini-canyon – pool, jumbled narrows, sandstone detail

After making our way through the shallow narrows of elephant sandstone, we came to this promontory that looked down a ravine which descended – eventually – to the Colorado (the river proper was not visible). Thankfully, we took a left – traversing Wave-like petrified sand dunes into this slot-like section. Near the end, the route headed straight up – scrambling a root-entwined series of ledges/layers

that, combined, were about 12 feet tall. Ultimately, going up was harder – although I fretted about this section for some time, worrying about getting down. And then we found ourselves on the Joint-like sidewalk section, traversing a crescent path over dozens of huge thumbtack boulders; although we never went down between them, you could see MANY Joint-like cracks among the sea of rock!



Left to Right: (top) into the Wave-like canyon with root scrambling; (middle) looking down root scramble (taken on the way out), thumbtack sidewalk; (bottom) Chesler II, Allison and Colorado, fruitless search for Green River overlook, Allison and Beehive

As with the Needles-Joint, the final section to the Colorado overlook was mellow scrubland – with flat sandstone near the end. As map-expected, the Colorado overlook was via an overhanging cliff that scared the shit out of me... frankly, I could not get within 6 feet of the edge. I can't say the view surprised or impressed me, though; it reminded me of the river-bottom views from the upper Colorado rafting trip, which were fine but not mind-blowing. Although there were a few more cairns along the map-suggested route (which was supposed to drop into this ravine above the Green), they soon vanished in poor/rocky terrain... to the point we were never able to find the Green overlook or locate any sign of a loop trail from here back to the Chesler-like area (nor had we seen any viable branches back along the Chesler-like area). We did see some cairns staying high and heading along this solid-rock edge that culminated in a scary-looking point, though; based on at least one website I found after this trip, this very likely terminated above the Green (notably close to its confluence with the Colorado)... but even those authors concurred that there was no loop, and this overlook did not match the one on the Nat-Geo map (i.e. there was no ravine descent). In retrospect, I'm surprised Allison didn't insist on running out there – but we were a little frustrated, tired, and just wanted to sit down and eat lunch... which we did, back near the big edge.



Left to Right: GREAT camp view of Needles in full light, basting the ribs, eating the ribs, next day - Matt's pancakes!

The hike back seemed shorter and easier, although we did manage to get off-track a few times in some of the sandy washes. Back in camp by 4 p.m., we had plenty of time to clean up, organize gear for tomorrow's early departure, and – in my case - help cook. In all my years of doing various levels of adventure travel, supported trekking, rafting, and glamping, I have to say: no one has ever done barbecue ribs. And so I was a little shocked there here we were in the Maze eating pork ribs. Of course, I am probably going to embarrass everyone with this story but - originally Matt suggested we only cook 1 rib-rack for dinner even though the company always

sent in half a rack per person... his rationale: he'd never seen any party eat their luxurious ration. My notable response: I assure you we will each eat half a rack... Allison (still down in her tent) may think she's a vegetarian but I've seen her put away ribs. And we definitely lived up to the hype, impressing Matt to the point he later referred to us as stout Oregon women (which we took as a compliment for our hiking stamina, camping fortitude, salty mouths, and rib-eating abilities). Of course, what made our feat even more impressive: Matt also served up pasta/pesto, green beans, and pre-fab mini-cheesecakes... all of which we finished. As should be obvious by some pictures above (i.e. the down jacket appearance), it was much colder and clearer overnight.



Left to Right: descending through Doll House on Spanish Bottom trail, view to Spanish Bottom, granaries, Joint-like slot

March 25-6 – Short Morning Hike, LONG Drive Back to Moab... Devil's Garden Down Day

