

Trip 4 – Episode #3: Meet Us in St. Louis, Louis

Our friend Jamie goes regularly to St. Louis for meetings, and before we left on this trip, I asked him if it was worth a visit. He said it was, and recommended a few things we should do. One of the things I've learned in all the years of knowing Jamie is to listen to pretty much everything he tells me.

So, after our wonderful visit with Huck and Tom and Mark in Hannibal, we turned south toward St. Louis.

Autumn was still very much in evidence.



As was Halloween.



We settled in a nice KOA south of St. Louis, where we saw a lovely sunset.



But it came with its own Halloween-style warning.

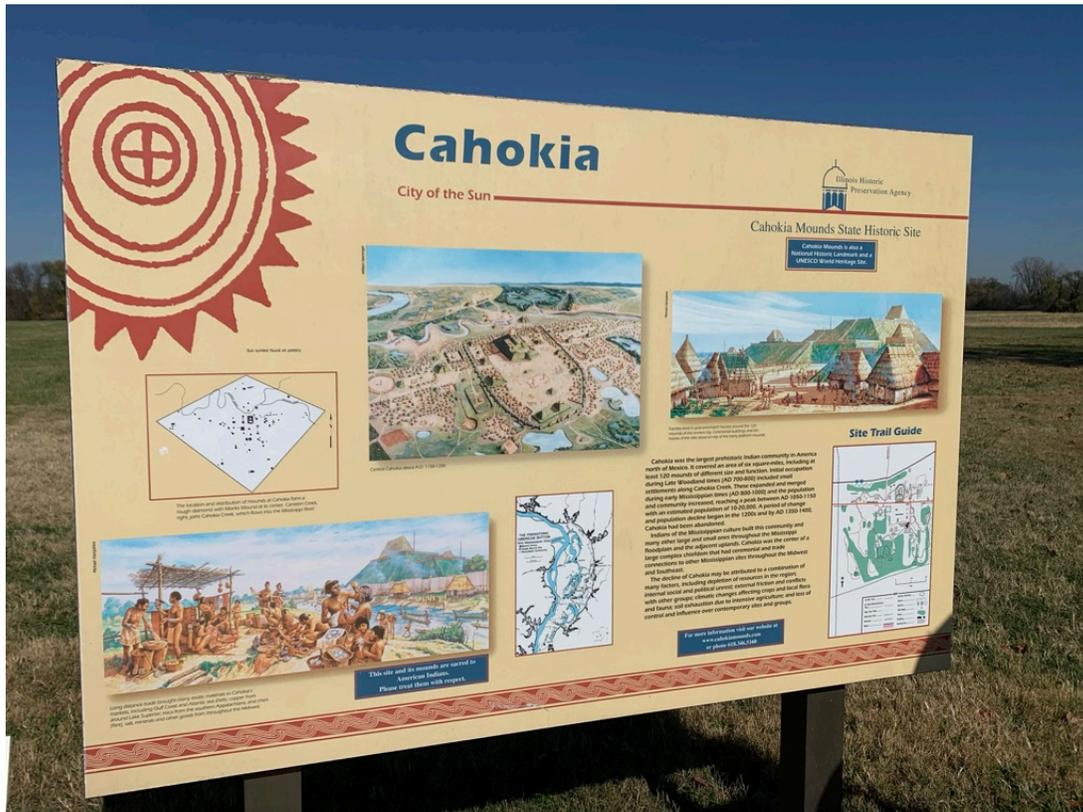


The next day, we journeyed toward St. Louis. Another couple we'd met at our previous campground (Susan and Jim) had told us about the Mounds in Cahokia, near St. Louis. So, we decided to stop there first.

I had been aware of Mounds, but really had no understanding of their significance. Basically, they're earthen hills, built by ancient peoples for a variety of purposes. In North America, they were built by indigenous people, going back as far as 3500 BC, and up until Europeans started showing up. So, they're kind of like the North American version of the Pyramids, but there were entire communities living around these large human-built hills.

(I can't resist mentioning that when you Google "Mounds", the first thing that comes up is the chocolate bar.)

