

It isn't everyone who will take a year off from their job, purchase a little RV, grab their partner and go on an unchoreographed tour around the countryside, but that's just what this author does. Jill Stewart has worked for many years teaching 4th & 5th graders in public school. But as she began adding up those years teaching she had to also subtract them from any time remaining to travel. "No-one is getting any younger, and I wanted to hike and bike and experience some of the continent while I'm still able. Waiting until it is too late is not in my plan." she says. "A year was great. When we found a place we really liked we could just stay as long as we wanted. Then we moved on. No hectic schedule to fret about. Unfortunately, even a whole year comes to an end and so now we're already thinking about our next big adventure."

This book is a small collection of the photos and reflections made over the course of their year-long trip – and may inspire others needing only a little encouragement to begin their own "Big Adventure". Travel with Jill and Thayer as they extend an average vacation into a truly memorable life experience.

Read along as they:

Learn about geological, political, historical and cultural flavors that make up our two nations;

Visit historical forts and cities; colonial, river and ghost towns; ships and sailing ports;

Enjoy sandy beaches and rocky shores, deserts, forests, swamps, caves, alpine views and more;

Get reacquainted with distant friends and family;

Experience soul refreshing National Parks and wilderness areas on both sides of the border;

Make new friends all along the way!



**Time Off for Good Behavior**

**Jill Stewart**



Redhat  
Rambler

# **Time Off for Good Behavior**



**A Sampling of the US & Canada  
in  
A Rialta Kind of Adventure**

**by Jill Stewart**





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This book is presented to potential travel & adventure partners everywhere.

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## Setting the Stage



I imagine everybody thinks about taking a break from their jobs and just traveling around for a while. Seems so perfect at first, but too quickly the needle of logic pops our fantasy bubble. What about my job? What to do with the house? Who's going to water the lawn and flowers? Will my car even make it that far and besides, where will we sleep, eat, shower, etc. etc.

etc.? That's how we use perfectly sound logic to shackle ourselves down. After a particularly rough day at work, I was the one who first voiced out loud the thought of just taking a leave of absence from my job. Was I serious? Who knows, but Thayer only had to say "OK", and from that point on neither of us called the bluff. We just marched forward, taking each step one at a time. Easy. Maybe a little frightening at first, but certainly easy.

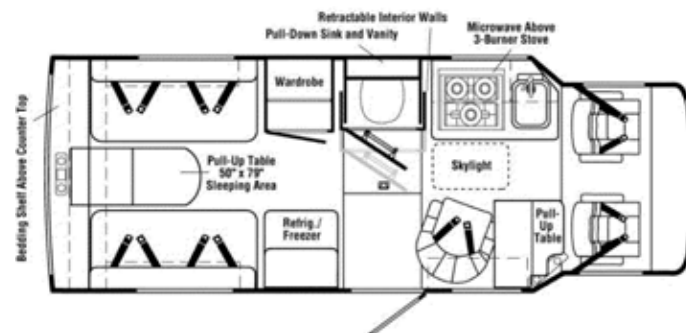
After we decided to really travel for a year, it became clear that it would be a far more pleasant experience with a more accommodating vehicle than our Astro Van. The van has been perfect for us on 2-3 week trips, and, with tinted windows and an unassuming forest green color, it's unsurpassed for "stealth camping". We can easily "disappear" onto a quiet side street at night to sleep undisturbed and get a fresh start in the morning. We have also visited some of the most beautiful and popular places, enjoyed 5-star hotel amenities, and then comfortably retired to our van in the parking lot.

But the thought of spending extended rainy stretches in a van AND remaining best friends seemed..., well, ...why

push a good idea to ruin? We wanted the advantages of our small vehicle with the amenities and roominess of a larger RV. Except we don't like large RVs. So after a thorough search of vehicle options we discovered that a Rialta might suit us perfectly. With a VW Eurovan cab/chassis and a camper shell installed by Winnibago, it gets great milage (18-22 mpg), is less than 22' long and yet has the comforts of a bed, table, toilet, shower, stove, AC, hot & cold running water, can fit into a regular parking space and more. As soon as we saw one we knew this was for us!



Manufactured for a decade beginning in 1995, there are several model interiors for the Rialta and we chose a 2003 or later "HD" version as best suited for a traveling couple – although since owning our Rialta we've also comfortably done shorter trips with both our 4-year old grandson and our Golden retriever.



It has a rear four place dining table that folds down into a comfortable full-size bed. It also has a smaller table up front, seating two, that we use for the majority of our eating and as our computer table

As we had started shopping around, we discovered resale values run typically much higher than Blue Book and more than we were comfortably expecting to spend. But in early December, after only two weeks of serious looking, we found one in great shape selling in Florida for a truly great price. Sounds great, eh? And here's where the life-changing, cut the shackles, commitment part happened: After some back-and-forth with the seller, Thayer flew down to inspect it, bought it and then started the drive back to the Pacific NW.

Along the way, he purchased a tiny little "Christmas tree" looking potted plant and installed a string of white Christmas lights in the new rig. When I joined him in Texas over my holiday break, we continued our drive home, spending Christmas together somewhere on the road. Our new rig was the perfect gift to each other because it was also the key for even more fun and adventure to come. From that point on, we were on our way!

Monday, April 1, 2013

## A Dream Being Realized

Looking back from this point it doesn't feel like such a hard thing all to do. Just a bunch of little steps in the direction we wanted to go. Really, the biggest and most difficult step was actually the easiest... just deciding to really do it! The rest just fell into place (with some reasonable effort, of course).

Friday, April 12, 2013

## Our Home Away from Home

After a few short trips in our Rialta, and perusing the on-line Rialta Users Group, we started making little changes to personalize our rig. The following probably won't mean much to anyone beyond other Rialta owners or RVers.

**Modified the overhead fan** for bidirectional air flow. The idea here is that when cooking or heating with propane there is an increase in moisture in the rig, which is not so much an issue in warm weather when the rig has fresh air flow. But when we're buttoned up in the cold this can lead to mildew problems and that clammy feeling. With the overhead fan being able to reverse direction, we can now pressurize the rig and open just the window adjacent to the stove so that moisture is blown quickly outside.

**Replaced the original microwave** with a convection microwave oven (Sharp Carousel 0.9 cu. ft. Grill 2 Convection). The "HD" version Rialta we have did not come with an oven, only a microwave. We do appreciate the storage space in having extra drawers, but now we also have the advantage of a fast cooking convection oven. Cookies, cakes, corn bread, pop-ups..., mmmmm!

### Installed a WAVE8 catalytic heater.

MUCH more efficient with propane than the stock heater and doesn't need electricity – so no battery drain. We should be able to heat the rig for weeks on a single propane fill. Heater nestles behind driver's seat in protective cover when stowed and easy to slide out when needed. An extra long gas hose allows placement almost anywhere. Independent gas cut-off valve under sink.



**Purchased an OBDII reader/transmitter** and DashCommand App to complement/replace the Scangauge. This interfaces through our iPods and gives a greater amount of real-time engine information, fuel economy, and allows us to check and clear engine error codes.

**Built new rear side panels** under the bench seats. More robust and (we think) look nicer than the originals.



**Rebuilt the drawers.** The stock drawers weren't very robust. Only after we rebuilt them did we consider combining two shallow drawers as a single more accommodating larger drawer, but that can be a future project. We're still learning.



Designed, built and installed a **two shelf book case**. A great little addition that gets lots of use. The top shelf utilizes the wasted space between the overhead locker and closet, and large books and road maps are easily accommodated.



**Rewired the radio** to be independent of the ignition key. The previous owner had installed a very nice Kenwood KDC-X994 receiver that, among its many features, allows us to pipe music directly from our laptops into the main speakers. We can control our entire music library from up front while driving, or anywhere around a 150 foot radius or more when parked, and now it won't lose connection when the ignition is turned off.

**Pulled out the carpet** and installed laminate faux wood flooring. This has been the biggest project but given us the greatest satisfaction. The original carpet collected dirt, and Thayer had initially christened it by spilling a large glass of milk during the drive back from Florida. Talk about stink! The new floor looks great, wasn't really so hard to install and makes cleaning effortless. We rebuilt it to span the entryway depression and enclose a large/deep shoe storage bay which, thinking about it now, seems only obvious. Doormat is removable.



Replaced and relocated the **(stupid) water drain valves**. Thayer was dumbfounded to discover the nearly inaccessible location chosen to place the valves used to drain the water lines. They also dripped; causing us to lose some of our stored water. Now they are easy to reach and no leaks.



**Rebuilt the upper and lower kitchen cupboards / cabinets.** This was a great modification that vastly increases our food storage space and also makes access to the piping under the kitchen counter very accessible. The top cupboard next to the microwave is now ~17" deep and much wider than the original. The photo doesn't quite show that the corner is an obtuse angle rather than the original 90°. They're all heavy-duty ply and go all the way back. This also facilitates noticing, accessing and fixing any plumbing issues which is NOT the case in the original build. There is now even a "basement" access hatch for even more crap! The photos should illustrate pretty well.



**Built a little hat & glove shelf** into the closet. Not much to this, but it was easy and is very handy to help maximize storage. This also seems apparent now that we have it.





**Purchased a Ubiquiti Bullet** BM2-Ti Titanium WiFi transceiver. We currently use it with an 8db EnGenius EAG-2408 omnidirectional antenna for a much increased range over our laptop antennas, and will additionally build or purchase a directional antenna for distances reaching the 5-12 mile range. The (expected) disadvantage with the omni antenna in towns and cities is that it picks up EVERYTHING. Our initial intent was to hard mount the antenna to the rig on a pole that could be raised or lowered when underway. However, we're finding that having the flexibility of not having it mounting it is advantageous also, as it is easy to throw a light line over a tree branch and hoist it 50' up, much higher than we could practically do with a pole. We'll have to use it more to see what evolves.



Note: Ultimately we did mount the antenna permanently on a short PVC mast (utilizing the existing TV antenna hardware) which can be conveniently raised or lowered from inside. We did purchase a directional antenna, which worked super GREAT, but made our little rig look like a CIA spy-mobile. The omni-directional antenna does well enough when raised to lock onto WiFi stations up to several miles away (depending on location), and served us very well throughout our trip. In most locations we could always find a free and open connection.

We hang the ignition keys on the crank-up handle to remind us that it's raised and to prevent any sorry mistakes.

**Replaced** the ailing stock **power converter** (battery charger) with a Progressive Dynamics Inteli-power 60 amp Converter RV (model PD9260 with charge wizard). This should increase the health and lifespan of our house batteries.

**Installed 120v LED "Christmas lights"** around the ceiling. These have been a GREAT addition and we rarely use the standard lights at all as these provide a soft, even lighting throughout the living area. The string is just the regular little lights you can buy around Christmas time and uses power efficient LEDs. I honestly don't know how long we could run these lights off the house batteries as we've never detected any noticeable battery drain, and turning them on or off doesn't even register on the inverter amperage draw display.

**Installed LED bulbs** in the regular 12V light outlets, just to be more efficient with our power.

**Purchased** a Viair 00088 88P **portable air compressor and tire repair kit** to carry along for the inevitable flat tire. In my experience it is often easier and faster to simply fix a flat without having to change the tire at all.

**Built a spice rack.** I found some 2" square metal containers with little windows and we built a 5x5 wooden rack that uses a flat magnet fixed into each space to securely retain each spice box.

**Fabricated some bug screens** for the front windows. Another great addition for those hot and buggy evenings.

Made a **new wooden cutting board** / sink cover. Simple, functional and looks nicer.

Installed a **shower water bypass** so that, when out in the toolies, we don't have to add to our black-water holding tank with practically clean indoor shower water. BTW, the Rialta also has an outdoor shower for warmer days.

**Added a bike rack** to the tail hitch. As small as our Rialta is, we really enjoy parking it somewhere and then touring the areas that we visit on our bicycles.

**Installed a few spring clips** on the overhead just behind the front seats (see upper cabinet photo on previous page). These are just strong stick-ons and usually hold up a light blanket that we have to serve a few purposes:

a) It allows us more privacy from the front windows when "camping" in a public area. Having the blanket tucked behind the front seats, and with our shades down, gives an appearance that the rig is casually parked without anyone necessarily being in it;

b) Allows us to heat or cool a smaller area in the rear; or

c) Allows us to exclude the entire living area behind the front driver/passenger seats so that we only have to use the air conditioning up front when we are driving. This works REALLY well and we typically run the AC on the lowest setting in the hottest weather and still freeze ourselves while the back area can be stiflingly hot!

We also picked up a pack of **cheap suction cups** from the Dollar Store along with some **springy wire clothes pin** type clips. The wire slips nicely through the holes already in the suction cups and so we have these handy relocatable clothes pins that we can stick where ever there's a smooth surface. Perfect for a damp swimsuit, wash cloth



or drying light clothing. They are also perfect to position a hanky onto the sunny side of the front side windows (not windshield) to act as sun shields on those long, straight runs.

**Installed additional 12V outlets** in the rear of the rig. Convenient and we use them a lot.

More recent additions we are installing include:

A **dual input AC relay** and replacement **shore power cable**. One real drawback with the stock Rialta was done for cost, safety and simplicity sake, not for convenience. The shore power cable is hard-wired into the RV breaker and to change between shore power or the generator you have to snake the cable through a hole in the bottom of the rear storage bay (that's the inconvenient part, especially when it's raining or bears are prowling around outside). The safety aspect is that physically you can only be hooked in to one or the other power source. Our new relay will do all this switching automatically. And having a shore power connector wired in to the RV, as is typical on higher priced RVs and boats, makes it easy to quickly plug in a cable if you want shore power, otherwise the generator is automatically chosen. It sounds more complicated than it is.

Purchased, and have yet to install, a **high precision watt meter / power analyzer**. Not very expensive and will allow us to monitor our power usage in real-time and over time. It not only displays the house batteries charge level, but also measures and records power in and out, amp-hours, peaks and troughs, phantom loads and more. If or when we add a solar panel it will help us balance our power usage against what we're putting into the battery bank.

We've also considered taking off the rear A/C unit. During our trip, we used it only about twice (although it WAS nice to have those times). Since we aren't attracted to high heat & humidity areas to begin with, A/C makes little sense and the real reduction in air drag driving down the road seems more appealing. It can always go back on if we change our minds or sell the RV.

It should also go without saying that everyone will have different traveling goals, habits, destinations, expectations, ...and so a "perfect RV" for one person probably wouldn't suit another. Many RVers like to arrive at a popular destination providing full services, park their rig and stay put for the duration, so roominess vs fuel efficiency may have different importance. We enjoy the flexibility of traveling to locations and hideaways that would certainly exclude larger rigs. Smaller, fuel efficient and comfortable were our traveling requisites and our Rialta fulfills those perfectly!



Sunday, June 2, 2013

## And now here we are!



Do you ever think sometimes that you're forever running around in the same, endless circle of life – wondering where this is all leading to? Just exactly “when” does the “reward” come after all the “work”? The question becomes even more pressing when a friend or family member has a health issue that reminds us to read the writing on the wall..., “We’re all not getting any younger!” If you ever wanted to do something in your life..., well, “just don’t wait around too long to do it” is about all we can suggest.

Thursday, July 18, 2013

## Under Way

After a long day of preparation, and a last minute sale of Thayer’s Blazer, we finally pull away from Bothell shortly before midnight. Although it’s late, we just had to begin the trip. And even though we only drove a short way and parked at Snoqualmie Pass to sleep, we were underway!!!

Friday, July 19, 2013

## Rafting the Payette

A good way to start any great adventure is to ease into it by doing something that you are already familiar with – something like rafting the mighty Payette River, just north of Boise, ID. My family has been camping and rafting here for



about 20 years, staying in the same campground, enjoying the same 4 stretches of river that we’ve always done. My sis Barbara, her hubby Paul and some of their friends from Salt Lake City meet us there for 3 days of fun filled rafting. Somehow it just never gets old. We are the first of our rafting group to ever show up in a real RV and I think I detected a few envious looks as we gave folks the tour. It is a little weird to be on the “other side”, having always poo-pooed RVs in the past! You know you’re getting old.....

A great thing about our trips is that there are almost always some young folks along to do the heavy lifting and learn the ropes so that in a few years they will be captaining us old folks down the river. The weekend after our rafting trip my son Tommy took a bunch of his friends on his first organized rafting trip here at the Payette. It has become a legacy activity!

Monday, July 22, 2013

## Leave the Payette

After a final morning float, we packed up and said goodbye to everyone.

We hadn’t traveled very far before we discovered Sunbeam Hot springs on the shores of the Salmon River, a



delightful soaking spot. Informal pools have been made out of river rock and heated by very hot water coming vigorously out of a culvert. You just move around in the pool ‘til you find the temperature that suits you. There is even hot water coming right out of the sand on the bottom of the pool.



Boot Hill Cemetery

We spent a quiet night at Boot Hill cemetery, located above the ghost towns of Bonanza and Custer. This is part of the Yankee Mining District and the Yankee River was heavily dredged back in the day. They are now trying to restore

parts of the river for salmon habitat. Custer is a nicely preserved town run by the Forest Service, manned by crusty old volunteers and has a nice little museum.



Mining Dredge near Bonanza churned up 5.5 miles of pristine river, leaving giant piles of rocks everywhere.

Tuesday, July 23, 2013

## Across the Great Divide

Learned a valuable lesson today: Do not cross the Continental Divide on a steep, gravely, single lane road with no pull outs or places to turn around, in the Rialta. The all-wheel drive Astro? Ok, no problem. The front wheel drive Rialta, NO!

We had chosen a scenic route from the map and it started out ok, but 10 miles later we were grinding slowly up the last long incline in the lowest gear with the accelerator floored and spinning dirt and gravel out on both sides. I was poised to jump out and push except for the precariously steep drop-off on my side! We were both sitting on the edges of our seats, willing the rig up the last 100 yards. As we crawled up to the summit all three of us heaved heavy sighs of relief. The only funny thing about this is that you’ve gotta love the Idaho DOT – there at the top was a sign, pointing back in the direction we just came,



that read “No RVs or trailers.” Brother! We were still a little rattled and, as is usual with me, I took no pictures of this most exciting part of the day. When the going gets tough..., I don’t take pictures.



Our new dining room – the great out-of-doors!

Going down was not a problem and we cruised to Clark Canyon Reservoir where we were treated to a nice free campsite above the lake and a beautiful sunset. It was a lovely finish to a somewhat stressful day.



Sunset over the Clark Canyon Reservoir.

The next morning as we were gassing up in Dillion, a guy approached Thayer and asked him if we were the RV seen going over Lemhi Pass the previous day. Our daring reputations preceded us!

Wednesday, July 24, 2013

## Montana Ghost Towns

From Dillion to Livingston we passed the interesting historical sites Robber’s Roost, Nevada City and Virginia City.



Robber's Roost

Robber’s Roost is simply an old station that the stage coaches used to stop at. The story has it that the sheriff and some of his men would scope out the travelers as they rested at the hotel, assessing their potential wealth. If someone came through that looked like a good target they would alert their comrades, the bad guys, who would then waylay the stage the next day and relieve the traveler of their wealth. It was never really proved to be the case, just a lot of coincidences.



Hotel balcony in Nevada City



Inside an old store all goods are originals and in perfect condition.

The next stop was Nevada City, where we learned about a wealthy visionary named Charles Bovey who was a collector of old buildings and their contents. Back in the 1930’s and 40’s he began buying buildings; lock, stock, and barrel, and moving them to Nevada and Virginia Cities. Folks donated buildings to his cause so that the buildings would be preserved instead of demolished or ruined by the elements.

Nevada City is more of a tourist trap with a museum, train station, cabins to stay in, and a few places to eat. It is a main street lined with old buildings, some are businesses catering to tourists and many are mini museums where you can look back in time, seeing original, pristine, authen-

tic goods that were purchased by Mr. Bovey. We talked to a volunteer who comes each summer to work in the buildings. She was folding period clothing that was brand new for display in a clothing store. She said they have buildings full of stuff to stock the museum buildings with, much of it new and in the box. I think it is very cool that a wealthy



Stagecoach in Virginia City

person leaves this kind a historical legacy for so many people to learn from and enjoy. I recommend Virginia City to anyone visiting Montana!



View of the back side of some of the buildings.

A recommendation given too late for this trip was Bannock State Park in MT (before we went over Lemhi Pass). It’s a really cool ghost town - pretty much intact, but preserved as the buildings were abandoned - peeling wallpaper, sag-



ging ceilings, the old gallows, jail, etc. There were some real bad-asses running the town - thieves, crooks, and outlaws serving as the town leaders. Good ol' wild west!

Many of you could already guess that the two little buildings in this photo are the old outhouses, but the taller one in the center is special. It is a double-decker outhouse that was once connected to the 2nd story of the old hotel. Upstairs guests did not have to go all the way downstairs to GO! (I suppose the downstairs occupants had other worries!)



Outhouses

These 12 days in “paradise” consisted of me continuing to help my cousin Tina sort, research, catalogue, redistribute and organize some of the remaining belongings. We tackled hundreds of books, looking them up on the internet to determine value, cataloguing the ones we thought were good ones, and contacting a dealer in Bozeman. We donated at least a hundred art frames to the Center for Art and Culture in Livingston, to be used for youngsters and adults taking classes there. We removed the nasty carpet tack strips from the house and the old, abused wood floors sprang back to life. Tina showed off her awesome researching skills to determine the history and value of dozens of silver and china pieces. There are still many things to deal with but we made a lot of progress.



Doing research on sterling silverware.

Thayer occupied his time making some plumbing repairs to the rig, assembling our super duper WiFi antennae for our trip, and scanning almost 2,000 family photos so that he can return the original photos to his aunt in Arkansas.

We did find time for some fun – the Yellowstone River was perfect for some tubing, Rylan and Kim were available for visiting with their darling little girls, and we attended a Shakespeare in the Park Henry V performance at historic Chico Hot Springs. Thayer and I also went to the Park County Fair and checked out the pigs, cows, horses and sheep, then watched some of the 4H auctions. It was wonderful to see the proud youngsters showing their animals

and projects and getting great prices for all of them. We also spent a few hours enjoying the “Fiddler’s Picnic,” a great crowd of musicians camping together and playing all types of country and bluegrass music just for fun.



The Sykes Clan

It was the longest time I’ve spent in Livingston since I was a teenager and I really enjoyed the time. We carted our bikes into town and ran our errands, looked at houses, ran our tubing shuttles, visited Jo, and just enjoyed the wonderful, flat little western town of Livingston.



Tea time with all the trimmings.

Monday, August 5, 2013

## Away Again

Monday morning and we are away from Tina’s again. We departed Saturday to top up our propane and begin our trip (for real), but the propane store(s) are closed on the weekend. So instead we spent the day in Livingston at the fair and then later at the fiddler’s convention. Sunday we worked on our blog a little and then went tubing on the Yellowstone before retreating back to Tina & Gary’s for a nice steak dinner. We also got to spend some time with Alayna, Tina’s 14 month old grand daughter. We’ll get another start tomorrow morning.

Wednesday, August 7, 2013

## Red Lodge/Beartooth Pass

After leaving Livingston we cruised to Red Lodge, MT, a cute little town in the foothills of the Beartooth/Absaroka mountain range northeast of Yellowstone NP. There is an amazing highway there that goes up and over the mountain range and drops down to Cooke City and Yellowstone. It has many, many switchbacks and climbs from about 5,000 feet at Red Lodge to nearly 11,000 ft. at Beartooth Pass. We planned to drive up to the pass then retrace our steps to the nice campsite we had the night before. (Where, by the way, I saw a bear while out walking by myself! The picture I took with my shaking hands is not convincing or worth posting but I also saw this moose the following day.)







Beautiful sunset and comfy quarters atop Beartooth Pass

As we drove up the mountains the scenery became more and more spectacular with towering peaks, glaciated valleys, hanging valleys, alpine meadows and bluebird blue skies. Up at the top we hiked to several lookouts and took lots of pictures. We enjoyed a nice cup of tea and snuggled down in the rig. By late afternoon the motorcycles and other vehicles had stopped coming into the parking lot so we decided to just stay and enjoy the sunset and spend the night. It is so very nice to have everything you need to just spend the night wherever the mood takes you! After it got dark the stars were simply amazing in the crisp, clear panoramic sky! The Milky Way stretched across the enormous sky from horizon to horizon and there was not a single man-made



Overlook near Beartooth Pass

light to be seen. Although it was cold outside, we stayed toasty enough inside.

Early the next morning, shortly after sunrise, we started back down the mountain. Along the way we rescued an overheated car on its way up with an offer of water and good advice of “run your car heater on high to help bleed off some engine heat”. They had been using their air-conditioner! Our good-deed was later rewarded by lucking into some yummy hot apple critters (& fritters) from the bakery in Red Lodge. Mmmmmm!



How many switchbacks can you count in this picture?  
This is looking toward the SW and Yellowstone.

Eastern Montana was not as bad as I had expected, it being still quite green and pretty in its own way. As we followed my favorite river, the mighty Yellowstone, past Miles City I was surprised at how much it changed as it went along, becoming very muddy and slow as it approaches the Missouri River.

Tonight we are on a quiet road near the train tracks and tomorrow we will see some nearby historical sites. Then on to Theodore Roosevelt National Park!

Wednesday, August 7, 2013

## Our First Shower (in the Rig)

As mentioned in an earlier post, the Rialta has a built-in shower. Its four gallon hot water tank is heated either electrically or simply from the engine's heat after a short time of driving. We had tested the functionality of all the hardware before we left home, but it wasn't until tonight that we thought to put it to full use. After a few days on the road, it was time.

I went first and had no problems until after I was finished and flipped the switch to pump the standing water from the floor basin. The pump was pumping but no water was being drawn out. After digging into the rigs innards, Thayer found the pump was dry, likely from when he had emptied the lines to replace the system drain valves, and he also concluded that the pump was not self priming. We didn't have a hose or anything to force water into the line, so we improvised.

By removing the shower head, the shower hose just barely reached down to the drain hole in the floor. We made a gasket from a wet paper towel and forced the hose as far in as possible, then turned on the drain pump and then the pressurized water for the shower hose. After a few seconds the line and pump were primed and everything was working as it should be. Now it was Thayer's turn for a hot shower and man, was he happy!

Afterwards, we got everything wiped down and stowed just in time to enjoy our first beautiful North Dakota sunset. You gotta love this “roughing it” lifestyle!

(Sorry, no pictures available for this post, but we don't want to lose any squeamish readers!)

Thursday, August 8, 2013

## Losing Our Bearing in the Dakotas

Today we crossed into N. Dakota (and back, and forth, and...) visited The Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers Confluence Center, Fort Union and Fort Buford.



"The Grandest Fort on the Upper Missouri River"

Built in 1828, where the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers join, Ft. Union was the American Fur Company's most famous and profitable trading post. Although called a fort, the post was neither a government nor a military installation, but a privately owned commercial establishment founded to engage in business with the seven Northern Plains Tribes. It was the most important and peaceful fur trade post on the Upper Missouri River, with many marriages between native women and fort workers. The Indians exchanged buffalo robes and other furs for goods including blankets and cloth, guns and beads.





Whenever we take an extended trip we can always count on some mechanical ailment for entertainment, no matter what we're driving. It's a tradition, almost something to look forward to, and this evening it was a rear wheel bearing. Luckily I had my live-aboard mechanic and his bag of tricks, but unfortunately we didn't just have a spare wheel bearing lying around.



Thayer managed to take the wheel off and get the whole thing taken apart but he couldn't repair it without having a new part. We spent the night there and then got towed to a garage just outside of Watford City, the ranch and home of Larry and Carla Sorenson. Got the part ordered, but the bad news is that it would take 5 or 6 days to arrive. This turned out to not be entirely bad news at all, as we got to spend those waiting days making new friends, traveling through the countryside, walking the fields, and learning about this rapidly changing community.



Natural gas companies are fracking the oil deposits wherever they can acquire the mineral rights to do so. Crops are scraped from farmers' land within a matter of hours

and wells drilled as quickly as possible. There has been a massive influx of workers drawn to the area, all looking for the high paying oil field jobs. Farmers are torn between their traditional way of life of caring for and working the land, and large amounts of easy money is being offered for drilling, mining gravel and sand, and sites for disposal of waste from the wells.

The natural beauty of the land is being stripped away at an astonishing rate. We visited with one couple who had bought land about 15 miles from town 5 years ago so they could have some solitude, peace and quiet. After just a few years they now have natural gas drilling going on two sides of their property with a 3rd planned for a remaining side. They have LOUD flares (openly burning natural gas and waste fumes, sounding like a jet engine) less than 800 ft. from their home. Besides getting some money they have little else to say about it all, though they have fought it tooth and nail.

In addition to the mining operations there is also rapid development of housing, shopping, hotels, and service industries, all stretching this little town to new horizons. I can only imagine how they are coping in the schools with the influx of families.



No matter where we stop there is always something to photograph.

Friday, August 9, 2013

## Ribfest

Larry and Carla invited us to join them for a trip into town to the 'Ribfest', a local eating and social event. We sampled the ribs, corn on the cob, lemonade and bought a bag of candy corn to bring home with us.



Larry and Carla Sorenson

Saturday, August 10, 2013

## Rain

Seeing the storm clouds coming, we pulled down the WiFi antenna and buttoned up the rig just before the heavy rain hit. We soon had a nice little pond in front of our doorway so we dragged pallets and boards over to the rig to step on. After the rain, we went for a walk down



Another "Stay at home" day

the lane accompanied by the three ranch dogs (Jade, Red & Tootsie). We also listened to Ben, our designated repair mechanic, relate his tale of woe of being arrested yesterday after the Ribfest event. Apparently we missed all that excitement.

Sunday, August 11, 2013

## Religion, lunch & bath, and a musical

I spent the morning attending church with Larry and Carla, grocery shopping and wandering around the farm. We also had the treat of taking a real shower up at the house and being invited in for burgers with the family. After the family dispersed Larry and Carla invited us to see the renowned Medora Musical, performed in a lovely outdoor amphitheater about 80 miles south of here.



Medora, ND Musical Revue!

We toured the historic little town, got some ice cream and fudge, and enjoyed a warm, pleasant evening watching the show. You can see the beautiful setting of the musical, they even had to chase 2 bull elk out of the background before the show. Part of the show was a stand up comedian from Hawaii who was very funny. Poked a lot of fun at North Dakota and getting old. "40 may be the new 30, 9:30 may be the new midnight, but 240 is not the new 180!" It was a very enjoyable evening. We got home late.

Monday, August 12, 2013

## ...and then we thought...

where else would we rather be?



Thursday, August 15, 2013

## We're Repaired and Ready

After more than a week of hanging out on the farm the port rear bearing has been replaced and after a short test drive appears to check out. The starboard bearing seems to be OK, no noise or anything, so we've decided to leave it in until there's a reason to swap it with the spare bearing we are now carrying.



Cleaned up and going out to dinner!

We have had a wonderful week meeting new friends and really learning about an interesting and quickly changing community. It has really helped us see the whole picture of fracking, not only from our tree hugger, knee-jerk liberal point of view but the perspective of hard working farmers and landowners sitting on top of the gold mines of natural gas, oil, sand, and gravel. It was sad to see the beautiful farmland being scraped away for oil rigs, man-camps, disposal sites, sand and gravel pits, roadways, stores and services and the astonishing rate at which it is all happening.

We opted to stay an extra day so that Thayer could help Larry get the alfalfa crop in on one of his many properties that he owns/manages. He spends so much time bird-dogging the oil companies on his land that it is really hard to get his farming done. It is also difficult to find hired help because of all the high paying oil jobs.



Thayer driving the tractor and Larry supervising.

Friday, August 16, 2013

## A Moment to Reflect

It's sometime past midnight and the heat plus a slight upset stomach has kept me from sleeping, so I thought I'd walk it off. Slipping quietly out of the rig, I find it is already a bit cooler as a slight breeze flows past. The Sorensons have a long driveway so I've decided to walk down to the paved road and back. From the top of the hill I can see and hear the big rigs in the distance as they race past the far end of the drive. There isn't a moon out but the stars overhead add to the burning gas flares to give ample light to see my way. Just moving around helps settle my stomach.



Walking along in the semi-dark also gives me some quiet time to reflect on the past week. The bearing repair cost a lot more than it should have due to the local NAPA outlet jacking the price 175% over NAPA list with a cavalier "take it or the road" attitude. The repair shop guy could have easily ordered it much cheaper elsewhere had he recognized opportunist slime-balls, but we've now waited nearly a week for this bearing, it's already installed and we need to get going. We returned the spare we had ordered and will pick up another along the way.

Looking out as I walk, I gaze at the bright flares on the stacks (burning off a reported 25% of collectable natural gas) as they illuminate the night sky. In addition to the

noxious fumes they produce in the air it seems to me a big waste of energy. Literally "energy to burn". We've also noted that many local drivers of large trucks just keep their engines running when they duck into the stores or businesses. We still can't understand that.

Bright lights at the nearby processing plant remind me of a space port, and will soon be joined by another plant under construction. All within clear view of the Sorenson's home. The contrast to the traditional farming life that oil is replacing couldn't be more stark, and reminds me of the days I just spent helping rake hay and herd cattle. I really sympathize with any farmer who is trying to make a living while being bulldozed off their land and having their groundwater tainted by oil drilling. We Americans allow big money to be the decider. So what's new? I think about this every time I pull up to the gas pump, ...hypocrisy withstanding.

As I crest the hill coming back to the house, the drone of a thousand crickets tries to compete with the roar of venting gas from a nearby rig that has just come online. The warm night breeze dances around me again as I look back up to the sky just in time to witness a large 'shooting star' scribing its straight, white trail between the stars. Its short display is a reminder of our ephemeral existence here on earth. Gone in a flash. We are harvesting the eons of what has gone before us with every gallon of oil we pump and minute of gas we burn. And yet we are so transitory and short sighted that I'm sure humankind's contribution to the big picture may not even be recordable a million years from now. Or less.

Oddly, what comforts me as I climb back into bed is the thought that the taint of humankind will be cleansed by time. In the long run it won't matter at all. But likewise, this lends even more urgency to continuing our travels so that we may meet more wonderful people like the Sorensons and see the beauty that still exists in the world – while we still have a chance.





Bison and getaway car at Theodore Roosevelt N.P.

Saturday, August 17, 2013

## Across the Great Plains

We left our friends, the Sorensons, on Saturday the 17th, bound for Theodore Roosevelt NP. It is a beautiful, rugged badlands area, where the rock formations have been eroded from the surrounding flatlands. The cliffs with their bands of colorful rocks, open green meadows and the Little Missouri River make for lovely views. We listened to a ranger (visualize William Macy in “ Fargo”) give a talk about the CCC projects in the park and the history of the CCC. Very interesting, though I kept wanting to finish his sentences for him since he spoke so slowly and sparingly. It was HOT. Thayer had me scampering along the road to take pictures of buffalo, funny how he would drive off just as the animals started glowering and making huffing, grunting noises at me. Not funny. I tried to bring home a nice concretion to add to my rock collection but it just wouldn’t budge and Thayer wouldn’t help me.



I want this rock!

We drove up to Lake Sacagawea St. Park for the night, beautiful and a little cooler.

The next day we were up early and headed across the plains in a serious way. It is very flat, and very agricultural. When we got tired of looking at wheat we were refreshed by the sight of corn or sunflowers or an occasionally herd of cows. We pulled into tiny Sykeston, just for



a fun photo with my namesake town. Ralph, from the café, quickly came out to greet us and invited us in for breakfast, home cooked and delicious he assured me. We ordered up some eggs and caramel/cinnamon rolls as the locals started arriving after church. We met lots of nice people, including John and Rosemary, former Rialta owners and 15 years of RVing experience behind them. They are residents of Florida who “home-stead” in ND during the summer. They were excited to see the rig and share their many stories. When I went to pay the bill John had already paid for our meal! It was a very fun stop! (wish I’d ordered another roll!) Turns out that the town cafe is supported by the “town fathers” because it is not profitable in any way. They support the cafe with funds and time.



Miles and miles of sunflowers

Monday, August 19, 2013

## Lake Superior and Duluth, MN

The rest of the plains went by, not much more description needed there. They were beautiful and we were lucky that they have had above normal rainfall, because they were very green, with many small lakes, interesting birds, and nice little towns. Thayer was eager to get into Duluth to pick up his mail consisting of the batteries and chargers for his camera that he left behind. Thanks Sarah!

Duluth is a cargo loading town! A huge part of their waterfront on Lake Superior is devoted to gigantic silos for loading grain from the plains, and amazing coal and ore loading areas. The harbor has a long spit (5 miles?) named Minnesota Point, that protects the inner harbor from the huge lake and the northers. The gigantic cargo ships come into the inner harbor around the end or through an aerial bridge built over a hundred years ago by the Army Corps of Engineers.

On Minnesota Point are lovely and funky homes and a large park with bike trails, beaches, picnicking, volleyball and, best of all, a small community sailing center! The Duluth-Superior Sailing Association has a tiny toe hold on



Duluth Superior Sailing Assn.





Duluth Aerial Lift Bridge and ship canal

the edge of the park. They have about 8 Optis, 10 Lasers, and an assortment of small keel boats. Tim, the program director, was happy to chat with us about their program. They have two small sheds and a wire cage to keep their gear in. There were not a lot of people going out for such a beautiful day so he took us out in a Yingling (20ft keel-boat.) We had a lovely evening sail learning about the various features of the city, their little sailing program, and the lake. We were delighted to get out on the water away from the heat!

The next morning we did a quick bike ride down the path and then headed into Duluth. We visited the Army Corps of Engineers Visitors Center where we learned about the history of trade and shipping in the Great Lakes, the arial bridge that controls traffic going to the loading docks, shipwrecks, engines, and all the cool boats used on the lakes. We were able to see a big freighter come through the canal, under the bridge and on to its docks. Nowadays, it takes only two workers to load a giant ship with ore, one on the boat to watch the loading and one above the ship controlling the conveyor belts that deliver the ore to the various hatches. Two people can load 60,000 TONS of ore in 6-8 hours.



Tuesday, August 20, 2013

## The Apostle Islands that weren't

Our next destination was the Apostle Islands, north and east of Duluth. They are a group of islands in Lake Superior or that you really need a boat of some kind to explore. We opted not to rent a boat or go on a cruise boats and come back to visit another time (yeah, right.). The ferry to Madeline seemed overly expensive as well. We did have a nice time in Bayfield though. It is a cute little town with old homes, a large marina, interesting stores, and, my favorite, a community sailing program. Just as we drove into town we saw the sign for a free concert in the park so that made us happy. We parked in the overflow ferry parking lot, right on the beach, and whipped up some dinner.

As we carried our meal to the beach to eat we started visiting with a fellow who looked a LOT like my brother Robb. He was in his swimming suit (bald, swimming suit – ring any bells?) and had his cameras prepared to photograph the full moon that would rise somewhere across the water, he just didn't know exactly where it would be coming up. So we each placed two sticks in the sand to line up where we predicted the moon would rise and then sat back to wait. The music from the park wafted down to us as the sun set, making for a mellow and pleasant evening (and drinking a bottle of wine may have contributed some).

David, our swimming acquaintance, is on a quest to swim in every river and near-to-the-edge lake of Lake Superior. It is a BIG lake, doncha know! With the evening so hot and muggy, and David obviously enjoying the water so much,

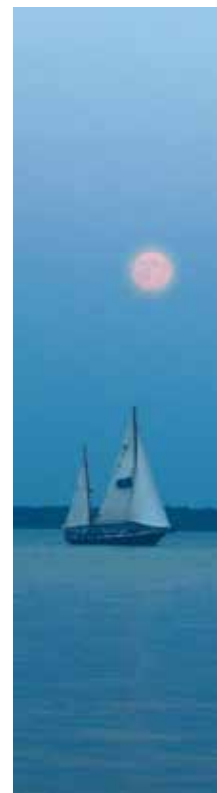


David and I cooling off, waiting for moonrise.

I put on my suit and joined him. The heavy humidity and haze subdued the spectacular moonrise he had hoped for, but it was fun watching it anyway. A sailboat and airplane flew by at just the right moment for some great photos. By the way, none of us were close in our moonrise predictions.

Once we got the moon to its proper height Thayer and I walked over to the park to finish up the music, and then strolled the marina looking at the sailboats. There were many boats owned by folks who come for the weekend so it was pretty quiet. We also chatted with the young Coast Guard cadets who were standing by to watch for drunk boaters.

The next morning, while Thayer was working(!), I wandered the town, found a nice park with WIFI nearby, the smoked fish shop, the Maritime History Museum, and the North Coast Community Sailing Center. Unfortunately, there was no activity at the sailing center – that would have been nice. We moved the rig closer to the park and then went swimming – really lovely water! We were pleasantly cool before starting off to our next destination.



