

Jeanette's and Conni's Great Train Adventure

By Jeanette

At 10 p.m., we took a van from McCarran International Airport to Kingman, Ariz. The drive was about three hours long. Jeanette thought our driver looked like Howie Mandel, so she called him Howie.

We arrived in Kingman about 1:30 a.m. We boarded Amtrak about 2 a.m. We were in Room 6 in Car 431. We were on the second floor in a roomette, which was made up when we arrived.

We were two cars from the dining car. Each table had a vase of carnations. The food was excellent, and we had a nice variety. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner and sat with different people at each meal—delightful people from all over. The most delicious dessert we had was an absolutely amazing tiramisu. We ate the most wonderful New York strip steak, beef ribs, salmon, apple-walnut salad and breakfasts. The coffee was the best ever. Water, coffee, juices were set up in all the cars and available to us whenever we wanted them. A newspaper was slipped under the door each morning. The person in charge of the dining car came by each room for our lunch and dinner reservation times.

The stops we made in Arizona were at Williams Junction (which is at the rim of the Grand Canyon), Flagstaff, and Winslow. The stops we made in New Mexico were at Gallup, Albuquerque, Lamy, Las Vegas, Raton. In Colorado, our stops were at Trinidad, and we “detrained” in La Junta, which means “The Meeting Place” in Spanish. It is located in the southeast corner of Colorado about 60 miles south of Pueblo.

We spent the night at the midtown motel—the only motel not on the main highway. We met Nick and John, who run the motel and are really gracious and very accommodating. The town has lovely old brick buildings from the 20s and 30s on tree-lined streets. About 7:15 a.m. the next morning, John drove us to the Amtrak terminal for our 8 a.m. train back home. It was running about three hours late. We went to a quaint, friendly local restaurant, the Kopper Kitchen, for breakfast. The police must have known Jeanette was in town, because they came in! Guns loaded!!

Jeanette had the best homemade blueberry pancakes she’s ever had. Conni had delicious huevos rancheros.

Eventually, we boarded Amtrak’s Southwest Chief. It starts out in Chicago and goes to Los Angeles. We were in Room 17 in Car 340 Upper Level on our trip home.

The train seems to ride in a smooth, straight line, but when you are *on* the train, you are bouncing from side to side. The upper berths have wide netting that hooks to the ceiling to

make sure the passenger doesn't fall out! Walking through the cars is also an experience. If someone has the door to their roomette open, you can bounce right in—uninvited!

There were times when the tracks curved around the hills and rock formations, letting us see the front and the back of the train at the same time.

We had two conductors on both trains. We were fortunate to have Conductor Nancy Wolfe on both. She is lovely and loves to give her passengers information, when possible, on what is happening outside the train.

Between Raton, N.M., and Trinidad, Colo., there is a tunnel under the mountains that is three-quarters of a mile long. You enter the tunnel in one state and emerge in the other state. On the Colorado side is a marker of a dead train robber who was killed in 1908 while trying to rob a train. In that same area, black bear, coyotes, and other wild animals have been seen.

Along the way, we saw cows, horses, antelope, deer, coyote, longhorn steer, hawks, a variety of foliage and terrain and wonderful, amazing rock formations.

People who live in the areas we went through came out to wave at the train.

In several areas along the way were adobe houses. In the backyards were beehive-shaped structures called *kivas*.

They are ovens (before we had outdoor grills) with the fire inside. The kiva warms up and holds the heat in. The bread or other food is placed inside. The small, arched doorway is sealed with clay. When the food is cooked, the clay is broken away from the hole and the cooked food removed. Most homes had two kivas.

The train we took home was 4 ½ football fields long. We had three engines (units), a baggage car, sleeper cars, a dining car, coach cars, an observation car and (surprise!) three private cars. Private cars cost about \$500,000 each (before personalization) and have to meet Amtrak standards. The owners have to pay to have them hitched and unhitched and per-mile costs.

We slept for a few hours on the way home and arrived in Kingman, Ariz., about 3:15 a.m.. We drove about 2 ½ hours to Las Vegas, Nev., getting to McCarran International Airport about 6 a.m. We were pooped.

The trip was Jeanette's and Conni's Great Train Adventure, since neither one of us had ever slept or eaten on a train. Fun times!! Good memories!! (And a few bruises!)