The next morning, we could tell Matt was a bit stressed, concerned about managing a hike AND getting us to the Hite airstrip by 4:30 (at our request, Navtech had booked a scenic flight back to Moab). Although we did manage an earlier wake-up, blueberry pancakes and packing took awhile – and we didn't get to the Doll House trailhead until 10, almost an hour later than hoped. We set out on the Spanish Bottom trail, intending to complete what looked like an easy, flattish 2-mile hike/loop. Spanish Bottom refers to the popular trail rafters hike up from the Colorado. Traversing the pinnacles again (west relative to yesterday's crossing), we started dropping a lot into this rocky draw where, shockingly, we lost the trail for a quarter of a mile. But Matt correctly insisted the draw funneled down to a junction – and so we just pieced our way down until we intersected the trail and – surprise, surprise – a welcoming sign. From here: left headed DOWN a BIG 1500-foot drop to the Colorado (still not visible), right headed UP to the granary. I insisted we briefly hike left because it was clear the Colorado would become visible soon (and it did, as the trail proceeded into a more open ravine), along with the harshly dry Spanish Bottom river valley. After snapping a picture, we then slogged UP the granary trail (right), Matt's pace increasing. After leveling out, we came to another junction, where we headed dead-end left to the granaries; although the map says they are 0.2 miles away, it felt like 0.4 – the trail meandering, sometimes along a cliff with views to the Colorado and Surprise Valley. The Doll House granaries, built under a huge undercut thumbtack, were unusual mud-rock structures – very different than granaries I'd seen before. After snapping several pictures, we headed back to the junction and headed right – 0.8 miles back to the car (that felt about right!). The way included 2 Joint-like passages, some flat scrubby crossings, lots of prickly tumbleweed, and more elevation gain. BUT we made it by 11 – Matt's goal for hitting the road! Although Matt said he'd never seen backpackers in this area, we passed 2 such spread-out parties hiking down the jeep road as we drove back up to Chimney Rock. And, for the record: we are not talking about crazy young guys, the usual phenotype of Maze bloggers we found on-line after this trip; most of these folks were 50-60 year old couples. We still have no idea how all these people got in, although on-line reports suggest either jet-boat drop-off/pick-up (from Spanish Bottom), or driving a personal vehicle to near the Maze Overlook from Hans Flat/Great Gallery and then hiking ~15 miles down to Chimney Rock area. Given how little water we passed, though, we have NO IDEA how they were all managing that.

In general, our drive back went and seemed fast – even with Allison jumping out to Go-Pro shoot several “best class III” jeep sections. Somewhere in there, Matt received a text from the main office: scenic flight canceled due to high winds – which frankly relieved Allison (who'd been nervous about the winds and the flight) and left me indifferent (because I'd done it before with Ellen). And so Matt got the loud, chatty, opinionated, stout Oregon women ALL day in the car again. Aside from a Teapot Rock lunch stop, and a pee/gas-stop at a fancier Hanksville facility, though, we did not dally. Indeed, one of the reasons I'd requested the scenic flight option was because its arrival time was 6 p.m. (vs. 9 driving – at least that's what they usually managed). But we were so efficient that we arrived back at 7. I wish I could say the same about our PAINFULLY slow and uncommendable service at the Japanese/sushi restaurant.



Left to Right: re-jeeping Teapot, lunch stop with pee-rag, next day – Devil upgrades – new bathrooms, more fencing by Landscape

The next day, we headed into Arches again to – in my case - redeem myself after Ellen and my famously problem-fraught Devils Garden/Double-O loop. Because this was, like, my fifth time on this trail (in some way or another), I am keeping today's write-up short. Although Allison and I were DREADING the crowds, we were both SHOCKED to find the trailhead only half-full – especially given that we didn't even leave the hotel until 8:30. The reason: it was FREEZING when we set out, 90% of the crowds scared away until noon when it finally warmed up. Consequently, Allison and I had a GREAT time on this notoriously crazy trail... hiking up to and across the fins with NO ONE around. There wasn't a soul even at Double-O! We continued around the primitive loop, making one side-trip to

Private Arch... ironically one of the most crowded spots of the day. Within 20 minutes of the Private Arch turn-off, we arrived at the famous wall of doom (i.e. which Ellen and I, coming from the other direction, could NOT scale). In contrast, Allison and I followed an obvious but narrow walkway over the sketchy rock. Where Ellen and I had tried to direct-scramble the fin, the actual route was farther within/down the fin-slot – a thin zig-zagging edge that more gently ascended (or descended, in Allison and my case) the sandstone.



Left to Right: Allison crossing big fins, me and fin garden from Private, near wall of doom, ON wall of doom, Allison and wall of doom

Although we were thrilled to have solved the wall of doom, we knew we had one more serious obstacle: the infamous pool where Ellen and I both took off our shoes to slog. While not as full as when Ellen and I waded it, it still proved challenging. Allison inched her way across this narrow ledge high above the water (which I found terrifying) as I tried to friction traverse lower down. Long story short: I slid in... and so we spent lunch on a sunny rock down-wash, drying my socks and feet as much as possible. Even though we actually bothered to test the sat phone (i.e. successfully telling Bryan, who loves Devils Garden, where we were and what just happened), no one took any pictures of the pool or the aftermath. Making it out very early from Devils, we did a 2-mile walk down Park Avenue (similar to Ellen and my trip) but then roamed the streets of Moab shopping, eating ice cream, shopping some more, and doing a grocery store dinner on the hotel terrace... all in restful preparation for tomorrow's big assault on Druid Arch!