Moonlit sail on Lake Superior

Wednesday, August 21, 2013

## Ashland and Boondocking and beyond

We stopped in Ashland, WI for a bike ride around the waterfront and town. I love the riding, everything we've done is reasonably flat, we ride as long or short as we want, we see historic towns, lake views, and places we don't see from the rig. The BEST part about this stop was ice cream at BUDDIES, a little eatery on Main St. A small cone (\$2.50) consisted of more than a pint of good ice cream packed firmly down in a full size waffle cone. We each had one about 4:00 and really didn't feel a need for dinner. One of those spectacular finds!



Buddies

A few months ago I had signed up with an organization called Boondocking. For \$30/year you get online access to 100's of RVers who offer up a parking space on their property for free! All you do is contact them via e-mail a few days (or more) ahead of when you will be arriving. If it is convenient for them, they give you the address and off you go! We did our first boondocking in Park Falls, WI on Aug. 22. I talked to Barb on the phone, we drove there, backed into her driveway, plugged into their power and WiFi, chatted and went to bed. They left early the next morning so we slept in, Thayer did some more work(!), and I rode my bike around town and did some thrift store shopping. I have contacted a few other possible boondockers down the road, it is nice to have a place to stay





Boondocking at Barb and Don's

and it's a fun way to meet people. It's also a good way to get that valuable local knowledge. There are boondocker opportunities in every state (except ND, SD), and quite a few in Canada.



Happy campers waiting for the evening show

After checking the tires and plumping them up, we actually did some driving and drove to Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, located at the base of the Keweenaw Peninsula on Lake Superior. We got there in the nick of

time to check into the visitor center to buy an annual State Park Pass for Michigan. Then we drove up to the "Lake of the Clouds" overlook on the lake side of the park. PMWSP is the largest state park in Michigan, it almost grew up to be a National Park. It has a very interesting geology and I'll make you look at some rock pictures to prove it in my next post. As evening came, we watched the sun set in a flaming explosion of light on the lake. We found a nice pullout on the boundary road to stay for the night, and dang if moon wasn't also so bright that I had to wear my eyeshades!



Monday, August 26, 2013

## Prepare yourself for rock pictures...

I warned you, PMWSP has some pretty interesting rocks and geologic goings on! It has the Nonsuch Shales near the bottom, metamorphosed sedimentary layers from vast old oceans in colors of black, gray, rust and pink. On top of the shales are the basalt layers laid down by a violent period of volcanic activity – all you Northwesterners are familiar with that kind of action. The massive weight of the basalt caused all kinds of tilting and sagging of the sedimentary and metamorphic layers. Then along came the glaciers to scrape and grind them down, pulverize them, and generally cause a lot of damage. At some point a LOT of lovely golden sand was created and used to decorate the shore of scenic Superior.



One of many falls on Presque Isle River

OK, with that possibly, sort of, accurate description, I'll tell you about our activities. We spent one whole day walking up and down the Presque Isle River in the west corner of the park. This small river spills down the watershed, carving its way over and through the Nonsuch Shales and patches of much softer sandstone. The result is very beautiful and fun to explore.



Deep round holes formed from churning rocks

There are 3 or 4 larger falls where the river flows off of sharp edges of the shale. Most of the river is quite shallow as it spreads across the flat rocks. The water itself is tinted brown and has a lot of foam, not because it is dirty, but because of organic matter in the soils that the water flows through. The trails wind through the shady forest and there are frequent overlooks and places to go and wade around in the stream. This time of year it is warm and pleasant but I'm sure in the spring that river is a real rip snorter. They get a lot of snow here! We found crawdads in the pools and some interesting invertebrate larvae that were attached, head down, to the rocks in the shallow riffles. There were very circular holes drilled into the shale where rocks just ground the rock down during high water flow.



As the river flowed into Superior it formed a nice big pool just daring Thayer to skinny dip in. It looked inviting but I



Frightening the wildlife

declined to join him and was glad I didn't because, shortly after he got in, a herd of young boys and their dippy mom/aunt came down to skip rocks for half an hour. Wouldn't want to traumatize any youngsters!



The shales in this area were really interesting because they were petrified sand ripples and were broken in such a way that you could see that each layer had a different color, direction of ripples and texture. I hope my pictures will illustrate that for you. See if you can match the picture to something I described...



After such a vigorous day of hiking and exploring we read books on the beach and dozed in our chairs until the sun did another glorious dive into the lake. Can you really have too many beautiful sunsets? I think not.

We found an empty trailer parking lot near a trail head to spend the night and were the only ones there besides the owls that kept me awake for a while asking "Who, who, who are you?"



We hiked several miles up one side of the river and down the other



Tuesday, August 27, 2013

**Keweenaw Peninsula**

We finished up PM-WSP the next day. I went for a 5 mile hike through the woods while Thayer continued his computer work for his friend Chris. Thayer is designing and setting up a business website, and working on their product information and labeling design. It is an ongoing project that he seems to enjoy. As for me – The woods were very beautiful, filled with maple, oak, cedar and many unfamiliar trees. I imagined that this is what the eastern part of the US looked like when "A squirrel could go from the Atlantic to the Mississippi without touching the ground!" I don't know who said that but I've heard it many times. It didn't take me long to do the hike, the bugs were very motivating!



The makings of a mighty forest



Eagle River Lighthouse

We then continued up the Keweenaw Peninsula, hiking to the Eagle River Lighthouse and enjoying the lake views. Incredibly, we are just starting to see the fall colors coming out! It appears that the sugar maples lead the way into fall, with their leaves just starting to turn on select branches. Just as it got dark we pulled into a cool wayside park on a little bay near Eagle Harbor. It rained like crazy that night!

The following day we drove just a little further up to the very top of Keweenaw to Fort Wilkens SP. I am really beginning to appreciate the time, money and effort that has gone into the preservation of our historical treasures. Here again is another beautifully preserved fort from the 1860's. It was





General store

Blacksmith's shop

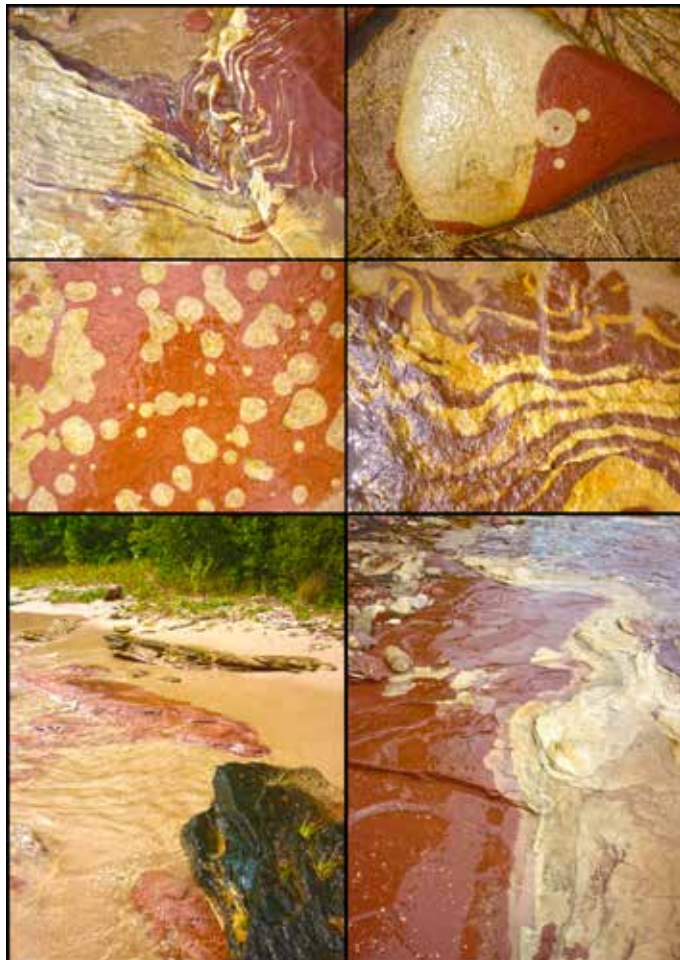
built to manage the rapidly growing trade and rowdy people that were coming to the area for copper, lumber, and mischief. It wasn't used for very long, typical of boom and bust economies. We toured the fort and bicycled around the park.

Now we headed back down the other side of the peninsula, the south side, taking in new sights and delights. We stopped at Brunette Beach and while Thayer dozed I walked up the beach to see the amazing rock formations.



Bottom Jacobville layer dates 1.5 billion years at Brunette Beach, 8.2 miles north of Gay, MI

Sorry, here I go again! I'll try to be brief. This where all this sand is coming from! Sedimentary rocks ranging in age from 1.5 Billion years to only 500 million years surround this lobe of Lake Superior. Needless to say glaciers, winter ice, monstrous winter waves, rivers and streams and wind have taken their toll on these soft layers of beautifully colored rocks. The lowest layers (1.5B), the Jacobville layers, are some of the oldest rocks you can see exposed in the US! They are the dark red rocks you see in these photos.



Other subsequent layers are in gray, white and tan. We will visit these layers again when we go to Pictured Rock National Lakeshore. But today I just moseyed along enjoying the interesting looping swirls of color along the shore. You will also see lots of lovely, rounded darker rocks that don't

seem to fit in with all the others. These are glacial erratics transported here from the granite mountains of Canada. They come in all colors, textures, and sizes, most beautifully rounded and polished by the initial glacier transport and then by the pounding waves and swirling sand of the lake. There are also agates galore, their translucent colors just shine in the splash zone. I had to go back to the rig and convince Thayer to come have a look and, boy, was he glad he did!



Erratic amid the sandstone



Agates galore

That night got a little tense as we drove into the darkness without a lot of turnouts for overnight. But Thayer rose to the occasion, found a forest service road, and we settled in on a dead end. On the way in we had seen a large lightening storm brewing to the east. A few hours after we stopped it slowly rolled over us lighting up the sky with almost constant lightning for a good 45 minutes or so. The lightning was high in the clouds so it wasn't too

scary but it was simply an amazing light show! I've never seen anything like it! This was the hottest night yet, 90+ degrees, 90%humidity, with NO air movement, absolutely stifling! One of the few hardships we must endure.

Friday, August 30, 2013

## Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

Our next stopping place was Munising, MI, jumping off place for the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. I just had to correct myself two times there and write Lakeshore instead of Seashore! These lakes are so large they look just like the ocean, ...hard to wrap my head around it all. The lighthouses don't make it any easier to remember. Anyway, I bought tickets for the sun-

set cruise (the most popular cruise because of the rosy glow of sunset) in eager anticipation of seeing the famous rocks from the water.



I then made friends with a fellow named Greg who was selling fish sandwiches out of his truck just down the way. I found out from him what all there was to see before our cruise departure time, made a date for us to have dinner with him later, and he even offered us an invitation to park our rig for the night on a piece of his property down the road. You would be proud of how my friendship skills are developing!



While I rode my bike around Thayer did his programming stuff for Chris, finding good internet right near the boat dock. I pedaled a few miles down to a waterfall and a perfect little beach on the bay called, fittingly enough, Sand Point. The sand was just like the finest golden brown sugar, without the sticky. The beach sloped out gently for about 100 feet before dropping into the lovely, clear blue green depths. There were a few people there but not many, and I really felt the need for Jackson to help me enjoy it all and to play with. I splashed around to cool off as the day was again pretty warm and sticky. I rode back to town, explored around a bit, found the thrift store and grocery store and just coasted around looking at the old buildings.



Later that afternoon we walked down to the fish shack, visited with Greg while he made our whitefish sandwiches and homemade fries (we brought the beer), then enjoyed our meal. Overlooking the fact that we always forget something, we headed down to the dock for the cruise. We and our approximately 80 new shipmates cruised by Grand Island and the old lighthouse on our way to the main event. Unfortunately, dead ahead, loomed a gloomy fog bank, sitting there like a big old wool blanket ready to tuck us in

for the night. We were able to see a few of the fabulous pictured rocks before getting engulfed in the woolly interior of the fog.



As the temperature dropped we realized what we had forgotten – Thayer's jacket. Being the tough old salt that he is, he did not whine or complain one little bit. It wasn't freezing fog anyway. Well, the short story is that the boat ended up turning around early and we received a full refund for our trip. But, as you can see, I did get a

few good pictures and I'll bet you can't tell which ones I ripped off from Google images or our friend Anna Berger's blog. The color of the water was incredible, even in the fog.

For those of you who don't know, Anna and Emir Berger are the wonderful Australians we met a few years ago who inspired this year long adventure. Anna is a fantastic photographer and wrote up an amazing blog about their year and a half journey around the US with their delightful and beautiful daughters, Jordan and Bella.



Now comes the educational geology part of the post so you may opt to skip ahead now. These sandstone formations range in age from 1.1 billion y.o. (the dark red ones at the bottom) to 400-500 million y.o. (gray on top.) They were formed in ancient seas, wetlands and rivers. The top gray layer is harder than the others and has helped form these beautiful cliffs by protecting the softer layers underneath



from erosion. The vertical streaking of black, brown, white, green and red is caused by minerals in water that flow between the layers of rock and drip down the cliffs. The most common minerals are iron, manganese and copper. The caves and arches are caused from the tremendous wave action of the great lake. I find it remarkable that the layers are still parallel to the water after a billion years, this must be a relatively stable part of the North American continent.

Oh, and by the way, these are all my photos. I didn't need to steal any!



Those crazy Aussies, the Bergers!  
Thanks for getting us inspired!



## A sailing we go...sort of

Well, we actually had a driving day and got some miles in. We left Munising and drove to St. Ignace, a cute little tourist trap right to the north of the Mackinac Bridge leading downstate. You can take an expensive ferry to even more expensive Mackinac Island but we decided to pass on



Petunias stand watch over the north end of 5 mile long Mackinac Bridge, longest suspension bridge between anchorages in the Western hemisphere.

that. We spent a restless night in the Comfort Inn parking lot, listening to late arrivals, car alarms, garbage trucks, early departures, ...although they did have good WIFI. Thayer spent the morning working and I walked into the town and browsed around. There was a nice museum of the Ojibwe (aka Chippewa) tribes with very informative exhibits about the importance of family, trade and migration, and canoe building. The fellow working there was a very nice young man, and we had a heart-to-heart talk about life. I found out the white cedar is their "tree of life", much like the western red cedar in the NW.

As I continued down the main street, minding my own business, I was violently accosted by a bakery that reached out and dragged me through the door. I tried to resist but the salted pecan caramel topped cinnamon butter crispy rolls jumped into a bag and forced me to take them with me. They were only \$.50 each! I only bought two. Then I ate only one and saved the other for Thayer. It was a

real battle against temptation! The pitiful part was that the provocation was repeated shortly later when I had to wait for Thayer to come back and pick me up and I made the same mistake of waiting in front of the bakery. I'm sure subliminal messaging is used somehow and I resisted until the very end. But, when he didn't come and didn't come, my resolve was shattered and I bought two more of the little butters. For tomorrow, I promise. Tell me if you could resist this little darling →



Well, after that debacle we drove to the Mackinac bridge overlook and read up on the history of the bridge and took some photos. Then we got to pay \$10 to cross the mighty thing and we were officially downstate.

The plan was to drive down the west side of the peninsula, taking in whatever sights we happened upon. There are definitely more people and traffic in this part of the state! We powered through a few biggish weekend resort towns and then, as we were tooling along Suttons Bay we spotted the tall masts of a schooner at the town docks. Thayer drove us through a construction zone to get us there but we made it. We found the "Inland Seas" at the end of the dock, a 65+ ft steel hulled schooner. We talked with the young man aboard and found out that she is the floating classroom for the Inland Seas Education Association, a non-profit environmental education organization. Their mission is to expose mostly kids, but their families too, to science activities and investigations that teach them about the wonderful Great Lakes. We decided to spend the night here and then find out if we could get on the boat the next day. We found a great overnight spot near a local park. First thing in the morning we got to eat those delightful little butter bombs that I'd bought yesterday, chased down with some healthy fruit.



We then made our way to the education center and spoke with the skipper of the boat. They were going on a cruise later that day but didn't need volunteers – however there was space available for paying customers. Since the cost was less than our cruise to the Pictured Rocks that was refunded, we had no difficulty in deciding to go. We even had enough time before departure for a quick visit to the Grand Traverse Lighthouse just down the road, and then returned to Suttons Bay (for our 3 hour cruise).



The schooner Inland Seas

After a quick introduction and safety spiel we got underway. There were about 30 passengers, 5 instructors and 4 crew on the boat. First thing we did was motor out to about 60 ft. of water and collected 4 different samples that would be used for the small group activities. We towed an Otter trawl to drag samples from near the bottom; we used a Ponar sediment grabber for the goop on the bottom; a Van Dorn sampler to get water from the bottom; and a plankton net for..., you guessed it. This part took too long because it was very hot and we were just sitting and watching while the kids were having all the fun. Once this was accomplished we hoisted the sails and tried sailing in the light muggy air. I was in charge of hauling up the mainsail and must say that I did most of the muscle with very little help from the 3 little girls who were supposed to be tailing for me.

We broke up into smaller groups and did 5 different stations to see the stuff we had hauled up and to identify and test the samples. We explored plankton, fish, sediments, and chemistry. I won't describe each activity but will try to explain what we learned:

- The plankton in the Great Lakes is declining due to exotic species of bivalves that have gotten into the lakes. They are very efficient filterers and reproducers. The water is beautifully clear. Unfortunately, this is bad for the native animals because they



Heave-Ho!

don't have as much food, they are getting crowded out.



- The population of invasives has increased hugely in the past 20 years – mainly zebra mussels and quagga (another bivalve).
- The diversity of fish has decreased as pressure from invasive species increases. Round gobies are taking over the lakes, though they think that native fish may be starting recognize them as something to eat and eat them.
- Asian Carp are creeping up the Mississippi watershed toward the Great Lakes, and





Learning about the Great Lakes

only thing keeping them out are electric fences in the canals connecting the Mississippi watershed to the Lakes. The big worry is that the wetlands that connect the two watersheds will have catastrophic flooding that will allow the fish to pass from the Mississippi watershed to the Great Lakes watershed. These wetlands are less than 200 feet above the lake and river levels. These guys are bad news.

Some other interesting facts about the Great Lakes...

- They contain 20% of Earth's fresh water! Other countries are interested in getting their hands on this water, including the Japanese. But how they would transport it?
- The lakes have their own salmon runs, they spawn in the rivers and swim the lakes to grow up instead of an ocean. We saw some fishermen filleting some beautiful Kings today.
- The funding for fighting invasives has been cut from about \$480 million to about \$60 million.

We were surprised to see few water skiers, sailboats, or jet skis, with most vessels being of the fishing variety. Maybe it is just because boats look so tiny in the vast waters.

Because this really was a "3 Hour Tour" and no one want-

ed to chance getting stranded on some desert isle with Gilligan and Co., the skipper asked me to take over at the helm and steer us safely home. My sailing prowess was immediately recognized and we made it back to port without incident (except for some sore smilin' muscles).



And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by.

Saturday, August 31, 2013

## Sleeping Bear

After our educational cruise we cut across to the western shore and found a nice camping place in Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore on Good Harbor. The mosquitos were swarming but we were safe and smug in our little rig. The next morning I walked on the long empty beach. Little did I



know that this was the place I should be looking for Petoskey stones which are fossilized coral. A guy showed me what they looked like but they would have been pretty tough to find.



Polished Petoskey stone

Here is a picture of a nice polished one, the ones on the beach have to be wet to see the distinctive patterns. The family looking for stones did find some.

We went on the scenic drive in the park which included beautiful forests, dune areas and beaches. From the highest observation point you could bounce your way down the dune all the way to the shore in deep, soft, golden sand.

It was very steep however and once you got all the way down there you had no choice but to crawl/climb all the way back up in the same soft, slippery sand. Lots of people were doing it and having a lovely time. I did a little bouncing and you can see that on Facebook if you have a strong stomach.



"Ha! No mere sand can stop me!"

I felt like we could have spent more time at this park but we had a boondocking host lined up and had to get there. Jon and Gail turned out to be very entertaining and gave us some pointers for the next day. Nice quiet night out in the middle of farming country.

Friday, September 6, 2013

## Bits and Pieces

Its been a while since I posted so I've had to look back through my notebook to recall the past 8 or 9 days. How do they go by so fast?

Gone with the wind I guess.







After Sleeping Bear we drove to a little town called Pentwater where we were early enough to grab a good parking spot at Charles Mear State Park, which is very near the town. It has a nice beach and a huge campground simply PACKED with people, it being Labor Day Weekend. We didn't spend much time at the park but unloaded the bikes and cruised the town. We found some Ensign class sailors waiting for wind at the local yacht club and chatted with them about the town, its history, and sailing, of course. It is more fun to learn about a place from some locals



Silver Lake State Park lighthouse

than visiting a museum or visitor center we've decided. We tried to get a little ride on a boat but they didn't seem to want our valuable opinions about all things sailing. In town we saw some fishermen cleaning and filleting some big King salmon at the boat ramp. Turns out that they are just like our salmon except they don't grow to adulthood in

the ocean, they grow up in the Great Lakes and spawn in the rivers that flow into the lakes. I had no idea that there were Great Lake Salmon! The next discovery was an estate auction going on in a nearby neighborhood. It was a good thing we are traveling in a little RV and we were on bikes. There were a few nice things that I don't need but they wouldn't get to the auction block until much later in the day. Whew! Later that day we drove further down the coast to Silver Lake State Park which was also busy. Another fantastic beach, this one with a pretty lighthouse and sand dunes.

We spent that night with some Boondocking folks who had a very interesting RV history. They spent 12 years work/camping. This entails traveling to a place that you would like to spend some time and working there for 8-10 weeks at whatever kind of job you could find. Several years of this time they worked for a company doing hearing testing around the country. OSHA requires businesses with loud workplaces to test the hearing of their employees every so often. The business hires this company to send a crew to test their employees. They also worked in national parks at hotels, restaurants, maintenance, retail, campground hosting....



Silver Lake Lighthouse

They were very nice folks and very encouraging to us newbies. They directed us on to Frankenmuth, Michigan for our Bavarian Experience (think Leavenworth x 10). Most of the town was just tourist stuff but a restaurant named Zehnder's was highly recommended to us and we were soon testing their reputation for ourselves. Zehnder's is one of the highest volume restaurants in the US, they can seat up to 1,500 people at one time and claim to serve 1 million people every year!



Zehnder's of Frankenmuth, MI

We were fed to the gills with their all-you-can-eat chicken dinner, which is what we also now recommend if you should visit the area. We started with chicken



noodle soup, two kinds of bread, paté and toast, cheese, coleslaw, cranberry relish and cottage cheese. Then the main course arrived, consisting of nicely baked, crispy chicken, dressing, mashed potatoes, green beans, gravy and buttered noodles. If a bowl went empty it could be refilled in a heartbeat and we had more of the cranberry relish, potatoes and green beans. Fortunately dessert was just ice cream because I don't think I could have handled anything more. We rolled out of there like butterball turkeys and waddled around the tourist shops until we could hoist ourselves onto our bikes again.

The other "must see" experience in Frankenmuth is the Bronner's Christmas Wonderland with acres of Christmas stuff,



A real wonderland

Then we hit the road for Ann Arbor and my cousin Lynnae's home. Lynnae is 9 years younger than me and we have never spent much time together so it was a nice chance to rectify that situation. It was a busy five days, she and her two wonderful kids, Calvin (age 8) and Vivian (age 5) were just starting the new school year (and I'M

NOT!!!), adjusting to a different routine and juggling a lot of activities.





Lynnae teaches theatre at a college on the other side of town and then some. I tried to help, without being too much in the way, with some cooking, cleaning, getting Lynnae out for a break or two, giving lots of advice



My cousin Lynnae

(who can resist with a younger cousin?) and hanging out with the kids some. Thayer worked on the rig, managing some repairs and maintenance, and played some checkers with the kids (Hello? Who's making up the rules??) I went on a couple of bike rides, one day to a little town called Dexter where they have a darn good bakery that makes a fine apple critter. I know, just what I needed after that chicken dinner, right? The days flew by and we really enjoyed spending time with her and the kids. But, not to overstay our welcome, it was soon time to move on.



As the sun set that evening we had tucked ourselves away in a little town called Marblehead, OH.

Saturday, September 7, 2013

## Marblehead

Marblehead, Ohio, sits on the southern edge of Lake Erie with its lighthouse a beacon into the dark for the many ships navigating the treacherous waters of the lake. With modern navigation equipment all of the beautiful lighthouses are really not needed but fortunately they are maintained and kept open for the enjoyment of all, and for those poor SOBs who don't have modern navigation equipment. I think Thayer might be getting tired of me wanting to visit lighthouses but too bad. I like 'em. They tend to get me



Beautiful biking on Kelleys Island

near the water which is what I need on a hot day. Marblehead is also where a small ferry takes people out to Kelley Island, about a 20 minute ride. I opted to go to the island while Thayer stayed in Marblehead. I took my bike and had a great time cycling around the 4 x 2 mile island. It was just the right size for me to see everything, riding or walking. The roads were mostly paved and traffic was about 2/3 bike and golf cart and 1/3 car traffic. It also turned out to be

“Treasure Island” weekend when all the locals have a yard sale! I stopped at about 3 or 4 and was not tempted by a single item. The stuff was so junky I just started riding by. There was too much other good stuff to see!



I slowly cruised the tiny town but didn't stop, I was on my way to see some rocks! Kelley Island just happens to be the world's BEST place to easily see the effects of glacial scouring on soft limestone rock.

Feast your eyes on glacial grooves! These spectacular, world-class glacial grooves were carved into the solid limestone bedrock 18,000 years ago during the Pleistocene era (the last Ice Age). The trenches in this area are 8-10 ft deep, 35-40 feet across and run for about 400 feet. Glacial ice, probably hundreds of feet thick, flowed from the north in what is now the Lake Erie basin.

More of the marks existed on the island, and many of them much more impressive than these pictured, but, alas, they were destroyed during the quarrying of limestone for building blocks. I know I may get more excited about this stuff than most, but you must admit they are truly impressive!



3-400 years ago the Natives that lived here recorded important events on a large limestone slab, now called the “Inscription Rock.” It sits under a shelter now because it is so eroded from weather that you can't really see the marks. Fortunately, a visiting military man made a detailed drawing of it back in the 1870's so we have a record of what it once looked like.



Inscription Rock & Marker

There were other interesting things to see on the island, some pretty beaches, spooky ruins in the forest (remnants of the quarry), and rare ecosystems of freshwater lakes and limestone shores. I took a short walk on a fancy boardwalk around one of only 3 (yes, three) remaining wetlands on this huge Lake Erie. This area was obviously



“developed” way before the value of wetlands was recognized. The old story of not knowing what we are losing when we destroy the natural systems that make our planet healthy. I think of the many places we’ve seen where they are now trying to get wetlands re-established, recognizing the many benefits they provide to animals, plants and communities.



Spooky ruins on Kelleys Island

The island was historically interesting as well, before Prohibition there were 25 wineries on the island. They had a lot of agriculture to provide most of their own food, as well as the quarry providing jobs. In the winter they would cut blocks of ice out of the lake and store them in straw, in a barn, for summertime ice for ice boxes. There are many beautiful old homes on the water, many made out of the native stone.



After I returned from the island Thayer and I biked down to the Marblehead Lighthouse for photos. We had to dodge around the 2 weddings that were occurring while we were there.

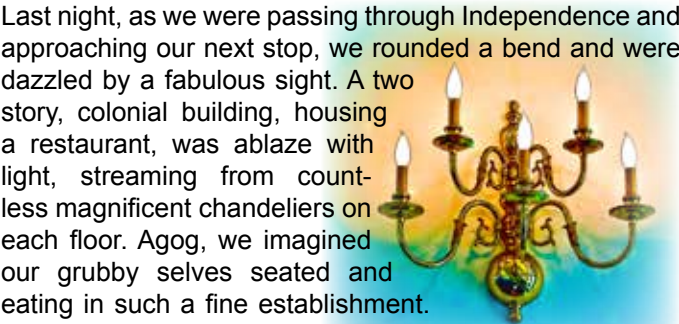


Marble Head Lighthouse

Monday, September 9, 2013

### Cleveland-Akron-Cuyahoga

Last night, as we were passing through Independence and approaching our next stop, we rounded a bend and were dazzled by a fabulous sight. A two story, colonial building, housing a restaurant, was ablaze with light, streaming from countless magnificent chandeliers on each floor. Agog, we imagined our grubby selves seated and eating in such a fine establishment. We stealthily cased the neighborhood, finding a quiet parking lot nearby for the night, vowing that the following morning we were going to eat breakfast there, cost be damned! We are on vacation! Chances like this don’t come around every day!



Bright and early this morning we cleaned ourselves as best we could and marched right in like we owned the place. We were courteously greeted at the counter by a cheerful teenager with a pierced nostril. Thayer ordered the most expensive breakfast on the menu, the Breakfast Platter, and I chose a sausage egg McMuffin and a cup of coffee. We smugly enjoyed our lovely breakfast under a softly glowing chandelier at the most elegant McDonald’s in America. Living large in Ohio!



Where the rich folk' dine.

But seriously now...

Right smack in the middle of the Cleveland-Akron corridor sits a lovely gem of a park. It is a conglomeration of federal, state, county and regional parks hop-scotched together into a patchwork park they call Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Created recently (2000), the goal was to bring recreational opportunities to many people and to preserve this beautiful, historic and environmentally important area surrounding the Cuyahoga River. The waterway was an easy pathway for Native Americans to migrate from their north-



Cuyahoga River



ern summer hunting and foraging grounds to their warmer winter homes to the south. It was used by so many different tribes that there was an agreement among them that they could not engage in hostilities while traveling through the area. Early trappers and traders recognized its value for moving goods from east to midwest and vice versa.



nice carved details, birds, squirrels and leaves to adorn the walls and joinery. The handmade rocking chairs were very beautiful and comfortable and I took many photos so that Thayer can make us some when we get home. He fell asleep in one of them and started snoring, blending in nicely with the sounds of the forest.



Thayer test driving the rockers

There were many trails to choose from, forest, meadows of flowers, streams, and grassland. I attempted to identify some of the many, many unfamiliar trees in the forests here.

I fell in love with blue stem prairie grass today. So I am not only a knee-jerk liberal tree hugger and rock hugger, but a grass hugger to boot! I asked for some more information on the trees after our hike and can now identify red and white oak, red maple, beech and the tulip tree. Not much of a start on these diverse forests, but something nonetheless.



Blue stem prairie grass

Today we explored one side of the park, walking to some falls on a creek that must be spectacular when there is water flowing over the rocks. As it was? Eh. Interesting rock formations though.

The Brecksville Nature Center was a lovely little



lodge in the woods, built in the 30's by WPA workers, made of rock and wormy walnut from the surrounding area. It had many

Oh yeah, the inside word about that McD's..., the only way the snooty, rich folks living here 20 years ago would let McD's come to their town was if they built a really nice looking restaurant. That tidbit of information is thanks to Gary, the RC airplane enthusiast we visited with tonight. We found a very nice and quiet night in the far corner of a park/picnic area, with just the insects and early morning birds to listen to.

The very next day....



We drove to the Brecksville Station near the north end of the park, our plan being to ride the 12 miles to the south end on our bikes, and then enjoy a lovely train ride back to the rig. The Towpath parallels the canal that lifted barges almost 400 ft. through a series of locks from Lake Erie to the Ohio River near Akron, OH. The canal was dug in 2 years (1825-7) by HAND by German and Irish immigrants. It stretched 308 miles and contained 44 locks that did the heavy lifting. It was 4 feet deep and about 40 wide, though the locks were narrower, accommodating only one 17 X 60-80 ft. barge. We learned that most of it was not filled with river water but the water came from the tributaries of the Cuyahoga River.

The Cuyahoga River Valley and the Ohio & Erie Canal have a rich history of trade, transportation, farming and industry. This canal, along with the Erie Canal, united vast areas of our country to transport the incredible natural resources and grain of the west and midwest to the east. Af-

ter the railway came through, the canal became obsolete and in 1913 was made unusable by a big flood.



Canals were excavated by hand

Today, the old canal itself is a mixture of lovely meadows, wetlands and forests. It winds along the Cuyahoga River and even crosses over it at one point. The towpath was crushed, compacted gravel and stretches of pavement that was very easy to ride on our road bikes. There are many interpretive signs along the way detailing the history and features of the canal, river, towpath and environment.



Brecksville-Northfield High Level Bridge reflecting in the Cuyahoga River





Old but still in good shape!

Midway, we stopped at a visitors center and enjoyed talking with a ranger and learning more about the area and it's history. We also were informed that the train doesn't run on Mondays and Tuesdays so we would be biking both ways. Not a problem, though I was dreadfully disappointed not to get a train ride! We made sure that we knew where to buy ice cream on our way back and continued down the path, cruising a few of the little towns and farms left over from the canal heydays.



Old but still in good shape!

We also stumbled across the best gas prices we have seen since departing from the NW. Sadly, we had only just filled our fuel tank and didn't need any more. Besides, the station was closed (and had been for about 50 years).



Be sure with pure.

They cleared the wreckage out of the area near the river and shortly thereafter a few beaver ventured back into the park after being gone for over a hundred years. They built a nice dam, the park tore it down, the beaver built it again, the park tore it down. The third time the park decided to let the beaver stay and they have been excellent stewards of the area every since.



Developers 0 : Beavers 1 (won)

There are now about 8 lodges surrounding a large pond and wetland just filled with plant and animal life. We saw birds, large and small fish, frogs, turtles and vast lily pad areas, sometimes moving randomly and vigorously with unseen creatures. This was our turnaround point and, as it

We stopped at the Beaver Marsh near the south end of the park to admire the transformation that a few determined beavers can accomplish in just a few years. 20 years ago there was

an unsightly auto wrecking yard near the river that was slated to become a parking lot by the park to accommodate visitors to a planned

was getting quite hot and muggy, we pedaled eagerly back toward the ice cream store (FYI, we indulged on locally made salted caramel).

It was one of those days that gave my smiling muscles a great workout. At first Thayer was riding behind me but I was driving him crazy (or off the trail) by my constant swerving and slowing to look at things and rubbernecking at the lovely and spectacular views. Needless to say he got to go first for a while after that.



Stop & go on the Ohio & Erie Canal Trail

I enjoyed the history and natural beauty of this lovely park. I continue to be astonished and amazed at the wonderful parks that we have in our country. This one was a special one, tucked in between two large cities, administered by collection of agencies, all with the same goal of preserving our natural and historical treasures. It was the dream child of several Ohio politicians who worked tirelessly over many years to make it a reality. It certainly deserves its nickname: The Emerald Necklace.

Wednesday, September 11, 2013

## Ohio Amish Country and beyond

As the incredibly hot (90's) and humid (75%) weather stuck us to anything we touched, we drove deeper into the heartland of America. We had spent a sticky night in a park in Lexington, using our outdoor shower for the first time. We felt great for about 10 minutes then the stickiness



Malabar Farm

was back. Our first stop the following morning was Malabar Farm, the only working farm in the Ohio State Park system. It was built by Louis Bromfield, a well known early 1900's author. It has some animals, barns and a beautiful big house that is in the process of re-furbishment.

Using our books and maps to guide us, we wove our way deeper into Amish country. We did a pretty good job of not behaving like the typical American tourist in a foreign land; trying not to stare at buggies, funny haircuts and beards, unusual clothing, ...but there were some moments. Dagnabbit, what do you expect from us? We are American tourists in a RV! Anyway, plenty of the kids back home also have funny haircuts and wear unusual clothing. Right?





We had a nice time at Heini's Place, a cheese and goodie factory. Not only was it air conditioned but you could eat all the samples you wished from over 30 kinds of cheese and 12 kinds of fudge. After eating enough to count for lunch and buying even more to take with us, we went on a short tour led by an elderly Amish gentleman who had worked there for many years. "When I was a young man...." He gave us the history of Heini's and then a tour of the facility where they were not making cheese at that particular



Lunch and a history lesson at Heini's Place.

time. A notable fact is that they only buy milk from farmers who milk their cows by hand. Their cheeses taste so good because they use milk from happy, stress free cows. He told a very funny story about a farmer with a bad batch of butter....

*As the story goes, a local farmer would save up the cream from his milk cows each week to make his own household butter and also enough to sell locally for additional income.*

*One time, when he began to make the butter, he discovered that a rat had fallen into the cream, drowned and settled to the bottom sometime during the week. He didn't want to lose a whole weeks worth of income so, discarding the rat, he went ahead and made his butter and brought the entire batch to the local store to sell.*

*He thought to exchange his households portion for fresh store butter and proposed this to the store owner. "That seems strange to me." said the merchant. "Why would you*

*want to trade equal amounts of your good butter for some other?"*

*"I cannot lie to you." the farmer replied, "A rat died in the cream but I'm sure that it tastes alright and perhaps we can keep this little incident a secret between us. I will take a smaller amount in exchange and you can sell the rest for profit. Besides, what people don't know won't hurt them."*

*"That is certainly true." replied the merchant and accepted the farmer's butter. Taking it to the back of the store, the merchant soon returned with the farmer's very own butter, now reshaped and neatly packaged in store wrapping paper.*

*"Here you go." said the merchant to the farmer, handing him the repackaged rat butter. "As you say, what people don't know won't hurt them." And each gave a knowing wink to the other.*



They're all so tasty it's hard to choose.



Picture perfect farms

A stop at the Mennonite and Amish Heritage Center gave us a greater understanding of their beliefs and culture. They had an excellent video presentation and I appreciated the chance to learn about them without feeling like a voyeur or observer as they go about their lives in their communities. Their farms are simple and beautiful, they only farm the amount of land that they can work themselves with simple tools and horses. They raise enough to feed their families and sell locally. Many use their crafts, carpentry skills, and cooking skills to augment family incomes. They are not entirely off the grid but using electricity requires permission from the bishop. For instance, its OK to use battery powered tools where the batteries are charged by a generator but they cannot use the generator or an engine directly. We watched a video about the typical barn raisings that they do on occasion. With the foundation laid and the materials organized, 3-400 men can raise a large post and beam barn by lunchtime (starting before



Most vehicles get around fine with 1 hp.

dawn). It was an amazing thing to watch, with just a few men in charge they have everyone working like bees in a hive, each one knowing the task and having the skill to do it efficiently and as a team.

The Amish wish for a slower paced life with an emphasis on family and community, and an independence from the outside world (hence the buggies, self insurance, small schools, home churches and a very tight knit community). A typical farm may house four generations of the family – each person fulfilling their own important role in support of the others. They believe in non-conformity to the larger society but extreme conformity in their own community. I am sure there are what we would consider hardships in their daily lives, but it also seems like a very successful model for a sustainable future. I loved the well tended farms, bountiful fields and beautiful horses and buggies that we saw, they certainly are skilled farmers and know how to build elegant and useful equipment. Everyone we spoke with was very friendly and polite, and even as we drove the back roads through the rich and green farmland most of those who looked our way would typically stop to smile and wave to us.



The warm and undulating fields of Amish country

We had an early dinner at an Amish styled restaurant (excellent food) before heading out to our boon-docking destination for the night. A long, hot & sticky drive, slowed by construction and detours, eventually brought us to David & Sarah's beautiful home south of Pittsburg about 9:30 that evening. We plugged into their electricity and used our air conditioning for the first time. It is noisier than the quiet we are used to but it worked well enough for us to sleep thru the heat. It would've worked better if it also wasn't so danged humid.



Sarah, David and their three sons Jonah, Levi and Abraham live on a lovely acreage surrounded by woods. David has worked really hard to make the place a little boy wonderland; big play scape, lawns, a pond, dirt bike trail, fire pit, climbing wall, trampoline and swings. Sarah and David are both pilots in the National Guard, so they have an interesting schedule with deployments and local work. They somehow fit in RVing, climbing, canoeing, backpacking and biking. David is obviously very skilled at carpentry and any kind of project. Thayer was having an extreme bout of shop envy while we toured the garage and David's shop area. We enjoyed our short visit with them.

With a day of driving ahead of us we cranked up the air conditioning and got on the freeway, heading for Erie, PA on our way to Niagara Falls, Ontario. We took a break mid-day to stop in Erie at Presque Island SP for some biking and swimming. Again we were delighted by the great bike paths and beautiful beaches of yet another park. We went for a swim though the waters didn't seem quite as clear and inviting as other Great Lakes we have visited.



We were pretty desperate for some kind of cool. We also got to see a couple of tall ships sailing by the peninsula which always makes it a good day for us. Then onward to Niagara to a hospitable boondocker site just a few miles north of the falls. Again, we were thankful for a plug-in for the air conditioning. The white noise also drowned out the big thunderstorm that rolled through. It is finally cooler this morning and temperatures are expected to plummet in the next few days to typical or even lower fall temps. We'll be happier when it happens.

