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Wednesday, September 22, 2010 9:21 PM
Postcard II

A Tale Untold

In Mesa Verde, at the extreme end of Chapin Mesa, past Spruce House, past Cliff House, the surveyors who originally laid out the park road goofed. They crossed the boundary from park land to Mountain Ute Reservation land, and a 50 yard strip of park road is on Ute property. The Utes made the best of it. They cut a little dirt track to the asphalt road, put in a parking lot, snack bar and a gift shop so the *matukach* tourists could leave some cash behind on the rez.

In 2001 we had visited Mesa Verde as a twosome for the first time. We stopped at that very Ute store and bought a couple of coffee mugs. We used them every morning until, nine years later, one of them chipped. We went online and found the Ute Mountain Pottery web page, which was buried in a bunch of casino pages, but there was no way to order a new one on the web. We took a picture of the chipped mug and emailed it to the Ute Mountain Pottery email address and asked if we could get another one like it. No response.

I combed the Internet for other web sites that might sell Ute mugs. I found one – and only one – and ordered it for Sheila for Christmas. It arrived and it was a piece of junk. Back it went. Sheila bought some other pairs of mugs, including a couple of Navajo mugs that were also a piece of junk (pieces, actually). Back they went.

So we made it a point to include Ute mugs on our agenda for this trip.

The day we went from Sedona to Bluff there was some free time in the schedule. We detoured 130 miles to the Ute Mountain Pottery factory on US 160, on the reservation, across from the Casino. It was Saturday at about 4:50 when we pulled into the lot. The OPEN sign greeted us.



Full of hope, we pulled in. Their posted hours were until 5:00. Didn't matter. They were closed.

We went across the street to the Ute Travel Center. They had a gift shop as part of the convenience store inside. We inquired about mugs from the unfriendly Ute lady at the cash register and were directed to a glass case that protected a few, apparently valuable, Ute mugs. There were some really little ones and some really big ones and there were the same ugly ones we had sent back at Christmas.

Now we're back with Miss Ute Congeniality – Are there any other mugs? *No*. Is there anywhere else to buy them? *Mesa Verde at the Visitor's Center*. OK. How about the little Ute shop along the road on Chapin Mesa that the surveyors screwed up next to the reservation? Deer in the headlights look. *Real mean* deer in the headlights look. OK. Thank you. We drove to Bluff.

Several days later, it was on to Mesa Verde. Hike. Eat lunch. Drive through three one-lane, pilot truck construction stops to get to the very end of Chapin Mesa. Found the Ute shop. It was so not open.



OK, to the main Mesa Verde gift shop... No Ute mugs.

To the Visitor Center... No Ute mugs.

To the campground and the camp store... No Ute mugs. But there were some nice looking Anasazi knock-off mugs so we accepted them as our consolation prize.

Down off the mesa, headed to Durango, we realized we had not been in a real tourist trap so far on this trip (Honeyville hadn't happened yet). We stopped at the Hogan Trading Post so we could take its picture and send it to everybody as our tacky pic of the trip.



We got our picture and went inside to complete the experience. Sheila wandered back among the aisles while I loitered near the door. She motioned to me and said “Dale, come here”.

There they were: Ute mugs. UTE MUGS!!! HOLY CRIMINY!



The shop’s owner told us he carries them because the potter, Mike Padilla, was his student 25 years ago when he used to teach high school. Uh, we bought two.

A tale untold is now told.

D&S