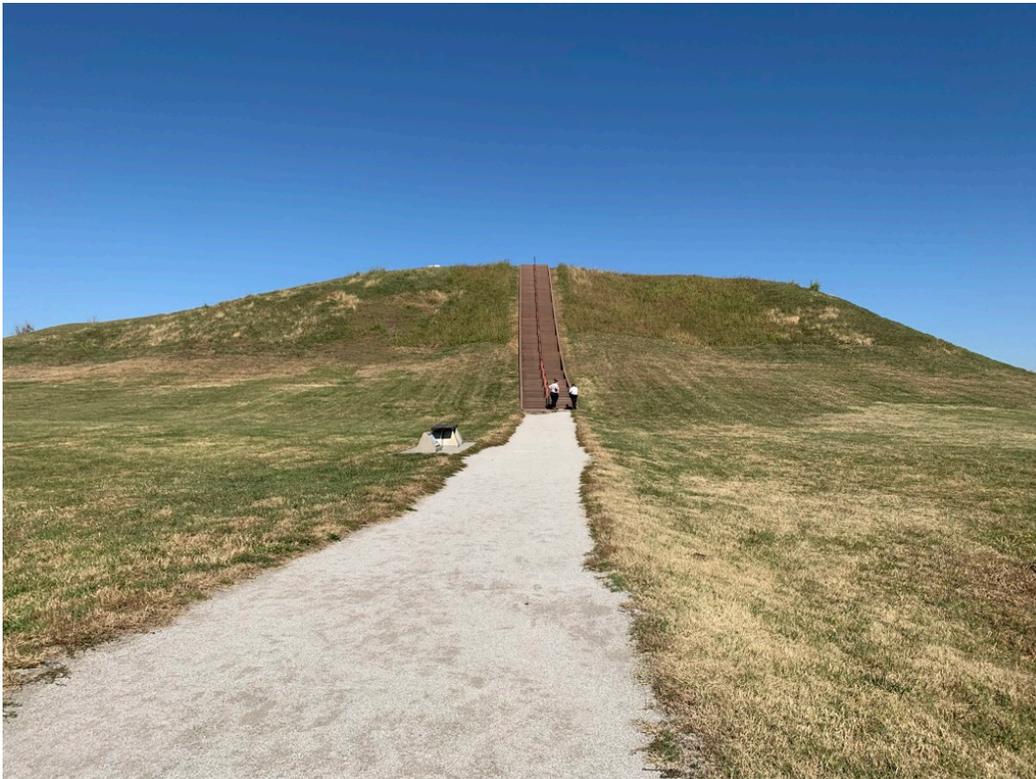
We started our education at the right place. Cahokia is the largest and most sophisticated prehistoric native civilization north of Mexico. The Mounds cover more than 2,000 acres, and an estimated 10-20,000 people would have lived there.



Monks Mound, which is 100 feet high and covers over 14 acres at its base, is the largest prehistoric earthen mound in North America. An estimated 22 million cubic feet of earth was used to build the mound between the years of 900 and 1,200 A.D, all of it moved by people, likely carrying it in baskets.



You don't really get a sense of the magnitude of this mound till you approach it.



And especially when you have to climb the steps.



And once you get up there, you realize how high you are, because of how far you can see. The arrow on the left points to St. Louis, which is 10 miles away. You can just barely make out the city's famous Gateway Arch. The other arrow points out the Mississippi, which would've been where potential enemies – or trading partners – would have arrived and been spotted.



And the arrow in this photo shows a very distant Charles in the parking lot below.



There are several lesser mounds and evidence of other structures surrounding Monks Mound. Some were burial grounds, and others had different significance.



Archaeologists have excavated several circular sun calendars referred to as Woodhenge, set up to determine the changing seasons, which display “an impressive example of scientific and engineering practices”. I don’t think these are the originals.



It was a fascinating introduction to another part of our history. Thanks Susan & Jim.
On to St. Louis and a closer view of the famous Gateway Arch.



We crossed the Mississippi ...



We got a glimpse of downtown (through our dirty windshield)...



We appreciated that St. Louis acknowledged St. Charles...



... And we went down toward the river in search of a spot to park Charles, so we could experience the Number One tourist attraction in St. Louis, which both Jamie and another good friend, Vicki, insisted was a Must Do: Riding the elevator to the top of the Gateway Arch.



Eventually we found a spot, although it was a little treacherous. But of course, we're intrepid. (Note Jim intrepidly standing on the downside of Charles.)



Along with recommending the ride to the top, Jamie told us to visit the museum underneath the arch. And of course, he was right. It's a very impressive space.