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

## Niagara Falls



A tour boat enters the mist of Niagra's Canadian Falls

We arrived in Niagara Falls, Ontario on Wed. evening after a fairly extended day of driving, about 300 miles. We were greeted warmly by our Boondocking host, Karsty, who was armed with maps and brochures to get us started the next day. He lives in a nice neighborhood and we just parked right in his driveway. The next day dawned gray and drippy so we spent the morning catching up with email, chores



Canadian Falls

and muddling around. I started getting restless after lunch and jumped on my bike to head to the falls while Thayer opted for a computer/rest day. It was about a 3 mile ride into town that didn't take very long. I checked out the town, figured out where the main attractions were, scoped out the routes down the hill and just got the lay of the land. I purchased each of us an "Adventure Pass" which gave us a discount on 4 of the major attractions and a 2 day bus pass for cruising the Niagara River Gorge. When I could finally peel my eyes away from the spectacular falls I was dismayed to see towering dark clouds brewing in the direction I had to go to get back to Karsty's. I was about halfway back when the heavens opened and soaked me in a few minutes. At least it was a warm rain. We visited with Karsty and learned about the local history and current events. That evening we drove into town to see the light show at the falls. They shine a bunch of BIG lights on the falls and it looks very pretty, sort of like oobleck or play-dough flowing over the rocks.

On Friday Thayer and I rode our bikes into town to have our big "Adventure Day" with our passes. I guided him through the "new" Niagara, where the real tourists have



Your worst nightmare

fun. As you can see, it wasn't the kind of place we wanted to spend much time. We biked on down to the river to admire the falls for a bit, then we started our cheap plastic poncho collection with "Niagara's Fury!" which is an entertaining video presentation on the formation of Niagara's gorge and falls. It was followed by a surround sound, panoramic video, snowstorm, rain, splash sort of "ride". It took us on a virtual arial trip over Lake Erie, down the river, over



A Canadian's perspective of American Falls

the falls, through the rapids and whirlpools to Lake Ontario. It had my head spinning from start to end. The next poncho acquisition opportunity was "Behind the Falls" where we were able to walk through tunnels bored behind the falls to lookouts on what amounts to a solid wall of water rushing downward. There were also several lookouts that took us right to the edge of the falling water and the roiling water below. The power of the water is just incredible. It is easy to see why much of the power for the NE and Canada is generated from this river. Fortunately the power people have cleverly kept most of the power generating canals, ponds, generators, dams and such completely out of the view of the falls area. You can certainly see it to the north



View behind the falls

and south and Thayer had a fun time puzzling out what each building or pond was used for. Since most of the buildings are quite old you wouldn't really know that they



are power related because they are beautiful structures made of cut stone with intricate carvings, decorations and windows. It is a very complicated system and is the very first large power generating system in the US and Canada.

After so much excitement we decided it would be a good idea to sit down for a while so we climbed aboard a WEGO bus and headed up river, to the turnaround and then down river to our next activity. We rode the elevator down to near the river then onto a nice boardwalk for the Whitewater Walk. The standing waves that roar along this stretch are HUGE. The signage says '15 meters' but they aren't quite that big. They are rated as Class 6 rapids, which means virtually un-runable. Also, they don't just go up and down but swirl, dive, swell, and suck. At one point in history entrepreneurs were allowed to run commercial rafting trips down the river, but that finally ended when 8 people were lost off one boat. Much of the information presented along the walk was about the incredible feats (and flops!) people have tried successfully, and not, over the years. There



July 8 1876 -- Maria Spelterini walking across a tightrope with her feet in peach baskets. In the background is the Niagara Suspension Bridge, which is full of spectators.

have been many tightrope walkers doing ridiculously wild things on a rope, boaters, swimmers, barrel riders, and an unintentional little boy in a lifejacket. At one time it was incredibly competitive and you had to outdo the last guy in order to draw a crowd. It is very tightly controlled now and they allow a tightrope walker about every 20 years, just to honor the history of the funambulist (there's a good word to look up!) in Niagara's history. A few years ago they allowed a kayaker in the rapids for a National Geographic film. It was certainly an impressive set of rapids that I only briefly considered running.



Maid of the Mist

We climbed back on the bus and continued to the down river turnaround and came back to the Falls for our next poncho. We rode another elevator to river level and received another blue poncho for our journey to the falls aboard the "Maid of the Mist." It being a cool afternoon, there were not huge crowds so we were able to secure good viewing spots right at the bow of the boat. We motored by American Falls on our way to where the real misty part happens in the horseshoe shaped drop pool of Canadian Falls. The mist rises in a giant cloud from the center of the falls and as the boat edges into the swirling cloud and churning water, the warm mist wraps around you, quite a bit warmer than the air outside the cloud. When you look down into the beautiful green water there are so many bubbles that it seems the water is only about half water, the rest is air. The drop pool is over 120 feet deep

so the water really churns and boils as it flows through. A Karsty fact is that people who go over the falls sometimes don't surface for a long time or perhaps never. He said that about 18 people a year commit suicide over the falls. Strangely enough there are many birds flying and swimming around the base of the falls, gulls and cormorants mostly, they are feeding on the stunned little critters that find themselves going through the gauntlet of the falls. We spent a short time in the swirling, pounding, misty center of the falls before coming about and heading back to the dock. About the ponchos: they are recyclable but we used just our first one all day and saved the others. We now have the spares in our backpacks and bike bags for emergencies. Millions of them must be used during the season!

It was getting late in the afternoon and we decided that a large hot chocolate was needed to warm us up before climbing back on the bikes. We were so energized that we decided to try an alternate route to get back to Karsty's. The earlier bus ride inspired us to ride upriver towards a nice park area which we had seen. The path led us through an amazing botanical garden filled with colorful flowers, large and small, and perfectly grouped and arranged. It was simply lovely. We continued toward some electricity generating areas consisting of gates, flumes, canals, and beautiful old buildings. We rode and rode, thinking we knew where we were going, Ha ha ha ha! We rode along canals, quiet streets, corn fields, abandoned houses and



This is where we realized we were lost.

construction sites. We went over bridges and around corners. As the light grew dimmer, the speed limit increased, the headwind increased, the traffic increased, the size of the shoulder decreased, and my legs grew tired. Finally, as we approached the on ramp for the QEW, I busted out the iPod and consulted my friendly TOMTOM map. Fortunately, all we had to do was go over the freeway, turn right and ride for another 5 miles in the dark beside cars whizzing by and we'd be home. Ugh. We pulled in just before darkness fell. Thayer calculated the distance the next day, we had turned a 3 mile ride into 15.

Karsty offered to show us around the next day which we happily agreed to, always preferring the expertise of a local to our own thrashing about (see yesterday's activities). Because of a big bicycle rally many of the roads were blocked so Karsty expertly navigated the back roads to



Beautiful homes abound

get us to Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). Nice to have an ex-cop showing you about, they know all the backroads. NOTL is a lovely little town located on the Lake Ontario end of the Niagara River. It caters to the wealthy, let me tell you. We drove the neighborhoods admiring the historic houses and churches. Great effort has been made to preserve the architecture of the 1800's and many of the buildings are original. The flowers on the main street are fantastic, reminding me of Victoria, BC. There are many chic shops, galleries, fudge and ice cream shops, bakeries





Prince of Wales Inn

and restaurants. The Prince of Wales Inn is a first rate, 5 star establishment anchoring one end of the busy street. Horse and buggy rides are available and the horses are very handsome.



Niagara River Whirlpool

We went out to lunch and when we got back to Karsty's we packed up the rig and prepared to leave. We had decided to go back to NOTL to do some more exploring, visit Fort George, one site of the War of 1812, and give Thayer a chance to photograph some of the beautiful old houses in town. We said our goodbyes and headed down the road. We successfully navigated back to NOTL only to discover that Thayer had left his camera and shirt in Karsty's car. After some vigorous walking around the neighborhood searching for open WIFI, emailing and finally a phone call made from the Prince of Wales Inn, we contacted Karsty who insisted on jumping in his RV and driving the camera and shirt out to us. We met up in the quiet parking area of the Jet Boat outfit, had a great visit and Karsty decided to stay the night as well. It was a nice quiet evening and we said our goodbyes once more to our newest best friend the next morning.



Dusk envelops Niagra's American Falls and Rainbow Bridge, our pathway east tomorrow.



Our most gracious host, Karsty

Sunday, September 22, 2013

## Into the Adirondacks

Our route away from Niagara led us along the south edge of Lake Ontario. On a whim we turned into a little town called Olcott, where we were delighted to find a big festival in full swing. The 13th Annual Niagara Co. Celtic Heritage Festival was still rocking along, even under cloudy skies late on a Sunday afternoon. We wandered through the vendor booths filled with everything a Celtic warrior or maiden needs: kilts, plaids and lovely wovens, leather accessories, chain mail, steel helmets, weapons of all sorts,



Closing ceremony parade of warriors

Welsh biscuits as well as the usual kettle corn, fish and chips, little girl tutus, fried flatbread and beer, lots of beer! As you can imagine, most of the people were dressed in their best Celtic wear. Some were very proper in their clan plaid and knee socks, toting bagpipes while others were dressed in their best fur and steel warrior wear and heavily armed. It was a wonderful assortment of people, all having a lovely time while pretending to be ancient Celts and drinking large quantities of beer. Yes, beer was involved.



"LOVETHOSE BAGPIPES!" "EH?WHATDIDYOU SAY?"



As is our usual pattern, we approached the stage just as the darling little girl Irish dancing troop finished their performance. We never seem to get there in time to see the kids dance. This has happened to us numerous times. The next and final performance was a rocking Irish group that was best enjoyed from a distance. They were very good but too loud for my old ears. We were happier sitting out by one of two large bonfires by the beer tent. During the band's break the officials and attendees held their closing ceremony consisting of a short parade of the costumed folks and 3 bagpipe bands. We felt a little out of place in our sandals, shorts and shirts but people were kind to us anyway with one very drunk fellow entertaining us with rambling accounts of his drunken wanderings around the countryside. We weren't sure if he meant 'over a lifetime' or 'that afternoon'. I didn't understand much of it but nodded agreeably at the appropriate times. The timing of the rain was about perfect, just as most of the vendors were getting their wares stowed away the wind and rain arrived. We decided to stay where we parked for the night and were lucky to even have WIFI. It was a blustery night and we awoke to see whitecaps and big waves on the lake.



He wanted to sign up just for the sword.

The main goal of the next day was to find a shower! This we accomplished with a short visit to Golden Hills S.P. which had a very nice facility and lots of hot water. You really learn to appreciate a nice shower when you only get them a few times per week. One of those terrible hard-

ships of the trail. Stopped for some shopping and internet in Rochester then moved along to Watertown for the night. We found a nice dark trailhead parking lot on the Black River Trail and settled in for the night. The next morning I explored the trail and ended up walking 3.5 miles to the next trailhead where Thayer met me in the rig. It was a lovely walk up a pretty river flowing over limestone ledges.



A roadside vegetable stand gets replenished

We continued driving up into Adirondack Park, one of the largest parks in the nation. It's mostly a NY state park, but interspersed with private lands and administered by a variety of agencies. We are finding that to be quite common out here in the east. It is a mountainous (by eastern standards) area covered with beautiful 2nd growth forests, lovely lakes and ponds, historic towns, and winding roads. We stopped at the Paul Smith's Visitor Information Center (VIC) where a video explained about the park. They have miles of nice trails with varied and fascinating ecosystems represented in the park. The Paul Smith's College is an interesting mix of educational opportunities. You can study natural resources, forestry, ecology, fisheries, environmental studies or business, cooking and hospitality. It has a very famous culinary school and students practice what they learn in local tourist accommodations while the science students have thousands of acres of forest to practice theirs. I guess it does make sense.



Tucked in for the night at Lake Flower, Saranac Lake, NY

The Adirondacks have a colorful history of farming, trapping, logging, and mining which has shaped the land and the towns. Logging and mining took its toll on the woods and mountains but the mining is gone and the forestry practices are more intelligent, working toward sustainable logging. The forests appear to be making a wonderful comeback after the park was basically denuded. Its most interesting industry, we discovered, was the 70 years that it was place to go for the "cure".

In the 1880's a doctor named Edward Trudeau, who had contracted tuberculosis, came to the town of Saranac to spend his final days. In those days TB was a death sentence. Turns out that the fresh air, good food and exercise cured him! In 1884 he established the first cure center for TB patients in Saranac. His theory was that rest, fresh air, good, high calorie food, exercise and a positive outlook could cure many people afflicted with



Where tuberculosis was tamed, the first TB research facility in the world!

the disease. By this point in history, germs were finally acknowledged as the cause of this terrible disease, a big change from the genetics theory. In 1894 Dr. Trudeau established the first research facility in the world to study the disease and research treatment options. The patients, lodged in "care cottages" spent a great deal of their time outdoors, year round, on porches built into each facility. In winter they were bundled in blankets and fur and hot water bottles called stone pigs. Being outdoors prevented the spread of the disease. They were fed a high calorie diet to help their bodies battle the disease, with local children employed to be "tray boys" who ferried the heavy trays up and down hills and stairs to the care cottages. Exercise was encouraged if patients were able and even those who could not were kept busy with crafts and hobbies to lift their spirits. One man built a Ham radio and fixed people's clocks and watches for them. By 1920 there were at least 166 care cottages in Saranac and thousands of people were treated every year. Other facilities in the Adirondacks sprang up and many support industries flourished along with them. "The Cure" was the main industry in the Adirondacks until 1954 when antibiotics were developed which cured the disease.



Health tip #86: Take long naps in the fresh air.

Tourism is now the main industry in the area but the cure industry left a legacy in Adirondack Park that remains today. A world famous research institute, two colleges, and a regional hospital still call the area home. There is a very interesting museum in the old research laboratory built by Dr. Trudeau. The museum is a non-profit organization that receives much of its funding from the Trudeau family (including Gary Trudeau, cartoonist) and the families

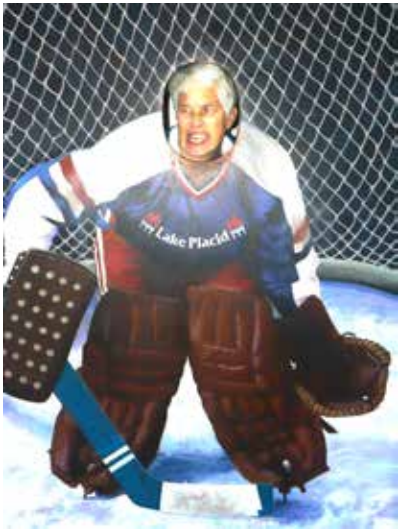


of patients who were cured by the good doctor. The town of Saranac is filled with restored and historic buildings and houses, all unique and architecturally beautiful. Every winter they have a large winter festival, complete with the construction of a large ice castle on the frozen river. This event dates back to the cure days when the festival was held to brighten the winter days and cheer everybody up by getting them outside!



Ski jumping towers! EEK!

Traveling another 12 miles down the road (we try not to overdo it) we stopped in Lake Placid, site of the 1932 and 1980 Olympic Games. We toured the 3 skating rinks, saw the one where the young US Hockey team beat the highly favored Russians in the “Miracle on Ice!” for the gold medal. We also saw the speed skating oval where Eric Heiden made history by winning 5 gold medals and setting 4 Olympic records. On our way out of town we spotted the incredibly tall ski jumping towers. They looked absolutely terrifying. Lake Placid is still a very happening little town that hosts events year round. Again, another place where we really should spend more time.



We then drove down out of the mountains to the flatlands, crossed the border and pressed on to our Boondocking hosts located about 30 miles west of Quebec. We arrived after dark, visited briefly, ate dinner and went to bed. In the morning we were delighted to find ourselves perched on



Another pleasant view from our rear window.

a hill about 1/2 mile away from and 150 feet above the St. Lawrence River. It is a wonderful view of the big river. We puttered around all morning then rode our bikes to a couple of small towns nearby, Donnacona and Cap Sante. There were many beautiful little stone homes (is anyone



More lovely stone cottages

getting tired of me mentioning these yet?) and old quirky neighborhoods. We talked to a woman who had just made 100 apple pies for the tart festival this weekend. Maybe we should stay put for a few days....hmmm. One steep little road took us right down to the water, more nice houses and a boat ramp. We are excited about the planned trip to Old Quebec tomorrow!



Getting ready for the Apple Tart festival

Sunday, September 22, 2013

### Old Quebec City

With our Boondocking hosts Andre and Denise's touring advice firmly in hand we drove the 48 kilometers into Quebec. We zipped off the freeway onto a large boulevard where parking was free, just a few kilometers from the city. We bicycled on the excellent bike path, along the river, into town, uphill (it seemed!), pushing hard into a 15-20 mph headwind.



Quaint Quebec corner café



Quebec is a walled city

Old Quebec is the only walled city in North America north of Mexico. The main part of the city is perched up on the cliffs overlooking the St. Lawrence River with the oldest part of located at river level. Quebec was established in 1608 by the French and was the most important strategic site for the trading empires that developed over the years. From the high ground they could defend the city from the English and Americans, who coveted it. The Citadelle is the armed fortress of the city and is still a military base today. The English took over Quebec in 1759 and remained there until Canada became an independent na-







Place-Royale

tion. The city contains many of the original buildings from the 1600's; lovely old churches, hotels and inns, shops, and homes. Governmental leaders realized early on that the city was an incredible treasure. Preservation efforts began in 1872 when Lord Dufferin (Governor General at the time) put a stop to the demolition of the city walls. Other efforts at modernization and "improvements" have been squashed over the years. The city is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We wandered the river level part of the city, called Place-Royale, enjoying the narrow, busy streets lined with quaint, old shops catering to people like us. A cruise ship had docked so there were swarms of camera toting tourists. I loved the sidewalk cafés and creatively decorated storefronts that were around every corner. We explored for a while then walked our bikes up the short, steep hill to the top part of the town and locked them up near the Chateau Frontenac Hotel. This amazing hotel was built in the early 1900's, its design based on famous old castles of France. We did a circuit of the city starting with the Governors' Promenade along the cliff and past



Chateau Fortenac



Shops on the Rue du Petit Champlain

the Citadelle. There are some wonderfully ornate buildings just outside the city walls housing the Parliamentary offices with each surrounded by statues, flowers and fountains. We entered the city again through one of the beautiful gates and zig-zagged through the narrow streets, taking in several churches along the way. At one time Quebec had the largest Catholic diocese in the world, stretching from the eastern seaboard to the Rocky Mountains. Circling back toward our bikes we took a short rest in the Chateau lobby, though it was a bit of a disappointment to me as they did not design or furnish the lobby for people to sit around and relax. It is a bustling, noisy place with only a few pieces of furniture for sitting and none of it comfortable. The finishes, flowers and chandeliers were fabulous but difficult to enjoy from



Statues for every occasion

the positioning of the few seats provided. They need to go visit Yellowstone, Glacier or Yosemite if they want to see what a real hotel lobby should look like. We checked out the menus at the two restaurants and determined that we could eat for a week on what one meal would cost us.



The Tourny Fountain

Hopping back on our bikes we circled the town and rode down the hill to the farmers market near the marina. Quebec province is quite the agricultural wonder, producing apples, pears, plums, carrots, potatoes, leeks, peppers, eggplant, and expensive corn. We have been shocked by the corn prices-\$6/dozen at the market and not much better at roadside stands. Our Boondocking host said that the farmers had a difficult spring and may be saving their corn for feed. I was delighted to find affordable and delicious fall strawberries, grown locally! Do we have these in Washington?? If not, then WHY not?



Tired and chilled we jumped back on the bikes for the spinnaker run back to the rig. It was nearly effortless as we coasted along the bike path with the breeze on our backs, pedaling at the small hills if needed. Absolutely no headwind! In the fading light we left Quebec, knowing that we should be spending more time there. From the pictures I have seen, I can see that it would be a lot of fun and very beautiful to come in the winter as Quebec is truly a year round destination city!



Some interesting facts about the St. Lawrence River: Its deep water ports are the key to trade and commerce in the Great Lakes, the US and across Canada. Quebec is 800 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and yet, this far inland, they have a tidal action range up to 22 feet! Today I've seen water up to the sea wall and now it is out at least 100 yards. This tidal and river action makes for some pretty interesting ice in the winter!

We spent the night in a quiet parking lot between Subway and the IGA and the next morning drove the short distance to our next Boondocking home on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. It was a quiet day including a much needed shower, catching up on little chores, napping, mending the quilts (they take a beating in the nightly tug-of-war that goes on now that it is getting cooler), and a gentle bike ride to the village. We have now watched all of the "Anne of Green Gables" shows in preparation for the next leg of the trip to Prince Edward Island. Whew! It rained most of last night and is continuing this morning. The weather report indicates rain for the next 3 or 4 days so we may slow down (is that possible?) a bit and wait for improvement. Made oatmeal for the first time on this trip - the strawberries made it a special treat!



A Church in L'islet with silvered steeples, conventional to the area.



Fresh fall strawberries!

Monday, September 30, 2013

Kouchibouguac

Our next stop was Kouchibouguac National Park, yes, that is really it's name, I am still practicing saying it: Coo-chi-be-gwack. It is a Mi'kmaq word meaning "river of long tides."



Tidelands of Kouchibouguac National Park

As we get further into the Maritime Provinces we are seeing the evidence of a harsher existence for life. Peat bogs are common and have an interesting variety of miniaturized life. Life in a bog is not easy. Bogs get started from glacial scouring out of pockets of rock. They fill with organic material that does not rot. There are standing pools of water that have very low oxygen levels, drainage and circulation of water is limited. Decomposition happens very slowly so most nutrients are locked up in the peat. Trees are stunted by harsh weather, low nutrient levels, water logged roots and a short growing season. However, if you look closely, you will see a lovely variety of organisms but on a very small scale. At least 3 plants I have learned about have adapted to these difficult conditions by becoming carnivorous, attracting and eating little bugs that come their way. It is



It has an interesting cultural history as well. The Acadians (descendants of the first French peoples) farmed the land and fished the seas for hundreds of years in this area. And, of course, the Mi'kmaq people for thousands of years before that. In the 1960's the Canadian government decided they want-



Blueberries for the pickin'

Kouchibouguac N. P. has many ecosystems interwoven within it's borders. After my bog walk I went for a very nice walk in the woods, wandering by still ponds, splashing little streams, beaver dams and large stands of dark trees. The changing colors of leaves are more evident everyday, with yellows, oranges and reds lighting up the trees and shrubs. The park also has extensive beaches, marshes and grasslands and is very involved in the preservation of the piping plover. The plover is an endangered little bird that likes to nest on the beaches. Seals rest and feed in sheltered lagoons every summer.



Under beaver management



Little fungi

too late in the season to see these guys in action but I was able to read about them. There are interesting and beautiful varieties of mosses, fungi, blueberries in large quantities, and lovely lichens.



Fungus among us

ed to preserve this land as a national park. They bought out as many of the residents as they could and then started forcibly taking over people's properties. This was not received well by many of the residents being displaced. Well, push came to shove, and the residents were removed with many bitter feelings. The park was created, homes, barns and fields bulldozed and naturalized. The government, after many years, relented somewhat and allowed former residents to continue fishing and lobstering in the area. This has created much needed income for the fishermen and is an added attraction for the park. Visitors can buy fish and lobster from the fisherman and see the boats going out and coming in every day. After the conflict created by getting Kouchibouguac started, the government has vowed to never again remove people from their homes to create parks. It is a beautiful park, still in the process of becoming the pristine natural area that it once was.



I want lobster!



At the park's visitor center we started talking to a lady who is a full time RVer and has been doing it for 15 years. She is 72 years old, travels by herself in a 30 ft. RV towing a small car, and loves to photograph birds and nature. She has a shed that she calls home in Oregon but spends most of her time on the road. She was a character!

The park offers many interesting interpretive programs for visitors during the summer, cultural and natural history in particular. They also offer opportunities for biking, canoeing, hiking, and cross country skiing. We spent most of the day in the park, toured the visitor center, and watched a very informative video. Though we visited on a cool fall day and we were almost alone, this must really be a happening place in the high summer!"



Thayer tried to catch this bigger one, but it got away.

We continued on our way toward PEI, stopping in Shediac when we saw a LARGE lobster on the side of the road. Obviously, photos were needed so we parked and scurried back across the bridge we had just crossed. As we were taking our photos we noticed another Rialta, just like ours, parked in the lot nearby. We wandered to the visitor center to see if we could figure out who was traveling in it. Didn't take long before we were gabbing it up with Charlie and Gina, from Santa Rosa, CA. We quickly found common ground with the desire to have a lobster lunch so we drove into Shediac and found a likely place. We had a nice meal with them, Charlie and I shared a lobster platter while Thayer and Gina went for the prawns and scallops. They are on a 6 month, and possibly longer, sojourn around the

continent. Their rig is a little different than ours on the inside but the two rigs look like twins on the outside. We shared stories and plans, swapped contact and blog information and then went our separate ways. They had decided to wait for the better weather predicted for the weekend while we decided to make PEI before nightfall.

Our drive over the massive, 17 km long, Confederation bridge was pretty exciting especially when being lashed with wind and rain. We stopped at the visitor center for maps, watched the movie about the construction of the bridge, and caught up on email. By this time my stomach was not feeling so good, that kind of dull ache that indicates too much rich food...ugh. We continued to Summerside, just a short distance up the pike and found parking in a Nazarene Church parking lot. I went for a walk to try to settle my stomach then we went to bed. Woke up feeling fine and ready for a new day. Takes more than a lobster to get me down. Now, if we can just start seeing the better weather predicted for tomorrow!



Charlie and Gina



"Don't just stand there like a statue, Help Me!!!"

Tuesday, October 1, 2013

## Prince Edward Island - Part 1



At last! The big turning point that we have been looking forward to. This was the destination for September! Home of Anne of Green Gables fame, interesting history, beautiful farm scenery, fabulous beaches, quaint little towns, entertaining maps..., where to start, where to start? Our first day dawned cold and raining and blowing, not all that promising. We had some internet so we muddled through part of the day, really itching to get somewhere but hardly able to see anything with the rain and wind. Finally, about 3:00 I was getting cold and bored so we packed up and headed up the road. We took part of the scenic road, mostly rainy coastal views. We decided to go to the Acadia Museum to glean some history of the island.



St. Mary's church and flock / herd

The Acadians descended from the first French settlers to come to this area. They were quite successful with agriculture and fishing, managing to grow and catch most foods that they needed and trade for the other necessary items. In the mid 1700's when the British took over they decided that all of the French living on the island needed to sign an oath of allegiance to the crown. The Acadians refused, and they were forcibly rounded up and shipped off either to the Louisiana territory, where they became the Cajun population or back to Europe. 2/3 of them didn't survive the trip, it was a massacre. A few escaped to the mainland and a small group went into hiding here on the island. The British then divided up the island and gave it to a bunch of Brits who didn't even live on the island. A number of years later the Brits allowed the Acadians to return to PEI, to be tenant farmers for the owners. It wasn't until over 100 years later that they got their lands back after the brand new Canadian government bought the land back from the British.



North Cape Lighthouse, PEI



The north point of PEI



They organized themselves into cooperatives of all kinds that exist today. We have seen fishing, grocery, gas, farming, and business co-ops all over the island. The 15-18 families that stayed here during the bad times formed the backbone of the new community and their names are everywhere, street, stores, most grave markers, businesses, and farms. The Irish also have a long history here and have integrated into the Acadian Culture. I don't know about today but the Acadians who settled PEI were exceedingly hard working, had huge families, and were very loyal to their roots and their culture. You definitely get the feeling that not too much has changed in that regard. It took me a while to understand why so many homes had a "Texas Star" tacked to their homes and barns. At the museum we saw that their flag is the red, white and blue stripes like the French flag, but the Acadians have added a gold star to the blue field. I don't know what the protocol is for hanging a star but there are a lot of them!

The island is roughly organized into 3 sections and we did the northwestern section first, driving along the coast in the rain to get to the North Cape area. We stayed at a Boondocker site in Tignish at the very north end. The owner wasn't even home so it was a nice quiet night next to a large church and cemetery. The next morning dawned with sunshine and a brisk breeze. We headed up to the North Cape wind farm, a collection of at least 20 large wind generators cranking away in the fresh wind coming off the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They also have a nice nature walk around the cape with signs giving information about geology, bogs, birds, and fishing. On our way away from



Can you see the worker up top?



Sea Cow Bay lobster boats

the cape we stopped at Sea Cow Bay to photograph the lobster/fishing boats and talked to a couple of fishermen. Their mainstay is lobster and there are two seasons, spring and fall. By Oct. 10 the season is over and the boats are hauled out. Many boats are stored at peoples' homes so you see large lobster boats inland, parked next to a barn or house. A specialty fish that they also fish for is blue fin tuna. A single fish can bring in 1000's of dollars from Japanese buyers. Each boat gets a limit of one tuna, then they have a lottery for the 50 or 60 tags that are left over. We learned a few days later that a big one had been caught, over a thousand pounds! That made the news!



Many boats are put on the hard during the off season



The celebrated 'House of Green Gables'

We followed the northern coast into the middle section of the island. The highlights here are the Anne of Green Gables Heritage Site and the PEI National Park. I never imagined there would be a National Park dedicated to a children's author and her 1908 book but, oh my, have they done it here! I never read the "Anne" books but we watched the BBC series on our way to Canada. I'm almost an expert.

The setting for the books was inspired by the Cavendish area,



where the author Lucy Maud Montgomery spent her childhood. Green Gables was the farmhouse where she visited her aunt and uncle when she lived on the island with her grandparents. If nothing else, Montgomery clearly cherished her childhood home

and is very much responsible for its preservation and enjoyment by many, many people around the world. Apparently the Japanese have a special fondness for her books and Green Gables is a destination wedding venue for many young Japanese. While we were there, a very giddy group of young Japanese ladies were striking the most hilarious poses for their photographers.

So silly!



Jill of Green Gables





We also enjoyed several days at PEI NP where we lounged on the beach, walked through the woods and wetlands, and I rode my bike around the lakes of shining waters. We read all the signs and just as you would expect there was more information about the geology of the area. (You knew this was coming.) I'll be brief because it is pretty straightforward. PEI is basically a big shelf of soft, dark red sandstone. The sandstone was deposited from the erosion of the Appalachian Mountains when they used to extend all



Red sandstone cliff of P.E.I. N.P.

the way to New Brunswick. This took a long time, starting about 4-500 million years ago. Well, you add some glacier thrashing, ocean pounding, winter ice grinding and you get some pretty fabulous coastline carved out of red sandstone. But what about those buff colored sands? I'm sure you're asking that right now! The sand particles are actually quartz once you grind the iron off of the outside of each grain with 100's of years of buffing. Go figure! Add lots of wind over eons of time and you get the beautiful blonde dunes you see in the pictures, all coming from that red, red rock.

Continuing south through the mid section we boondocked at Rocky Point for the night. The next day we visited Fort Amherst, the old fort that protected Charlottetown from whoever was invading this time. Then it was on to Charlottetown, the biggest burg on the island. We find that the cities are not as entertaining for us as the natural areas. Cities seem to be focused on shopping and eating out, two activities that we don't really do very often. We generally ride our bikes around looking at the neighborhoods of old, gracious homes, tool along the waterfront, looking at boats or finding nice parks to hang out in. Today we found the lovely old building called Province House that housed the first meeting of the Fathers of Confederation. They were the group that led the way to the creation of Canada as a country. PEI still uses it today as their legislative building and they present a very informative video relating the history of that special event.



Beach walk at PEI National Park

This post has gotten very long. I guess we've been here about a week, so I'll wrap this entry up. PEI is certainly worth more than one post! It reminds us very much of the San Juan Islands in the Pacific NW.



Wednesday, October 9, 2013

## Prince Edward Island - Part 2

Our first night in Charlottetown we spent with a Boondocker host on the peninsula across the bay from the main town. We were lucky to catch Bob in time, as he was leaving the next day on his own winter adventure to the American SW. He has been going there for several years now and just loves it. He gave us lots of good ideas of what to do once we get to the SW and we may catch up with him later in our trip. His darling granddaughter cleaned up her room so she could give me a tour and drew a nice picture to decorate our rig. Happy Trails, Bob!



Our PEI boondocker host, Bob



Canada as a country began right here in 1867

The next day we spent touring the town, it happens to be a very historic site. The very first meeting of men to ever discuss a Canadian Federation was held here. We rode our bikes around the lovely old homes and parks on the edges of the city. Leaving Charlottetown, we headed north again for the northeastern coast of the island. It was a cool, blustery day so we were happy driving through the countryside admiring farms, churches, houses and the increasingly



beautiful fall colors. We spent the night at the Visitor Information Center in St. Peters. The sun was shining again the next morning so we unloaded the bikes and set out on the Confederation Bike Path which runs over 200 km from





the east to the west points of the island with branches in the other directions. It was created on the old railway line crossing the island on a lovely, mostly level grade. We did only a short section from St. Peters to Morell, about 22 km round trip and saw only a couple of joggers the whole way. We were treated to views across rivers, wetlands and bays as we rode through short stretches of forest and longer stretches of potato fields. Several of those wily spuds jumped into my bike bag on the way home. They grow a LOT of potatoes here and I had been wanting some but didn't want to buy 10 lbs to haul around. I parboiled 'em and fried 'em up for dinner in Souris that night and we had a tasty dinner of smoked salmon and spuds.

That night in Souris (say sur-rey) we went to our first "ceilidh" (forget most of those letters and just say kaylee)



which is an informal gathering of musicians (mostly amateur, but some events have pros), singers and dancers who get together for music and fun. The visitors center had given me a list of ceilidhs that happen all over the island and this was one that was on our path on the right day. It took place in the Silver Threads Senior Center with admission at \$5 but they had the 50/50 drawing where a person could win half of the take for the night. The minute we got out of the rig we were greeted by Kathleen, who parked right behind us, and welcomed into the center. As you could guess, most of the audience were indeed seniors, but there were also some teenagers and middle-agers like us. Actually, I fit in quite nicely with all the white haired ladies. A variety of folks played guitars and there was one accordion player, and another player was a young man about 12 or 13 years old. What may have been lacking in the music was more



than made up for by the friendliness of the people. We all danced and laughed the night away, snacks were served, potluck style and Kathleen made sure we had a good time. I even won a door prize, which was my \$5 back for my admission! By the time it was all over, it was late and we found a small park a couple of blocks away for the night.

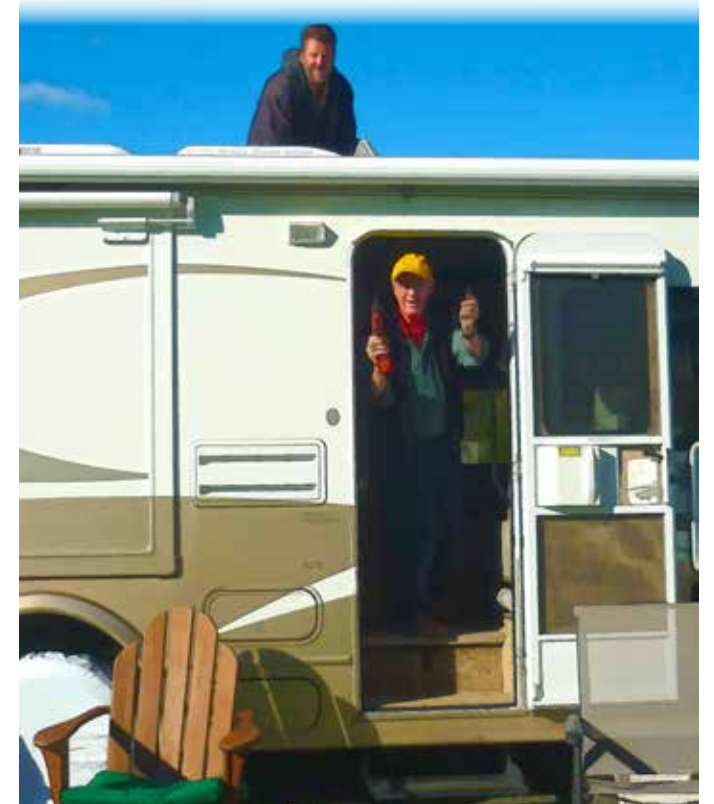


Our good friend Kathleen

The next morning we woke up and got ready to move by about 9:30. We were just pulling out when Kathleen trotted up and invited us to her apartment for a shower! Well now, we don't pass up opportunities like that, and we always love a good visit with new friends, so off we went to Kathleen's place. After our showers we were served toast and tea with homemade bread! We had a lovely visit, took some photos, and Kathleen loaded us up with fruitcake, applesauce, a loaf of that homemade bread, and a small pile of potatoes (after informing us that "some of those farmers have spy cameras up in the trees and levy big fines on potato rustlers!") We then took a short trip to Isabella's (K's sister) to see her Halloween decorations. More photos and we finally said goodbye to Kathleen. Like

I keep saying, our best times are when we get to meet people and spend some time with them. Thank you so much Kathleen!

We meandered down the eastern coast, stopped at an orchard to pick up some beautiful apples, and talked apples for a bit with the farmer. Our destination was Murray Harbor at the home of more Boondockers. Wendy and Larry Siebrand were waiting with glasses of wine and we had a nice visit before dinner and bed. Wendy offered up her washing machine and clothesline which was very much appreciated so the next morning we ran a big load of dirty clothes.



Mr. Fixit & an Advanced Male

Larry and Thayer got involved in hooking up Larry's CB radio antenna while Wendy and I walked to the harbor, bought farm fresh eggs and watched the herring catch being unloaded. The mens' project got more involved and Wendy served us up some wonderful lunch and dinner! It



was so nice to eat some real, home cooked, good food! Wendy has several gardens and cans all sorts of tomatoes, beans, relishes, salsa and pickled beets. And those were just the ones I saw or got to sample! Larry has a hard time getting her to travel in the summer because she is so



Never far from water. That's me!

busy with the garden and canning. They offered to let us use their kayaks to paddle around the harbor but it was too late in the day and too windy. The next day dawned sunny and calmer. We puttered around all morning, Thayer working on the website and I did some housekeeping. After another great lunch provided by Wendy we loaded up the kayaks in their pickup and drove the 2 blocks to the harbor. It is a tiny harbor with a few fishing boats but you can paddle out into a small bay, seeing eagles, nice beaches and houses, and racks of mussel farms.

We paddled a good part of the bay but it was still pretty windy so we headed up the river that flows into the harbor. It was all very pretty and it felt great to be out on the water. When we returned to the house Wendy had fixed us yet another tasty meal which we ate with appreciation and enthusiasm. We had such a fun time with Larry and Wendy, talking about news, politics and books, it was another great boondocking connection and we hope they will come visit us someday after we get home. They are headed south sometime in Nov. or Dec.



Wendy & Larry = new friends

The next morning we said good bye to the Siebrands and PEI and continued our trip toward Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. I am having a hard time waiting a few weeks before eating our "Dilly Beans" that Wendy sent along with us. We will think of Wendy and Larry very fondly when we tuck into those little goodies.

Along our way to the island's south Northumberland Ferry we stopped at a few places along the way to take photos and shop (or window shop) but it appears our time on Prince Edward Island is drawing to a close. It's so pretty here and we've had such a good time with new friends that we wish we could loiter longer, but Cape Breton is luring us onward.



These aren't so big up close



Catsup or lobster flavor? It's so hard to choose!



I've heard every excuse



The coastlines of Prince Edward Island are formed by sandstone cliffs consisting of sedimentary rock and other natural materials containing a high iron concentration that, when exposed to air, oxidizes and produces the rich, red coloring shown here.



PEI has a beauty unto itself



Tuesday, October 15, 2013

## Cape Breton

Upon leaving PEI, we drove quite directly to Cape Breton Island, which is the northern part of Nova Scotia. There is just a short causeway that you cross to get from the mainland to the island. At the Visitor Center I was loaded up with books and brochures so I could get thoroughly confused in a short period of time. I think they are trying to get rid of this year's materials by overloading every poor tourist who walks in the door. The most important piece of information we got was that the Celtic Colours International Music Festival is starting on Oct. 10 and runs for 10 days or so. That allowed us about 4 days to do the Cabot Trail, supposedly one of the most scenic drives in North America. We also



Fall colours beginning to show

wanted to find some of the Celtic music that is played all over the place around here. We stopped at several venues along our route and they were really crowded and had a cover charge so we finally ended up at the Glendora Distillery. For the cost of our wonderful dessert and coffee we were treated to an evening of acoustic music, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, and a couple of numbers involving spoons. We spent that night nestled next to a dark cemetery and church. It was a little spooky!



"My son, don't wait and dally here. Go spend your life without a fear. For all too soon the days will pass and you will sleep beneath the grass."

The next morning we felt as if we had missed something the previous day. We had rushed by the homes of Natalie MacMasters and the Rankin Family (renowned Celtic musicians) and felt the need to go back to the little burg of Mabou. Good thing we did! It was a blustery day and the weather was expected to get worse so we needed to kill some time. The Red Shoe, a restaurant in this tiny town (and also run by the Rankin Family), had free music offered from 5-7 and then fiddle jamming at 8:30. We found some WIFI and I spent 3 hours scouring the Festival website to figure out a plan for the week. After much consideration and considerable confusion, I finally purchased tickets to two concerts and filled in more time with possibilities from the many other options offered for free and low cost. The festival is not just about music, there are events involving art, history, biking, hiking, community meals, storytelling,

workshops, dance, and lectures. The venues are all over this large island so to figure out a few days of participating was much more difficult than you might imagine.



