

July 18th: Denver (Hilton Garden Inn) to **Scotts Bluff, Nebraska** (Hampton Inn) – 196.2 miles (3.5 hours give or take)

Significance of Visit: Beginning of our tour of the Great Plains of the United States.

Drive there: Grassland and farms as far as the eye can see - Corn or Cattle feed being cultivated. Gentle rolling hills. One gets the sense and feel of the enormity of The Great Plains – from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. 10 states of the United States (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico) and the three Prairie Provinces of Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) and portions of the Northwest Territories are within the Great Plains proper.

What we did: We reached Scott's Bluff a little after 1.00pm and went straight to the Visitors Center. Tchotchkes! After that we toured three exhibits outside – the different types of covered wagons used by the settlers of the mid 1800's. (Wagons drawn by oxen; they covered 20 miles a day, reaching the west coast in about 4-5 months) Drove to the top of the Bluff where one can see the North Platte River, the city of Scott's Bluff and the surrounding vast plains. After that we checked into the *Hampton Inn hotel*. We had a great steak dinner at what was recommended as the best restaurant in town. Part of it was a sports bar -lots of young people – I think motor cycle folk and others who lived in town (because of the motor bikes parked outside).

Brief History: Scotts Bluff National Monument in western Nebraska includes an important 19th-century landmark on the Oregon Trail and Mormon Trail. The National Monument contains multiple bluffs (steep hills) located on the south side of the North Platte River. It is named for one prominent bluff called Scotts Bluff, which rises over 800 feet (240 m) above the plains at its highest point, after **Hiram Scott**, a fur trader who died in 1828 near the bluff. The local Native Americans had called it Me-a-pa-te, "the hill that is hard to go around.

The collection of bluffs was first charted by non-native people in 1812 by the Astorian Expedition of fur traders traveling along the river. The expedition party noted the bluffs as the first large rock formations along the river where the Great Plains started giving way to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Their findings were not widely communicated because of the War of 1812. Explorers rediscovered the route to the Rocky Mountains in 1823, and fur traders in the region relied on the bluffs as a landmark.

Impressions: Reminded of the history and hardship of the settlers who came here on a trail connecting the Missouri River to valleys in Oregon and California. Also (per Wikipedia) - the Great Plains was part of the Louisiana Purchase that the US Government made from France in 1803. Imagine France selling land that belonged to the Native Americans! The city of Scott's Bluff gives the impression of being driven by an agricultural economy – quite obvious from the farmland around it.