

## Side Trip to Fort Larned, Kansas

HikaNation spent one of our layover days at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site in Colorado. Bent's Fort's heyday was the 1840s when it was an adobe trading post surrounded by a stockade where traders, trappers, travelers, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes came together in peace for trade. The stockade was to protect the inventory from marauding individuals who might want a share of the stock without a concomitant sharing their wherewithal.

While walking (hurrying) across Kansas, Butch, Rex, Mary, and I were walking early one morning a day or two after we departed Dodge City, a farmer came out of his house, walked down his driveway, and engaged us in conversation. What are you doing, he wanted to know. Where are you going? We told our standard story. I don't recall how the conversation came around to it, but I or someone in the group expressed dismay that we were not going to have time be able to visit Fort Larned NHS so that we could compare and contrast this fenceless, gateless outpost of sandstone buildings and corrals that had been a military base for the protection of the Santa Fe Trail during the Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s with Bent's Old Fort. (War technique at that time included skirmishes and ambushes, not direct attacks on forts filled with soldiers.)

This farmer, a normal-appearing fellow in every respect looked each of us in the eye and then pulled out his keys. "You can borrow my pickup for that side trip," he said. "Just fill it with gas when you get back."

It was over an hour's drive up to the fort. It must have been Saturday because several NPS volunteers were assembling to fire their 12-pound mountain howitzer. They didn't have enough uniformed soldiers, so "recruited" Rex to help out (he was wearing his military-issue fatigue pants with cargo pockets). He did well. Many pictures were taken that afternoon, including one of Rex holding a cannon ball rammer-sponger while the smoke of the shot filled the background.

You can bet that we filled the tank of that pickup up to the brim before we returned it! Then we started walking our day's planned mileage at about 6 p.m. We found the HikaNation campsite around 1 a.m. The next day, we got up and walked that day's route as if nothing had happened. In that one 24-hour period, (6 p.m. until 6 p.m.), the four of us walked 28 miles. I cannot speak for the others, but that day remains the farthest I've walked in one "day" in my life.