Fall color along the Salmon Pond walk

Well, after all that hard brain work I went for a nice long walk and when I got back it was about time to go hear some music at The Red Shoe. This restaurant is owned by several of the Rankin sisters and they serve very good food and have live music nearly every day. We ordered the corn bacon chowder and it came in a large bowl with two thick slices of warm, homemade bread. A fiddle and guitar couple played traditional Celtic music that kept our feet busy. After the couple was finished playing the real fun started. At 8:30 they just open up the restaurant to fiddle players who come in droves to play together. At one point there were at least a dozen players, aged 12-70 fiddling away. The music would start out slowly so the kids could play along and then it would get faster and faster until just the best players were playing. A group of kids involved in a Gaelic language program sang a few songs and several of them danced to the fiddle music. It must have been time for the kids to go home and go to bed because at one point the bagpipes were brought out. In such a small space one set of bagpipes can really rattle the windows! The crowd thinned out considerably and by the time the second piper had his turn the evening was over. We really enjoyed the friendly atmosphere and spirited music. It is wonderful to see music binding the generations of a community together

er in a way that we don't see in the States. It is a driving force in the culture of this place, an island settled by Acadians, Scots and Irish.



Thayer's inukshuk, an Inuit tradition meaning "You are on the right path."

Rain pounded down on us the next morning, but we were armed with things to do, thanks to my research from the previous day. We started with the Salmon Museum, which should really be renamed the Salmon Fishing Museum. Located near the famous and lovely Margaree River, it houses an enormous collection of rods, reels, tied flies, photos of famous salmon fishermen (bet you couldn't name even one!), miscellaneous fishing equipment, poaching gear, nets... and a bit of information about Atlantic salmon. There was a very cute little old lady who showed us around and



answered our questions. I did learn some interesting things about Atlantic salmon and the history of fishing here on Cape Breton Island. Atlantic salmon are different from our Pacific salmon in several important ways. After hatching they spend two or three years in the river, growing slowly, until they are ready for the sea. Once they get to the sea they grow very quickly because of the increased food supply and they live in there for several more years. Like the Pacific salmon, they return to the stream of their birth to spawn, but they do not die after spawning. They return to the sea and live to spawn several more times before they die. Since 1984 commercial fishing has not been allowed, and sport fishermen are limited to 4 fish per year and they may only use flies to catch them. It is big business here, people come from around the world to fish the beautiful streams, ponds and rivers. I get the feeling that “catch and release” is the method that most employ these days. They may not keep any fish over 63 cm. The rivers do not have dams on them and the logging regulations attempt to protect habitat – unlike our northwest rivers.



Cape Breton hooking

We visited several other places where I saw the Cape Breton form of rug hooking and talked to some hookers in a store. Their work is more detailed than what I am familiar with and is very pretty. Some of the tapestries looked like paintings and are quite famous. We also visited a wood shop where they make beautiful cutting boards out of larch wood.



Larch wood cutting boards

Lobster trap wreath

We moved along our route to Cheticamp, the gateway to Cape Breton Highlands National Park. We scoped out the music scene, deciding on the Doryman Tavern for our musical entertainment for the evening. A young lady named Chrissy Crowley played some very energetic fiddle music with an equally energetic piano accompanist. It was quite different from the traditional music we heard the night before but we enjoyed it very much. Their hands move so quickly that they are just a blur! They were quite engaging and really seemed to enjoy what they were doing. We spent the night in the parking lot behind the tavern and got a good nights sleep in preparation for tackling the park in the morning.



Chrissy Crowley

Tuesday, October 15, 2013

**Cape Breton Highlands N.P. and the Cabot Trail**

With the music festival due to start in 3 days we had plenty of time for the 298 km Cabot Trail, which is actually a road that winds around, up and down the low and highlands of the park. It is a marvel of engineering built in the 1920's and is kept open year round, which has got to be a challenge considering that the highlands of the park get 500+ cm of snow in winter. We opted to do it clockwise in order to be in position at the end for our first music concert in Sydney. We started the drive heading north up the west side of the island.

I got my geology fix early by getting to see the major rock formations lined up neatly on the edge of the beach. For clarity they aligned themselves vertically so that I could march along and identify each layer without having to lean over or anything difficult. Starting at the south end of one small beach I saw dark slate rocks peeling off the cliff, aged about 4-500 million years. Right next to them were thick layers of large crystal, lovely pink and orange granite with striped intrusions of white and black, these guys are



younger at about 380 million years. At this point a small lake had formed where lots of soft sandstone had eroded quickly away and on the other side of that was the currently eroding soft sandstone bluffs, aged about 350 million years. The beach was covered with a colorful array of smooth rocks that rolled and tumbled with the surf.



Western side Cabot Trail



The Cabot Trail, a truly spectacular drive

As we continued past this beach the road began to climb and twist through the forest and over headlands. The fall colors were really getting going at this point, Thayer struggled to watch the road and admire the fantastic scenery at every corner. Fortunately there were lots of scenic pullouts where we stopped to gape and take photos. We could look all the way up the coast, seeing the twists and turns of the road ahead. The skies had pretty much cleared, just the occasional puffy cloud cruising by hoping to get into the photo. Once we got up onto the plateau we stopped for the “must do” hike, the Skyline Trail. It meandered through the stunted trees and colorful meadows to an amazing boardwalk and views out over St. Lawrence Bay to the west. The boardwalk had about 270 steps connecting sections of the walkway. It was built to keep people off of the



delicate plants that struggle to survive and take years to recover when trampled by thousands of feet during the summer months. The return part of the hike led us through more sheltered woods and meadows. We were delighted to see two moose, the bull, sleeping in the woods and the cow feeding near the trail. She posed nicely for her photos, showing off her sleek coat and fat haunches. She was a fine looking specimen.



Madame Moose



At the beginning of the hike we were walking and talking with a very interesting German named Klaus. He was riding a bike around the Cabot Trail and then will write articles for several magazines. Nice gig! Get a magazine to pay your expenses, get some companies to give you a groovy collapsible bike to ride and a bunch of brightly colored hi-tech clothing and off you go! We continued down the road to Pleasant Bay, joined Klaus for a beer at his lodgings and spent the night right above the beach near the marina. It was a wonderful starry night with crashing waves lulling us to sleep.



Klaus precedes us down Skyline Trail boardwalk



Klaus was able to keep up with us for several days



On the Cabot Trail, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, looking south

The next day was a beaut! Bright sun, a brisk breeze and amazing fall colors blooming all around. We did a short walk through the only old growth Sugar Maple forest in Nova Scotia. Though the trees are not huge like we think of when we think “old growth” they were beautiful and had a lot of character. We drove on, up huge hills, down steep grades, around bends and ridges, stopping at many of the overlooks for awesome views. At one pullout we noticed a rig very much like our Rialta, actually a precursor model, that we had seen on PEI. We pulled up next to them and



Fall colors in the highlands



Front row seating provides first-rate views.

we started to chat. Jean Ramon and Lizette are from Quebec and are on a 3 month RV jaunt before heading to Japan and Bali.

Down, down, down we went into the North Aspy River area, a fascinating geologic area. It runs along fault line that is straight as an arrow with the west side several hundred feet higher than the east side, a result of different types of rock eroding at different rates. I went for a lovely hike through the maple woods seeing not a single other person in 3 hours.



Yes, many of these!





Driving down towards North Aspy River



Steep grades, dizzy heights and lofty views lead towards secluded Meat Cove

Driving out of the park, we headed toward the very remote little hamlet of Meat Cove (pop = 10?) at the northernmost point of Cape Breton. The last 8 km was a gravel road that climbed and dived like a roller-coaster along the cliffs overlooking the bay. The wind was howling, the gravel was flying, Thayer's teeth were grinding and I thought we had made a big mistake heading for this spot. Once Thayer gets going in a direction he pushes onward, but I was not convinced that we would be able to escape from this tiny little burg wedged into the bedrock at the edge of the sea.



Meat Cove is the end of the line



Aspy River sugar maples



Reflecting pool in the woods

We found the sole semi-level spot in town where we could camp for the night – in the parking lot of the closed Chowder Shack. On a positive note, we did have an incredible view high on the bluff. We did the two attractions in town, the windswept beach, hemmed in on each end by towering cliffs, and the rickety boardwalk that went from the beach up the hill and through the woods to the only open business in miles, a restaurant. Still worried about our future, I took my sleeping aide and hunkered down for the night.

The following morning we started our climb out of the town. As we passed the restaurant we saw two wild looking fellows also attempting their escape, but they were trying to hitchhike. Figuring we needed someone to help push us up the steep sections we decided to bring them along with us. Thomas, from Holland, and Zack, from Vancouver and Seattle, were very interesting and distracted me from the road. Before I knew it we were back on the Cabot Trail.



Breakfast with Zack and Thomas

We spent the rest of the day with our new friends, stopping at the Keltic Lodge and taking a splendid hike out to Middle Head. The Keltic Lodge had a comfortable and lovely sitting room but we didn't stay to enjoy it, as Thomas and Zack needed to get down the road. We were all headed to St. Ann's for some musical entertainment that evening. Once we arrived they ran into some people they had met at Meat Cove and introduced us to Leo and Mady from La Réunion, a French territory in the Indian Ocean.



Keltic Lodge sitting room

They are driving a classic old VW camper van, complete with a wild paint job, to the west coast of the US. We all ended up going to the music performance together and then camped out at a great spot nearby. Thomas and Zack had been couch surfing, WOOFing (Work On Organic Farm) and were not very well equipped for the tenting they had been doing for 2 nights. It was getting pretty dang cold at night so we loaned them our down sleeping bags and a ground pad, and they were very grateful and much warmer. The following day Leo and Mady took them to the ferry bound for Newfoundland.



Leo and Mady with bus





Thayer, Leo, Mady, Thomas, Zack & me

We ended up having an amazing time driving the fantastic Cabot Trail and seeing Cape Breton Highlands NP, but the best part of it all was meeting a bunch of fun and inspiring folks, all looking for adventure in different ways. Watch for some of them to reappear in the next post as we kept bumping into each other in unexpected places. We are starting to feel like locals, we have so many friends!



Wednesday, October 16, 2013

## The rest of Cape Breton

Having completed the Cabot Trail it was time to turn our attention to the east side of the island and devote some time to music! Thayer and I both enjoy Celtic music and were very happy to stumble upon one of the best festivals in the world devoted to it. This year's theme was the connection between Maritime Canada music and it's European and Scandinavian roots. As I stated in a previous post the festival is about so much more than music. After saying farewell to our young friends we cruised on down to a medium sized town called Baddeck, where many events were scheduled. We wandered through an art show of local artists, and then took ourselves down to the Alexander Graham Bell Museum.



A replica of Bell's 1909 Silver Dart is displayed

A.G. Bell fell in love with Cape Breton after his success with the telephone. He built a large home, or small castle, that is still owned and used by the family, called Beinn Bhreagh. As a young man Bell was inspired to help the deaf and blind communicate and did much to improve their lives. Once Bell was awarded the patent for the telephone, which took many years, he came to C.B. to work on his other ideas. He was fascinated by flying and worked on enormous kites, thinking that might be the way to get man in the air. He had time and money to work on any project he could imagine and he had a lively imagination! He had



The AG Bell family home overlooking schooner Amoeba

an amazingly scientific and inventive mind and was largely self taught. Bell developed a photo phone, improved the phonograph significantly, and developed hydrofoil boats to name just a few of his ideas. The museum was filled with artifacts donated by the family. I started reading a book called Reluctant Genius, a biography about him, that someday I will buy and finish. Bell was also a devoted family man and the museum is filled with wonderful family photos showing Bell's tender side. We spent several hours here but could have spent more.



Beautiful quilting!



Other activities in Baddeck included a fibre arts show with quilts, tapestry, knitting, appliqué, and many other creative and useful crafts. One gal was “up-cycling” old wool sweaters into very cute mittens, which I should have taken a picture of, but I didn’t. There was some beautiful work displayed.



A Baddeck Ceilidh

We then found our way to the Baddeck Yacht Club for a couple of hours of live music and dancing. There is such an enthusiasm for music in this place, it is really infectious! The musicians will be playing away and a person of any age might just leap up and dance for a few minutes, always receiving an encouraging round of applause.



As we were driving out of town to the potluck supper we had scheduled we ran into Klaus. He was on the final leg of his journey on his bicycle and would be leaving in a couple of days for home. After trading contact information we said our good-byes. In Whycocomagh we loaded up our plates and chowed down on some truly great home-cooked food and visited with some really friendly folks. Of course, there were a mother and daughter providing some nice music for all. There was a ton of leftover food so they



The largest fiddle in the world is in Sydney

let us load up a doggie box for the next day. But, soon enough, it was time for us to drive to Sydney for our first big concert.

Each of the big concerts in the larger venues had 3-6 different groups lined up to play. They each played 4-5 pieces and then at the end they would all come on stage and play the finale together. We heard some fantastic music from an interesting variety of groups. Some groups looked like they had been working on the farm all day, dusted off the hay, and hurried right to the concert to play. Others were very polished and looked really young. There were groups from Ireland, Scandinavia, the Shetland Isles, and Scotland as well as Canada. Some of the music was what you know: traditional fiddle tunes, jigs, reels and dances.



Other music was a cross between Celtic and Rock – all very high energy! We really loved it! The skill of the players was fantastic. I’m running out of superlatives here so I will stop trying to describe it with words. If you like this kind of music you must someday come to this festival!



As we left the hall that night we noticed our friends, Jean Ramon and Lizette, parked in the concert hall parking lot. We spent the night just up the street and visited with them in the morning. They might be looking at getting a larger RV because Lizette has trouble accomplishing her yoga with the low ceiling in their pre-Rialta. I laughed, I will be starting my yoga practice completely from scratch when I get back, it’s pathetic. We spent the bulk of the day exploring Sydney, getting caught up with the internet, and enjoying the sun. In the late afternoon we wandered down



Performance at Marion Bridge

to Marion Bridge on the Mira River, a small town about 30 km from Sydney, where we had a dinner and concert scheduled. We pulled into the parking lot of the community center next to a RV and within 3 minutes were chatting with David. We had a nice ham and potato dinner at the hall and then walked to the concert venue down the street. It was another great concert that I will not try to describe since I have used all the good words already.



Breabach, from Scotland, at Marion Bridge







The next day was devoted to Fort Louisbourg, an old fort celebrating its 300th birthday this year. We cut it a little fine, as the day we were there was the LAST day of the season. Fort Louisbourg was built by the French, taken

over twice by the British, burned at least once, abandoned in the 1760's, and left in ruins for almost 200 years. In 1961 the excavation and rebuild of the fort and town was begun as a make-work project for a bunch of coal miners



who were unemployed when the mines shut down. Working with archeologists, historians and master craftsmen they rebuilt the Governor's "Castle" and one fifth of the town outside the fort. They used many historical documents to rebuild the town and refurnish the buildings. Documents included building plans, maps, deeds, inventories, shipping documents, military logbooks, and personal accounts and diaries. Many original foun-



Mi'kmaq man



dations were used in the reconstruction of the town. This year, in particular, they brought the place to life, filling it with authentically dressed personnel and period actors. I sat and talked with several of them since it wasn't crowded

and learned a lot about their place in the town and in history. I had a long conversation with a Mi'kmaq tribal member about treatment of the native peoples through the settlement of the Maritime Provinces. Turns out they were treated quite a bit better than the native peoples of the US. The Mi'kmaq and the French frequently joined forces against the British or the Americans, depending on the conflict.



Governor's palace







Thayer and I became separated early on, as we usually do, and didn't see each other until the end of the day. The fort is so big that there was no way to find each other and, as you can tell by the photos, there was more than enough to see. Even so, with it being so late in the season, not all of the usual buildings were open – but we were tired by the time we found each other and happy to call it a day.

Fort Louisburg is a must see for anyone planning a visit to Cape Breton. For the Music festival they hosted a night where attendees ate an authentic 18th century meal, walked the streets guided by lantern carrying villagers, listened to music and storytellers, and drank at the taverns. It sounded like a really fun night but the tickets were sold out months ago. I guess we'll have to do it another time!



Lucille and me



That night we spent at St. Peter's, attended a casual community music session, where our friend David bravely played his guitar and sang. The next morning I took a nice walk along the canal and into town. The canal is unusual in that it has to work both ways between the ocean and the lake. Sometimes the lake is higher than the ocean and sometimes lower so it has double locks at each end.

It's a bittersweet farewell to Cape Breton Island! So fun, but now on to Nova Scotia and the Bay of Fundy!



St. Peter's Canal and Locks

Tuesday, October 22, 2013

### Of Bores and Fundys

Before actually getting to Halifax we were determined to see the famous Bay of Fundy tides and tidal bores. We were a little confused about the big deal regarding these tides but as we observed and learned we saw the wonder of it all. The Bay of Fundy has some of the largest swings between low tide and high tide in the world. 50 feet of difference is not unusual and the record is 70 feet! In a 12 hour tidal cycle, 115 billion tonnes of water flow in and out of the basin. And all this water sloshes in and out roughly two times a day! It comes in so quickly in some places that it causes a tidal bore which happens on the smaller tributaries of the Bay. A tidal bore occurs when the incoming tide actually reverses the flow of the river and creates a wave of varying height, depending on strength of the tide, that moves quite quickly upriver, bringing the incoming tide behind it.



Sandstone shores



Evening tide flats outside Thomas Bay

One of our guide books recommended Thomas Bay and Burntcoat Point as places to watch the tide come in so we chose Thomas Bay. We arrived just before sunset and quickly walked out to a point on the edge of Thomas Bay, which at that time was completely empty, covered with sea grasses and mud flats and interesting shelves of sandstone. The flats and ledges continued out from the point a good half a mile. While watching yet another spectacular sunset from the lovely sculptured rocks of the point, we could see the tide racing up, covering the flats ahead of us. This area of the Bay is too wide for a tidal bore but to actually see a tide coming in this quickly was astonishing. In lower places it flowed in as fast as a river or a flood, carrying mud and sand with its speed. We were running out of daylight so we didn't get to see the whole event and had





Thomas Bay at 8 AM

to wait until morning. The next high tide was due at 10:20 the next morning. I set out about 8:15 or so, not sure what I was doing or was going to see. I walked down to the bay that was empty last night and saw that it was beginning to fill at its furthest reaches. I took a different trail so that I could see across the Bay of Fundy as the high tide finished its work and then perched myself on a high bluff overlooking



Woods walk



Thomas Bay at 11 AM

stream and back to the beach of the Thomas Bay, which was now full to the brim.

Hoping to be more impressed with a tidal bore we made our plan for the next day. We got to the popular site near Truro several hours early because I didn't want to miss anything but really they are absolutely predictable, ours was coming at 11:29 am. The Salmon River was just flowing nicely along, curving around a large sand and mud bar in a broad river valley, doing what rivers do best: flowing downhill to the sea. At about 11:28 we saw a little wave rounding the bend downstream and moving rapidly upriver. The highest part of the wave was nearest the shores and there were several smaller waves coming in behind.



Tidal Bore on the Salmon River

At its tallest, the bore was about 2 ft. tall. The river stopped flowing downstream, got caught up in the wave and was pushed back upstream. The sand and mud bar completely disappeared in less than 10 minutes as the bore went past us and continued upriver. The river (and tide) was now flowing uphill. I can't actually say that it was jump up and down exciting, but it was quite astonishing and impressive.

I probably would have jumped up and down in my usual fashion, but I had a touch of flu that kept me down the rest



Handful of moonlight

of the day. With an aching head and body it was good time for it to start raining. We found a place to hole up with some WIFI and I slept and rested most of the afternoon. The night was beautifully clear after a nice sunset, and the next day I felt a little better and we continued our travels into the fortress city of Halifax.



Sunset on Thomas Bay

Tuesday, October 22, 2013

## Halifax



The Citadel overlooks modern Halifax, Nova Scotia

Our main objectives in Halifax were finding a shower and touring the Citadel. The YMCA welcomed us in for a free shower and we found a good parking place near the Commons Park, located right next to the Citadel grounds. I was still feeling under the weather but we ventured downtown for dinner at the Old Triangle, an Irish Pub near the water. The waitress kindly brought me some ginger ale, without ice, according to her mum. I started feeling better immediately. We had a nice evening eating and enjoying the music.

The next morning dawned clear and windy, a perfect day for viewing the hilltop fortress. The first fort built here in 1749 was a simple log structure staking Britain's claim to



Changing of the guard





Changing of the guard

the harbor and lands around the harbor. The Mi'kmaq really didn't have much say in the matter as usual. Many settlers were shipped in from England and the continent to settle the lands and begin farming to support the growing town and it's shipping industry. Halifax played a central role in almost every war involving England, France and the US for the next 200 years. The current Citadel dates back only to the early 1800's when Britain decided that if she wanted to keep a toehold in North America they had better protect Halifax and their great shipyard located in the Bedford Basin, a very safe and protected harbor inland of Halifax Harbor. The Citadel has undergone many changes over the years, all due to the increasingly sophisticated weaponry that would be used against it. When land

based fortresses became obsolete with the advent of air dominated warfare, the Citadel was a true state-of-the-art fortress. It was never attacked because it would have been impossible for any force to take it by land or sea. The British rotated their troops through their various empires, resting the regiments that were war weary and sending fresh troops to conflicts and active duty. Halifax was considered a resting place because of it's strong position in the area.

The British Empire had an enormous army and navy. They were able to recruit large regiments by allowing the soldiers to keep their cultural identity, they created the Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Indian brigades, to name just a few. The troops were allowed their own distinctive uniforms, music, and pastimes.

During our visits to the Citadel we were able to talk with many young men dressed in precisely replicated uniforms of the 78th Highlander Regiment. These fellows played their parts to the T! They knew the life of the soldier, the history of the Citadel and Halifax, as well as Canadian and English history. They played instruments, fired rifles and



Learning about rifles

cannons and kept strict order among the unruly tourists. Parks Canada has done another fantastic job of making history come alive with the period actors, hands on activities and excellent exhibits and videos. Visitors were encouraged to try on uniforms, heavy woolen jackets and stylish feathered helmets. Every aspect of the soldier's life was explained and demonstrated. Every person we talked with could field any question we asked or would quickly find the answer for us if they didn't know it.



Squad for unruly tourists

We were also lucky enough to visit the Citadel on the weekend when the WWI and WWII enthusiasts were dressed and ready for action. Halifax was a major player in both wars, the harbors and shipyard were the staging places for the convoys of ships cruising to England and Europe during those bloody conflicts. We talked to men representing British, Canadian and US soldiers as well as a few German, Russian, and Austrian soldiers. It is a



Very knowledgeable WWI and WWII interpreters



"But seriously Jill, you need to give it back."

fascinating way to learn about the history of the conflicts and, more importantly, the lives of the men serving their countries. War was not glorified in any way, I came away absolutely horrified at what the soldiers had experienced and the decisions they had been forced to make as leaders and warriors. By the end of each day that we were there I came away with my brain buzzing with excitement about what I had learned. Now if I could just figure out a way to remember it all!



Working out all that stress & anxiety





Preparing to fire the noon-day cannon.

During the Victorian era, gun signals were sounded twice daily in Halifax, one at noon and one in the evening. The firing of the noon day gun was timed for vessels in the harbour to set their chronometers by sight of the puff of smoke rather than the noise of the report, which took time to carry. The evening signal was fired at either eight or nine o'clock



Bombadier and Lance-Bombadier in attendance at the noon-day gun

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t h e c i t y .



Another interesting thing we learned, among all the other interesting things, was the reasoning behind the burning of Washington back during the War of 1812. What I seem to remember being taught was the 'bad ol' British attacked us "good American citizens" for no good reason. In truth, the Burning of Washington was a response to the earlier raid on Port Dover on the British (Canadian) side of Lake Erie. We at-

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c a p i t o l . W h a t  
c a n y o u s a y  
a b o u t h i s t o r y ?



Personal protection is your own responsibility when dating.



Saturday night was a big night in Halifax, it was "Noc-turne", an annual celebration of the arts. The town opened its doors for the whole evening, until midnight, with exhibits, shows, activities, performances, food, music... It was a beautiful clear night and the streets were packed! We started at the Citadel, where a local tech school had created a virtual reality, time travel, video, participatory game. They created a story where the folks at the Citadel were connected to some folks down on the waterfront through a computer network, and our job was to save the world from a devious evil dude. It was a little glitchy, but we muddled through and succeeded (apparently) in saving the world.

Then we shuttled down to the waterfront and did the other end of the game, pretending to be the soldier who helps save the world. I'm not going to spend a lot of time trying to explain it, but you can thank us that you're still alive to read this! We were also able to visit the Maritime Museum and some of the ships in the harbor. It was a fun night but long day and we were really tired when we finally got "home". I'm sure we could have spent a lot more time here in Halifax but we moved on down the road.



Halifax Citadel clock tower at night

Sunday, October 27, 2013

## Nova Scotia, the final days



Peggy's Cove was next on our "must do" list and it was not that far along the way. We took the slow road, around each beautiful bay and inlet between Halifax and Peggy's. It's longer and prettier that way. The colors continued to entertain us but we got the feeling that we were beginning to see the end of the peak. Bare trees were beginning to show their barked trunks and branches.



Sculpted granite





Quiet lakes in fall colours

We arrived in Peggy's Cove just as the sun was going down, another postcard kind of sunset. The lighthouse at Peggy's Cove is perched on sculpted bedrock of beautiful, light gray granite that has been ground and polished by



Sunset on Peggy's Cove Lighthouse

glaciers. It is a stunning sight. There is a restaurant nearby with a large parking lot that serves the busloads of tourists who come everyday. We were lucky to visit when there



Town of Peggy's Cove

were very few people around. We hopped around taking pictures for a while, shared a dessert at the restaurant, and camped out in their nice parking lot. The next morning I was up and out early to catch the sunrise which was equally beautiful to the sunset the night before. We heard that there were some tour buses coming soon so we decided to bug out before being left with the memory of the lighthouse surrounded by gobs of people.



Continuing along the rocky coast we charted our course toward Lunenburg. The bright morning sun and fresh air were so nice. Coming around a bend we were greeted and drawn in by the most colorful bakery we have ever seen,



This is the spot!

and the timing couldn't have been better! While trying to decide what we wanted we chatted with the proprietors and got some recommendations as to what was ahead for us. Thayer finally made up his mind (it was tough) and we loaded up on lots of fresh baked goodies that were still popping out of the oven. Their courtyard was lined with brightly colored chairs and we enjoyed the lovely waterfront view while downing a few apple critters with hot coffee. If you ever need a perfect 1-2-3 wake up punch of color-coffee-critters this is the spot!



Color, Coffee and Critters





Just down the road, another historic city centered around the fishing industry is Lunenburg – a World Heritage site. It has a scenic harbor filled with fishing and sailing boats, a couple of streets in the business district, and neighborhoods of ornately built and brightly painted houses. The town possesses a real sea / salty flavour. We spotted the tall masts of a big schooner right away and went to investigate to find it was the “Bluenose II”, a replica of the original Bluenose. Unfortunately, we had to admire it from a distance because it is undergoing some repairs and they weren’t allowing people to get too close or come aboard.

The Bluenose was built near Lunenburg in 1921 to be a racing/fishing boat. Because it set so many long standing records when worked as a fishing boat and freighter, and



then won so many races when it was racing, it became famous and was “adopted” by the whole country. They even stamped it on the Canadian dime. The Bluenose was eventually lost near Haiti in 1946. The Bluenose II was built in 1963 and for many years has been a major tourism draw. It is a beautiful ship! They are struggling so much financially that Thayer and I think we should be able to buy it and get it ready for next summer’s cruise down the Atlantic seaboard.



Lunenburg is not afraid of bright colors!

We drove the 5 km out to Blue Rocks, a fishing/summer cottage kind of community. It had a fabulous rocky coastline and many cute and interesting boat shacks, docks and boats. We talked to a nice older lady from New England whose family has owned a small house here for many years. Back in Lunenburg we met some other Rialta owners in the parking lot and joined them for dinner at the local pub. Nice folks from Wisconsin. They were on a quick trip to the Maritimes, only 3 weeks. They were headed to PEI



Blandford fishing fleet



Lunenburg is one of only two urban communities in North America designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site, recognized as being the best surviving planned British colonial town on the continent.

next for only 2 days. We spent 10 days there and it wasn’t enough. I guess we are just lucky to have all this time, not everyone does apparently.



Glacial carving in Blue Rocks



Boat house island

The last big stop before leaving Nova Scotia was Kejimikujik National Park, located in the center of N.S. Yes, I had to go look that up to make sure I spelled it right. This special

place is not only a National Park, it is also a National Historic Site. It contains Canada’s treasure trove of Mi’kmaq petroglyphs, ancient sacred pictures carved into the smooth black rocks near the old villages.



The Mi’kmaq traditionally spent their fall and winter seasons in the Kejimikujik area, fishing, hunting moose and deer, gathering berries and supplies for baskets and canoes. We did not get to see the petroglyphs because they are very protective of them and you can only see them with a Mi’kmaq inter-

Its not easy being a tree!



Mill Falls on the Mercey River





Kijimkujik National Park

preter to guide you. The many lakes of the region were the Mi'kmaw's highways from the ocean shores 50 miles away from these wintering grounds. The campgrounds were deserted and mostly closed but we found showers open and electricity. During the summer season they provide all kinds of camping facilities: large tents & yurts, canoes, backcountry sites (firewood and picnic tables provided), group areas, semi remote group sites..., all beautiful, large sites. It would be so fun to have a canoe here, so many places to go and cool things to see. The trails I walked were lovely in the fall colors and delightfully deserted. I took two long hikes and



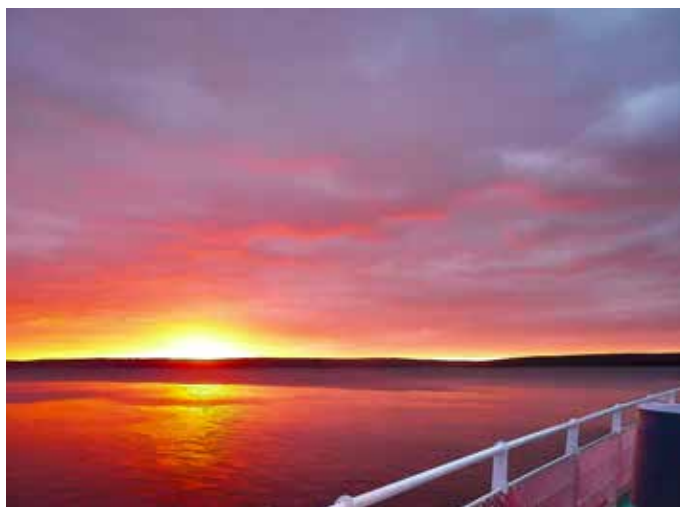
Kijimkujik campground in fall color

saw only one other person. Canada does a wonderful job of providing opportunities to learn about the First Nation peoples, we have seen them represented in every park we have visited. They seem to have been treated much more fairly than the native peoples of the US.



Enjoying fall sunshine!

With some regret, we turned toward Digby, our last stopping place in Nova Scotia. We missed the afternoon ferry so we camped in the parking lot at the ferry terminal, awaiting the 8 am ferry to St. John. Digby is the scallop capital of the world we hear, but we did not have scallops for dinner, I just haven't been having much luck with seafood and my stomach. Terribly sad, considering where we are. Anyway, farewell to Nova Scotia!



Sunrise in a sea of fire, crossing on Digby ferry

Sunday, October 27, 2013

## O' Canada



Bold maple colors

Our final days in Canada involved a temporary fix for some tire trouble in St. John, followed by a quick dive into Maine for about 2 hours before arriving back in Canada for a Boondocking site on Campobello Island.

Our front right tire has been wearing unevenly for some time and finally demanded immediate attention when the steel belts started showing and causing a front end wobble at low speeds. Way back in Michigan we had tried unsuccessfully to get an alignment done and had decided to wait until we were ready to put on new tires. Well, we are now ready to buy new tires. We have replaced the bad one with our spare, and have four new Continental 215/65R16Cs waiting at my brother's home on



Hmmm, time for a new tire?

Cape Cod. The spare is a new tire, so I'm just hoping the other front tire lasts, as it is looking worn also. The roads we have traveled are not the lovely interstates, and tires can take a beating on the rough back road potholes and broken asphalt. And another thing – most Rialta's come with four tires of two different sizes (yes, there is a reason) and we have been looking forward to getting all four tires and spare to a common size. Now is the time.

Campobello Island is a small Canadian island that sits just off the easternmost tip of the United States. When the summer ferry isn't running you must drive through the US to get to it – sort of like Point Roberts back in our Pacific NW. Our hosts, Peter and Bea, are Europeans who have come through Norway and Alberta to Campobello, where they run a sight seeing business during the summer and migrate south in the winter. Upon arrival we were welcomed with tea and freshly baked cookies, which totally made my day. Peter then offered to guide us around the island and gave a marvelous tour, complete with historical facts and anecdotes, local color and current events.



Tour guide Peter and me

During the early part of the last century the island was the summering grounds for wealthy New Englanders who would flock to the area, many of them building summer "cottages" or staying in grand hotels. Most notable was the F.D. Roosevelt family. There is an international park here devoted to the family containing many beautiful acres of



beaches, forests, bogs, miles of hiking, and a nice visitor center. The original Roosevelt home is now gone but they have created a nice representation of the home. Sadly, it was closed for the season and we were not able to visit. The next day, after it stopped raining, the four of us went for an excellent walk on several sections of the International Park trails and saw seals and lots of birds. This area reminds me greatly of our own San Juan Islands.



Bea, Peter & Thayer

Much of the economy of the island is dependent upon tourism, which is hardly enough, but many more locals still make their living from the sea. There is a salmon farm in a nearby bay and fishing boats tucked into snug harbors.



Beach covered with beautiful rounded rocks!

A lighthouse at the north end has been adopted by the community and refurbished after years of neglect. You can only get to it during the low tide and must be very careful to get back before the tide turns. Even here the tides are tremendous.



Head Harbor Light station

Our time here in Canada, much longer than we anticipated, has been so wonderful. We have enjoyed each and every beautiful park, village and city that we have visited. The well tended, wonderfully tidy farms and homes are a joy and inspiration to see. The people have been so friendly and helpful at every stop, and are generous with their advice and time, taking a break from their day to visit and share what they know about their communities. We often drive away from a place saying “I could live here!”, but happily move on after considering the frigid wintertime season. The National Parks and Historic Sites have opened our eyes to new and exciting landscapes, fascinating cultures and thousands of years of history. I am inspired to learn more about the people and places we have only just started to get to know. We have enjoyed expanses of wilderness, agricultural lands and seascapes, dotted with small cities and villages and flavored to perfection with friendly local people. Thank you Canada, for a wonderful 6 weeks!!



It is with some trepidation that we journey into the north-eastern part of the US. When I look at the map filled with criss-crossing highways, huge cities, and dense populations I can just feel my blood pressure rise. Adding to my unease, the weather is getting colder and wetter with temperatures dipping into the 20's later this week. Brrrrrr! Where has our summer and early fall gone so suddenly?



Fall in the highlands

Quebec

Cape Breton seashore

Aspy River trail

Spruce branch = PUB



## Back in the USA!

We crossed the border into Maine in the morning and headed down the coast toward Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park. We decided to take in a part of Acadia that many people miss, a chunk of land across the bay from Acadia,

to the north, called the Schoodic Peninsula. It is a wind-swept hunk of granite where waves crash against the bedrock, shooting skyward with every impact. Interspersed in the granite are large veins (6-12 ft across) of basalt that were squeezed up through cracks in the granite. These “dikes” are softer and erode more quickly than the granite. Some of the “beaches” are covered with small round boulders, at first we thought they had been hauled in to act as a breakwater



Crashing waves!



Basalt dike on Schoodic Peninsula

After viewing the NP visitor center, we arrived in Bar Harbor in the late afternoon and decided to stay there for the night. Even this late in the season lots of shops were still open and there are many, many touristy shops. Think of Seaside times 2, but nicer. On the drive into the town we saw a sampling of the numerous lovely homes from the early part of the century. Many were lost in a large fire in 1947. It was still windy and quite chilly but early the next morning we were on our way to see the park.



Acadia summer cottage

Acadia is a small but lovely park. It has spectacular ocean and bay views, a craggy, rugged coastline, beautiful hardy forests, lots of hiking trails and an interesting history. The area was first developed by the rich summer folks who built their “cottages” and spent their summers here. The area was also being pillaged for its lumber and a few of the rich folks decided it would be a good idea to preserve it before it

was gone. Charles and George Dorr were instrumental in gathering up properties for preservation. Acadia is the first NP established east of the Mississippi and is the only national park that was created solely from donated land. Although the entire peninsula is not in the park, a good portion of it is.



Summer castle



Acadia shoreline

John D. Rockefeller and some friends were concerned about the impact of automobiles on the park and they established 45 miles of carriage lanes in the surrounding forests that were limited to horse drawn carriages and sleighs. Today these lanes are open for hiking, biking, horses, and cross country skiing. There is a concessionaire in the park who runs horsey activities. Most of the road going around the park is one way, which makes driving much more enjoyable, even the driver can relax a little and enjoy the many views to be seen.



Artistic inspiration on Sand Beach



Caretaker's cottage

We stopped at Sand Beach, the only really nice sandy beach in the park. It sits in a lovely sheltered bay bookended by craggy outcroppings of basalt. These are the remnants of basalt left after the glaciers ground the rest of it off of the granite underneath. I almost thought I was going to get through a whole post without mentioning glaciers, but I guess not this time. Jordan Lake is the main facility in the park for meals and shopping. It sits on a pretty lake with many trails leading into the woods and carriage lanes.



Shorelines are solidly constructed



Regular restrooms were also provided for the more demure.





Cruise ships supply visitors to Bar Harbor and Cadillac Mountain



Granite boulder beaches



Cairns on Cadillac Mountain

Leaving the lower part of the park we then climbed up to the highest point, a pink and gray granite knob called Cadillac Mountain. There are tremendous views all around from the top and the viewing trail winds over smooth, glacially carved granite. You can see up and down the coast for miles and miles. It was windy but sunny and we enjoyed the vistas from this viewpoint. I decided to walk down the mountain and meet Thayer and the rig on the road about 2 1/2 miles along. The trail was marked with large cairns and blue dots painted on the slick rock. They really like cairns in this park and put a lot of effort into them. It took me longer than I expected on the rocky trail but it was very beautiful and I enjoyed the sun, colors, and exercise.



We found our thrill

After our day in the park we had a delightful dinner with my nephew, Mo Sykes, enjoying our first pizza in months and getting caught up with Mo. He is attending the Univ. of Maine in Orono and plans on following his old man's footsteps by becoming a surveyor. He is a wonderful, entertaining young man! I would have enjoyed spending more time in the park hiking and sightseeing but I was also looking forward to a shower and getting our tire situation fixed.

The next day we continued southward, taking one more jaunt out to the coast to see the town of Stonington, a fishing village on the peninsula just south of Acadia. It is a terribly quaint old village situated in a rocky, sheltered bay. The oldest piers and wharves are made out of gigantic blocks of granite quarried at the

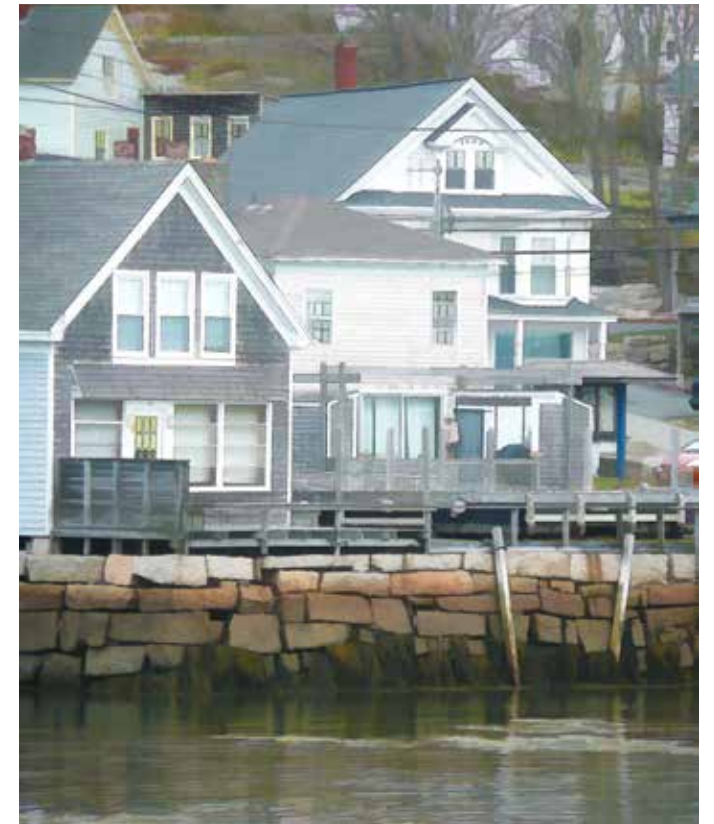


Stonington

southern end of town. It has many lovely old homes, one main street with a few shops and restaurants and was not as touristy as many places we have visited. Fishing continues to be the main event here, the boats were out, the parking lots filled with pickup trucks, and most of the shops were closed for the season. We had a nice long walk, took lots of pictures and had a very good lunch.



