

2024: The Great Texas Solar Eclipse Trip

Some photos from this trip are include in the [2024 Family Photos album](#). Photos are linked to a larger view online.

Introduction:

Jim was not part of the group who traveled to Wyoming in 2017 to see a solar eclipse, so when one was due to cross Texas on April 8, 2004, he made plans to be there. So, early on the morning of April 3, we took uber to the Oakland airport and caught an early Southwest flight to Houston.

Houston

We reserved a “green” car from Hertz, but when we arrived at the rental office, I didn’t see my name on any of the stalls. We learned that Hertz did not have the car we reserved. In fact, they had no cars at all, though they assured me that one would be ready *soon*. The first car to make it out of the “get ready” lot was not a green car; it was a muscle car appropriate to someone half our age.



Our First House 2315 Shakespeare

We took it anyway and headed to Flo's, driving past our old house on the way. The neighborhood has gentrified somewhat.

We had lots of things to do in Houston before hitting the road:

1. A dinner with Jim's siblings, cooked by Bill. Jim agreed to take charge of the property in Polk County that we each own a small share of. That got relegated to a C priority when he discovered that Polk County is a bit behind the curve, Internet-wise. Someone would have to visit the courthouse and pore thru the records. But the meal was nice.
2. We had lots of meals with Houston friends.
 - a. We met Ann and Bob Arnett for lunch at the Raven Grill on Bissonnet
 - b. On the 5th, we met Emily Bull at Rice and toured the new engineering building — after lunch.
 - c. That night, we joined Flo and some of her classmates from Kinkaid who were in town for a 60th reunion. Though we were older than the others, Jim jumped at a chance to see his former debate partner, [Bonnie \[Brigance\] Leadbetter](#). Her husband was very polite and let us reminisce. We had a perfect, though short, career debating, winning every match.



Pipevine Swallowtail

3. On the 6th we headed for San Antonio to join a Rice Eclipse group. We decided to do a little birding on the way. We stopped at the Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge, where we hadn't visited in years. Luckily, we arrived for a special day with organized tours to see the chickens displaying. We had fabulous views, but alas the photos were not the best due to the distance from the males showing off. We went on a wildflower walk where, we took a good photo of a Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly.

Hilton in San Antonio



Linda and Jim at Hyatt for Eclipse

We arrived at the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort in time for a quick swim before yet another dinner, for all the Rice alums.



Red Admiral Larva

We frittered away the next day. We drove to Government Canyon State Natural Area, where we had birded with our friends Lorna and Dodge Engleman several years ago. The birding was less impressive than the hordes of people in the area for the Eclipse. We took lots of flower pictures, mainly for identification, and this caterpillar, which someone on iNaturalist identified as a Red Admiral butterfly larva.

Flying L Ranch

On the appointed day, one day before Linda and I completed 58 years of marriage, we boarded a bus early in the morning for a drive to the Flying L Ranch near Bandera. The schedule assumed lots of traffic, but we didn't see much. That turned out to be a prediction for the Eclipse.

We used to visit the Flying L regularly as a family. We hadn't been there in years. New owners have improved the property.

We had a lecture by a Rice professor who specialized in eclipses. She had seen many with only 3 washouts. Alas, this proved to be her fourth, as the sun vanished into the overcast sky before our few minutes of totality.

So it goes. At least it grew dark as the moon covered up the invisible disk of the sun but not pitch black as we expected.

Austin

The next morning, we headed for Austin for more visits. Here is a photo of the Moorman side of the family. Starting at the left, Noah, Leslie, Marilyn, Abe, Linda, Jim, Panika, and the dog.



Moorman Clan in Austin

We made a reservation for the entire clan, including Noah's girlfriend Charlotte, who took the photo above, at The Grove, one of our favorite spots in Austin. Part of the charm is a beautiful patio area where we planned to eat. Oops! One of the Texas legendary thunderstorms dumped beaucoup rain, forcing us inside. The service was exceptional given the conditions, and we had a nice dinner.



Singing Male Golden-cheeked Warbler

We traveled to Wilda Campbell's place (farm? ranch?) southwest of Austin, where we met more friends,

- Bobby Hughes, Rice alum and birder.
- Wilda, Bobby's girlfriend
- Trent Miller and Meta Hunt, another birding couple, who were part of our 2014 New Zealand trip.

We heard and photographed a singing male Golden-cheeked Warbler.

We spent several more days in Austin, visiting old friends before heading back to Houston for one final bash. We had a big family party to celebrate

- Our 58th anniversary!
- Linda's 80th birthday!
- [Jim's 29th KDay!!](#)

So, in the end it didn't seem to matter that the Eclipse was less than spectacular. We enjoyed the trip immensely.