Left to Right: Allison near trailhead, paintbrush, checking mileage at first junction, shady grotto before drop to wash, wash junction

### March 27 – All Washed Up To Druid Arch, Needles District

Anticipating a 2-hour drive to the Needles, we were on the busying road by 8 – Allison claiming I made at least one illegal pass when I used a short-term left turn-lane as a passing zone. Oh well – we made it to the quiet visitor center in 1 hour 40 minutes. Despite many previous trips out of the Elephant Canyon trailhead, we had always focused our efforts on the Chesler-Joint loop - avoiding Druid Arch, a dead-end side trail along the way. But this year – in the spirit of “do as much new stuff as possible” – we decided to finally visit Druid. Hitting the trail at 10:30, we made good time as we followed the usual path towards Chesler for just over 2 miles. At the second signed junction in Elephant Canyon (following a moderately steep descent to the wash), we headed left – following all new ground up Elephant Canyon proper until reaching Druid in just over 3 miles (our usual hike to Chesler would have gone straight at this junction).



Left to Right: sandy wash, elephant sandstone wash, mixed wash, big junction – UP/right to Chesler, flat left to Druid!

After a snack-water break, it was time for wash, wash, wash, wash, wash. So – Roger will tell you that I was not as fond of this hike as he/Susie were because it was a lot of sometimes boring wash hiking. Indeed, I prefer the Chesler-Joint hike... I like the trail more, I think it's more diverse in terms of terrain covered, I think there is less annoying sand-hiking. Am I glad I did Druid? Yes – but I am not ga-ga ready to return... not like I am with Chesler-Joint. As can be seen in the collection of images above (and some below), the wash was wide, open, and hot most of the time; it was either very sandy or bedded with the aforementioned elephant sandstone (the same stuff we acknowledged for the first time back at the Doll House). At a few points, there were hard-pack trails along the wash-sides, or tighter spots with boulders to navigate... but, by and large, it was just wide washy-wash washing. Halfway to Druid, we were briefly perplexed by a sign next to a trail that headed up a scrubby hillside... but that was just a campsite. Within 20 minutes, we came to the

only real junction on this otherwise dead-end route: yet another route into Chesler (this one entered the circular park trail nearer to the Joint). The map indicated this junction was only a mile from Chesler; even so, the connecting trail looked steep and intense, climbing immediately onto these ledges at the base of towering thumbtack formations. A group of young backpackers (probably Boy Scouts) were descending from this route in a long, spread-out line – most looking tired and hot. Shockingly, these were the first people we'd seen since heading up the wash, begging the question: where are all the guidebook-claimed hoards of people hiking to Druid?



Left to Right: more wash, more elephant sandstone, looking down into big pool from scrambling ledge trail, more wash

Continuing up the wash, we hiked another 20 minutes before being confronted by the evil wall-ledge of doom (which Allison disputes). One set of obvious cairns veered away from the wash (which appeared to be pinching off in a HUGE boulder mess a ways up), the route climbing to the base of this wall-ledge where it was clear you had to scramble up this scallop-y rock formation to reach a higher trail system. My issues: the total height of the scramble was over 10 feet, the holds were awkwardly far apart and in all directions, and the places you needed to put your feet sloped downward and were slick with fine sand. After half a dozen earnest attempts, I gave up and went exploring – given that there were a set of smaller cairns continuing below the ledge. Allison, who had no issues with the scramble, continued on the trail above. After a quarter of a mile, I came to a MASSIVE pool in the boulder mess that you could not get around or across without a BIG swim (no obvious continuation of a route beyond). Upset, I hollered back to Allison, who backtracked annoyed... but then coaxed me up the scramble, despite the fact that I had lost my nut at this point. Not surprisingly, we failed to take ANY pictures of the evil wall-ledge of doom. After 5 minutes of pleasant hiking, we came to an impressive long chute with waves of scalloped sandstone layers – reminiscent of Half Dome. Although gentle-looking at first, the final 100 feet were quite steep and required outright scrambling; Allison's Go-Pro of this ascent is impressive. Less than 10 minutes away, the next obstacle – the ladder-and-bar of doom (which Allison also disputes) – looked easy at first... but then required this bizarre bar crab-walk, followed immediately by a move between what were HUGE thumbtack formations, all surrounded by 15-foot drops. Unfortunately, Allison was significantly ahead of me when I climbed the ladder and promptly found myself on the crab-walk bar with sewing machine leg because I could not make the transition to the adjacent boulder. Looking down between rocks, I panicked and yelled Allison's name several times. Ultimately, I got so frayed by the heights that I somehow sat down and essentially butted my way to a better position. Allison, Go-Pro-ing at the time at the base of the final boulder chute scramble, can be heard muttering "oh for fuck sake" as she heard me yelling in terror from the crab-walk bar. Nonetheless – and without assistance, I arrived at the base on the final obstacle: the boulder chute.