Thayer wanted to join right away!



Check out the breakwater!



Southward we went, taking in a fantastic observation deck on the very tall Penobscot Narrows Bridge, towering above the Penobscot River. The observation tower, over 420 ft. high, provides a breathtaking view of the Penobscot River Valley, and is the only observatory like it in the Western Hemisphere!



The Penobscot Bridge observation deck is 420ft up!



Fort Knox and neighboring Bucksport

Next door is Fort Knox, constructed from 1844-1869 and one of the best preserved fortifications on the New England seacoast. Maine was repeatedly involved in north-east border disputes with British Canada, and the area between Castine and the rich lumber city of Bangor was invaded and occupied by the British during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Despite a treaty, Fort Knox was established in 1844 to protect the Penobscot River valley against a possible future British naval incursion. But by the time the work was completed (stopped), the technology and building techniques were nearly obsolete. It was never finished, never completely armed, and never really occupied by troops.



Stairs as solid as rock



Impressive masonry

The stone masons did an incredible job working with the native granite though. It is beautifully constructed and a very sturdy structure (uh, like a fort). It seemed a little anticlimatic after touring Ft. Louisburg and the Halifax Citadel, and we decided that it's history was not nearly as splendid. We wandered around the fort, all by ourselves, once again stumbling upon a place on it's last day of operation.



That night we stayed with an elderly lady boondocker out in the woods. She couldn't offer a shower because she doesn't have one. Heck, she just got a flush toilet a couple of years ago. She warms up some rainwater in a bucket and dumps it over her head a few times in the summer and calls it good. These Mainers are a hardy bunch. She does have good internet however. Priorities!



Made me feel like I could hold out till Cape Cod for that hot shower.

The next day we made a poor decision to stop in Portland, Maine. Driving in a strange city, even a small one, we find very

stressful. Where should we go? What is there to see or do? Where can we park? Why are we even here? It was rainy and yucky by the time we got completely frustrated so we left. You would think we would have learned by now.

Then, after a white knuckle, hair raising drive through Boston during rush-hour, the tunnel, the dark and the rain, we rolled into my brother Robb's yard about 8:30 and were more than ready for a nice break!

Sunday, November 10, 2013

### Cape Cod Interlude

Ten days on Cape Cod was more than we had planned on, but as usual, it turned out to be a great time. Robb has a giant house that he rattles around in so we didn't feel too bad about filling it up for a bit. We had many projects to do on the Rialta, the biggest being getting new tires on all around and getting the front end aligned. Surprising how hard that turned out to be! Several shops said they could do it, we drove there, then it turned out they couldn't. Finally we found someone, but he ended up keeping the rig over the weekend which limited what we could do on some of our other projects. To fill the time I made a waterproof bike cover out of heavy duty gardening plastic, lots of duct tape and strong sailor's twine. We'll see how it holds up to wintery conditions but it's pretty sturdy. We will also cover the whole mess with our weather worn blue tarp. I know, I know, it's going to look awesome! Thayer fixed fuses, drain pipes, and has almost finished the web-site project – yay for that!



My brother Robb



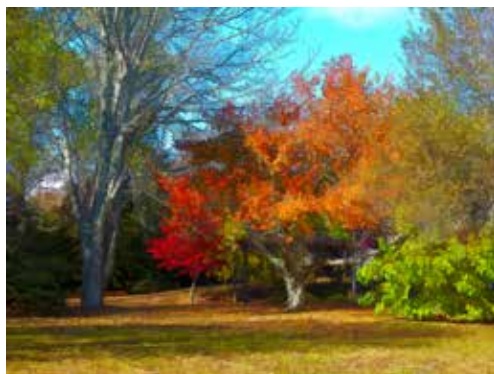
Trying out my new Panasonic DMC-LX7





Rolling plastic

My big project was helping Robb "daylight" his garden which had been covered with large sheets of black plastic for years. Weeds grow here like they do in the NW and the plastic was for weed control and watering of his vegetables. In the past he has had bumper crops of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash, chard, arugula, rhubarb, and lots of berries. Production has slowed, indicating that the soil needs to be worked some, so it was time to lose the plastic. Also, Robb's two boys have flown the coop so he doesn't need all the food he grows and having a huge garden is a lot of work! So, his idea was to daylight the soil, level the garden, and plant a perfect croquet lawn. We had to clean up after last year's garden, stack the wire cages, unscrew a billion screws holding the plastic to boards, pick up a million bricks and stack them, roll up the plastic, haul the boards



Lingering colors in the yard

away, and finally transplant 40 raspberry plants and 28 blackberry bushes. It took us 4 days working about 4 hours per day. He has reduced the vegetable space from



Me and my big bro!

50 x 100 feet to about 20 x 50 feet. I think he will still be able to grow all the veggies he can eat. If he can keep chickens from eating the grass seed after planting and keep it watered it will be fantastic fun come summer.

We also made some time for fun. One morning I got up early and Robb and I went to the beach for the opening day of oyster season. It is pretty weird how they do it around here. Instead of going to the rocky coast and prying your oysters off of the rocks like we do in the NW, you go out to the beach, which has been stocked with farm raised oysters. They do this by dumping truckloads of oysters along the beach. The next day everyone races out to the beach and picks them up! At least the oysters have a chance to get away....



The end of an active day



Michael in his studio

on a horse, a peace dove with a rainbow, and a baseball player. His apprentice was making paperweights and some beautiful vases while we watched. I love watching glass blowers in action and it was fun to see all the different colors and designs. I bought a new glass ball for my collection. We also played some games, watched a few movies and ate a lot of great food. One night we were treated to fresh lobster, right out of the bay. Tonight it was fresh oysters and mahi-mahi. Sadly, it'll be back to my cooking soon. ...sigh.

Today we went to Robb's friend Michael's glassblowing studio to see the "giants" that Michael makes. The giants are large rebar/steel rod structures that people buy and then wrap with Christmas lights for the holiday season. They have become quite the thing out here and he can't keep up with the demand. He has made many different designs; a lighthouse, a glassblower, Ben Franklin, a knight

It has been really nice having relaxed time to spend with Robb. It seems like when the whole family gets together you don't get to talk as much because you are pulled in all directions. I really enjoy the one-on-one time I have been getting with my family as we travel by their homes. It is also nice to not have to be making decisions every few hours; where to go, where to over-night, what to see, what to eat, and so on. The large comfy bed and hot show-



Joanne, Robb & oysters on the half shell

ers have been great too. Additionally, Rob is an excellent cook and so we've been very well fed – to the brim, actually. His BBQ ribs had Thayer wanting to move in permanently! We also have all our Rialta fixes completed, including our new tires mounted and balanced. It will be nice being back on the road after a full charge!



The "Giants" of Sandwich



...Step 147

...Step 183

...Step 235

...Step 344

...Step 401

...oops.



Sunday, November 24, 2013

## Amish Country to Gettysburg

We were surprised to see snow outside when we woke up our first night away from Robb's place. It was cold enough for snowflakes but not cold enough to stick to the road and be a problem. We were headed for Lancaster County, PA for a few more days of Amish enjoyment. On the way we went through Kittatinny National Recreation Area, which was probably

much prettier a few weeks ago when there were more leaves on the trees. We hiked the short distance to Dingman Falls, one of many waterfalls cascading over the large rocky cliff on the west side of the area. The visitors center was closed so I never did learn the geology of the area, but it was the first thing to look like a rugged mountain that we have seen in a while.



Dingman Falls - note the Rhodies!

We found our boondocking hosts right in the middle of the Amish and Mennonite communities. Don and Hettie were our hosts and they were really nice and very helpful in charting our course for the next couple of days. Don has lived there for 60 years and Hettie was raised in the Mennonite community. She left the church when she and Don decided to get married. We learned a great deal about the Amish and Mennonites from them.

Some newly learned facts about the Amish:

Fall is the wedding season, ceremonies are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays through the month of November, though the season seems to come earlier and last longer



Watchful Jemma is head of ranch security

Since we arrived I have taken over the chicken and geese routine in the morning. I let them out of their pens, give them some corn and then I get to gather eggs. It is just like Easter everyday! Jemma, the head of ranch security, helps by barking a lot and chasing the birds around. I've also eaten eggs every morning, they are so fresh and creamy!

From here we are off to visit my old college friend in PA, Thayer's family and friends in VA, possibly another college friend in NC, and more friends of Thayer's in FL. There are lots of boondocker possibilities on the east coast so we will be taking advantage of them as well. There is some cold weather coming soon but it really warms up as you head south. I would like to see some historical sites and some of the Intercoastal Waterway, which extends southward from Chesapeake Bay for hundreds of miles. We might get a day or two in DC if it works out that we can leave the rig outside the city and ride a bus or train into the city. There's still so much ahead of us to see and do!



On the road just in time for the 'nice' weather



Amish farm near Lancaster

according to our experts. A wedding is an all day affair, the bride's family serves up 3 meals during the day, for up to 500 people! They build on temporary structures made of wood and plastic to enlarge the home for the event. When its over they deconstruct it and move it to the next home for the next wedding.

The Amish don't have a centralized church and they take turns hosting church services in their homes. When a church gets too big or there are divisions within a church a few families may splinter off and create a new group. About 3 years ago, a group of 30 families picked up and moved to Tennessee where they had purchased 3500 acres of land to begin their own community. The Mennonites have centralized churches around the community.

The Amish are buying up any land that becomes available in Lancaster County for top dollar. Their population is growing quite steadily and they require more land for the up and coming families.



Spreading the wealth (manure)



A happy mule

They are very industrious, not only working their farms with horses and simple machinery, but many farms have their own store where they sell preserves, quilts, fresh fruit and vegetables, and oodles of craft items. If they don't have their own store they make items to sell at the stores in town. The town of Intercourse has a large shopping area filled with Amish and Mennonite made goods. Many of the men run construction companies that build all over the NE. Because they are not union and are extremely skilled, wealthy people like to hire them to build barns and houses on their estates. The Amish do not drive cars or trucks so the owners of the construction companies hire a non-Amish ("English") to drive their trucks and transport them to and from the job sites. We did see them using cell phones, credit card scanners and electrical devices in their businesses but it varied from place to place.



One of many covered bridges





Plowing the fields

We saw many horse and buggy rigs driving about the countryside and also learned that some antique and collectable buggies sell for up to \$90,000! Its not cheap being simple!

The Amish have their own schools for their children, though they aren't easily identifiable. We saw very few bicycles, most young people rode large wheel scooters, so they would have to push themselves along going uphill. Most kids walking along the roads wore bright orange safety vests.

We enjoyed our time with Don and Hettie, and on our second night we went out to dinner with them at Yoder's Buffet. Lots of good home cookin' and really easy to eat too much! Yoder's is one of the smaller buffet style restaurants in the area although they are very popular and people come from miles away to have a good meal. A larger buffet restaurant up the road from Yoder's serves busloads of tourists – up to 6,000 folks a day!

The best part of Amish Country is driving around seeing the beautiful and productive farms and fields. Large houses are occupied by generations of a family, so you won't see elder care facilities in Amish Country, ...they take care of their own. Horses, mules, cows, and goats munch their way through fields carpeted with green grass. Horse and mule drawn teams were busy turning the soil and spreading manure. Lancaster County is very densely populated



Yet another one of 29 covered bridges in this county with these lovely farms and the contrast when you drive out of the county is quite amazing.

Our next stop was Mechanicsburg, PA and the home of an old college friend of mine, Mike Guion. We sailed together at the UW over 30 years ago and spent a lot of time sailing, going to regattas, playing ping-pong, running the UWYC, and having a lot of fun. He hasn't changed much over the years except that he has become quite the cook and fixed us a fine meal the night we arrived. Mike and Vicki gave us lots of advice about what to see as we headed into Virginia and Washington DC. We were really lucky to catch Mike in town, as his job now has him globe trotting all over the place, Asia, Russia, South America... I hope also to see another old friend in North Carolina from the same era, Andrew, but am not sure it will work into the current route we have planned. Its so hard to do it all!



Vicki and Mike Guion



Commonly used M1857 12-Pounder "Napoleon"

From Mike's we drove the short distance to Gettysburg, a lovely, old historic town and, of course, the site of a huge Civil War battlefield that changed the course of that war.

About 51,000 soldiers were killed, injured or missing during those 3 days in July, 1863. We toured the main battlefield, listened to a ranger describe the battle and I felt like I had a much better grasp of what had happened. We also visited the cemetery where the Union soldiers were buried; many, many of them in numbered graves. The cemetery was not laid out and used until several months after the battle so the remains were difficult to identify after the hasty burials

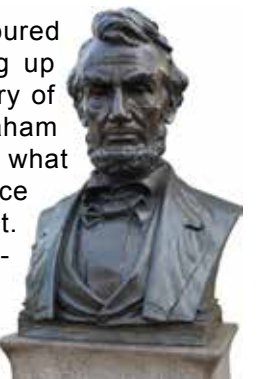


Lots and lots of statues and monuments



Pennsylvanian Memorial

immediately after the battle. We toured the site just as they were setting up to remember the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln. We didn't find out exactly what was planned for the remembrance but I imagine it was a stirring event. What a marvelous speech, so concise and inspiring!







Gettysburg Cemetery

It was a gruesome battle and the memorials spread across the landscape and programs presented by the park service give you just an inkling of how horrifying and terrible it had to have been. There is a brand new, very large and fancy visitors center which we did not tour because it was a beautiful day and we wanted to be outside. They also charge quite a lot for admission. As always, we learned a great deal. My knowledge of US history is growing by leaps and bounds on this trip!



*Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*

*Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.*

*But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

– Delivered by Lincoln during the American Civil War, on the afternoon of Thursday, November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, four and a half months after the Union armies defeated those of the Confederacy at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Tuesday, December 3, 2013

## Shenandoah to Washington DC

We found our way to Thayer's Aunt Boots' place in Stephens City, VA, eager for a shower and a home base for a few days. Boots is 85 years old and still very independent and sharp. She and Thayer had a lot to catch up on. We tried to make ourselves useful by raking leaves and climbing ladders to change light bulbs. We then continued our sampling of country buffets by going to the Butcher Block Buffet in Winchester. Lots of good food and even better desserts than in Amish country. We rolled out of there and walked it off by visiting the Shenandoah Museum nearby. They had a special exhibit about the life and times of Patsy Cline so I felt right at home. This is really pretty country, the Shenandoah River winds through a flat valley between the Massanutten Mountains and Shenandoah National Park. It seems like it might not have changed so much in the past hundred years. There are many historical battlefields dating back to the Civil War.



Thayer with his aunt Boots



View from the top



They really are the Blue Ridge Mountains

We packed up after a few days and headed down to Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park. Located along the crest of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, Skyline Drive is one of the best mountain drives in the United States. The Blue Ridge Mountains are named for the hue created by water evaporating from the trees and plants and they really are blue. Most of the leaves have fallen by now but that actually improved the long views with the road hugging the high ridge of the park and many pullouts for viewing to the east and the west. The hiking trail along the ridge is the 2180 mile Appalachian Trail, which runs from Georgia to Maine. We saw many deer and a black bear. Darkness comes early this time of year so we headed for the nearby town of Luray for the night.



On the Appalachian Trail





The Wishing Well, with \$100000's donated to charities







Luray automobile museum

Also on the site was a fantastic antique automobile museum, many lovely old cars! Funny how my favorites were the Rolls Royce!

With the good weather holding we drove back up into Shenandoah NP, I was determined to hike a few miles of The Trail. Thayer dropped me off at one of the trailheads and I was going to hike the 3-4 miles to another trailhead, where Thayer would meet me. Well, long story short, it



Happily preceding the bear

was about a 5 mile hike and it was quite cold, especially on the shady side of the ridge. I came upon one of the shelters where the long hikers could stop and, sure enough, there were 3 hikers on their way down from Maine. They looked cold but determined. The shelter had 3 walls, an open fireplace, and a sleeping platform. As the sun was getting close to the horizon I called Thayer from

the first spot I could and was very thankful for my cell phone. After he picked me up, I found out that shortly after I had left the trailhead a young black bear had checked out Thayer in the rig and then followed me up the trail. I'm glad I didn't know! It was a beautiful trail and something I would like to do in warmer weather with more time.



Appalachian Trail viewpoint

Next up was Washington, DC., with our first night spent on a busy street in the parking lot of Mike's Carpets. We had offered & delivered our unused spare tire to Mike to use with his Rialta. We attempted to use the bus and subway to see DC but gave up on that right away after getting stranded with no way "home" but a taxi. It surprised us just how quickly the capitol area shuts down promptly at 5pm.

What really worked for us was driving into the city, parking for free at West Potomac Park near the Jefferson monument, and riding our bikes. It was about an 8 minute ride



Jefferson Memorial at night



The U.S. Capitol Building

to the Mall where we locked up the bikes and started in on full days at the museums. Having the bikes minimized the amount of walking we had to do to between venues and gave us relief from the standing and walking in the museums. We were lucky to have clear weather, although it was



The Supreme Court Building

fairly crisp. Our routine after being ushered out of the museums was to bike back to the rig, load the bikes and drive about 7 miles to this quiet neighborhood in Arlington we adopted with easy access to a Starbucks and the internet.



Smithsonian Institution Building (The Castle)

We were able to meet up with Thayer's cousin, Marilyn, for a few meals and some local color. She gave us a tour of her "office" in the Library of Congress. I cannot think of a greater contrast to my job in an elementary classroom. I loved the quiet and orderliness of the place! As most of



Thayer's cousin Marilyn at the Library of Congress





Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian

you know there is nothing quite like the museums of DC. I was able to “do” the American Indian, Art, American History, Holocaust, Natural History and a bit of the Air and Space Museums. Thayer doesn’t move as quickly as I do but he did a thorough job in the Air and Space and Natural History Museums. We also toured the Library of Congress and the US Capital, two buildings that make America look like a world class country!



It's like being in a European palace!



Library of Congress Reading Room

(Jefferson Memorial Panel One) -

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men. We...solemnly publish and declare, that these colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states...And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”*

(Jefferson Memorial Panel Four) -

*“I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”*



Jefferson Memorial

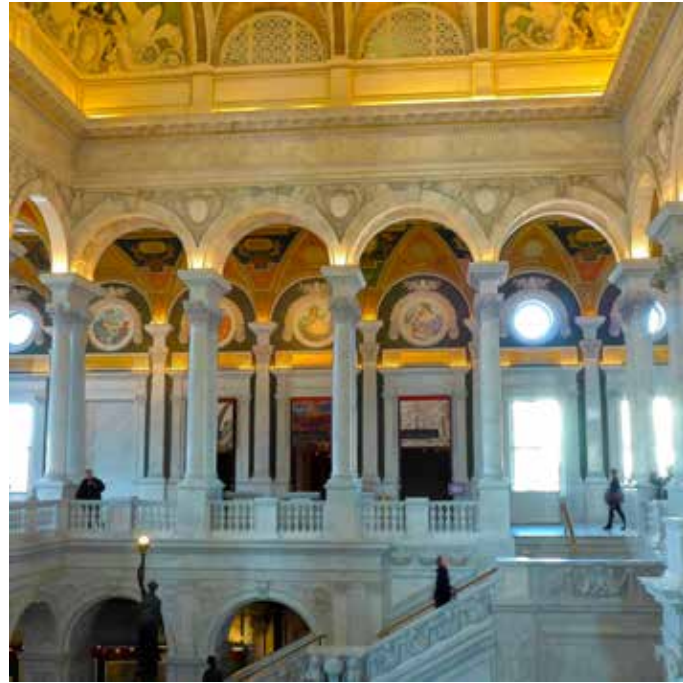


Lincoln Memorial





Beneath the Capitol Rotunda



Library of Congress



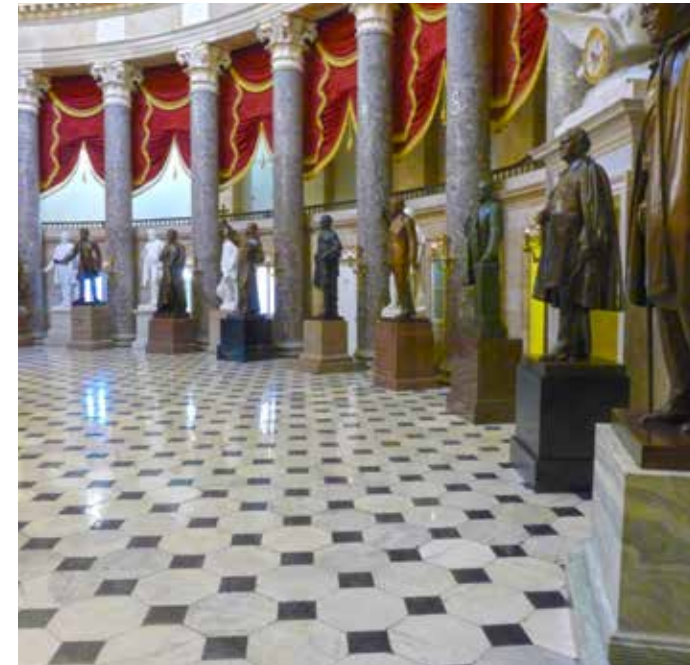
The only DaVinci in North America



The Hope Diamond



In the Botanical Gardens



The National Statuary Hall Collection in the United States Capitol Building is comprised of statues donated by individual states to honor persons notable in their history.



The Capitol Bldg. in reflection

Our final stop on our last day we wandered through the Botanical Gardens for a warm tropical blast before heading out into the cold. After 5 days of sightseeing, we reluctantly drove on through the driving rain toward central Virginia to visit more of Thayer's people.



# Tobacco Country

While in DC we had begun to hear a slight squealing sound in the serpentine belt area of our engine. It didn't seem to be getting any worse so we purchased a new belt along the way in anticipation of replacing it and, after a little research, also decided to repack the bearing for good measure. Heading south, we first stopped at the home Thayer's parents owned in Virginia before they moved to Washington. The current owners, who bought it from Thayer Sr. and Betty, graciously gave us a tour and proudly displayed the many updates and improvements they have made to make the house even more lovely. Then, after our brief visit, we continued on towards the Brook's Family Farm, near the tiny town of Dundas, VA., strategically timing our arrival for the day before Thanksgiving. What perfect planning!



Last Virginia Hughes home

We had thought to spend the holiday and an additional day or so before continuing down the road, but when Thayer checked out the noise and the engine belt he discovered that the tension bearing was completely gone, shredded beyond repair. He couldn't figure out how the belt had continued turning without the bearing, and we were VERY thankful that the engine hadn't died on us on the drive down as the weather had been horrendous and the traffic even worse. Are we just lucky or what?!! Needless to say we had to order the part, which did not arrive until the following Wednesday evening. Be wary when they promise expedited shipping over a weekend. We ordered the part Fri. morning and they didn't begin processing the order until Monday. Don't even get Thayer started on that debacle.



The Brooks farm

Fortunately, thankfully, luckily we were in a great place to hang out for a week. Many years ago the Brooks' provided Thayer with a welcome haven during a trying teenage year, after his family moved here from Alaska. He can't recall his time in Virginia without mentioning his time with the Brooks. Even milking cows, picking and processing tobacco, and driving a tractor sound fun when he reminisces. Alison and Lenora were so tickled to see him, it had been 25 years at least. Their 4 children all managed to come by for a visit while we were here, two of them driving 5-6 hours to see Thayer. We ate about 5 Thanksgiving dinners, 4 pies, 2 cakes, mounds of sweet potatoes, home canned snaps and baked apples. It was non-stop eating for the first 3 days, then I think we were all worn out and toned it down a bit. We were able to help move chairs and tables around for Lenora's church group luncheon and other little projects. Lenora was pleasantly surprised and pleased that I knew how to do dishes.



Squirt and Bea(st) hot on the trail



Old tobacco drying barn that Thayer worked in as a boy.

Alison is as quiet as Lenora is chatty, and Lenora just loves to tell stories! After hearing the escapades of every family member, friend and neighbor from the last 77 years (and some of the stories several times) I felt the need to get outside and explore. With no internet and a very warm house, I looked forward to my daily walks outside. Surrounded by acres and acres of farm and forestland, I walked 4-6 miles



In a shed normally sealed up tight, the tobacco leaves are hung from sticks that are in turn hung from the beams seen in this photo. Smouldering hardwood fires will dry or cure the tobacco leaves over a period of a week or more.

a day. Bea, their big brown lab, and Squirt, the little spotted beagle and I rambled around each field, checking out the sheds and drying barns that we kept finding. We sat and watched the bright red cardinals flitting through the bushes and tried to sneak up on a beaver in one of the ponds.

Though the Brooks don't actively run their farm anymore, the fellow who does grows a little tobacco, soybeans and winter wheat. The wheat is already 3 inches tall. They own about 280 acres and live in the house they built 55 years ago. I learned about tobacco farming, from planting and harvesting to processing and marketing. As with our farming friends in North Dakota, we heard about the good years and the bad years, weather, crops, prices, machinery, and lack of good help. We learned about growing up poor in southern Virginia.

Lenora's family farmed and also ran a sawmill many years ago. As a young girl she plowed fields behind the family mule, slept in a windowless upstairs attic, and has been on the back end of large equipment from an early age. It certainly wasn't an easy life! But now she and Alison have a happy, cheerful relationship and have been a hard working team for 57 years. Its very sweet the way they look at each other with such a sparkle in their eyes. They are proud, determined and opinionated folks. I feel very fortunate to have met them.

With an arctic storm looming on the horizon, we said our good-byes and trundled down the road (without a squeaking engine) toward Historic Jamestown, Colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown.



Alison & Lenora Brooks



Historic Triangle

Virginia certainly has a rich history. By visiting the Historic Triangle, we were able to retrace the British presence in North America from their first successful colony in Jamestown (1607), through the colonial period and revolution in Williamsburg and their surrender to George Washington in Yorktown in 1782. Each of these places has a different character and focus. The Jamestown area is a very active archeological site. For many, many years the opinion was that most of Jamestown had been cut away by the river and was



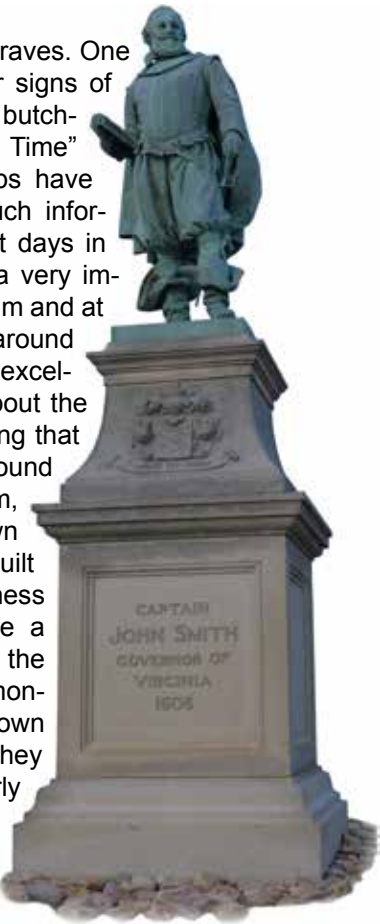
New Town

lost. Then someone did some good research and independent thinking, using the known location of the church to figure out the location of the rest of the fort. The actual site of Jamestown was just determined in 1994 when they found where the logs making up the walls of the fort had been dug into the ground. They have just recently found



First housing

other buildings and many graves. One woman's skull shows clear signs of having been carved and butchered during the "Starving Time" of 1609-10. Garbage heaps have been unearthed giving much information about those difficult days in the new land. They have a very impressive Archeology Museum and at least 4 active digs going on around the fort. We listened to an excellent ranger presentation about the new discoveries and learning that is going on. We walked around the fort, toured the museum, and walked the New Town area where townspeople built their homes and business eventually. They also have a glass works on the site of the original, one of their early money making ideas. Jamestown was a bustling town once they got through the rough early years and was the first capital of Virginia. It eventually moved to Williamsburg and then Richmond.



Wet Williamsburg



Cook for the Governor



Q&A with George Washington

ings on the grounds 88 are original. The rest have been built in the period style. The Governor's Palace and the Capitol were reconstructed from the original plans. Every building not only looks totally authentic but they have been built authentically using the tools and methods from the 16-1700's. There is a combination of homes and museums,

Williamsburg has been preserved for many years, many blocks of the old town are right out of the 1700's. This enormous undertaking was begun in 1926, financed mostly by John D. and Abby Rockefeller. They quietly bought up the land and made their plans to preserve and rebuild the town. Of the nearly 500 build-

intermixed. The homes are used by employees of CW with many regulations: no electrical or modern devices can be visible or heard through windows, all decor must fit in with the museum buildings. The tourist trinket shops follow the same rules. The museum buildings are staffed with knowledgeable and passionate people who visit with you and share their expertise for the trade or business they are in. For the most part they stay in character, using the vocabulary and language of the times. Some of the most interesting conversations happened when they stepped out of character. There were very few tourists so we were able to learn about each trade and activity by engaging the



Q&A with Thomas Jefferson







Basket maker and assistant



Cobbler repairing shoes



A wheelwright explains his trade



Catching up on 1771 news & gossip  
over Cocoa at the Coffeehouse

staff, they are really fantastic in their authentic clothing and using all traditional tools and skills.

On each day a historical personage came to the stage to give a speech and answer questions. We heard George Washington and Thomas Jefferson chat away about their beliefs, background and activities. These guys did not break out of character! I loved it when Jefferson lambasted a fellow who obviously had an issue with the Koran and Muslims.



A historical/architectural blacksmith



Dressmaker fitting



Dress seamstresses

We were there for 3 cold, rainy days and were able to visit almost every museum and store. Thayer was really disappointed by some of the changes he noticed from the last time he visited, 30+ years ago. It doesn't seem like a lot to ask when they have a working bakery to crank out hot cookies and goodies on a cold rainy day. But no-oooo....

They only peddled regular plastic sealed cookies and stocked electric coolers full of big-name bottled drinks. Thayer said they used to pull fresh baked gingerbread cookies & samples right out of the open hearth oven while you watched and chatted with the bakers. Well, what can you say about "progress"?



Gardens at the Governor's Palace

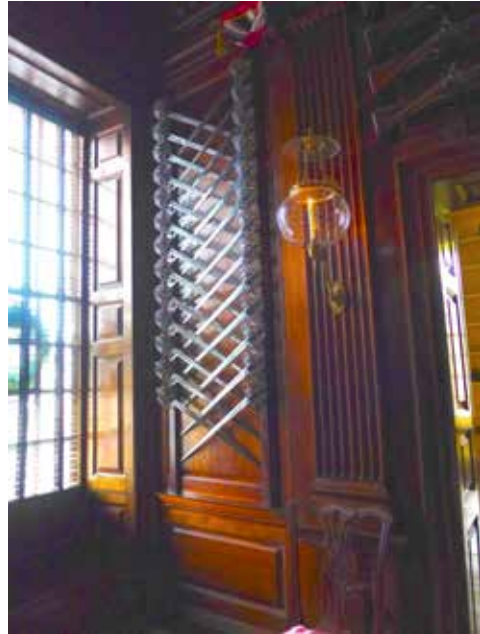


In the Governor's Palace





Sleeping room



In the Governor's Palace



Writing desk with ledger

The town was dressed up in its Christmas finery and the Great Illumination was on, unfortunately even the festive lights could hardly penetrate the rain and early darkness. We passed on the fireworks display. Despite the gloomy weather I enjoyed Williamsburg immensely and would



recommend it highly to anyone visiting Virginia.

The last point of the Historic Triangle is Yorktown, a National Historic Site. It has a small visitor center and is mostly forests and a battlefield with lots of earthenworks where two wars were fought. It is the site of the surrender of the

British to the Americans. One fact I found interesting was that Cornwallis did not surrender his sword to Washington, he was such a sore loser. He assigned the duty to his second-in-command. When Washington found out who was presenting the sword he sent his own second-in-command to receive it. Ah, gamesmanship! We got there late in the day and I didn't get any photos...



In the Armory

It was another trip down memory lane for Thayer when we visited the old home that his grandfather built 50 years ago in Hampton, VA. The nice young couple who lives there now was gracious enough to show us the inside. Thayer was disappointed to see the bright paint covering the wood panelling he loved. It is a sturdy house, well situated on the shore of the James River. With 3 children the family doesn't have much time (or maybe the inclination) for yard work and the grounds are a bit unkempt but you could imagine it's former glory.



Thayer's grandparents home had tarnished over time

We also visited nearby Fort Monroe, another National Historic Site, situated at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, protecting it from invaders of several wars. Something new here is that the parks are renting out townhomes and apartments fashioned from the beautiful old housing of the fort.



Old fort = creative housing



Casemate Museum

We had a nice stay with new boondocker friends, Pete and Phyllis, in Virginia Beach and they have given us a good contact for our Florida Keys expedition. Love the Boondockers!



Fort Monroe Lighthouse



# North Carolina's Outer Banks

Heading south into North Carolina and warmth and sun seemed like a fine idea, and one that proved to be true! There are many long bridges across the many waterways and wetlands of this state and we crossed one of them and found ourselves on the famed Outer Banks, or OBX, as many signs indicate. OBX is a long chain of narrow islands of sand that protect the mainland from storm surges and big water erosion. On one side is the Atlantic Ocean and on the other is Currituck Sound to the north, and Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds in the middle and southern stretches. The chain runs for about 200 miles, which is most of North Carolina's coast. Our main stop was the Wright Brothers National Memorial near the tourist town of Kill Devil Hills. Kitty Hawk is the name of the area on the edge of town where the Wrights flew their amazing machines.



Horseshoe crab shell



In the early 1900's there was fierce competition to be the first to build a machine that could carry a person, take off, be steered safely, and land, entirely under it's own power. The French had made some headway with the problem of lifting the thing, working on wing design and gliders, everyone thought they were the experts. Orville and Wilbur Wright, without a diploma between them, studied the problems and scientifically solved them, using the skills they had gained building and operating a printing press and running their own bicycle shop. First, they found that the French wings were not expertly designed at all, they didn't provide the required or expected amount of lift. They invented their own wind tunnel to test and study different wing shapes quickly and efficiently. The work they did in their primitive wind tunnel is still very close to what modern day engineers use for wing designs. Using this information they were able to build gliders that they tested and flew more than 2000 times from the top of the sand dunes at Kitty Hawk. With the problem of lift solved they



Flyers Hall of Fame



Plaque commemorating first four flights



Not so famous 5th flight

tackled the remaining issues of steering and power. A fellow who worked in their shop designed and built a small 4 cylinder engine that would run long enough to make the first short flights and that was all. The next big problem was steering the craft, the major issues being roll, yaw, and pitch, the 3 dimensions that had to be mastered for safe steering. They came up with revolutionary mechanics that twisted the two wings (called wing warping) and operated the tail for right and left turning. This mechanism was operated by the pilot shifting his hips in a cradle attached to wires controlling the wings and tail. Another smaller wing was in front of the pilot, trimmed using a handle, that controlled the elevation, up or down (pitch).



Thayer tried it after I showed how safe it was



I love flying with Wilbur

On Dec. 17, 1903, in the privacy of Kitty Hawk, they made 4 historic flights that demonstrated their progress toward solving most of the big problems of manned flight. They continued tweaking their designs, filing for patents and improving the performance of their airplanes. They were very smart, they kept things quiet, did not share their progress until they had their patents in place. They mistakenly thought the US government would be interested in financing their work and offered to show them their planes, if they had a contract. The government refused, financing Samuel Langley instead. Langley was not even close to powered flight and had some disastrous outcomes. The Wright Bros. took their machine to Europe and showed their stuff. They were declared the winner in the race to



Cheering helpers



flight but it took some time in the States to have that status. Finally they received the financing and acclaim they deserved and became very successful. As with many inventors of the era, they had to fight to protect and profit from their patented ideas.



Monument at Wright Brothers National Memorial

We learned much about the brothers both here and the Museum of Air and Space in DC. At the visitor's center they have a replica of the first craft, a wind tunnel and a few other artifacts. (The Smithsonian got the original Flyer.) They also have a large sand dune with a massive stone memorial, the field marked with stones showing the exact location of the first 4 flights, and replicas of the two hangers the brothers lived in and used for their planes. There is a steel sculpture of the plane out in the field surrounded with the figures that were present on that historic day. Another large exhibit area was closed the days we

were there in preparation for a big celebration on Dec. 17 commemorating 110 years of flight. Every few years they induct someone into their Flying Hall of Fame and this year the inductee is William Boeing, who started his company in 1916. Well, we all know how that worked out!



Wright Brothers National Memorial Visitor Center

We stayed several nights in Kill Devil Hills, enjoying the beach one morning and then moving southward. We could not continue to Cape Hatteras because the bridge to that island has been deemed unsafe at any speed and closed. They had a ferry service up and running but we decided it was too complicated. We continued on to Roanoke Is. and the historic town of Manteo. In 1585, the Roanoke Colony was the first to be established by Britain in the New World but it disappeared without a trace, so Jamestown got the honor of being the first successful colony. Manteo was establishing in 1870. We toured the visitor's center and focused on the building of a replica of the 'Elizabeth II', one of the ships that carried early settlers. They built it in the old ways just a few years ago.



The Elizabeth II, similar to vessels from the Roanoke Voyage of 1585

That night we sat in our little home while the rain pounded down for several hours – we are so happy with our rig. A little further south in Beaufort there was a tornado that pulled the roof off of an elderly hardware store.

Back on the mainland we headed toward a Boondocker opportunity in another historic town, the above mentioned Beaufort, NC. We met Tipper, our host, got the tour of his jealousy inducing wood shop and saw pictures of the fine boat he built as a young man and sailed around on for 30 years. Tipper is a master craftsman and woodworker, working on many restorations, most notably Mount Vernon and some New England Grist Mills. He also puts in many hours for the local Historical Center and we really enjoyed the several hours he spent with us touring the town. He had the keys to some of the historic buildings he has worked on so we were treated to a private showing of some wonderful old buildings. He is trying to be retired but keeps getting lured



Tipper and Patty



Example Beaufort, NC home

back to interesting projects, good pay and appreciation of his skills. It is the best fun to be escorted around an interesting place like this with someone who is very involved with the community. We heard some great stories. His wife, Patty, has a shop full of nice things to buy in town. Tipper and Patty left us in charge while they visited Tipper's mom in DC, pretty dang trusting! We had a huge party and almost burned the place down, but I think it will pass inspection upon their return.



Heading for the water hole

I've had a hankering to see some of the wild horses that inhabit many of the Outer Banks islands. I had no idea there were so many! Right across the channel from Beaufort is a little island named Carrot Is. It is also the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge and is the home of about 30 wild horses. I rode the water taxi across the channel where I could see 3 horses browsing along the shore. These hardy little horses seem to thrive on the coarse grass that grows in the tidelands, most of them are fat and healthy looking. They don't seem to have a distinctive background, someone just turned some horses loose here in the early 1900's.



Naptine





Wild pony of Carrot Island

To keep them from over populating the island many of the mares are issued birth control on a yearly basis. Fresh water is not plentiful, and when there isn't much on the surface from rain, they have to paw out a hole and drink the brackish ground water. I followed the first 3 I spotted up and over the island to a large tidal grassland where I was able to sit and watch about 20 horses grazing and drinking from a big rain puddle. They didn't mind me much at all, just watched when I moved around taking pictures. I sat in the sun and read my book for a while and just enjoyed having all of this to myself. I only saw 2 other people later in the day.



Raccoons and pony tracks

We spent an afternoon at the very excellent North Carolina Maritime Museum. The coastal area around here is part of the "Graveyard of the Atlantic", a nickname given because of all the shipwrecks. There were so many ships transiting the coast that piracy was also prevalent. Blackbeard lived, pillaged, and died in these parts, and his ship went down nearby.



Pirate and wench

Now archeologists have been excavating Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge* since it was discovered in 1994 very near Beaufort. They had a great exhibit with a lot of information about pirates, their ships and their exciting lives. Most of them came to a very bad end. For example, Blackbeard was killed by the British and his head hung from the bowsprit when they came into port. The display about the wreck, it's excavation, and the recovery of artifacts was very interesting.



Pirate booty

The museum also featured the forerunner of the Coast Guard, those heroic men of the US Life-saving Service. These fellows watched the dangerous shores of the east, even at night they patrolled the beaches, constantly on the alert for a ship run aground. When a ship grounded the surfmen leaped into action with canon, lines, buckets, life boats and if the boat was lucky enough to be within about

400 yards of shore they had a shot at survival. It was all very interesting! Thayer got sucked into the library and I'm sure he would still be there if I didn't drag him out. We also really enjoyed the many sailing ship models they had, there has been a long line and evolution of working ships, all with features making them ideal for their purpose and beautiful as well.



