

# Los Angeles Times

Celebrate the transcontinental  
railroad on a weekend escape in  
Utah

By JAY JONES  
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Replicas of the Central Pacific's Jupiter and the Union Pacific's No. 119 come to a stop within a few feet of each other during twice-daily reenactments of their historic meeting 150 years ago at Utah's Promontory Point. (Jay Jones) A century before Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, America was abuzz with news of the completion of the first transcontinental railroad, an equally momentous feat for that era. On May 10, 1869, two locomotives — one from Sacramento, the other from Omaha — met on a remote stretch of track at Promontory Point, Utah. I'm a train buff so last fall I visited the remote Golden Spike National Historical Park. Finding the place, about 90 miles northwest of Salt Lake City, gave me fits even with GPS. Once I did, I enjoyed the reenactment by steam engines that chug to within a few feet of each other, just as they did 150 years ago. The tab for two, excluding transportation: \$120 for a room at the Bigelow Hotel, \$30 for a meal at JC's Country Diner and \$10 for park admission.

### **THE BED**



(Lou Spirito / For The Times)

Don't expect to find even a modest motel within 30 miles of Promontory Point. Ogden's Bigelow Hotel is a great choice for history buffs like me. I was transported to the roaring '20s at this freshly renovated property with crystal chandeliers and Art Deco murals. The accommodations are all extra-spacious suites. For views of the Wasatch Range, ask for a room that faces east.

### **THE MEAL**

My tip for finding good restaurants: Look for ones with lots of cars in the parking lot. JC's Country Diner in Elwood, about 28 miles northeast of Promontory, was the winner. JC's, a homey place frequented by locals, features hearty meals at modest prices. My chicken pot pie with a side salad was just \$7.99. Also consider a bowl of ham and bean soup (\$2.29) and pork souvlaki with fries and Greek salad (\$8.69).

### **THE FIND**

The Golden Spike National Historical Park documents the remarkable accomplishment 150 years ago. Although I learned plenty from an excellent film and the many artifacts among the exhibits in the visitor center, it was the "wedding of the rails" that fascinated me. Two replica steam locomotives — the Central Pacific's Jupiter and the Union Pacific's No. 119 — rendezvous at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. daily on demonstration runs from May 1 through mid-October. Volunteers reenact the Driving of the Last Spike ceremony at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturdays and holidays from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Sesquicentennial events at the park take place May 10-12 and will feature music, storytelling, historical reenactments and train demonstrations. Tickets for May 12 cost \$10; May 10 and 11 are sold out.

### **THE LESSON LEARNED**

You won't find the famous golden spike in Utah. It's in the collection of the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University in Palo Alto. Leland Stanford, president of the Central Pacific Railroad and the university's founder, drove that ceremonial spike 150 years ago.

Bigelow Hotel, 2510 Washington Blvd., Ogden, Utah; (801) 627-1900. Weekend rates in May start at \$120 for a one-bedroom suite.

**JC's Country Diner**, 10260 N. 5200 West, Elwood, Utah; (435) 257-1867. Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Wheelchair accessible.

Golden Spike National Historical Park, 6200 N. 22300 West, Promontory Summit, Utah; (435) 471-2209. Admission \$10 per car. Wheelchair accessible.  
Spike 150 Commission