Of course, one of the first exhibits showed us the Cahokia Mounds, which stood as evidence of the location's potential as a fine city. Yeah, we knew that.

Pierre Laclède
"found a site [that] might become hereafter, one of the finest cities in America"
- Auguste Chouteau

Mississippian People Built a "Mound City" Here
The landscape of the St. Louis area was molded for hundreds of years before Europeans arrived. The Mississippian people who lived here from 1050-1300 A.D. built huge mounds. Some mounds were platforms for homes and ceremonial buildings. Others were places to bury the dead. Their largest city was across the river, at a site now called Cahokia, which once supported over 10,000 people.

On a limestone bluff north of where the Arch stands today, 26 mounds once overlooked the river. They surrounded a large plaza—a city center for social gatherings and games. This was a smaller city than Cahokia, with about 2,000 people.

Now, Most Early Features are Gone
When the French came to build St. Louis in 1764, they settled south of the ancient mound complex. At first, the mounds were left alone. It was not until 1822 that the city began to expand northward. By 1841, the town had engulfed the mounds, and by 1869, local workers used dirt from the last remaining mound for a railroad bed. Fortunately, the State of Illinois preserved a large portion of the Cahokia Mounds. The Osage Tribe owns and preserves Sny Leff Mound in south St. Louis, the last remaining mound in the city.

1. **Flint Arrowhead**
A flint arrowhead used for hunting.

2. **Mississippian Pottery**
A piece of pottery from the Mississippian culture.

3. **Iron Blade**
A piece of iron from the early European settlement.

4. **Beaver Teeth**
Beaver teeth used for building dams and as a source of oil.

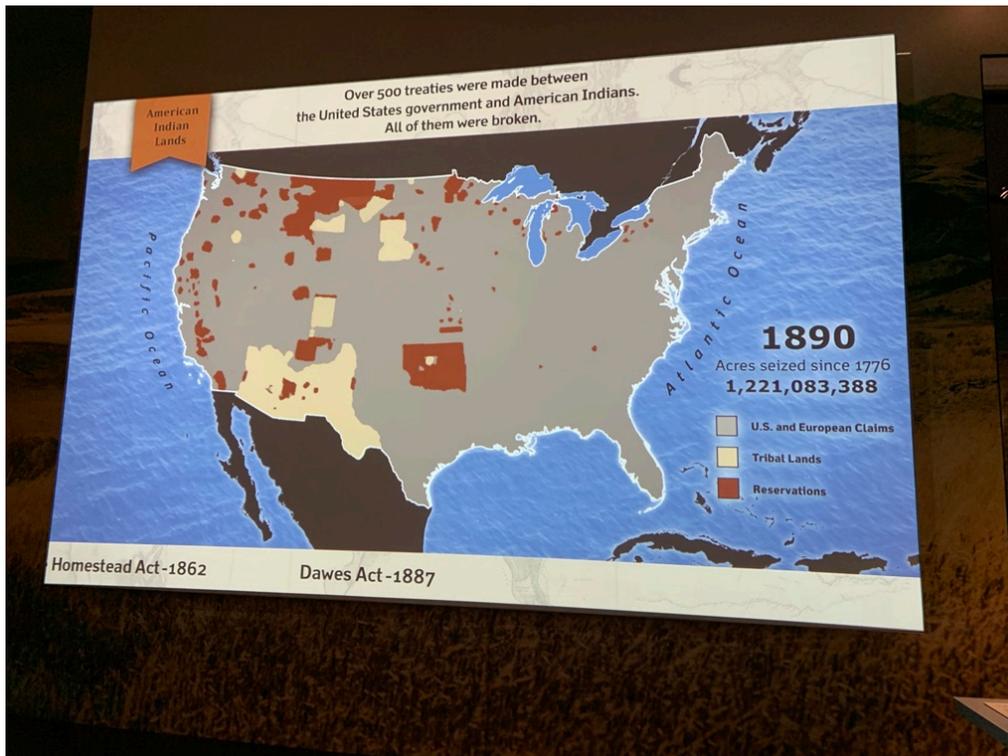
5. **Architectural Model**
A model of a Mississippian mound complex.

6. **Map of Cahokia**
A map showing the layout of the Cahokia Mounds complex.

The exhibits tell the story of the “indispensable” relationship between the settlers and the indigenous people.



And later acknowledges the truth about those relationships.