Another nice Beaufort home

A short trip to Cape Lookout Visitor Center and the Core Sound Museum on a beautiful, sunny day allowed us a nice nature walk and a fine lookout over the inland waters of the Inter-coastal Waterway. Fort Macon was right on the way so we stopped for a short visit, it is really a lovely place. All of the Atlantic forts are being to muddle together for me, there is a common theme among them all. Within the last 200 years they have all undergone the same transformations due to the changing weaponry they expected to be used against them. They are all located in prime locations for long views and lovely scenery. Someday maybe I'll count how many we have visited.

We then started our way 400 miles across the state to Andrew and Teresa Thompson's beautiful home near Hendersonville, NC. Andrew and I sailed on the UW Racing team many years ago and had many memories to rehash. It had been about 25 years since we'd seen each other so we were definitely due for a reunion. He lives in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains.

Sunday, January 5, 2014

## Back to the Coast

Our uneventful trip across North Carolina found our first destination to be the little town of Brevard. That evening we had a good time listening to some true-blue, authentic Blue Ridge story tellin' and music by Michael Reno Harrell and Sheila Kay Adams. They related whimsical stories from their past about Christmas that were both very funny and touching. Shelia is a National Heritage Fellowship award winner and Michael has won the Recording Industry Association of America Platinum award. But sitting with them and listening to their tales was almost like casually being in a country kitchen or sitting around a fire – trying to discern just where the facts were buried beneath the BS er, ...fiction. It was very entertaining!



Sheila Kay Adams, storyteller

The following morning we drove the short distance to Laurel Park (near Hendersonville) to see my ol' dear college sailing friend Andrew. While there, over the next 6 days



Andrew & me



we enjoyed many wonderful family Christmas traditions with him, his wife Teresa and daughter Michelle. I also enjoyed the attending the rehearsal and performance of their church's youth Christmas program. Andrew volunteers as the driver for a bunch of lively kids who probably wouldn't attend church without the ride. The rehearsal was a little rough with shepherds dozing, angels wiggling and little lambs racing around, but they pulled it together for the big performance and did a great job telling the story of the birth of Jesus.

I probably won't get the rest of the events in order but we did a variety of other fine and festive things, including visiting Carl Sandburg's home. Nowadays, the Nat. Park Service continues to breed and raise the goats that Mrs. Sandburg became famous for. She took a very scientific approach, concentrating on three types of goats, and was mainly interested in improving milk production and quality – eventually breeding goats that produced record quantities of milk. The estate now covers about 200 acres and is still very beautiful.



Eating was a main theme at Andrew's

While at Andrew's, we replaced the Rialta's house batteries, which sounds easy but really wasn't. The old batteries were getting a bit tired and we had purchased some new ones a few days earlier. The replacement batteries are a just teeny bit different than the old ones and Thayer had to do some delicate "modifications" with a BIG hammer and hacksaw

to get them in. Our rig now accepts nearly any sized battery. It is so nice to have such skilled technical staff traveling along! We can play on our computers and run our lights for much, much longer – important when we're confined inside on dark, rainy days & nights.



Two heads are better than one

We did all the good Christmas gift stuff and, of course, the eating part. The Thompsons' follow a Danish tradition of making lots of cookies, appetizers, munchies and candies and then browsing all day long on Christmas, thus eliminating the thankless job of preparing a giant meal. But we also did that too on the following day when we were invited over to their friend Charlene's house. We had a wonderful meal followed by exchanging and receiving gifts. I was also happy to learn that the Thompsons enjoy reading Patrick McManus as much as the Sykes family, and we had some spirited reading and laughter that only comes with good old Pat and his gang of frightened wieners.



The Biltmore really is built more!

Andrew and Teresa took us out one day to show us the sights around Asheville, most notably a peek at the Rockefeller estate, the very grand Biltmore, but with a \$45 entry fee we limited ourselves to the visitor information center and the video. We continued on to the Grove Park Inn, a massive hotel built of large, rough hewn granite boulders. We wandered the lobbies, admiring fantastical and prize winning gingerbread houses (and Pandas) on display. Entries to the annual contest and constructed by people of all ages, I don't know how anyone could single out the "best" one as there were so many stunning creations.



Edible bears

Near the inn are some historic buildings that showcase the crafts of the city. Asheville was once known for their fine woolen fabrics and had a booming weaving industry. Several of the building were stores carrying beautiful hand crafted glass art, pottery, fabric and paper arts, and amazing fine crafted wooden furniture. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with Andrew and his family and were a bit sorry to be moving on.



Congaree swamp



Congaree swamp

Traveling eastward again, we stopped at Congaree N.P., learning about the amazing swampland ecosystem of the Congaree River that covers a beautiful 26,000 acres. It was nearly destroyed by early logging, but the swampland was too difficult to manage and had so it had a better chance for preservation. It is the largest area of old growth bottomland hardwoods in the US and there are at least 80 species of trees, some towering 170 above the swamp. The seasonal flooding is the heartbeat of this unique park, bringing nutrients to the plants and animals of the swamp.

Farther down the road, a short visit to the Charles Pinckney N.H.S., homestead of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence; and to Fort Moultrie, which gave us a look at yet another fort. I think we're becoming experts on early America forts. Just ask me a question!



The Charles Pinckney house





On a Time-Out at Fort Moultrie

We rode our bikes around historic Charleston, NC, and found easy parking on the southern waterfront. It is a lovely city just drenched with beautiful homes, colorful streets and interesting historical sites. Spending some time in the crafts market, I especially enjoyed watching men and women weaving beautiful baskets. The Hominy Cafe was recommended by a gentleman we'd met earlier, so we enjoyed a good southern cooked meal, but couldn't stomach the popular boiled peanuts. The next day we found a local swimming pool and took full advantage of a long swim and a longer shower for only \$2, ...a darn good deal by our standards!



"Grits are good for you."

We then "quietly" welcomed the New Year in Savannah, GA. The town had a street blocked off with some live music and lots of fun people to watch. We both mingled with the Georgian partygoers 'till about 10:30, and then retreated to a dark Walmart for a very quiet night.

Inspired by a book I just finished that included a gumbo recipe, I began gathering the ingredients and advice necessary to give it a try. I even had to ask a woman in the store to identify okra for me because I had no idea what it looked



My first attempt at Gumbo



It is hard to pick out a favorite in Charleston

like. She gave me some good advice and during the next day, which was rainy and dreary, I gave it my best shot. I included shrimp and sausage for the meat, and lots of vegetables. The spices I'd bought previously in Charleston gave it a delightful spicy taste. Not bad for a beginner, and voted 'two-thumbs-up' by everyone who tasted it!



Cape Canaveral

Next up as we worked our way down into Florida was Canaveral National Seashore. Sadly, it was raining sideways during our brief visit. I was happy to learn that they'd had a banner year for the number of sea turtles nesting in the park, almost double the usual number of nests were laid. That adds up to almost 8000 nests! I explored around an old Native American shell midden, which is a large hill of shells shucked from 1000's of years of oyster feasts. The midden has created a lovely little ecosystem that provides habitat for all kinds of plants and animals. I also discovered a tree just loaded with large, just-out-of-reach, oranges! Dang!

The next day we continued through the Merritt Island N.W.R., observing thousands of birds and a whole lot of wetlands. These parks were created after the land was gobbled up by NASA for Cape Canaveral and then given back as a wildlife refuge. They've done good things with the land, making a multitude of environments supporting an incredible amount of wildlife. There are so many opportunities to see birds wintering over here in Florida that I may just skip over the details.

We also had nice visits with a shirt tail relative (Cindy Sykes' cousin), and Mark and Beverly, a Stuart, FL. boon-docker couple. Mark is an auto tech teacher at a high school and is both very accommodating AND a good cook! We are still hitting 100% with the boondocker crowd, and have yet to met one we haven't hit it off with instantly. A pretty good average, we think!



Anhinga



White Ibis



Great Egret fishing



Tricolored Heron



## Florida Keys

We continued into Hollywood, FL. Most of the south eastern coast of Florida is continuous city, hugging the coast wherever the ground is solid enough to build on. We were visiting

Thayer's close paragliding friends, Sven and Nata-sha, whom he hadn't seen for some time, and they enjoyed rehashing good 'ol days from the Lake Chelan fly-ins. Nata-sha brought out old photos and had many stories to tell. They showed us around the boardwalk/tourist areas, and other great places for people watching. We spent two nights with them, a slight change in plan since our friends from North Dakota got stuck in the blizzard and had to cancel their trip. As usual, it worked out for the best. We had a nice visit with Sven and Natasha and didn't have to brave the wilds of Miami trying to track down Carla and Larry. We were very sorry not to see them however. There is a chance we will meet up in the desert somewhere.

(...and not to be confused with "dessert somewhere".)



Natasha & Sven Nolasnamé



Rest stop!!!

Next up was the Florida Keys! It was driving rain and pleasantly cool as we headed south on to the Keys.

One of the boondockers from Virginia Beach put us in touch with their parent, John. He lives at MP 21, that is, 21 miles north of Key West. He is a 90 year

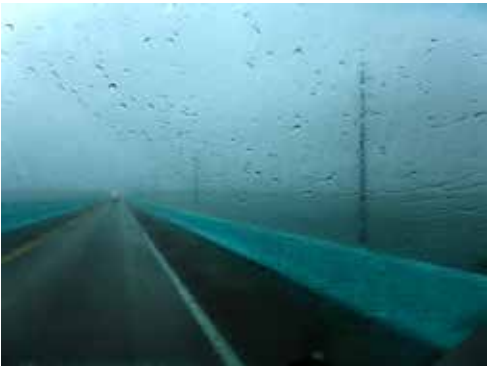


Welcome to Paradise

old retired Navy nuclear submarine captain. In his spare time he has written at least 3 interesting books on the history of the Keys and many articles for magazines and the local newspapers. Still very sharp, John continues to write and volunteer time on the Ingham, a 230 ft. decommissioned USCG ship in Key West. He was also a sailor for many of his civilian years and he cruised the Caribbean and Floridian waterways extensively with his wife. We stayed with him a total of 3 nights, treating him with my "home cooked" meals and we



John, our wonderful host



Bridge to the Keys



Key West Arts Center

had many lively conversations about sailing, the Navy, submarines and the history of the Keys. Our visits with him were really the high-point of our Keys stay.

Two of our days were spent in Key West, tourist mecca of the Keys. The first day we rode our bikes around the town and along the harbor. There are many beautiful old homes with wonderful tropical yards and landscaping. There were also a multitude of little funky shacks and bungalows each having lots of character. In the harbor we discovered an armada of large sailing vessels, trimarans, schooners and such, most of which take tourists out for tours of various lengths of time and providing different activities. Most were of the sunset cruise variety, serving lots of booze and blaring loud music. Key West is really for a younger crowd than



Key West mansion



One of many fine schooners for hire we comfortably fit into anymore. If you don't drink much or enjoy partying all night the evening activities are limited.

Having bicycles was definitely the way to go, the downtown streets are narrow and crowded. There are city blocks lined with touristy shops which, after six months on the road, are not very interesting. The one and only one I shopped in was the "\$5 for Everything" store. Those of you who best know me can easily imagine my favorite kind of shopping!



When you park too long in one spot



Although there for three days, we only spent one night actually in Key West, nervously parking in a residential area that turned out to be just fine. They don't welcome RVs all that much in Key West and have many restrictions on campers or vehicles over 20'. But that didn't stop us from having a good time and we had a nice dinner at a little Cuban restaurant, a local hangout that John recommended.



The beginning of the end



"I'm sorry, did you say something?"



The mighty Ingham

The next day we met John at the Ingham and after he gave us the introduction to the boat we did a self guided tour. It certainly is a fascinating floating museum and a National Historic Landmark. In 1985, the Ingham became the oldest active duty and most decorated Naval ship serving the U.S. She was decommissioned in 1988 after 52 years of service, having cruised the Bering Sea, escorted 31 convoys across the North Atlantic in WWII, sank a U-Boat, led convoys to the Mediterranean and Africa, served in the Vietnam War, rescuing survivors of sunken boats & ships, and finally served as the command ship in the 7th Fleet in the Pacific. She was involved in a lot of actions and earned many citations and awards.

The most interesting thing about the ship is that she has been preserved exactly as she was the day she was decommissioned. The Navy simply walked away, leaving all of the original equipment on board. For Thayer it was a walk down Memory Lane. He recognized much of the same equipment he had used during his years in the Navy.

The Ingham is now operated by a struggling non-profit and her future is uncertain. It would be a sad thing to send this museum to the scrap yard, but the city of Key West would like to put a marina in its place on the waterfront. Not many cities can accommodate a ship of this size and it simply cannot generate the funds it needs to stay afloat.

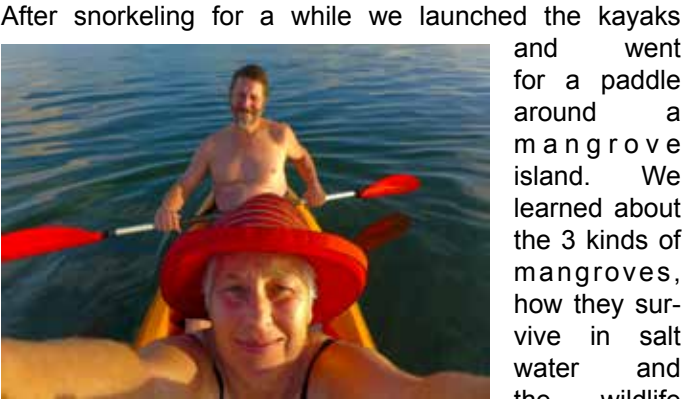


Ingham from the bow



Fearless crew: Joe, Vic, Nick

After touring the Ingham we had tickets for the Danger!, a 50 foot sailing schooner that was going to take 13 of us out to the Marine Preserve for some sailing, snorkeling and kayaking. Nick, the captain, and Vic and Joe, the crewmen, were very entertaining and knowledgeable. As we sailed out to the preserve Joe gave us an abbreviated account of the history of the Key, from Native Americans to modern times. He was funny and engaging and told some great stories of the Keys (which we were able to flesh out a little more with our own reading of John's books the following day). This Marine Preserve is not on the reef side of the Keys, it is on the gulf side which has a very different ecology. It is shallow and warm with beds of sea grasses in the shallowest areas and sponge beds in the slightly deeper areas. We were able to see quite a few fish, eels, lots of sponges of various shapes and sizes, though it was nothing at all like reef snorkeling. They provided good equipment, wetsuits, fins and snorkel gear that worked.



Another great pic of my hat



Captain Nick gets some sailing tips

that depends upon them. The "islands" don't really have any land, just masses of mangrove tree roots. They are the basis for a host of living things, fish, turtles, and gobs of birds. We saw osprey, cormorants, egrets, gulls, and many others that I don't remember or were not identified. The mangroves have clever ways of excreting salt and getting enough air for their roots while standing in 2-3 ft. of saltwater. Afterwards, the crew served snacks, soft drinks, wine and beer the whole afternoon accompanied by their lively banter and cheerful conversations. Being the "quiet" boat in a flotilla of noisy sunset cruise party boats, we cruised



Much cooler after snorkeling!



I could get used to this



until the sun finally sank in a colorful display over Key West. It was a very enjoyable afternoon and evening on the schooner with another one of those beautiful sunsets you read about in picture books.



We stayed at John's that night and planned to leave the next morning but when he invited us to stay for another night we jumped at the chance to have a beach day. Contrary to my preconceived ideas about the Keys, there are very few sandy beaches and even fewer that are open and free to the public. The mangroves dominate the shorelines and the beaches are far and few in between. We borrowed several of John's books on the Keys and found Veteran's Beach about 20 miles up the road. It is a small but lovely beach and we had a perfect day and a shady spot to enjoy it. The waters are very shallow so it isn't really a swimming beach but I wandered around finding some fish and several large sea slugs of the non-decorative variety. The pelicans were actively diving for fish out beyond the shallows.



In the News: "Arctic air; snow and freezing rain will continue across parts of the U.S. from California to the Northeast; as the winter storm continues to wreak havoc."

I read John's book on the history of the Keys while Thayer focused on the sea story collection. The Keys have a colorful history, many cycles of boom and bust, good ideas, bad ideas, greed, shipwrecks, pirates, smugglers & Indians, naval battles, struggles for power and control, and people who busted their asses to survive and prosper in a difficult land. With very few fresh water sources but an endless supply of biting flies & bugs, the challenges for any enterprise were significant. Anybody who had a good idea, worked to get it off the ground and began to make a go of it was invariably wiped off the map by a hurricane.



Most folks in the early shipping days made their living off of the shipwrecks that occurred very frequently on the eastern and southern reefs, for a time earning them the highest per-capita income in the US. It was a culture of greed and corruption at all levels. Channel markers, current tables and GPS technology has virtually eliminated shipwrecks so tourism is the main source of income for pirates these days.

After one more night with John we said our fond goodbyes. It appears that we have reached the turning point in our trip – we are almost 6 months into it, now at the farthest distance from Seattle (3,581 miles taking the short-cuts or 12,011 miles the route we came), and have begun heading back in a west and northerly direction. We hope this second half will be as wonderful as the first half has been!



This is as far as we got

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

## The Everglades

Southern Florida is where hard core northwesterners meet their match. Even though the temperatures are not high, only in the 70's and low 80's, the humidity makes it feel much hotter and very clammy. Sweating does nothing to cool you off, just makes you stickier. People must be able to acclimate to it because the folks who live here love it and wouldn't/couldn't live anywhere else. Go figure. That's evolution for you!

The Everglades are an amazing ecosystem, covering a huge area of Florida. Over time it has been reduced to 1/5 of its original size. The digging of canals to drain the waters, and the development of agricultural and residential areas have nearly destroyed the functioning of the massive wetlands. The yearly cycle of flooding and "drying down" has been reduced to a fraction of historic levels. For years, in an effort to control flooding, create farmable and buildable land, and reduce mosquitos, extensive canals were built to drain away the "excess water". Turns out that it is not excess water at all to the plants and animals that live in the broad shallow river that is the Everglades. The Everglades are one-of-a-kind on our planet, and are the most studied ecosystem in the US. Mere inches (or less) of elevation will define moisture content and which plants and animals can inhabit a particular ecosystem.



River of Grass with dormant cypress trees





Foundation of the food chain – algae!

Fortunately, efforts are underway to restore some of the waters to the Everglades. Whether these efforts will be in time or enough to save the wetlands remains to be seen. Many governmental agencies, conservation groups and community groups are working together to protect large areas of land that are important to the Everglades. They are building bridges to replace roadways that impede wa-



Petrified coral at a quarry

ter flow, blocking old canals to redirect the water back to its original course, and trying to educate people and businesses to improve the water quality of the water flowing into the system. It is vastly complex and costly but it gives me hope that this special place can be improved and protected. It is sad to think that it will never be what it once was. I guess that is true of any place that mankind touches for any length of time.

Most or all of the roads and paths in the park have been created by dredging a canal to build up the road or path, which results in a canal, large or small, running along the way. The park has tried to minimize this effect but the pools of water have become habitat for many animals and visitors have access to the park. Needs must be balanced.



Make way for cormorants!

We explored several areas of the park, the "River of Grass" overlook at Pa-Hay-Okee, the Royal Palms boardwalk where we saw our first, very exciting alligator, and the Shark Valley bike loop and overlook. The tall overlooks are important because the elevation change in the park,



Great Blue Heron



American Alligator

from high to low amounts to a whopping 14 feet. That doesn't seem like much but it is the only thing that makes half the state of Florida a river, not a swamp. It flows very



Great Blue Heron with snack



Hérons everywhere!

slowly but it is always moving. At one point we drove over Rock Reef Pass, the signage proudly announcing the elevation at 3 feet. From the overlooks you can see what looks like grasslands stretching to the horizon, dotted with groves of trees. These grasslands, in fact, have their roots in 6-12 inches of water that flows steadily to the south. The groups of trees are called hammocks and they are slightly higher than the river, only a few inches, just enough for trees and shrubs to grow. Each additional inch in elevation supports a new level of plants and animals. There are birds in every direction, herons, egrets, storks, anhinga, cormorants and so many more. What is sad is that the populations of wading birds are 1/10 of their former populations. I kept trying to imagine what 10 times more than what I was seeing would look like.





Crocodile smiles! (although this is an alligator)



A baby gator

The pathway for our bike ride in the Shark Valley was actually reclaimed from an old oil exploration road from long ago. Our excitement and awe of the gators was diminished fairly quickly after passing about 138 trailside lounging gators in the 7 miles to the lookout tower. They ranged from about 4-12ft and they were just everywhere, even blocking the pathways. We also saw 6 baby crocodiles. The birds were fantastic, wading through the shallows, perched in trees, swimming underwater and riding the thermals. At the overlook there was a large pond filled with large fish, gar, a favorite food for the lounging gators. We could see at least a dozen gators dozing in the shad-



Shark Valley bike trail



Speed bump

ows from the overlook. There were turtles swimming about as well. On the way back we saw gators by the car-load and hundreds of birds.

As we drove westward out of the NP we entered Big Cypress National Preserve, another invaluable wetland and important ecosystem of South Florida. It is different from the Everglades in that it is dominated by forests of Cypress trees. Water flows through the forest similarly to the Everglades but the trees tower over the clear waters. We went to the visitors center but didn't have time or energy for a walk into the forest. From the



On the hunt...

boardwalk at the center we were treated to views of our first manatee. These wonderful mammals are like watching slow motion water ballet. They just drift along, turning, spinning and surfacing quietly once in a while. They like coastal areas and warm water, salt or fresh. In the winter when the sea is cooler they move up into the rivers and fresh water inlets for some warmth. They really like the output waters from electric plants but we haven't visited one of those yet. By waiting patiently we saw several more manatees feeding on grasses in the river.



Manatee



So cute! Can we keep him?

Big Cypress is also home to the endangered Florida Panther. This big cat would probably be extinct by now without the efforts of people to introduce some new genes into the pool years ago. The native cats had gotten so scarce that inbreeding was affecting the babies. They brought in some Texas panthers for a few years to add some genetic variety and they have been doing better ever since. The foreign animals were removed and sent back to Texas after donating their genes.



This was something new!



Unfortunately a National Preserve does not get the same protections as a National Park and Big Cypress is open to more uses. Folks can fish, hunt, there are some homes and fishing camps, and the activity that we disapprove of is the use of swamp buggies that can go out and thrash around with big tires and engines. I imagine that there are only certain areas where they can do this but it seems out of line with preserving and protecting habitat and wildlife. As we drove through the area Thayer got tired of my nearly continuous cry of “Croc!” every 7 seconds when I saw one or three lounging on the shore of the canal. I did stop after a while.

We stayed with some very nice boondockers for 2 nights outside of Naples. Linda and Paul are completely refurbishing an old Airstream trailer and hope to be traveling for real when Paul retires in a couple of years. We had fun with their little grandsons, Tucker and Wyatt, aged 4 and 2. They brought back many memories of having my two little boys. Their father, Matt, is into “mud trucks” which needs no further description than this photo. Somewhere in the community is a vast mud pit where they meet with friends to compete to see who can go the furthest and get the muddiest. When they get stuck they haul each other out and do it again! We sure don’t have this kind of fun in Bellevue!

The bugs in Southern Florida have been very excited and happy to have me visit. They told all their friends and rela-



Itchy, itchy, itchy!



tives to meet and greet me. It takes every ounce of will power I have to resist scratching my feet right off the ends of my legs! I’ve included this picture just for those of you who imagine our trip as a total lark with everything always being awesome and fantastic. There is some suffering involved and I won’t regret leaving these little Florida vampires behind!



Wyatt & Tucker

PS – Found out several days later that I had gotten into a pile of chiggers! They are really miserable bites but I think I’m on the upswing with them, not quite so itchy today.



Sunset at Royal Palms

Friday, February 7, 2014

## Finishing Florida

The past few weeks have been a bit of a blur, ...we’ve just been moseying our way up the Gulf side of Florida. Along the way, we had a very nice afternoon with the manatees at Apollo Beach, near Tampa. As the Gulf waters cool down in the middle of winter the manatees abandon the estuaries and head up the many rivers and inlets search-



Surface shot, really, lots of them!

ing for warmer waters. Some of the rivers have hot springs which the manatees have enjoyed for many years, but at Apollo Beach the slow motion mammals have found a hot tub of their own for their winter enjoyment – a toasty (70 degrees or so) inlet heated by the cooling water outflow of



They're beautiful. Like potatoes with personalities!



Manatee hot tub heater

the nearby coal fired power plant! The visitor center had a large display and canned ‘propaganda’ about how efficient, wonderful and non-polluting the power plant is supposed to be but I had a hard time believing it all.

The day we visited there were about 140-50 manatees lolling about and socializing in the outflow of the plant. The power company and some environmental groups have built a nice viewing platform and visitors center. We watched the manatees paddle about individually or swarm around in groups of 10-12. We couldn’t tell what exactly they were doing but it was all very graceful and slow. Manatees are vegetarian, eating fresh water plants in large quantities, and face many challenges in the wild, the most dangerous being hit by speeding motor boat props.



Next up was a visit to Thayer's aunt Glenda, just outside of Tampa. She works horrendous hours at Disney but we found time for some very nice visits over our 3 day stay, and we ate out a lot! Thayer was also able to meet his two cousins, Kevin and Craig, that he had never seen before and they all really enjoyed sharing stories about the family. Their father, Jim, was Thayer's uncle and had succumbed to cancer about 12 years ago. As a lad, Thayer had spent quite a bit of time with Jim and had many fresh stories to tell Jim's boys that they had never heard. It was a great visit with some really nice folks



Aunt Glenda and the family.

Continuing northward up the coast, we arrived at Tarpon Springs, sponging capital of the US. It is a neat little Greek outpost with many restaurants, stores, and (of course) sponges! We learned about the history of the town, the many varieties of sponges, and how they were/are harvested and prepared for sale. There was also a big artsy



Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks



Sponging boat

craftsy street fair happening on the waterfront with vendors selling all kinds of hand crafted items. We rode our bikes around the neighborhoods and saw some lovely old homes.



Classic homes

Our next destination was Homosassa, where we had a boondocker host lined up for several nights. There were plenty of things to do around this little burg. The old Yulee Sugar Mill was a small site but pretty interesting, signage helped explain the process of turning sugar cane into sug-



Salt works

ar and molasses. The little town of Homosassa also has a unique island called Monkey Island and I'll bet you can't guess the ethnicity of its residents... That's right, monkeys! About 5 or 6 monkeys have their own playground island just offshore of the largest restaurant in town. There was also lots of boating going on: fishing, kayaking, and airboat tours. It seemed like there was a fish market around every corner.



Monkey Island



Should've gotten one or two...

years ago and comprised of about 10 Indian large mounds.

We visited a Nature Preserve Center that was right on the water and although the center itself was not much we did discover this funny sailboat/barge that is made almost entirely out of square cut lumber. The only rounded piece I saw was the lower section of the main mast. Very clever and unique but also clunky looking. Definitely not built for going upwind or going fast but you could sure haul a large load of goats or crates!



Square lumber boat





Cedar Key is a man-made beach

Cedar Key was a few more miles up the road; a very lovely little town perched out on the end of a peninsula. We rode our bikes around, enjoyed the warm weather and indulged on some very tasty Key Lime Pie. We were lucky enough to arrive just in time for a city parade held to kick off the

homecoming celebration at the local high school. I'm sure there were more people in the parade than were watching the parade so we were able to recover lots of the candy treats that were being thrown to the, er, ...crowds. I found a nice farmers market and bought some great fish that we enjoyed over several nights. It has a funny name that I can't recollect right now but was a lot like Mahi-mahi. Needless to say, the seafood around here is fantastic.

As we left the area we stopped by the Shell Mound Unit of Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, adjacent to Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, and site of a 28 foot high mound of shells covering several acres. This unique feature was created from about 450 to 1,800 years ago by the Calusa, archaic period Eastern Woodland Indian cultures, by discarding oyster and clam shells they used as a food source. The mounds create whole new environments and ecosystems out of the lowlands that they are built upon. These coastal areas supported a complex society of people who were master fishermen and harvesters of the sea, supplying all their needs. In more recent times, before it came under park protection, the shell mound was mined for material for road construction.



Water, water, everywhere



Parked on indian shell mounds



Too bad it wasn't a little warmer!

With colder winter weather looming just to the north, our course turned westward into the panhandle of Florida. We spent a night in Apalachicola, which at one time was one of the largest cotton shipping towns in the US and is still one of the more prosperous small towns we have seen. The shops, restaurants and streets were quite busy without seeming really touristy. A local resident recommended Crooked Island as a favorite beach stop and, being along our way, we checked it out the following day. Crooked Island is located on a U.S. Air Force base and turned out to be very beautiful with white, sandy beaches stretching far in both directions. The panhandle coastline is much differ-



Strange shell conglomerates



Lots of pretty little shells

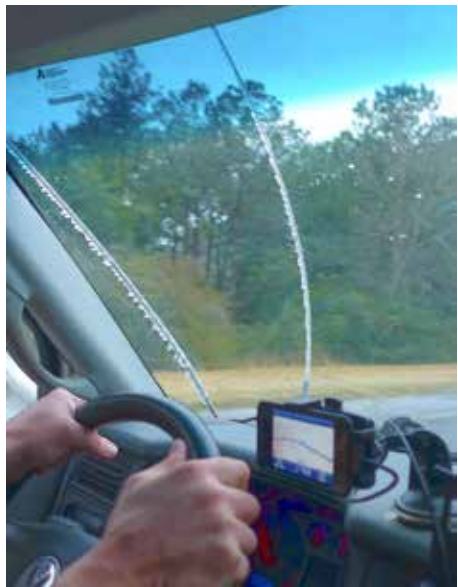
ent than the west coast of Florida where there are very few beaches. We ended up spending two nights on the island and I finally spent some time painting and drawing and sitting still. Very challenging for me! I also had several nice long beach walks.



Spanish Moss hanging from tree limbs



As the weather deteriorated and we headed into Georgia, the rain turned into ice when it touched anything, transforming the road into a skating rink and our antennas into crystal stalagmites. We wisely decided to layover at a nearby Walmart and spent two nights there, using our wonderful Wave 8000 propane catalytic heater to ward off the freezing cold and keep our rig warm and toasty inside. What are the chances that the one winter I spend in the southeast happens to be the coldest one they have had in 25 years? Just my luck.



Beginning to ice up!



Notice the little icicles!

After the Great Ice Storm of '14, we zipped along through the continuing cold, but clear, to Saucier, Mississippi. It is not pronounced the way it is spelled and heck if I can remember how they say it. "So-sha", I think. We spent two days there with our friends Larry and Wendy whom we met and stayed with on PEI. It was really great to see them again. In no time Wendy began whipping up wonderful food for us and Larry, being an advanced male, wasn't



Bring out the plows! Oh yeah, we don't have any!

hesitant to ask Thayer for help with his battery disconnect solenoid. Initially they thought it would need to be replaced but you might be surprised how hard it is to get simple RV parts from regular auto parts stores. So, Thayer just ended up taking it apart and fixing it good as new, saving \$85 and a bunch of driving around to parts stores.



An 'Advanced Male'

community. There aren't a lot of entertainment options nearby but I've discovered that not all people are like me – they don't mind sitting in the sun, reading and doodling around.

We cooked sausages over the fire, drank wine and Gin and tonics and had a lovely old time with them. Over the past few years they have migrated to the same small, private campground which includes all the amenities for a reasonable price and they've gotten to know all the other campers, all five rigs worth, as friends. We've found this to be typical in the RV'ing com-



Wendy and Larry

Wendy was also having PC computer issues that Thayer quickly solved by buying a Macbook online for them (their dime, obviously). We will rendezvous with the computer in Arkansas, Thayer will work his magic on it and then forward it to them. Sadly, Wendy will then really be able to dominate on 'Words with Friends'. I was nice enough to help her get started but now she just goes ahead and starts taking me to school! Once she gets that new machine there will be no stopping the carnage. Anyway, we had a really nice time reconnecting with some of our boondocking friends!



Wendy and mobile garden

We continued west toward New Orleans but first there was work to do for Habitat for Humanity in Mandeville, on the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Inspired by Emerick, a Salt Lake City friend, I contacted the local H4H office, near the boondocking that we already had lined up. It took about 5 minutes to get on the schedule for this week. The three houses under construction are located less than 10 minutes away



A comfy stay at Mandeville Christian Church

from our comfy camping spot, the Mandeville Christian Church, which has provided us with everything we need this whole week including electricity, showers, laundry, hot water, great company, dinner on Wednesday, recliners, cooking facilities.... It has been just wonderful. There are four other RVs parked here under the trees. On Super Bowl Sunday I whipped up a giant pot of gumbo and we enjoyed watching Seattle shame Denver on the big screen in the church sanctuary with our new friends (who included a lonely Bronco fan). We've had some cold weather, below freezing two nights in a row so having all of these conveniences has been terrific.



One of three Habitat for Humanity houses



The three houses under construction were all in the drywall phase so we were mudding and taping seams, windows, corners, walls and ceilings for four days. It was hard work! It was very tiring being on our feet all day and using muscles that haven't seen much action lately.



Siding/handrail crew

The houses are not big but they are well laid out and will be very comfortable for the new owners. We enjoyed our experience but are very tired and sore. Now we can get back to lounging around and seeing the country!



Building wheelchair ramps



Knocking out windows

At lunch Thayer and I put on long underwear and extra fleece up top. The girls were fun to work with as they chattered away in Dutch, sang songs and laughed a lot. They were strong and worked very hard for the most part, certainly harder than your "typical" teenager (boy OR girl). There was also an outside crew working on wheelchair ramps, siding and porch railings.



Mud me!

Monday, February 24, 2014

## Two weeks in Mandeville, LA

Our stay in Mandeville has been extended by new friends, sites to see, easy parking and hookups, better weather and just enjoying being in one spot for a while. The day after finishing up our H4H work we were invited by our fellow RVers to go plantation touring in the country west of New Orleans. There are two must see plantations that are close enough to each other to do both in one day. They are also very different from each other and each represent a different period of history important to Louisiana.



Map of Mississippi Plantations

Back when France was in charge of the area the acreages along the Mississippi were carved up into long narrow parcels of land and given to friends of the authorities. They all had frontage on the river for transporting the sugar cane products and other crops that they produced. Sugar cane was extremely profitable and as the French became richer



Laura Big House



Cheerful colors at the Laura Plantation they started building large homes within site of the river. All of the work on the plantations and most of the building was done by slaves.

The first plantation we visited was the Laura Plantation, named for one of the last of the family who built it and lived there for 90 odd years. It was built in 1805 in the French Creole style, meaning it was not huge, but well built, off the ground and painted in the bright, vivid colors of the Caribbean. Business was conducted in the front side of the house facing the river, and, in this family, the business was



Slave quarters





Slave quarters, Oak Alley

run by the women. The head of the business was called the president and that person was chosen because they were the smartest in the family. Turns out the women had the brains of the family, though several of them were less than enthusiastic about being in charge. Their lives revolved around the business of growing and selling sugar. Buyers came and went, but it was not a social life, it was a lonely life, and it seems like the men would die young or not be worth the food they were fed. Life for the slaves was horrendous, watch the movie '12 Years a Slave' if you need a refresher course in slavery. Laura was the last of the line for the original family and she utterly rejected plan-



New profession for Thayer?



Oak Alley, Big House

tation life. She wanted to get an education, speak English and be American. She also hated slavery. In 1892 Laura sold the plantation for a pittance, moved to St. Louis and never looked back. The German family who bought the plantation ran it for another 95 years. In her latter years Laura wrote a memoir which was found in the 1990's by the man who wanted to restore the plantation, and it was he who gave it her name. Laura's memoir paints a vivid picture of life on a plantation and the history of her proud and determined family. What a cast of colorful characters!



Antebellum belles



Originally named Bon Sejour (pleasant sojourn) but re dubbed "Oak Alley" in recognition of the quarter-mile avenue of 28 giant, live oaks leading up to the home.

The next plantation was very different, built in the Greek Revival style, the gracious plantation home that you have seen in movies and pictures. Oak Alley gets its name from two rows of Live Oaks, 28 of them in all, that stretch from the house to the lane in front of the river. These trees are 300 years old and no one knows who planted them way back in the 1700's. The big house was built about 1839. The plantation was built as a gift from a husband to his new bride. Unfortunately, he forgot to ask her if she would enjoy living in the country and it turns out that she did not enjoy living in the country. She stuck it out for a few years, bouncing back and forth to New Orleans for her socializing and shopping. Finally she just didn't come back but continued spending funds freely, entertaining and running a large home in the city. Her husband, down on the farm, was not able to keep up with her spending, got sick and died. She tried to run



Oak Alley, interior





Beautiful tour guide

the farm for a few years, her son took over for a few more years but the debts were too great and they were forced to sell what they could to pay them off. Eventually a couple named Stewart bought the home, refurbished and improved it, and lived in it till they died.

Today the home is a major tourist draw and is used for weddings, movies and special events. They have a restaurant, cafe and lodgings. The slave quarters were partly rebuilt to educate visitors and give them a good idea of the cramped living conditions and harsh treatment doled out to the slaves. The grounds and gardens were



Receiving a pineapple from your host was the polite way of being informed it was time for you to hit the road



Oak Alley, Dining Room

extensive and very beautiful, the huge Live Oaks dominating the landscape with their 130 ft. spreading branches. They can live to be 600 years old! At the Civil War tent we learned about major events of the War that happened in this area of Louisiana. There was a very learned young soldier manning the general's tent that day.



RV friends

It was a great day, spent with Jim, Sandi, Betsy and Clark, some of our RV buddies here at the church. A little bit about the Mandeville Christian Church...it is a small church with only about 35-40 members. The building sits on several

acres, just off the highway going into Mandeville. Lynn and Linn are the Boondocker couple that we contacted for our stay, they have been the temporary ministers here, off and on, for several years. They are full time RVers with some property in Oregon. Kevin is the church's young(27yo) pastor who is currently living in the building. He is funny and can deliver a fine sermon as well as cook up a storm on Wednesday nights for the weekly church and RVer dinner. There are two other RVs here with us, two couples from the Southwest who have been traveling together for almost a year. We have had many meals together, car-pooled to the grocery store, played Mexican Train dominoes into the night and just had a great time with them. One of them is having some medical problems which has been worrisome, but they are optimistic and hopeful about the outcome. Jim and Clark are both retired military – Jim was Army, and Clark was a test pilot in the Air Force. This will have some real advantageous come parade day.



Thayer (Navy), Jim (Army), Clark (Air Force)

Thayer and I spent two days in New Orleans. The first was a cold foggy day, midweek. It was very quiet but that made it easier for us to get our bearings and do some exploring. We took a three hour guided van ride around the French Quarter, the Hurricane Katrina disaster area, and the Garden District. It gave us a great overview of the city and helped us decide what we wanted to do on our next visit. We also took in some music at the New Orleans Jazz National Park. They have two venues for live music, on this

day we heard a fantastic pianist playing some wonderful jazz, boogie woogie, and more. We practiced riding the street-car, walking safely in the French Quarter, and staying mostly out of trouble.

Our second day in New Orleans was planned so that we could take in a Carnival Parade in the evening. It was a much busier day in N.O., a Saturday, a parade day, and NBA All Stars game day, it was a happening place! The street-cars and streets were full of loud, friendly people. We rode to the Garden District and did a self guided walking tour of the historic and beautiful homes of the neighborhood. So many to see, so many lovely architectural details and



N.O. Jazz National Park



Garden District





Sandra's house in the Garden District

designs, wonderful iron-work and beautiful yards and gardens. The sidewalks are terrible so you must be careful to not fall on your head while ogling the houses. I think our favorite was Sandra Bull-ock's home, it just looked perfect. I don't think she spends much time there.



Street art







Decorated for Mardi Gras



Interesting shopping!



Another nice home in the Garden District



U.S. Marine Brass Band at the Mint

Next, we visited the Mint, which is where the National Park has another music venue and a Jazz Museum. We were able to hear the U.S. Marine Brass Band playing loud jazz! It was fantastic, and they looked and sounded as precise you would expect of fine military musicians. We then enjoyed a wonderful Italian meal at Frank's, located across the street from the French Market. I have never heard Thayer praise any food the way he raved about his chicken alfredo! He still reminisces about it.



Dinner and serenade at Frank's



Scales at the Mint

Next up was the big Carnival Parade, featuring the Krewe de Vieux. Probably most of you know all about Mardi Gras but I'm just learning so here is what I understand about this crazy event. It starts shortly after Christmas with the Carnival season, which lasts until Mardi Gras, which lasts until Lent, and is thusly based on the Easter calendar. Carnival season seems to be the warm up for the full blown craziness of Mardi Gras.



