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Subject: Postcard

You don't get to Gila Cliff Dwelling by accident. It's not just off the Interstate like Walnut Canyon; it's not a major tourist destination like Mesa Verde. You have to want to go there. We haven't had an Indian ruin fix in almost a year and we wanted to go there.

First you have to find Silver City and stay overnight. Then there's a 44 mile, 2 hour ride through Gila National Forest. It's one of those roads that you hope no one will be coming the other direction because it looks like it's too skinny for two cars and there are no safety rails. There are no shoulders. There are no painted lines. But hey, it's paved.

Murray lives for roads like this. Drop his CVT into 2nd and he'll stick to the curves and hills like glue. We did. And he did. Until we caught up to an F-150 with Texas plates and a Texans football sticker on the tailgate. This guy was all over the road and couldn't get past about 20 mph. Dude – pull over – it's like no passing for 44 miles. Oh man was Murray frustrated. WE pulled over just to give the guy a head start.



Not a bad idea. After all it was early morning in Gila National Forest. Ponderosas cast long shadows under a cerulean blue sky.



Mule deer stared from between the trunks then bounded over the fence and across the road.

So we poked along until we saw the pickup at a viewpoint overlooking Big Valley. So long Tex! It was a clear sail to the park.

A quick stop at the visitors' center and we drove up to the trailhead to the ruin. There are some park people there who take your money or check your pass and give you behavioral advice: Stay on the trail, no food, no tobacco, don't touch the ruins. No problem.

We walked over to the car and changed into our gear. Layers again (started at 30 in the morning went to 75 in the afternoon) which we remove as the day progresses like we're self-peeling onions. We were getting our jackets on when we're distracted by an enormous belch to our left. An F-150 was now parked next to Murray and two, shall we say non-hikers, walked around the back of it toward the trailhead. Help! Help!

Fortunately they had cigarettes to finish and we got a head start.

What a beautiful walk.



The trail is uphill but well maintained and goes through partly burned but recovering woods.



Wild flowers are abundant in the cleared area. This is *Corydalis* (aka Scrambled Eggs, Golden Smoke) and is pronounced kor-RID-uh-liss. The park volunteer gave us the correct pronunciation then said he prefers KORY-DALLas. How do you respond to that?

Arrived at the ruin.



This is a lizard – lizz-urd.



This is Sheiladalius.



This is the view from inside a Mogollon mansion.

We finished up the tour and put our peeled layers into the car. The Ford pickup was still there and, inasmuch as we hadn't seen the Texans up on the cliff, we assumed they were overcome by thin air or gravity or something. Too bad.

We had more fish to fry. At the suggestion of another of the volunteers we went to the Lower Scorpion Campground. There was another small ruin there and some Mogollon rock painting. Regular DaVincis, these guys.



The campground had some picnic tables and the perfect ambiance for a salmon salad sandwich.



Sheila found a friendly lizard on a burned stump.



After lunch we went back the visitors' center and pulled into the parking lot. Yep. Next to an F-150 with a Texans sticker on the tailgate. We jumped back into Murray and took off. Not, however, before snapping this one.



Some good old boys have a gun rack.
These two had a paper towel rack. Made out of a coat hanger.
Well, it was a weird day.

D&S