Left to Right: (top) gorgeous lower chute – from bottom, near top, looking down; ladder and crab-walk bar shot during descent; (bottom) near the final chute, looking up the final chute, Druid Arch, Monkey-Capitan, impressive cirque-wall around arch

Several accounts characterized the final boulder chute as the most difficult segment of this hike – but I found it quite straightforward. Unlike Allison, I also managed to stay on what was an upright, civil, zigzagging "trail" all the way up the 5-minute ascent. At the top, there seemed to be exit points heading both left and right. We first headed left, leading us to this flat balcony across from the arch (separated from it by the chute) – but then crossed to the area right by the arch. Although we never went fully up to the arch (and you cannot really go under it – not like you can with Delicate), we found a spot in some shade and finally enjoyed a proper lunch. A couple older guys were wrapping up their lunches 100 feet beyond; they stopped to chat as they were leaving, seeming slightly concerned

about our safety given that they heard all my squawking from the ladder on the way up. Both LOVED this hike and thought Druid was the best arch they'd ever seen. Druid was – no doubt – impressive but so was the big cirque where it lived: behind us was this massive tower that reminded me of a three-way cross between Yosemite, Zion, and Smith Rocks (I called it Monkey-Capitan), across from us was this HUGE wall of striped towers... and sort of in the middle of everything was Druid, reminding me of a less delicate Delicate in terms of its stand-alone setting amidst an equally scenic amphitheatre. After taking some pictures, we wrapped up lunch as a younger couple arrived to take our place. But that was it for Druid visitors, which seemed shocking given all the hype. Our hike out proceeded without incident in terms of the tricky spots – but was hotter than hell at times... easily the hottest day on this trip. The funniest moment was during the climb out of Elephant Canyon, right after we joined the major thoroughfare of hikers returning from Chesler: Allison had erroneously chosen to hold her pee too long... and then it dawned on her that it was a freeway so she better commit. Scrambling slightly above the trail (but still on a somewhat steep and open slope), she dropped her pants while I attempted to halt a big family marching up fast. Completely ignoring my request to stop, the father – in a thick French accent – gestured: don't worry, we are European... and they all marched right by Allison's very bare ass as she waved openly to each and every one.

After our long day, we arrived back to Moab FAMISHED. Fortunately, we'd had the mental fortitude to call ahead (i.e. while driving back) and reserve a table at Miguel's Baja Grill, an always-popular spot on the main street. We JUST had time for quick showers before walking to dinner. Although I am not a huge fan of Mexican food, our final dinner was memorably awesome – both for the food and the satisfaction of a well-executed and enjoyable trip. We each downed 1 Corona and 2 mid-range margarita's (all seemed pretty light – i.e. we were in no way drunkety-drunk-drunk) – along with a platter of chips and guacamole (excellent!), and fish or lamb taco entree (which were just the right size).

### March 28 – Getting Home

Our flights back to PDX were straightforward and uneventful. We learned that Delta was going to be suspending small-plane service to Moab in the coming months; apparently, the long-term plan is to extend the runway to allow larger jets. This seemed odd to us given how empty both SLC to Moab runs had been (especially by comparison with the more popular Grand Junction access/flights Ellen and I used). Despite the many uncertainties that preceded this trip, Allison and I both agree - given what have been more limited travels this summer – Moab was worth the time, money, and effort. Seeing the Maze and doing the hikes we did there were truly a privilege and I would definitely use jeep-support to do another hiking-focused trip (e.g. more in-depth touring around the Needles, Horseshoe). While it was a little weird at times to be just 2 stout Oregonian women plus Matt in one of the most remote places in the lower 48, I won't lie: having a man cooking and tending to your needs was a luxury... and any quality time with Allison is always a treat, even if she's crabby as hell in the morning and eats ribs like a man. As for the other hikes – I was surprised how up and down the crowds were: Delicate madhouse, frozen Double-O shockingly empty, and hot-as-hell Druid nearly nothing. But in the end, Moab never disappoints.