Always love the mules



Carnival Parade

thing to do so you have something to be forgiven for! Anyway, it is BIG business and many, many people are totally into it. Various Krewes (organizations of like minded, creative folks) work all year long to come up with a themes, build their floats or contraptions and make costumes, gather throwing materials and start a booze collection. In the French Quarter, on their parade night, they drink their booze collection, put on their costumes, find their float and follow it through the narrow streets. There is lots of dancing, drinking, singing, horns, laughter and music. French Quarter themes are very adult but, to my



Carnival Parade

During Mardi Gras you get all of your temptations and sinning out of your system because you know you gotta be good during Lent! And then, of course, all will be forgiven at Easter, so a couple months of partying and debauchery seems like a "reasonable"





Here's a common theme and crowd pleaser surprise, there were lots of little kids there. Some of the Krewes have been around for 100 years! Apparently, since we are only in the Carnival season, this parade was fairly tame which was fine by me. The highlight of the night was catching up with friends Jaime Clarke and Marshall Weinstein, visiting New Orleans from Seattle, with Marshall's parents. Haven't seen them since last June and it was fun to stand on a noisy street 3000 miles from Kenmore and shout at each other for a bit. The only bling I scored was during the afternoon before the parade when some was being thrown from a balcony.



Pre-parade entertainment at Slidell



Even the horses love Mardi Gras! By way of contrast, the next day we went to a small town called Slidell for the Krewe of Perseus parade. It was very family friendly and we were deluged with bling from the 20+ big floats. There were also emergency vehicles of all types, marching bands, drill teams galore, horsemen and women, rope jumpers, bagpipers, big and little girl beauty queens, clowns, and much more! It was a fantastic parade! Not much in the way of candy compared to your typical 4th of July parade though. Sitting on the sidewalk with retired military guys wearing their hats is a sure fire way to get the most bling around here. Because Clark and Jim



Slidell parade



Cute minis! kept handing their bling to Sandi, the throwers didn't think they had any so they kept throwing more stuff to them. Many people came up to thank them for their service.

I spent several days exploring the Tammany Trace Bike Trail which stretches to the north and south of the trailhead closest to the church. Biking 5 miles to the south brought me to the Fountainbleu State Park on the shores of Lake Ponchatrain. Its a big park with many Live Oaks providing shady picnic areas, big fun fountains for the kids, and several miles of nature trails. Going to the north brought



Slidell parade



They only tossed out bling, not beer :o( me near the H4H site that we had worked on so I stopped and did a couple of hours worth of painting. The highway and streets are miserable for biking because there is no shoulder and lots of traffic. I found that the drivers were very courteous and moved over for me and slowed down. The bike path was awesome, really flat and smooth, and no one else seems to use it. I didn't do the whole thing but it is 30+ miles in length.



Jim, Sandi, me, Thayer and our haul of bling



Our two weeks in Mandeville were a delightful interlude in our trip. We met some terrific people, contributed to the community, explored the city and countrysides, and had plenty of party & relaxing time. We were kind of sad to be leaving our lovely spot but the time had come, with warmer weather on the way, to find our way to Arkansas.



Tucked in for the night with a good book



New Orleans - Buy or rent, with or without ghosts

Monday, March 17, 2014

No, we’re not lost!! We just had to get through Texas!

I know it's been a while but here goes. I've had to look back through my notes to even get started!

In the several days that we took driving to Texarkana we made several interesting historical stops. The first being the town of Natchez. This quaint little burg is located high on a bluff above the Mississippi River. Since 1716 it has been occupied by the French, Spanish, British and finally Americans. Early on it was important to control the towns along the River. Natchez features a lovely park at the edge of the bluff with good walking trails, historical information, and nature trails. It was once a very busy place, being a major shipping port for cotton and goods up and down the river. It has many lovely antebellum homes built by wealthy farmers and businessmen. Natchez was not involved in any Civil War battles so



Older Natchez home



Another fine antebellum home the homes have been preserved. In a more humble, but nice home is the Johnson House National Historic Park. It is the old home of one of the most successful free black families in the south. Johnson started as a barber and expanded his enterprises until he became quite a wealthy man. Strangely enough, he owned slaves. In general, he treated them well as long as they worked hard but was abusive when they did not. He was shot by a neighbor over a dispute and, because the neighbor claimed to have some white blood in him, and the only witnesses were black, was not punished. They had a great exhibit about the free blacks living alongside the privileged whites. There was



Den of Iniquity Under the Hill



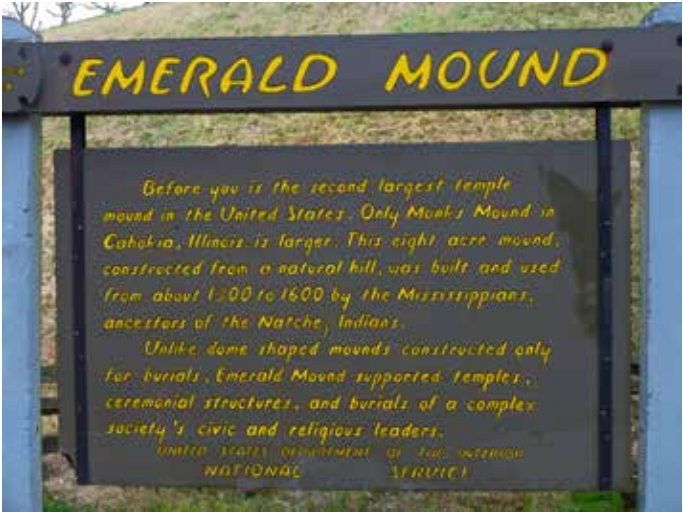
View from the upper town also an upper and lower part of the town. The part down on the river, called Under the Hill, was not a safe place for decent folks. In 1816 William Richardson wrote: “From this filthy spot emanate all the contagious disorders that infest the town above.”



And what's so great about the South?



Connecting Natchez to Vicksburg is the Natchez Trace Parkway which originally was the road the Native Americans used in their yearly migrations up and down the river. Now it is a scenic highway that winds through the hills and valleys through what I am sure are beautiful forests in the right time of year. We also took a side trip to Emerald Indian Mound, the second largest in the U.S. It was not a burial mound but was used for temples and such. Other side trips included an old farmstead and the Windsor Ruins, a fabulous ruined pre-civil war home.



One of many churches



Homesteader's tools



Windsor



Windsor ruins

At one time the Windsor plantation covered 2,600 acres. Smith Coffee Daniell II, from Mississippi and the son of an Indian fighter turned farmer and landowner, constructed the mansion in 1859-1861. Basic construction of the house was done by slave labor. The bricks for use in the 45-foot columns were made in a kiln across the road from the house and then the columns were covered with mortar and plaster. There were 29 of these fluted columns supporting the projecting roof line, had iron Corinthian capitals at the top and were joined at the galleries by an ornamental iron balustrade.

Skilled carpenters were brought in from New England for the finished woodwork. The iron stairs, column capitals and balustrades were manufactured in St. Louis and shipped down the Mississippi River to the Port of Bruinsburg, several miles west of Windsor.



The glorious and short lived Windsor Mansion

When completed, Windsor contained over 25 rooms, each with its own fireplace. Among other innovations, the mansion featured interior baths supplied with water from a tank in the attic. The mansion cost about \$175,000 (equal to over \$4.5 million today) to build and was completed in 1861. Unfortunately for him, Smith Daniell only lived in the home a few weeks before he died at the age of 34.

During the American Civil War, the home was used by both Union and Confederate troops. Confederate forces used the roof observatory as an observation platform and signal station. After the capture of the area by Union forces, the mansion was used as a hospital following the Battle of Port Gibson and as an observation station. The home survived the war and continued to be used for social gatherings in the area. Mark Twain stayed at the home and is said to have used the roof observatory to observe the Mississippi River.

On 17 February 1890, a guest left a lighted cigar on a balcony when the family had gone into town to pick up the mail. As they were riding back, they saw flames shooting through the shingled roof. The fire burned from top to bottom making it impossible to extinguish, and the house was completely destroyed in the conflagration.



Column construction method. Metal capitals resisted the fire.





Vicksburg Union cannon

The next major stop was Vicksburg, MS, site of the battle that broke the Confederate Army's back and assured the Union victory in the Civil War. Gaining control of the Mississippi effectively cut off the South's supply lines. Though the Confederates had the high ground and were well entrenched they couldn't handle the siege that Gen. Grant set up around them. Grant had tried to attack but was beaten back several times. He was in a bit of a hurry because he was actually caught between two armies and feared attack from behind. The siege did the trick though. The Vicksburg National Battlefield is filled with monuments rivaling those found at Gettysburg. From the high ground you can almost



The Ironclad ship Cairo

see the action of the tremendous battle. Also part of the park is a museum featuring the Ironclad ship "Cairo." The Cairo was sunk in a tributary of the Mississippi by the Confederates using underwater mines. Years later it was carefully raised from the riverbed and preserved. They found many, many artifacts and have an excellent display.



Cairo artifacts



Vicksburg National Military Park and Battlefield



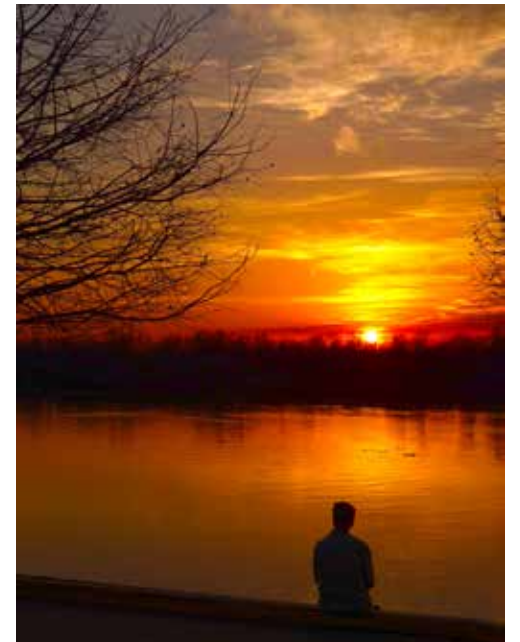
The M/V 'Emily Davis', a 3,000HP pusher tug, with two oil barges as she passes an ACE Mississippi river model and red/green channel markers ashore

In the town are more beautiful homes and churches. Down on the river you can see the levees that have been built over the years, the largest wall has the flood levels recorded. The Army Corps of Engineers has a large center there which educates people as to what the ACE has been doing over the years to control and contain the River. They showed many of the models they have gone through over the years to figure out how the river runs and what effects the dredging and levees would have on it. Now they do it all with computers. It was extremely interesting and informative.



Simulator Captain on the Mississippi IV

Also on the site is the ship Mississippi IV, an A.C.E. working ship dating back to the 1960's. Like the Ingham in Key West, this ship is preserved just as it was when it was decommissioned. Not as old as the Ingham, it was in much better shape. In the pilot house they had a simulator where you had to guide the ship through various obstacles on the river. Thayer had a good time with that and even completed one of the missions.



Sunset over Vicksburg





Where the heck are we?

The miles from Vicksburg to Doddridge flew by, where we were cheerfully greeted by Thayer's Aunt Vivian. We spent 10 days here, Thayer was mostly involved with collecting the family history, recording Vivian's stories about family, tagging names to faces and photos, and listening endlessly.

Vivian is 92 years old and has a remarkable memory of the extended family. Seeing a photo would unleash a torrent of stories about family, friends and neighbors. Thayer tried to keep her centered on family but it was hard to either keep her focused or to understand just who she was relating about. Thayer has the whole family tree on his computer and can plug in new names, facts and events as he learns them.



Serious game playing

I walked everyday and found a route of about 3 miles through the woods that led to a little old cemetery. I also played hundreds of games of dominoes with Vivian as she chatted with Thayer. While he entered the info we would play a few games, then she would talk some more. Thayer finally began recording our conversations and her stories on his laptop as she talked, initially so he could keep facts straight but also just to have her voice to remember. She certainly is entertaining to listen to when she gets going! I didn't realize (nor did Thayer) just how colorful his kinfolk were.



Thayer collecting family history from Vivian



A couple of those wild Hugheses



Now, those are some real biscuits!

We met her grandson, John Paul and his family and spent some good times with them. They came out for dinner several times and we went to a Mardi Gras parade in town one afternoon. Vivian can still dish up some good southern cooking! Don't believe I've eaten that many carbohydrates in one meal in my life, but she taught me how to make some awesome biscuits! We finally drove away, a little saddened knowing in our hearts that we may never see her again. Thayer did a great job of collecting and organizing the family story.



More Hugheses

We then drove across the big part of Texas, staying 4 nights at boondocking sites. Why did they have to put Texas in the middle, anyway? Next up: Carlsbad Caverns!



Yup, it's flat



Everywhere you look



Displayed at a rest stop and historical marker



Stopped for a lunch break



Sunday, March 23, 2014

**Carlsbad Cavern Natl. Park &  
Guadalupe Mtn. Natl. Park**



First views of Guadalupe Mtns. from BLM lands just before sunset

You'll have to imagine how excited we were to see something that looked like mountains again! Coming out of the flatlands and into New Mexico, just seeing those mountains gave us new energy and enthusiasm – and they aren't even all that big. After getting our bearings in Carlsbad, and stopping at the BLM offices and Visitor center, we were ready to go. There are some BLM lands near the entrance to Carlsbad and though it was noisy with oil trucks occasionally rolling by we endured one night there.



R&R from all the intense R&R



Carlsbad Caverns were splendid beyond words, I won't even try to describe them but I'll post a bunch of pictures. I will explain a little about the unusual geology of the area. Most caverns are located in large limestone formations created millions of years ago by industrious little sea creatures like algae, sponges and shellfish. Many caverns are created by water from the surface flowing through cracks in limestone formations, dissolving the soft rock, and creating the large rooms and passageways. Then, over hundreds of thousands of years, groundwater seeping into the spaces and dripping and flowing creates the stalactites and stalagmites that make up the amazing formations, including columns, chandeliers, crystals, sheets, curtains, and everything in between. What is unusual about Carlsbad



Main Entrance and descent into Carlsbad Caverns

is that the major work of hollowing out the ancient coral reef was not done by flowing water, but by hydrogen sulfide rich water seeping up from fossil fuel deposits below, reacting with the water in the limestone to create sulfuric acid. This acid ate away the limestone much faster than

just flowing water and contributed to the many unusual and enormous rooms of Carlsbad. Most of the formations were then created in the usual way, water seeping into the caverns over millennia. Carlsbad is mostly a dry cavern now, there is very little dripping water, partly because it

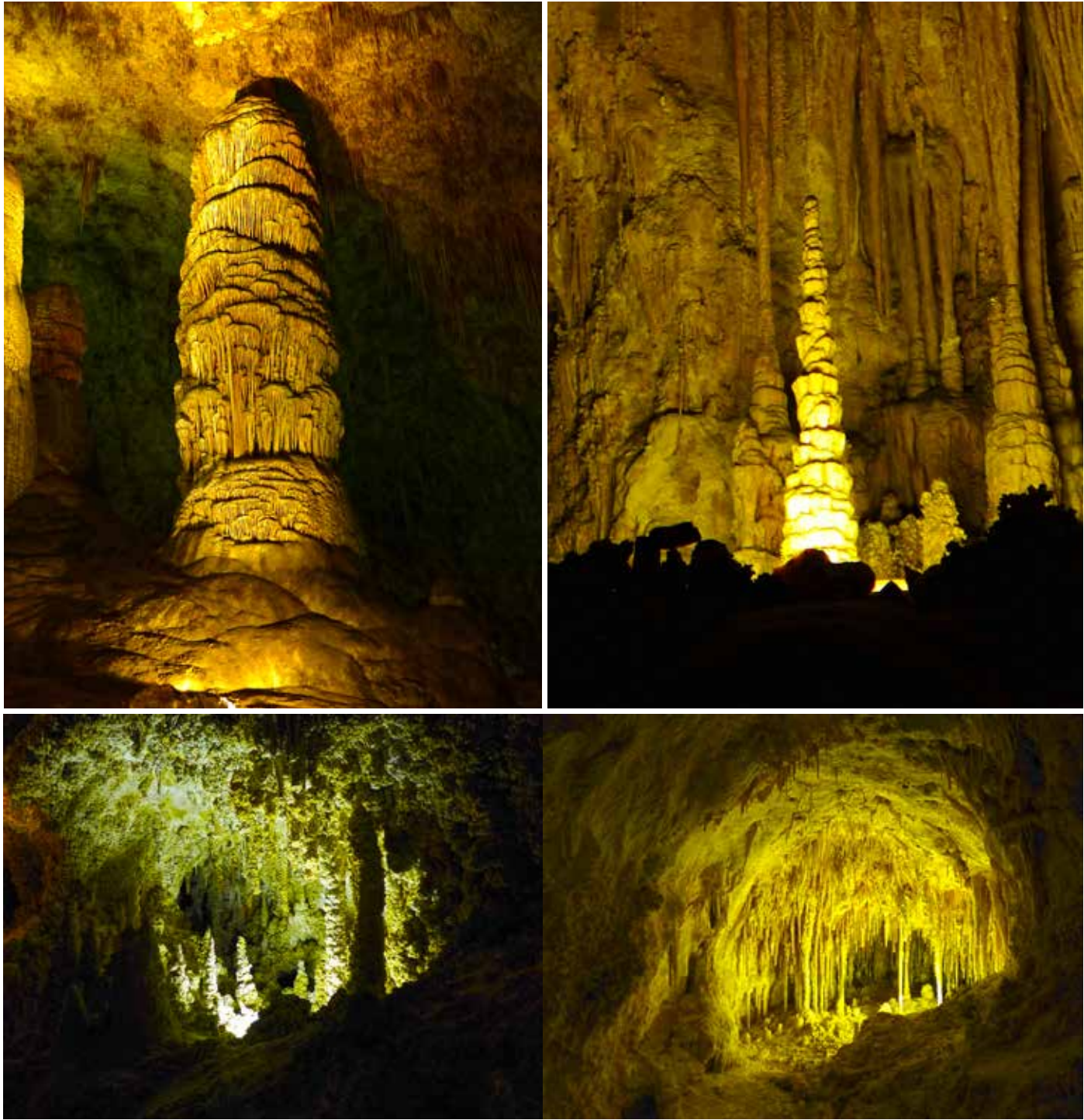




is located in a desert on a warming planet. The two and half miles of trails through the main part of the cavern are very easy and well planned and maintained. You can do side trips and additional sites for a fee but we found that two and a half miles was plenty. The NP works hard to preserve and protect the cavern and have pretty strict rules. What we really liked is that it is self guided and you can leisurely take your time to enjoy the cave. Thayer and I had fun playing with our cameras and experimenting with different settings and effects.



Lion's tail formation







Heading back into Texas (sigh) we drove a few miles down the road to Guadalupe Mountain National Park. These beautiful, rugged mountains are made of the same limestone as Carlsbad and probably even have caves and caverns underneath. The highland areas, at 8000 ft. resemble



a northwest forest rather than a desert habitat. We didn't visit this area but it looked very beautiful in the visitor's video. There are two main entrances to the park, the first being McKittrick Canyon, arguably the most beautiful place in Texas. It has a very different ecology than the surrounding areas, many plants and animals are hold overs from way back when there was more water around. A stream flows through the canyon, though you can't always see it as it goes underground for long stretches. The gray and brown cliffs tower above the creek bed and forests of pine, cactus, maple and even Texas madrone trees fill in the low areas.



McKittrick Canyon



McKittrick's Lodge



A kolk formed rock basin

What really stands out is that the stream bed is filled with white boulders, all rounded and shaped from tumbling downstream during the flash floods that happen fairly regularly. These white rocks came from the cliffs above but the brown and gray coloring gets worn off on the way downstream, exposing the white sandstone. It is quite beautiful. In 1930 Mr. McKittrick built a beautiful stone lodge about half way up the canyon, above the flood areas and lived in it for many years. He donated the lodge and the property in the 60's, initiating the formation the park. The other entrance to the park has an old farm house and barns of one the earliest white settlers in the area.



Homesteader spread with springs

Many hiking trails start near the Visitor's center so the next morning I hiked up another canyon similar to McKittrick Canyon except it was a little more rugged with much of the trail in the empty streambed. The very best part was about 3/4 the way up where the water way wound its way down a steep stretch of canyon. It cut a slot canyon about 60 feet deep and 15 feet wide and 150 feet long, below that took several 90 degree turns, dropped into a pool, turned 90 degrees again and then flattened out. The pools are formed by kolks, which are underwater vortices created when rushing water passes underwater obstacles in boundary areas of high shear. Gradients of really high velocity produce violently rotating columns of water, similar to a tornado, and any rocks caught in the vortex are either lifted out or grind their way down into the bedrock like a water drill. It would be awesome to see in a flood stage!

The night we spent in the parking lot (that they call a campground and thus charge a fee) we had a fun evening with a young couple from Seattle on a 6 week jaunt in their old VW camper. Andrew works for Homestreet Bank and Andrea works for the Seattle Parks Dept. in Environmental Learning so we had lots to talk about. We had so much fun listening to their adventures at Mardi Gras in Eunice, LA. Totally different from our experience but it sounded wild and fun! Next time we are going there for Mardi Gras!



Odds and Ends

Before leaving Texas I do have to mention the wonderful little town of San Elizario located about 20 miles south of El Paso and part of the Historic Mission Trail. It has one of the oldest churches on the trail, nicely preserved with a few blocks of the town including a very good museum, many art stores, the jail that Billy the Kid broke into to save his buddy, and some touristy shops. The lady at the museum invited us to stay in the church parking lot for the night and sweetened the deal by telling us about the live music at the local hangout, El Desperado. The people we met during the day were super friendly, almost all of them mentioning the



...speaking of 'odd ends'...



San Elizario Church

musical evening and encouraging us to stay. The music was not great, a local garage band, but every person we had met during the day came up and talked with us during the evening. Rene, the group leader, introduced us and made a big deal so we felt very special. When he asked us



On the Mission Trail



Funky adobe

how many miles we had driven to get there someone in the crowd yelled out "They must be lost!" They didn't know we've come the long way around! The next day we walked the town, chatted with the shopkeepers and a boot maker, and visited several more churches on the Historic Trail but they were closed.



Cobbler & leather worker



San Elizario Jail

We spent 3 nights at a Boondocker just north of El Paso. They have a dusty 8 acre ranch with some horses and a cow. Thayer worked on getting a new hard drive up and running while I enjoyed the sun and read books. Just across the road is the Rio Grande River and its Biking/Hiking Trail, a wide, smooth trail which follows the mighty Rio Grande down the valley. They haven't seen much water in the river in the past few years, no surprises there.



Outback Macho Mobile!!!



As of Marty Robbins fame

We have had a very nice couple of weeks exploring New Mexico. The camping is free and easy in the many BLM sites, the state parks are cheap and have all the amenities, and the scenery is wonderful. It is still cool and there is quite a breeze every day. If any of you are thinking of trying RVing sometime this is the place to have a great experience. For \$225 you can buy an annual state park pass which allows you access to all of the state parks and camping with no fees. We did not do this because we will only be here for a month but you could spend a lot of time here and never get bored. Not only is the natural beauty spectacular but the history of the state is very interesting, from the Native peoples, the Spanish explorers, the Missionaries, Billy the Kid, to the atomic age, rocket development and the beginnings of the space program.





Old Mesilla church

Our boondocker host, Robert, recommended a stop at Old Mesilla, located just south of the larger town of Las Cruces. We were delighted to find an old town square, dating back to the mid 1800's, with an old church on one side, a plaza in the middle, surrounded by restored, old adobe build-



Clean & attractive lines



Bright colors everywhere we look

ings. They contain a variety of stores, tourist, art, jewelry, restaurants, and a wonderful book store filled with books about the SW. Robert had recommended the Double Eagle Restaurant and from the outside I was quite dubious, it was just an old adobe alley that led to the door. I went in though



It's like art!



Double Eagle Restaurant



Double Eagle Restaurant

and was delighted to find an ornate old bar with sparkling chandeliers and a spacious, garden-like restaurant located in an interior atrium. In smaller rooms off the main atrium were dining areas beautifully decorated, where they could accommodate private parties. Later we both came back and had margaritas and a nice meal. I learned not to judge buildings from the outside! Especially adobe, they look very earthy and plain from the outside but are very beautiful and interesting inside.



Double Eagle Bar



Double Eagle Restaurant





Josephina's

Breakfast at Josephina's

Beautiful doorways

We spent the night on a quiet street nearby and in the morning went to Josephina's for breakfast, they have a wonderful outdoor patio with fountains and big shady trees.

We've been having great weather, blue skies, reasonable temperatures, cool breezes and chilly nights. We are looking forward to getting into the National Forests and BLM sites for some real camping!



Mexican folklore says that hanging a Ristra on your door or in your home brings good luck!







Where's a donkey when you need one?



"This is the end you've been waiting for!"

Wednesday, April 2, 2014

## New Mexico Outback!



It's a tough lifestyle and not everybody can do this!

Our first camping spot was Aguirre Springs campground just over the mountains from Las Cruces. It is a BLM campground with about 30 some sites and pit toilets. If you have a National Park annual pass the camping is free.



After toting it 18K miles, finally using our firewood



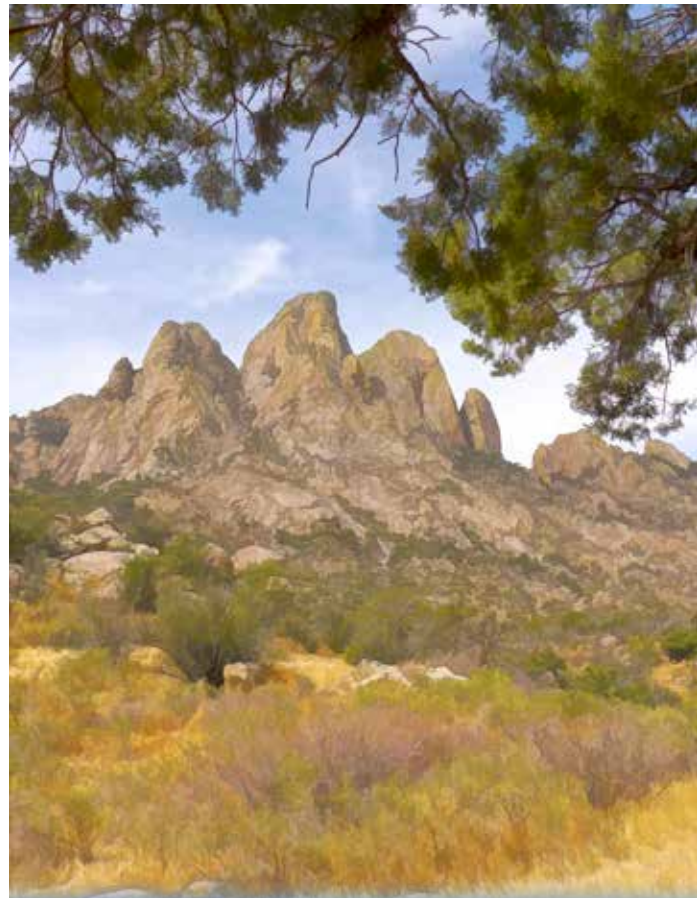
Moon over sunrise over the Organ Mountains

There is no water or power at the campground but water is available 4 miles away at the host's site. With a 20 gallon tank we can go for a long time between refills. The campground is nestled up under the cliffs of the Organ Mountains, with spectacular jagged peaks reaching into the sky. The sunrises are fantastic! There are two very nice hikes from the campground, one a loop hike through the rocks and cactus, the other going up to Baylor Pass to see the valley on the other side of the range. Both are about 4+ miles round trip. We met some nice people, one couple from the Netherlands who regularly come to the U.S. for RVing, renting a rig and spending a month at a time. They say there are good deals to be had if you do a delivery for the rental company, with rates as low as \$10/day in some cases.



Big trees even in the desert!





White Sands National Monument was our next destination, just a few miles from the Springs. The dunes are simply amazing! We felt like we were driving up in the mountains in winter with piles of snow along the road and a hard packed dirty ice surface on the road. They also allow sledding on plastic disks on the dunes near the road so we saw crowds of people racing down the dunes on snow disks! These dunes are by far the largest gypsum dunes in the world, dwarfing other sites, with it's 275 square mile expanse. The next biggest is a mere smear 10 sq. miles in Mexico. The gypsum comes from the surrounding mountains which are just full of the stuff, dating back to the ancient sea beds that are the reason for most of the landscapes in this area. Gypsum is quite soluble in



White Sands NM, interdune area



Looks like snow, doesn't it?!!

water, so it gets washed down the hills into the Tularosa Basin where it forms shallow lakes. These lakes have no outlet so the gypsum accumulates and concentrates. During dry periods the water evaporates leaving the gypsum which then crystallizes to form selenite, a soft mineral. For 10,000 years wind and weather have been breaking down these soft crystals and blowing them around to form dunes. The secret to these dunes is the water that exists right below the surface of the area. This high water table anchors the base of the dunes and keeps them from blowing away entirely. There are several kinds of dunes and they move



White Sands, N.M.





at different rates and have different shapes. The youngest dunes romp along at up to 35 ft. per year, the older dunes get slowed down by plants anchoring themselves in the sand. As you can imagine, the plants and animals here have some pretty amazing adaptations which enable them to survive in a very harsh environment. The plants have varied and interesting ways of anchoring themselves and getting access to water. The animals have changed over the years to be light colored in order to blend into their blindingly white environment. The lizards actually have quite a blue tinge to them. We went for a nice long ramble in the dunes and did a very informative walk with a ranger at sunset, where we learned all about the adaptations of plants in the dunes.



Special camouflage

"No. I'm pretty sure the car is THIS way."



It's not easy to be a plant at White Sands



Spring from Dog Canyon

By this time we were about ready for a real shower, so we found our way to Oliver Lee State Park, not far from White Sands. Showers, laundry by hand, topping off the batteries and some fabulous views were all available. Everything but trees! Fortunately it was not overly hot since there was not a lot of shade. I wandered around the historical areas of the park, enjoyed the cactus garden and scoped out the hikes for the next day. We got up early enough to beat the sun as we climbed the hill to get up Dog Canyon, topping out on a series of benches that wind up the canyon. We were treated to lovely canyon views and rugged cliffs all around. It was about a 3 mile hike into an old stone cabin



Sunset in Dog Canyon



Pretty springs in the desert

built by ranchers in the 1930's. It is very hard to imagine cattle ranching in this country but back when they started doing it here it was during a wetter climate and there was more food for the cows and water for orchards and farming. Dog Canyon still has spring water running down it, not a lot, but enough to create pretty pools, sculpted rocks and seeps filled with ferns and water plants. The original settlers built quite a large dam and irrigation canals to water their crops. One of the settlers built long primitive fences made of the stone blocks that are everywhere.



Sunset over Frenchy's homestead





Early morning hike up Dog Canyon

We spent some time in Alamogordo, getting caught up with life on the internet, shopping, oil change and getting organized. We visited the Space History Museum and spent a good part of the day there. I was quite impressed with how pivotal New Mexico was in the development of rockets, bombs and space exploration. Thayer showed off his piloting talents by landing the space



Space Cadet landing the shuttle



shuttle, at the most difficult level on the simulator, on his second try. It must be all that practice he gets driving us in the RV. Anyway, the SHM offers a very large helping of space history and we walked away with a lot of information to process.



A 1950's Nike Ajax Surface-to-Air missile



Rocket engine



Next, we found ourselves heading up into the Sacramento Mountains east of Alamogordo, the first stop being the National Solar Observatory in Sunspot, NM. They have a good visitor center with the most difficult information packed into the smallest space I have yet seen. It was very dense and took a long time to get through. They



Dunn Observatory control room

play a NOVA video which was very informative and had spectacular footage of the sun and it's wild and crazy activities. I'm not so worried about asteroids anymore, one giant burp from the sun and we'll all be toast. We then were able to see two of the big telescopes that scientists from all over the world come to for their research.

Their most impressive telescope is the Dunn Solar Telescope, weighing in at 200 tons and measuring 136 ft above the surface and 228 ft. underground! The main part of the scope floats on a pool of mercury weighing 10 tons, this allows for smooth and easy movement of the scope as it tracks the sun across the sky. It was pretty amazing! The observatory is located on the top of Sacramento Peak, about 9200 ft. above sea level, still pretty chilly this time of year.



Above ground section of Dunn Observatory solar telescope



Light guide and spectrograph

We spent the night just down the road in a Lincoln NF campground. We are high up in the mountains around here, the campgrounds are at about 7800 feet. Presently we are near the White Mountain Wilderness Area, with lovely camping and great hiking. More on this in the next post!



## Camping in New Mexico



Argentina Campground. I went on several long hikes, climbing up toward 9000 ft. in the local peaks, seeing the forest just coming out of winter. There were still some patches of snow but the trees are starting to leaf out and a few dandelions were attracting butterflies. Lower down the fruit trees are blooming and grasses are greening up. We had some fun pho-



Got my camos on!

This has got to be the greatest deal in the U.S.! Free or very low cost campgrounds in spectacular county, hiking trails abounding for the restless, corrals for horses, sun shelters, fire pits, odor free pit toilets, garbage, even electricity in some of them. The water is a bit more scarce but we've had no problems with that. We spent 4 nights in a Lincoln NF campground called



tographing the small waterfalls and building rock sculptures. I'm practicing and learning how to use some of the many features on my camera. Can you tell?

They must have some terrible forest fires around here, evidenced by the many burned slopes we've seen in our travels. Along



Best food for miles around has gone through over the years. Smokey ended up living in the National Zoo in DC but is buried here in the monument.

FYI, Teddy Bears are not the same thing, they were inspired by Theodore Roosevelt who was on a hunting trip in the south someplace. They were having trouble finding Teddy a bear but finally their dogs found one and the locals tied it to a tree to wait for Roosevelt



with the fires go great floods in the small creeks coming down the mountains. The road crews keep pretty busy moving sand, gravel and rocks off of the roads. In Capitan you can tour the Smokey the Bear Historical Monument. The original bear cub was rescued after a fire, right here in Lincoln NF, and was the inspiration for the Smokey the Bear "Only YOU can prevent forest fires!" campaign to educate the public about forest fires. The museum displays the founding and history of fire fighting and the stages it



to come and shoot it. Roosevelt spared the bear, not finding it sporting to shoot a bear tied to a tree. Well, that is a nice start to the story but the sad part was that after Theodore left the scene the



Rock people

other hunters went ahead and killed the bear. In one of the many books I've read on this trip, several about T.R., the author related how the Teddy Bear stuffed toy became an overnight sensation and of course we all know of it's continuing popularity. Someone came up with a brilliant follow up to the Teddy Bear and a chance to honor the new President of the US, William Taft. They chose the lowly opossum for the next stuffed toy! Needless to say the idea didn't take off quite like the Teddy Bear.

A short tour of Lincoln, NM taught us all about the rowdy nature of this place back in the 1880's. It was a lawless land, everyone settled their disputes with guns. There were too many



Lazy day fun



This is how Thayer entertains himself conflicts for me to remember but it was a very violent period of history in this area. Fort Stanton, constructed in 1855, was built to protect settlers from the Apache Indians who were not at all happy about being displaced. The economy of the surrounding areas were dependent upon selling goods to the fort, mainly cattle. There were family feuds, business battles, assassinations, scheming, plotting, cattle and horse rustling, drunken brawls and silly squabbles that were fought to the death. Billy the Kid escaped from the Lincoln jail by killing two deputies on the way back from the outhouse. We have been following his trail for several hundred miles it seems. The Mexicans in Lincoln built their own circular fort to defend against Indian raids and to protect their animals. A lady we talked with said to imagine being shut up in this little fort with 50 of your neighbors surrounded by all the animals, with no water or toilets for several days.... not nice. This same lady was spinning wool at a little shop and took the time to show me a crochet pattern for a scarf.



Mexican fort protecting against the Apache





We've stayed in 3 BLM campgrounds lately: Fort Stanton, Three Rivers Petroglyphs Site, and Valley of Fires. Fort Stanton was free and the other two very inexpensive. River of Fires even has nice bathrooms with showers! Happy day! I have been getting plenty of walking, each site has miles of trails. The Petroglyphs site was amazing, over 20,000 pictures spread out on basalt boulders along a ridge. The last inhabitants of this area were the Jornada Mogollon and about 1000 years ago they vanished mysteriously leaving no trace or heritage that anyone claims today. They also have the remains of the village with several dwelling styles present. We spent a lot of time photographing the rock art and imagining what inspired each artist. It has been very hard to choose the photos for this site, it was all so spectacular.

River of Fires is an interesting site, 125 sq. miles of lava flow dating back only a few thousand years. It came from a shield volcano, simple fissures in the crust that oozed out gobs of molten rock. There are the usual lava tubes, pahoehoe, aa, and other cool volcanic features. What I find interesting is that there are more species of plants growing on the lava than there are in the surrounding desert! The convoluted surface is good at protecting plants, moderating temperatures and conserving water. There is also abun-

dant wildlife, mule deer, bats, desert squirrels, tarantulas, and rodents of various kinds. Evolution is hard at work here, the same species that we saw down the road at White Sands in light shades are here as well, except they have much darker

coloring to blend into the black lava. It is quite astonishing to see this volcanic site in the middle of this desert country. It is a very small site compared to Washington's "biggest on the planet" Columbia Plateau Basalts but New Mexico is very proud of their volcano.



Pahoehoe lava flow



Ancient Pinon Pine





Trinity site memorial

The last activity for this post is visiting the Trinity Site at the north end of the White Sands Missile Range. Trinity is the site of the world's first atomic blast on July 16, 1945. It is open only one day each year, down from two days in the past. We were glad we arrived early because by the time we left several hours later there was a huge line up at the gate. The site consists of a very shallow "crater" and a memorial obelisk to the event. Outside the fence were informational stands and vendors. We eavesdropped on a tour group to get some information, talked to a few guys who were enthusiasts, volunteering their time to answer questions and tell stories. It was interesting how casually the project was put together in the final stages. Most of the work was done by the scientists at Los Alamos,



Goatheads by the googol



Trinity bomb test casing

to the north of Trinity, and the folks at Hanford who were creating the uranium needed for the bomb. Pieces of the bomb were delivered to Trinity in trucks and the uranium arrived in a car. They were assembled into the complete bomb in the farmhouse not far from the site. There were many observation sites around the countryside at varying distances. Unfortunately the farmhouse was closed for this one day affair so we were not able to see that part. This was the only bomb set off above ground in New Mexico during those early years of testing. The second and third bombs built were the ones dropped on Japan. The site has been cleaned up but you can still find plenty of Trinitite, the glassy, green rock created by the intense heat of the bomb. Just for the record, I did not collect any. It was a great history lesson and a very interesting morning.

Monday, April 21, 2014

## More fun in New Mexico

Well, after failing to drive the Rialta all the way up a dry, sandy washboard riverbed to a BLM site I had scoped out on the map (is this a repeating theme?), we tucked tail and reversed course the first chance we got, which was a lot farther up the wash than we should've been. Our poor Rialta was vibrating like crazy and I was sweating bullets and begging Thayer to turn around at the first opportunity. He couldn't slow down because getting stuck in the soft sandy riverbed would lead to a more serious problem if it rained! Again we're being given our remedial lesson about washboarded gravel roads and sand. We do not like!! The only casualty was the muffler to the generator which rattled loose from its mounting bracket and then was damaged as we maneuvered our retreat. All else was well as we pulled into a nice boondocking site near Belen, NM.



Hey now! Pay attention to what you're doing!

Fortunately our nice host, Rex, had a shop with the extra tools and grinder Thayer needed to fix the parts up so that they could be welded back together again. But finding a welder able to do the job was a lot trickier than we expected. Rex drove us around to some shops near his place but no one dared to try welding the lightweight stainless steel parts. Ultimately, we ended up in Albuquerque, chasing around all day until we finally found a custom welder dude who had the skills. Thayer reinstalled the muffler and we

were back in business. (He's so handy, I'm glad I brought him along!)



We spent a short time at Petroglyphs NM, just outside of Albuquerque, but these petroglyphs were not quite as awesome as the ones in Three Rivers so we moved on. We overnighted at the Sky City Casino, our jumping off place to visit Sky City, the Acoma Tribe pueblo. The next morning we drove the short distance to the visitor center where we bought our tickets for the tour, which is the only way to see the pueblo up on the mesa. They also have a very nice museum, a fantastic pottery exhibit, and several videos demonstrating pottery techniques and the culture of the Acoma.



Acoma Sky City mesa





We rode a bus up to the mesa, 375 ft above the surrounding area, for our 1.5 hour guided tour. Sky City is off the grid and the only full-time inhabitants are the spiritual elders of the tribe. Tribal members can drive their cars up the road to deliver food but no one else is allowed to drive to the city. Porta-potties ring the edges of the town but they are slowly replacing them with modern communal composting toilets. The city comes alive with activity during their festivals and celebrations several times per year. Sky City dates way back, being one of the oldest continuously lived in cities in North America – dating back to around 1100 AD. They have a heart-breaking history, as have all Native



American tribes, but the Acoma Massacre involved some particularly hideous treatment from the Spanish. After being attacked and provoked, the rebellious Indians were punished by cutting off one foot of every man over the age of 25 and enslaving the women and children. Today they are a very organized and successful tribe, using their casino profits to improve their community and keep their traditions alive. I was surprised to see that alcohol was not allowed in their casino, I thought that was a staple in the casino world. It was a very educational experience and along our tour were tribal members selling pottery, jewelry, crafts and food who would answer many questions we had. We enjoyed our knowledgeable and gracious tour guide sharing her culture with us. Thayer and I decided to descend from the mesa by follow-

ing the ancient foot path that is cut into the rock. Note the hand-holds to keep from falling. This is the means that the Acoma used to bring all their food, daily water and other materials up to the top!

