

Mancos and Mesa Verde

Mancos Camp, Colorado, U.S.

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July 17, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

Stay anywhere too long and things start to settle in too much. The bus was made to move, its fluids pool, metal rusts, wood decays, the windows smear with dirt and rain, as Chinua Achebe put it, things fall apart. Everything. All the time. Stay too long and the world will settle down on you. The tires will lose air, the chipmunks will come for the avocados. I'm from California, messing with my avocados is messing with my emotions, I don't care if you're cute and striped.

So we shook off the cobwebs, pulled out of Junction Creek for a few days, and headed up over the pass to the west, to Mancos and points beyond.



View from the top, looking out over the Mancos river valley.

We found a nice enough campground, nearly deserted. The only downside was a little road noise — it was up on a hill above the highway and the sound of truck engine brakes was at times annoying. Aside from that though it was much better than Junction Creek. Fewer people and Mancos was much more my speed than Durango.

Mancos consists of one stop light and two paved roads. Or partly paved roads. The rest is dirt and hardly even a stop sign to be found. Still, there's a decent grocery store, a pretty good sandwich shop and a coffee roaster with the best double espresso I've had since we left Athens. There's also a library with passable internet speeds that I could work at.

Mancos is also only about 20 minutes from the entrance to Mesa Verde National Park.

I knew that after Chaco Canyon Mesa Verde was going to be a let down. You just can't have crowds and retain the stillness and mystery that Chaco has. I feel strange criticizing a place for it's crowds because on the one hand if no one is going to our National Parks no one is going to fight for them to continue existing. Still, I did not enjoy Mesa Verde. I am glad that it draws crowds, glad that people are out there visiting natinal parks and I'm glad they aren't going to Chaco.



If you know me you know I'd sooner chew my leg off than go on a guided tour. And Mesa Verde is all guided tours, you don't go into the big ruins by yourself anymore. You get a nanny. That's not for us really so we skipped that part and went to the one smaller ruin you can still explore (somewhat) on your own.



It was a nice stroll. It was funny to hear the rangers questioning whether our kids could do it, it was less than a mile and only 300 feet elevation change. The trail was paved. It's sad that we've created a world where it's considered amazing for five year olds to walk a mile on asphalt.

We left after lunch.

Just hanging around camp was more to our liking. The kids built obstacle courses, made bees out of pine

cones and looked up whenever the thunder rumbled up above, somewhere high in the San Juans because after a month here they've learned that the storms come out of the high country.





Bedtime

In the evenings we sat around the fire and listened to the nighthawks darting after food between the pines overhead. This is the Western slope of the Rockies, less water, fewer pines, more oaks, more stars to backlight the silhouettes of Ponderosa needles scratching at the wind.