There was lots to take in, and it was full of opportunities to explore.



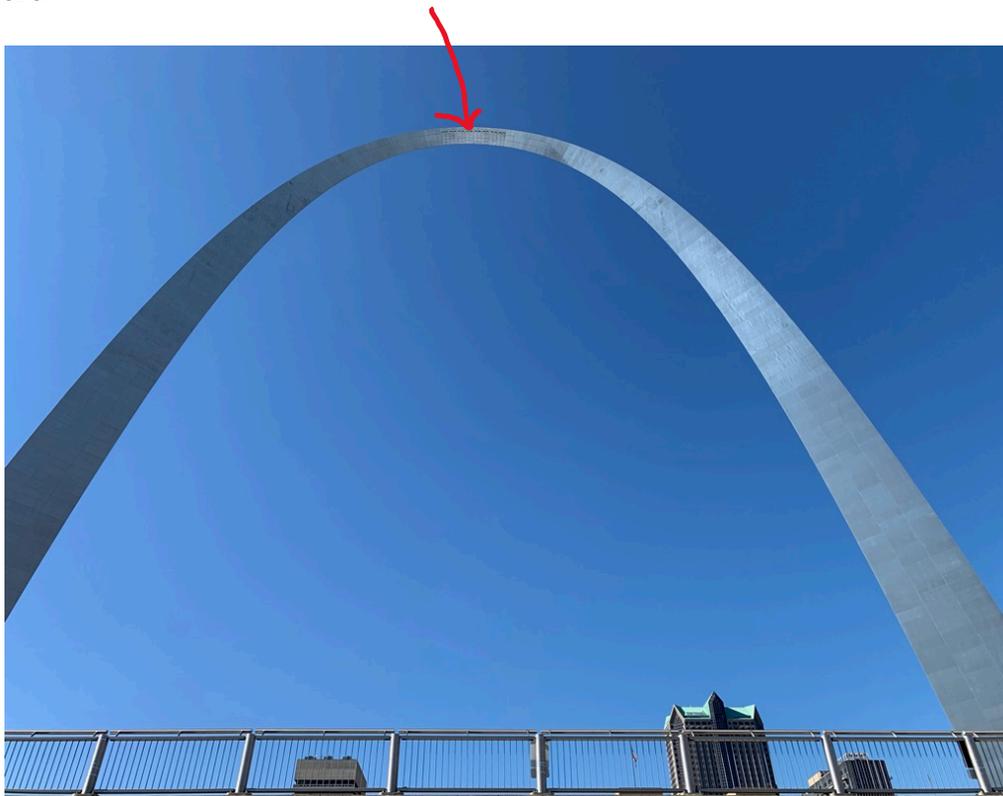
But it was time to go ...



In this...



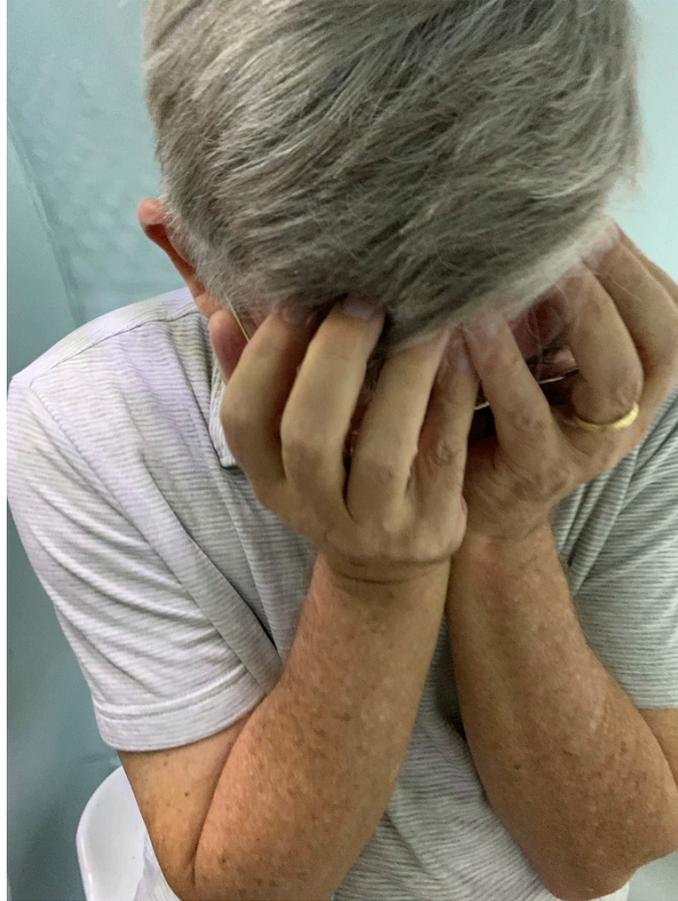
To get here.



One of us was less thrilled about this idea.



Nevertheless,
he persisted.
Proving once
again his
intrepidity.



But once we were there, at the top, it was all fine, and the views, as promised, were quite amazing.

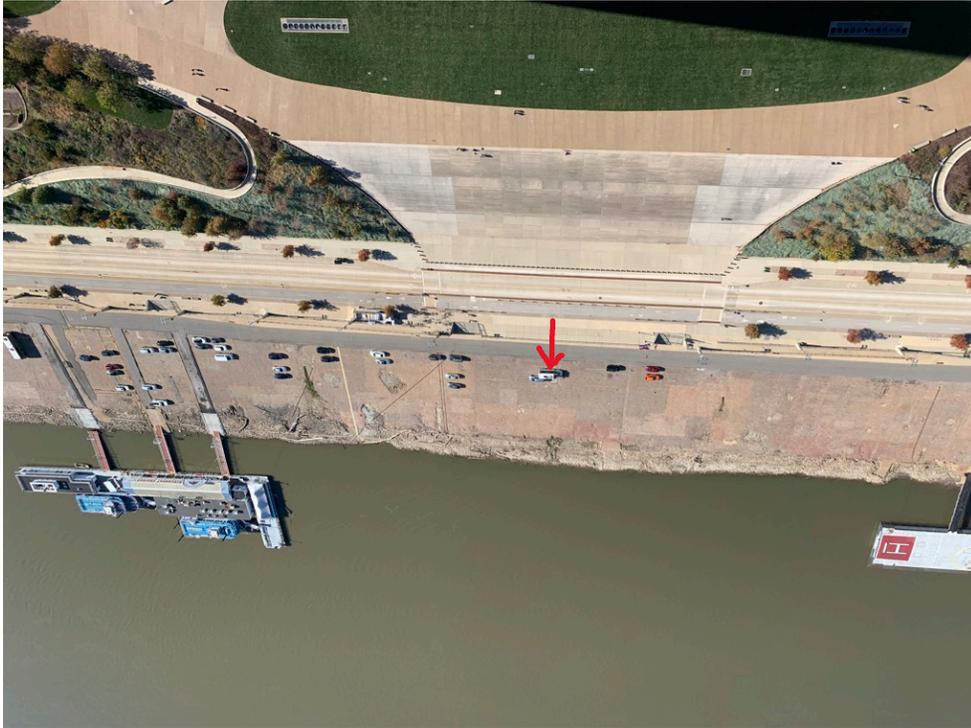




The windows Jim's looking through are the little black rectangles we saw from the ground at the top of the arch.



And if we thought Charles looked small from the Mound, look at him from the top of the Arch!



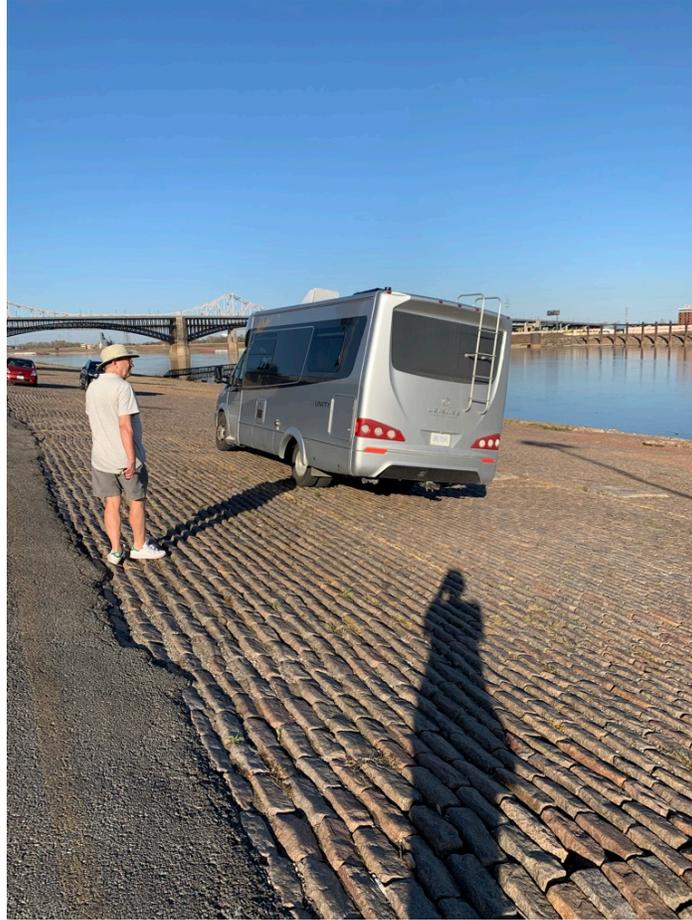
The elevator ride, which was fully enclosed for the entire time, was actually not as scary as Jim had imagined, and we both arrived back on terra firma unharmed.



And as a reward for his bravery, Jim got a lunch in the Cardinals' home, where Budweiser is king.



We
walked
back to
Charles
who was,
to our relief,
still
upright.



And then we went to another historic St. Louis mecca, recommended by Jamie: Ted Drewes, famous for their Frozen Custard. The line-up reassured us that we'd found the right place.



Neither of us is an aficionado of frozen custard, but despite Jim's expression, it was pretty darned tasty.



The last St. Louis icon we were told about was that it was the home of the Budweiser Clydesdales. We were eager to get up close to these famous gentle giants, but couldn't arrange a tour while we were in St. Louis. However, we discovered that a couple of hours west of St. Louis was Warm Springs Ranch, where they breed and train the Clydesdales. So, we said goodbye to St. Louis and headed west.

We had a most interesting stopover at a spot where they welcome boondockers. The place was called Eagle Point and they boasted about the numerous bald eagles we would see. We didn't see any eagles, but we did have quite a lengthy one-way conversation with our host, who was on a mission to travel around in his mobile home, helping veterans and promoting "Old Glory". To that end, he and his wife were selling all their property and hitting the road.



Here he is with Jim and his dog, Sergeant Major.



We did get a nice sunset, and a lovely sunrise, then we hightailed it outa there.



Moments later, we were at Warm Springs Ranch. From the moment we entered its gates, it was classy in every way.





Just seeing these two magnificent horses lazily grazing in the field was comforting – knowing that they had such freedom in between gigs.



We had booked a tour, and the first stop was a visit with Stan, a famous star of Bud TV commercials, who would deign to pose with us for pictures. Here he is in all his glory, without obstructions.



Here he is, with obstructions.



Our guide offered us all a free Bud, and then took us outside to see the grounds, meet a few residents, and learn more about the life of a Budweiser Clydesdale.



We went through the barns, and learned more about their care and training. You really get a sense of how big they are when you see their shoes!



We also saw the amazing amount of gear they wear, and heard about the skills and strength required to drive the team.



THE CLYDESDALE HARNESS

The elaborate harness worn by the Budweiser Clydesdale hitch is a beautiful and expensive piece of custom design.

Each harness and collar weighs nearly 130 lbs and is handcrafted with solid brass, patent leather, and stitched with pure linen thread. Collars come in various sizes and must be individually fitted to the Clydesdale like a finely tailored suit.

TEST YOUR SKILLS

Take control of the team - hold tradition in your own hands.

HARNESSING THE TEAM

Like everything else associated with the Budweiser Clydesdales, the tack is meticulously cleaned and prepped for each event. Two handlers oil and polish the leather harness on a daily basis. Prior to each event, it takes two people four hours to prepare the tack for the show. Following the event, the same crew will spend over an hour cleaning and storing the gear.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The 40 lbs. of driving lines held by the driver plus the tension creates a total weight of over 75 lbs.
- Handlers for each hitch care for 10 horses and their tack, as well as the equipment to transport.
- The combined weight of the wagon and horses exceeds 12 tons.

And then, the highlight of the tour ...

We got to see the foals. We were lucky because they'd just had a few new ones, so we got to see some babies, between a couple of weeks and a couple of months old.





It was a wonderful tour, and very reassuring that these beautiful beings are treated with the love and respect you'd hope for them.

It was also a great way to end our time in Missouri.