Continuing down the road and heading south we turned toward El Malpais National Monument. Well, if I thought the lava flows at River of Fires was impressive this flow was staggering! The ranger station was closed so I wasn't able to get the brochure so I'll do the best I can with the facts. The flows came from the south, filling the valley; the mountain range to the west is a chain of 100,000+ years old volcanoes and cinder cones; while the mountains to the east are sandstone formations dating back millions of years. Mt. Taylor, to the north, is an old composite vol-





Some of the 27 antennae that compose the VLA Radio Telescope on the Plains of San Agustin, N.M. cano like our NW volcanoes, dating back about 3.5 million years. We found a good BLM campground, did a few short hikes, taking in the lava flow itself, a sandstone arch and beautiful sandstone cliffs. This state is just full of interesting and surprising landscapes!

Next up was the VLA Radio Telescope located on the vast Plain of Augustin, west of the town of Socorro. VLA stands for Very Large Array and when they named it thusly they spoke the truth. This telescope doesn't capture the visible spectrum of light, it captures radio waves from planets, stars and galaxies. They needed a broad, flat, quiet, plain to set up 27 large telescopes in a Y shape, away from terrestrial radio interference. Using a dedicated rail system and lifter, the telescopes are portable, even though they weigh in at 200 tons each! Each telescope is 25 meters across and really tall. Because they can adjust the spacing between each dish, they can configure arrays from <1 mile across to 22 miles across. Four times a year they change the size of the array using the railroad tracks and specially designed hoists to lift and move the telescopes. The farther they are apart the more detailed the pictures they can produce. It can see 26,000 light-years into the universe!

The VLA is one of the most productive telescopes in the world, operating 24/7 and scientists can access the data via the internet. It has one of the world's most powerful computers that can combine data from the 27 telescopes into a single image, save the data in huge data banks and make it available almost instantly. It was an amazing place, once more a small visitor center just packed with

astounding information. It included incomprehensible (to me anyway) videos about the minute technical aspects of the telescope components and computers. And, if the VLA wasn't enough to blow my little mind, the VLBA just about did me in. The Very Long Baseline Array is a string of 10



Where's Thayer?

giant telescopes stretching from Hawaii, across the continental US and ending up in the Virgin Islands. Working together, these telescopes give even more astonishing images of black holes, quasars, and galaxies. The technology involved with these instruments is mind boggling but really fascinating!

We continued along a very scenic drive southward toward our next big destination, Gila Cliff Dwellings N.M. The drive up into the Gila NF was a harrowing, twisting, climbing, dropping, convoluted 40 miles of coiled asphalt. Even using low gear, our brakes were just smoldering by the end. Turns out that this whole area is composed of ancient volcanic calderas, now very eroded and erratic!! Our first night we spent in a NF campground but we quickly realized that this was destined to be the party campground for the weekend younger crowd. We decided to walk up the road to the Hot Springs to see what it was like and ended making friends with Martin (aka Jack, Jackass) who drove us up to the springs, stayed the day soaking with us and telling stories about treasure hunting. He also drove Thayer back to the NF campground so we could retrieve the rig to stay at the hot springs.

The owner of the springs made us promise not to tell a lot of people about his campground because he doesn't want too many people showing up. I will say that it was a wonderful spot along the Gila River and, as you can guess,



We need one of these in the RV!

had some very nice hot springs. We met more really great people, including Erica and Gabe



Gabe and Erica with 'All or Bussed' in their transformed school bus. They had purchased it in North Carolina, put lots of work into the bus, and are now on their way to the NW. They are doing a great job on the bus and were lots of fun to talk to, as Thayer and I have often discussed the merits of remodeling a school bus. The next day we met the Polaha family from California



With the Polaha family with 3 young boys and lots of energy. Turns out that Kris, the dad, is a successful TV actor who has played in quite a few recent TV shows. Since we don't ever watch TV, we didn't recognize him or know anything about the shows. A tad embarrassing to be so out of touch but he thought it was cool that we aren't tied to TV. They had just rented





an RV and were on their way to Graceland to celebrate their 7 year old's birthday. They were having quite a steep learning curve in RVing but were doing just fine. We built a fire for 'smores and the next day toured Gila Cliff Dwellings with them.

Gila Cliff Dwellings are a series of seven caves that were



built between 1268-1287'ish and probably housed two clans of the Mogollon peoples. They were only occupied for about 30 years and are located high on the side of a ravine that drains to the Gila River. They were farmers, hunters and gatherers, growing squash, corn, beans and sunflowers in the fertile lands downstream of the dwelling site. It looked like a beautiful place to live with good water, soil and resources. It is a bit of a mystery as to why they



moved on after such a short time. One ranger speculated that they were searching for their place of belonging and didn't believe that they had found it yet. To see the site you follow a very pretty and shady mile loop up the stream and the cliffside.

Our last stop before leaving New Mexico was the City of Rocks State Park, located SE of Silver City. Another volcanic surprise to explore! This area is an eroded, exposed flank of an ancient volcano that sticks up out of the surrounding flatlands. The rock is glassified ash and debris from the old volcano, quite soft and easily eroded into fantastic columns, hoodoos, and shapes of all sorts. The



Welcome retreat in City of Rocks



The desert colors were very vivid and pretty

campground is immersed into the outcroppings with camping sites snuggled into rocky enclosures. We went clamoring through the site for quite a while, eventually losing each other in the maze of rocks (this is not unusual for us, we generally lose each other within 5 minutes of entering a visitor center or museum). In one section there were about 8 -10 holes that had been ground into the soft rock by Native women grinding their corn. The spots were clearly located where they had a nice view, shade in the summer, or sun in the winter and having a nice rock to lean against.



Ready to make some lunch

It was easy to imagine them sitting there, chatting with friends, minding the children and grinding their corn. A few of the holes were very shallow and I could imagine a young girl sitting and learning from the women.

We had a beautiful sunset and moonrise, though the moon was not as red as we expected during the several days of eclipse.



Beautiful sunsets and moon rises

I was sad to think that our time in New Mexico was running out, there was still so much to see! We didn't even touch the northern part of the state, though everyone we talked to said that it was fantastic. I just kept looking at the below freezing nighttime temperatures and so we decided to stay in the warmer areas. New Mexico is definitely at the top of the list for a repeat trip. Now on to Arizona and California and increasing heat (and gas prices)!





Sunday, May 4, 2014

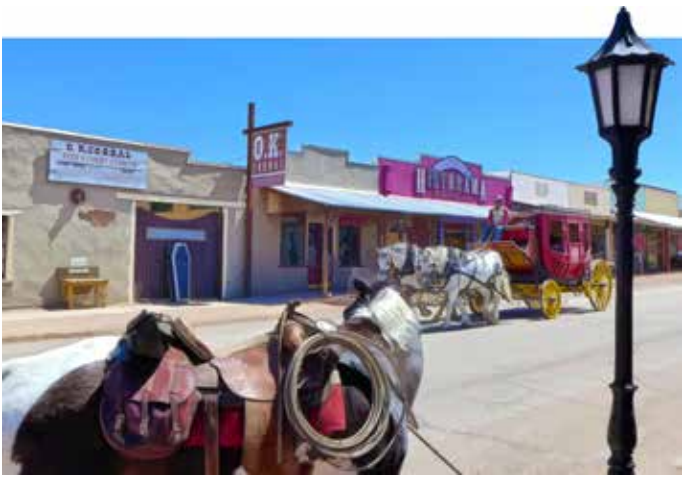
# Turning the Corner

Thinking of our trip as a big rectangle, we are now getting close to turning the last corner and heading into the homestretch. Nine months into our odyssey finds us in the southwest, skipping quickly across the expanse of Arizona with three main stops of note.

Our first stop was Tombstone, site of the famous Shoot-out at the OK Corral. We wandered around the town in the early morning and enjoyed having the place pretty much to ourselves for a while. This interesting town offers many historic buildings, shops and re-enactments to attract and entertain visitors. We opted to attend a humorous “tongue in cheek” gun-fighter show that also included a trolley ride/tour around the town afterwards.



Shady Ladies in red hats



The OK Corral



"Aint no fancy Red hats 'lowd down this here street, lady!"



Jill with her low-life, scum sucking gunslinger buddies she eventually made friends with



He DID own the horse he was hanged for stealing      Losers in OK shootout

As you may know, things were pretty wild & crazy in the late 1800's southwest, and sometimes it is difficult to understand just who the bad guys and good guys were. They don't always wear the correctly colored hats! Tombstone was one of the last wide-open frontier boom towns in the American Old West, prospering from about 1877 to 1890, during which time the town's mines produced US\$40-85 million in silver bullion, the largest productive silver district in Arizona. Its population grew from 100 to around 14,000 in less than seven years. Before leaving town, we wandered around Boot Hill Cemetery and checked out the tombstones. The majority of the wooden grave markers indicated that the unfortunate occupant had been shot/ murdered, and often by whom.

Our next stop was Saguaro National Park, just west of Tucson. We arrived later in the afternoon so we could watch the sunset in the park. The cactus are fantastically shaped and varied and we wandered around for quite a while taking pictures.



Yes, they're really this bright



Saguaro National Park





Chris, Shay & Susan

After the sun was well down we hopped back in the rig and hurried to my niece's home near Phoenix. Susan, husband Chris and their 14 month old Shay were there to welcome us to their lovely, air conditioned home. Long hot showers, a real bed, a swimming pool in the backyard, and fresh lemons and grapefruit from their trees was a really nice change for us.

We spent several days as their guests, with much of the time just watching baby Shay and playing. It is such a fun age. With Chris away working, we were able to give Susie a few breaks (and got ourselves a little extra baby time). Thayer demonstrated his mastery at putting a crying child to sleep within 10 minutes and then both napping for 2 hours. He always teaches by example!



Dress-up



When life hands you lemons...

On one of our nights there we were able to hook up with my teaching buddy Jean Duncan and some of her friends for dinner and visiting. As far as we still are from home, it is really fun to see dear friends along the way!! Jean is in the home stretch of her career and will be retiring this summer. We hope to have inspired her to take a big trip!

On Saturday Chris returned home and they scurried around getting ready to fly off to St. Louis to visit his sister. Thayer and I stayed two more days at their home, keeping watch over Zeus and Hera, their gentle giant dogs, and taking care of misc. business before continuing our trip.

Palm Springs was our next destination – to visit one of my very best of friends, Mary Lou Halfon and her husband Lar-

ry. We were treated to great food, soft beds, and a swimming pool in their wonderful condo on the golf course. This was pretty high living for the road tramps we've become over the past nine months! Mary Lou and I rode bikes everyday, cruising Palm Springs' riverside trails, shopping, and getting caught up with each other's lives. She also whipped up some wonderful BBQ's for dinner while I made the salads. Another afternoon we visited the Art Museum, experienced the weekly street fair with all its activity and then out for dinner. We always had something fun to entertain us!



Pam, Sue, Jill & Mary Lou

Getting together with Sue Showman and Pam Laird, more Kenmore retirees, was definitely a high point of the visit for me! It had been years and years since I had seen Pam and I was amazed at how little she has changed – the same wonderful sense of humor, hearty laugh and cheerful nature that I remember so well. Sue has not looked back since retiring and also has a lovely home in Palm Desert. We stopped by her place one day to raid the lemon tree

in her yard. I was also glad to learn that she remembered how to make tasty Carmelita bars for dessert! Mmmmmm!

One day Mary Lou and Larry escorted us to the visitor center for the Annenberg Family home called "Sunnyside." It has extensive desert gardens, ponds and lawns, a solar array to provide power, and it all surrounds the large "desert modern" home. It is difficult to obtain tickets for a home tour but the visitor center had a good video and many displays showing the interiors and fabulous furnishings. When it was occupied by the Annenbergs they regularly entertained the political and Hollywood elite. Frank Sinatra even got married there. The Annenbergs were very active on the world stage, interested in politics and improving relations between nations by hosting visiting dignitaries and royalty. Sunnyside is now run by the Annenberg Foundation and their mission is to provide an elegant and historic place for world leaders to meet, problem-solve and discuss peace issues. It has been used by every president since the 60's and has hosted many leaders from around the world.



With Larry & Mary Lou at their Palm Springs home

It was so nice to spend some real quality time with my dear friend Mary Lou, we have so many great memories of working, playing and laughing together. In her retirement she stays very busy, has surpassed me in her technical wizardry, and keeps up with her busy family of whom almost all find a reason to visit her in Palm Springs during the spring months. And now we know why!

On a more somber note, on Sat. April 26th we turned the corner and began heading north, with less than 1000 miles from home and about 5 weeks to go. Oh-no! Where has the time gone?







Monday, May 5, 2014

## Southern Sierra Nevada

Hey now, this is a great place! Blue skies, warm temps, balmy breezes and fantastic scenery! Yes, we do feel a little guilty hearing about our soggy friends & family back in the Pacific NW, but we're coping with that as best we can.



Rainbow Basin

Over the past week we have visited several notable places, the first being Rainbow Basin, a BLM site north of Barstow. It is a crazy geologic site, eroded out of some vast sink hole, and I never did quite get the whole story of how it was created. There are layers of colorful rock going

in every direction with an exciting (but not too exciting) wash-boardy, dusty, narrow loop road going through it that has been carved into the terrain. I like excitement, don't misunderstand, but I also want to feel we won't be stuck out in the middle of nowhere. Manageable, controllable excitement is best, I think. Anyway, we spent a night at a scenic lookout, hiked around the next day and then drove on. And looming in the distance were the southernmost Sierra Nevadas, startling in their height and beauty.

Some of you old-timers, or folks who enjoy old B-westerns, would easily recognize this area. The main road going through it is called Movie Road, named for all the movies that were shot there back in the early days of action



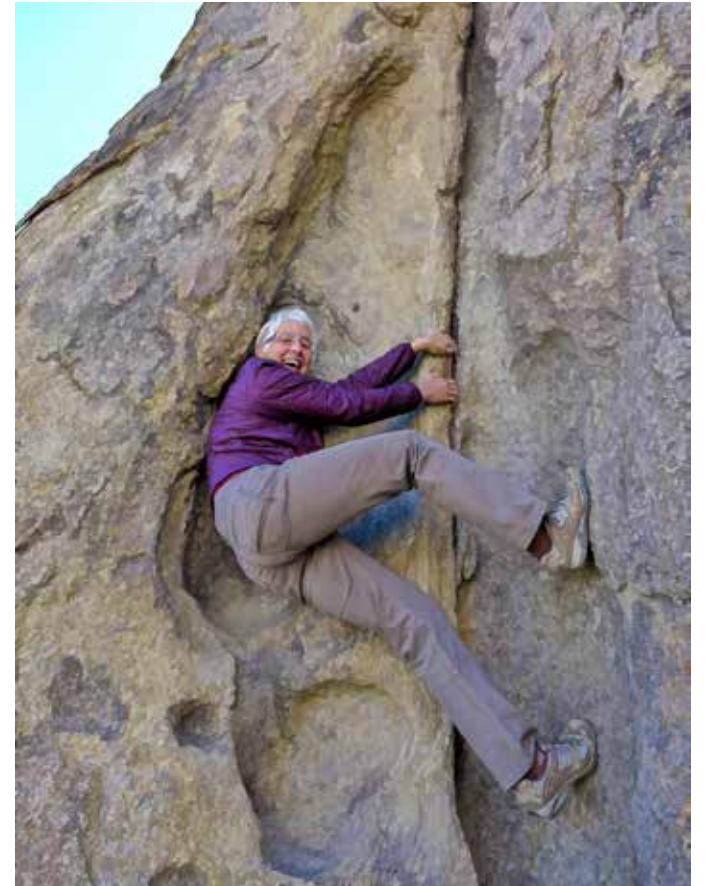
westerns. Thayer was sure he saw the exact spot where the Lone Ranger leaped off the rock onto the back of the bad guy as he galloped by on his horse.

If the City of Rocks was great, this area is even larger and better. The Alabama Hills are comprised of BLM land and designated for dispersed camping with sites plenty far apart and tucked in amongst the rocks. BLM usually equates to free with little-to-no amenities. That's fine with us!

We stayed for five nights, taking long walks, reading books, painting and sketching, taking pictures, and scrambling over and under the countless boulders and rock outcroppings. It did get hot during the few midday hours but



the sun drops pretty quickly behind the wall of mountains and everything cools down to a perfectly nice temperature.





One hot day we drove the steep, winding 10 miles up the Whitney Portal road which leads to the trailheads for Mount Whitney, the tallest mountain in the lower 48 states at 14,510 feet. Just as we were pulling into the parking area, a little mouse popped out of the gap between the hood and the windshield! It was a little desert mouse from our camping area down below, and had been hiding in the engine area until the heat from the climb had finally driven him out. Thayer helped it down to the ground where it can now become a mountain mouse – or until it hitches another ride back down with some other vehicle.



Desert mouse becomes mountain mouse

We hiked up a few thousand feet to still frozen Lone Pine Lake, passing through forests of BIG trees with many varieties, including some that I was unfamiliar with.



After all our recent time in the desert it was really nice to get up into the cool trees and streams. This felt more like home and was a refreshing break from the hot & dry. We were stopped by snow above 10,000 feet but didn't really mind as we were plenty tired enough by then. Stopping on a sunny rock for lunch, we enjoyed the magnificent view and impromptu dinner show entertainment by



Training the humans



the Stellar Jays hitting us up for a share of the grub. Then down the trail, down the scary road, and back to our little campsite next to Fred and Wilma's stone cave. We loved our stay in the Alabama Hills!



Modern day Flintstones







A few miles farther along our journey we came to another must see site, the Manzanar War Relocation Center. Manzanar is one of ten internment centers created immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. With racial phobia growing in the US, the defined purpose was to inter, control and “watch” the Japanese Americans living in the west coast states. These citizens and whole families were unceremoniously uprooted from their homes and lives only because they were deemed a potential threat to the war effort.



War refugee in her own country

Even though 2/3 of them were American citizens by birth, the government worried that they might retain some loyalty to the Japanese emperor. The other 1/3 of the prisoners were immigrants (mostly elders) from Japan who had been denied citizenship solely because they were Japanese!! Thus, 120,000 Japanese Americans, infants to elderly, were interred for 2-3 years, from 1942-1945, with about 10,000 of them at Manzanar.

It is a fascinating and sad chapter in American History, and only recently, with the Reagan Administration, did the US admit that an injustice was committed. With current events as they are it is even sadder that we seem doomed to repeat this horrible discrimination of imprisoning our people without due process. Lest we forget the tragedy, there are regular pilgrimages to the site by survivors and their families.



Today the Manzanar site is mostly a ruin, though they have reconstructed several barracks and a mess hall for visitors. The visitor's center is very well done, presenting the concepts and events fairly and truthfully (I felt) but mostly focusing on the lives and experiences of the inmates.

*“He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.”* - Thomas Paine

Moving along to the north, our next couple of nights were spent at lovely, green Dehy Park in Independence. A pretty little stream flowed through the trees and we found quiet, private parking. We spent the afternoon in the East California Museum, enjoying the best Native American basket exhibit that I have ever seen. The designs and workmanship of the artisans were outstanding. They also had loads of arrowheads, worked points and tools, and one ceremonial point was about 14 inches long!



Being a fan of Edward Curtis, I was excited to see about 20 beautifully framed prints of Native Americans. They were just stunning! Several months ago I read (and would recommend) a biography about him, a great book called ‘The Short Nights of the Shadow Catcher’. We owe much of what we know about the tribes from the early 1900’s to Edward Curtis.



Outside the museum was the nicest collection of old wagons and rusty stuff that I’ve seen in a long time, most of it farm and mining equipment. The native plant garden was blooming

like crazy and the scents were almost overwhelming. The path between the park and the museum went out into the sage, and I so wished I could take “pictures” or somehow capture the aromas wafting through the sage and lupines to share and remember. In the park we enjoyed sitting in the shade of the big trees with our feet in the water, watching yet another day draw to a close as the breeze wrapped its warm arms around us and ran its gentle fingers through our hair.



You can bet I’ll be recalling this day when I find myself back in a classroom next year!



You don’t know how good you have it until you’ve had it so good!





Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery

Ever northward we traveled, next taking in the surprisingly impressive and beautiful Fish Hatchery just north of Independence. Who would expect a large 3-story stone Tudor building, looking more like an old European monastery, to be California's first and greatest fish hatchery? It is a lovely building, situated on Oak Creek, and has a large pond loaded with the state fish, the golden trout.

Unfortunately, there was a forest fire in 2007 which preceded a terrible flood in 2008, damaging the ponds and tanks badly enough that the state abandoned the site.



Fortunately, there was a volunteer group already involved with the facility and they have taken it over and preserved the historic building and grounds. They raise a few fish for seeding, provide educational programs for area schools, tend the grounds and pond keeping it open for public visitations year round. It would be grand to see it returned as a fully functioning fish hatchery again. I can't fathom how bad the damage from the flooding was but it seems like there is so much already invested in the hatchery that we would all want to keep it going.

Before heading on into Bishop for resupplying, we made one more stop. Keogh Hot Springs was right off the road and Thayer had fond memories of stopping there during his flying competitions in this area. And goodness knows we can always use a bit of cleaning up! There is a little resort area with cement pools, camping, and "developed" stuff but we opted for the natural pools just down river. There are a series of semi-private pools that wind through the sage, rocks and grasses. They are a very pleasant temperature, nice even on a hot day. There were very few people and plenty of pools – a good ratio. One young family with children had the nicest pool. It had waterfalls, boulders and deep holes that the children were clearly enjoying. We also tried "panning" for gold in the gravel, using clear plastic cups, but had no luck. Well, no good luck, that is. There were lots of little sparkles but they were pretty lightweight.



We will now be heading deeper into the Sierra Nevadas, then going up and over Yosemite National Park and on to the coastal areas. We have only about four more weeks before ending up in Seattle....Nooooooooo! It can't end!!!



Evolved camouflage

Monday, May 19, 2014

## Bishop and beyond



"Fill 'er up, and the left front feels a little soft."

Bishop is a great little town, all the stuff you need to get back into the forest and then some. Lots of bakeries, delis, and sporting goods stores. They have a beautiful city park where we spent some time, a good starting point for most places we needed to go. A few miles away is a great museum called Lays Railroad Museum. They have a big steam locomotive, other RR cars, a depot and two long



Lays Railroad Station



rows of old little buildings for the little “town”. They have a very active crew of volunteers who work many hours rebuilding and refurbishing old rail-road cars, mining equipment, and many kinds of machinery. We arrived on a day when a couple of busloads of 4th graders were visiting so we had the bonus of many volunteers sharing their knowledge about the exhibits.



Ice box at Laws RR Museum



Sunrise over the Owen River

Not far from Bishop, in the foothills of the Sierras, is a unique area called Buttermilk Country. It is similar to the Alabama Hills in that it is a world class boulder climbing and scrambling area. We spent two nights here, taking long walks, scrambling around and watching the real climbers on the boulders working out challenging moves. The nights were lovely – bright stars and cool temperatures with the dramatic backdrop of soaring mountains to the west. We even saw a few snow flurries but they were very short lived. We hiked to where the river plunges through a steep boulder canyon, very scenic.



Fresh snow in the Sierras



Buttermilk Country views



Scenic Buttermilk Country



Buttermilk panarama



Secluded waterfall hidaway



Fun rock formations



Climbers stringing together moves



Desert colors





If we could only fit all this into our backyard! Feeling pretty grungy, we headed into Hot Springs country. We stayed 2 nights at what we think is Crab Pot Hot Springs. Though not large pools, they are big enough for the 4-5 people that might show up. The water is heated underground by the hot magma that still exists after thousands of years of volcanic activity in this area. The ground is covered with pumice and small chunks of obsidian from the many explosive eruptions in the past. Talking to other folks, we learned about other springs in the area and ended up coming back to one called Sheepherder HS, also a beautiful pool overlooking a small lake. It felt really great to get cleaned up! Another short detour was to Hot Creek Geological site, with geysers and springs too hot for soaking and looking very much like Yellowstone.



Sheepherder Hot Spring



Hot Creek Geological Site  
Next up was Convict Lake, a pretty alpine lake carved by glaciers out of the ancient stone of the Sierras. There is a resort on one end of the lake and a nice trail going all the way around. We stayed one night and most of two days so I was able to get in 2 laps around and then some. The path leading up to the pass was a bit too much but I did part of it. There was a nice beach and lots of sun for lazing around reading books and feeding chipmunks. The lake is surrounded by glacial moraines, one of the best examples of a glacier carved lake that I have seen. The lake is a fantastic shade of blue green. A typically colorful history involving escaped convicts, posse chases, murder and mayhem gave the lake it's name.



Convict Lake



Yes, it's still cold at night around here!  
Mammoth Lakes is a ski town, still open though I could not see where they could be skiing, just didn't look like enough snow to me. I took a longer hike to Sherman Lakes than necessary since I missed the second lake and walked way past my destination. Is it possible to get blase about continuously scenic beauty? I have so many pictures of towering, snow topped mountains, stunning trees and rocks, gorgeous lakes and sights that I've almost stopped taking pictures! We made a quick stop at Obsidian Dome, a large outpouring of glassy volcanic material, a source for the Native Americans.



Sherman Lakes



Parker Lake  
June Lakes Scenic loop is a short detour off of Hwy. 395, there are many resort and camping opportunities, some lakes and streams and cute little shops. We drove through all of that and ended up at Parker Lake, another dazzling alpine lake. We spent two nights downstream on the creek, enjoying the sound of water rushing by and choruses of birds in the morning. The bugs started eating us however, so we moved along, counting the days til we have to actually be home.



Views from Parker Creek





Obsidian Dome



Fantastic Western Juniper



Panorama from Punar Crater near Mono Lake

Mono Lake (MO-NO, not Ma-NO) is a fascinating place, geologically, biologically, and historically. The lake bed is the remnant of a colossal volcanic eruption, certainly on the scale of the Yellowstone Supervolcano. It is riddled and surrounded by cinder cones, old craters and volcanic debris. We visited Punar Crater, a textbook example of a rhyolitic volcano. It had a huge initial explosion, then collapsed, sinking a mile into the ground. It then went through a period of cone building extruding loads of obsidian and glassy pumice. It is one of many craters in a chain stretching to the south of Mono Lake. Right on the edge

of the lake are the Tufa formations, tall, intricate towers of limestone created by springs that used to be under the lake surface. As the lake level dropped the springs disappeared and the formations left behind are left to the forces of erosion. It was kind of like being outside in a cave, if that makes sense. A short distance away is Navy Beach, where there is another kind of tufa, called sand tufa. They are produced similarly to the other area but are much more delicate, constructed of thin walls of sand. They look like fantastic sand castles or Star Wars cities eroding into the sand.



Sand Tufa, Navy Beach



South Tufa area





South Tufa area

The Mono Lake area has a very interesting history. The Paiute Indians lived prosperously and gently in this difficult environment for thousands of years, they were called the “fly eaters,” because they ate the pupae of the tiny flies that line the shores.

The ecology of the lake is like no other on earth. Millions of birds use Mono Lake as a resting and feeding site on their migrations. There was a delicate balance in the populations of brine shrimp, brine flies and birds.

In the 1930’s the city of Los Angeles came along and secretly bought up all of the water rights in this great valley, called Long Valley. They started diverting the water to their aquaducts and sucking it dry, putting most of the farmers and ranchers out of business, and devastating the ecology of the watershed. The level of Mono Lake dropped precipitiously as the sources of it’s water were diverted to the city. Creeks that used to flow to the lake dried up, killing the trees and plant life that fed the lake. Since the lake has no outlet, similar to the Great Salt Lake, the salinity increased, changing the whole food chain of the lake and severely impacting populations of insects, brine shrimp, and birds. A staggering 80% of California’s seagulls make their nests on an island of Mono Lake. As the lake level dropped the island was no longer an island, and predators were able to get to the nests and devour the eggs. By the 1960’s the ecosystem was on the verge of collapse.

About that time, a small group of dedicated people began to fight back, working to restore historic levels of the lake, improve creek habitat and rebuild a devastated ecosystem. It wasn’t until 1994 that the state of California decreed that LA had to limit the amount of water they were taking and begin to raise the level of the lake. Drought in current years has made this very difficult but they are slowly making some progress. There is an excellent visitor center in Lee Vining that relates the whole story and highlights the efforts of the individuals who made it happen. One that stuck in my head is the story of a LA Mother’s group who spearheaded water conservation efforts in LA, providing low flush toilets to anyone who would install them. Because of this and many other efforts, LA has become a world leader in water conservation. There are massive educational programs for youth, trying to drive home the point that water is not free, it has to come from somewhere. Kids learn about the communities that are affected by their water usage and ways that they can protect this precious natural resource. Mono Lake is now one of the most studied places on the planet.

Lee Vining was our turning point to the west, we are on to Yosemite and the coast, the final push for home.



Saturday, June 14, 2014

## The final leg...

Well, I suppose all good things eventually come to an end. As I start one of the final blog posts I have very mixed feelings. I feel sad that this wonderful trip is drawing to a



Bringing our blog up to date

close, but I look forward to seeing my friends and family. I bounce back and forth all day long during these final days. I usually get the “post trip blues”, as I call them, even with a short trip. I have no doubt that I will have a serious case this time. Tommy and Alex’s wedding will hopefully distract me in a wonderful way. The looming school year and a new granddaughter on the way will take care of August.

Ah well, not to get ahead of myself...



Up and over stunning Tioga Pass into Yosemite we went! The road has only recently opened in the past couple of weeks, so the high country is



Lembert Dome

still just coming out of the snow. Many areas and trails were still closed with the park employees working to open campgrounds and other services. The scenery is simply spectacular with glacier carved peaks, rounded domes, granite boulders dropped erratically across the landscape, rushing streams and sparkling lakes. We hiked up to the top of Lembert Dome and were treated to a 360 degree view across this wonderful gem of a park. I lazed in the warm springtime sun while Thayer occupied the time by building a cool arch out of the native granite.



With a little photoshop magic you can make this!



...out of this.





Panorama with glacial erratics

It is fun to imagine the mountains much higher than these that existed thousands of years ago but have since been eroded by wind, water and ice. Smooth glacial valleys perched high on the mountain peaks, showing the path of ancient glaciers, abound throughout the Sierra Nevadas. At Olmsted Point a short walk took us to another amazing overlook, down into Yosemite Valley with Half Dome anchoring the view. We spent most of that day stopping for streams, lakes and views as we headed west, aiming for the Valley.

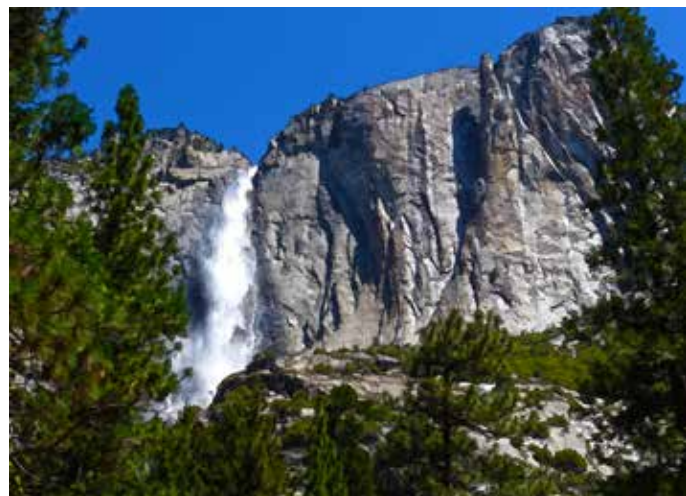


Half Dome from scenic Olmsted Point

Yosemite is celebrating it's 150th birthday as a preserved area this year. In the midst of the the Civil War and at the urging of Galen Clark, Abraham Lincoln was the first presi-



Half Dome from the valley



Upper Yosemite Falls



Rafting the Merced River

dent to take steps to preserve Yosemite for the people. Later, Theodore Roosevelt, with the prompting of John Muir, Gifford Pinchot and others, made it into the nation's second national park, after Yellowstone. We can thank Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot for most of our national parks and forests. If these guys hadn't done everything in their power to set these lands aside the land would have been ransacked by the logging, mining, cattle and railroad industries. John Muir wished to set the lands aside completely and parted ways with Roosevelt and Pinchot when they allowed multiple uses in the national forests. A very interesting history of this period of history, including the formation of what would become the US Forest Service, is The Big Burn, by Timothy Egan.



Upper Yosemite Falls reflecting in the Merced River

Back to our narrative... We spent two days roaming around the Valley, walking to waterfalls, scrambling around on "the Apron" where Thayer used to climb, and visiting the visitor center and museum. I dusted off my bike one day and had a nice ride along the bike trails through the valley. Yosemite has a great public transportation system, and once you find a parking spot you can then ride the clean, non stinking buses around all day for free. Bikes and rafts are available to rent and there are miles and miles of hiking trails with a large variety of terrains. Just sitting and watching the climbers can be pretty entertaining after a long day of walking.



The Apron





Amazing skill

The park also offers opportunities to learn about the Native Americans who once inhabited the valley. We found their art, culture and history very interesting and were able to watch and talk with master basket weaver Julia Parker, 84, as she demonstrated her expertise. Creating a beautiful basket takes an amazing amount of time, skill and patience!



Upper & lower Yosemite Falls



Amazing baskets



Lower Yosemite Falls

In addition, there is the history of the Sierra Club, which was born in this area, and the colorful biography of John Muir and other early protectors of the park.

One day we chatted with a volunteer who was meandering around answering people's questions. After he answered mine we began talking about what volunteers do in the park and how to get involved doing that. Turns out that if you can volunteer anywhere between one week to multiple months – and there are some neat things to do! In the winter, during Thanksgiving and Christmas, they need people



Yosemite Valley and Merced River at sunset to work in the information center, art museum and other areas, with indoor housing provided. During the summer there are many more things to do and they provide you a campsite in the campground, discounts at some of the eateries, and a cool shirt to wear. I am thinking pretty seriously about doing a month in the park during the summer. There is just so much to do there that you can't possibly see it all in just a few days, I think it would be really fun to spend a month there. Then it would just be a matter of deciding what next year's park would be, then the next year...



Soaking it all in





Sonoma vineyards

Sadly, with time becoming our master, we turned our back on the lovely mountains and headed down the winding road to civilization. Next up was Santa Rosa, home of my nephew, Stuart, and his girlfriend, Chelsey. Stu has turned into quite the forager, taking after his Uncle Robb in a big way. He and Chelsey moved to Santa Rosa just 3 years ago but have quickly figured out how to live off the land. Stu chases the mighty abalone to great depths, free diving 30-40 feet to chase down the wily mollusk. On his way up and down from the ocean floor he spears a few rockfish or lingcod and comes up with a fantastic meal for a big group. Fortunately he had had a successful fishing trip just a few days before we arrived and we were treated to one heck of a meal. The prize abalone from the trip was about 12 inches across! They are also very interested in wine and have a large collection. In just driving through Sonoma County, I could tell that they have found their niche in life. It was great fun to have a short visit with them and we look forward to seeing them in August. I hope they can sneak some abalone on the airplane.



Chelsey, Stu and helper



Seals on the beach

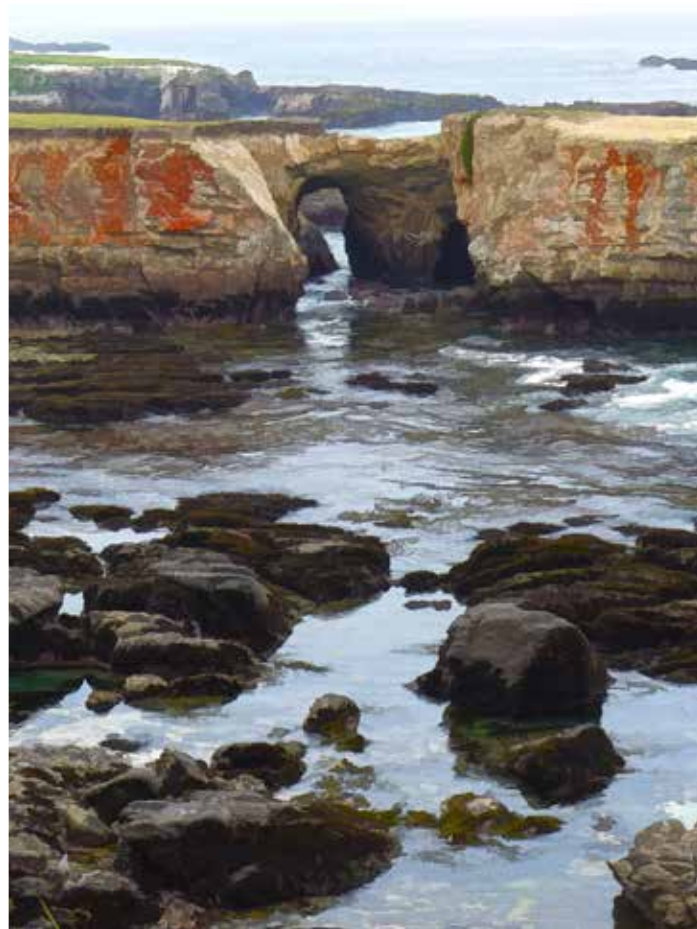
We proceeded towards the coast, stopping at beaches and overlooks as they came along. The views are stunning and expansive, including lovely beaches, tall cliffs, headlands and islands, windswept trees, and beautiful flowers and succulent plants. As we left Hwy. 101 the road became twisting and winding, steeply climbing up and dropping down, very narrow, and quite frightening in many places. We overnighted high up in the forest, close to the pounding surf, and in a few large turnouts.



5 geese hiking the Lost Coast Trail







Finally we fell precipitously out of the clouds into the cool little town of Ferndale, just south of Eureka. Ferndale is a very quaint little town with some lovely old homes that are nicely turned out and maintained. It is surrounded by many



square miles of beautiful farmland, estuaries, and rivers and the people were really friendly and eager to share information about their big event, the K.G.C.





This was another case of perfect timing on our part! Memorial Day turned out to be the third and final day of the Kinetic Grand Championship. I copied the following description from the website:

***The Kinetic Grand Championship is a 3-day, 42-mile bicycle race over land, sand, mud and water.***  
*(The “bicycles” are actually highly engineered sculptures.)*

*Kinetic Sculptures are all-terrain human-powered art sculptures that are engineered to race over road, water, mud and sand. Kinetic Sculptures are usually made from what some people consider “junk”. But one man’s junk is another racer’s raw material. Each Kinetic Sculpture is a work of art and each racing team has its own theme. The teams consist of pilots, pit crew and pee-ons. Kinetic Pilots pedal the sculpture and steer, the pit crew assists the pilots in transforming the vehicle for the various elements and fixing mechanical issues, and pee-ons, well, they do whatever is needed for the team to get glory. The teams give out “bribes” to their adoring spectators, judges and Rutabaga Royalty.*

The day we arrived the whole town had turned out for the grand finale, incredible human powered crafts completing the grueling course and finishing in a blaze of glory. Everybody was dressed to the hilt and the alcohol was flowing freely. The event has been going on for 44 years and many of the participants have been involved for decades. Winners of the event become the judges for subsequent years. Looks fun!



I know I've seen this guy somewhere!



Keep It Simple design



Just crossed the finish line





Monster nurse log

At Crescent City we entered an area of the Redwoods National Park, into a towering forest of ancient trees. There is something so peaceful and timeless about these special forests. I literally just absorb all that energy of the trees; feeling calmer, steadier and more patient for every moment I spend wandering among the giants. I am forever thankful to the individuals and groups who have fought to preserve these precious places, and hope that more people will understand and appreciate their true value.



Towering trees



Burned out relic (the tree)



I'm feeling SO much better already



Yoga amongst the redwoods



*"Take a course in good water and air; and in the eternal youth of Nature you may renew your own. Go quietly, alone; no harm will befall you."*

*"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul."*

*John Muir*





A secluded little beach hidden away somewhere on the Oregon coast. (But we know where!)

From there we meandered up half of the Oregon coast seeing the usual spectacular coastal scenery. The weather remained perfect as we cruised into Portland for a short overnight at the home of my long-time college buddy, Rosemary. The next day we made the final crossing back into Washington but only traveled a little way, spending the night at my cousin Cheryl's house. It was a great way to ease into the home stretch.

After meandering 18,982 miles and more than 10 months on the road, I drove us the final leg home. I guess Thayer

needed a rest. Handling the RV in busy big city traffic after so many months of backroad travel was a little hair raising but the rig just seemed to want to go faster as we got closer to Bothell.

And so, after hills and dales, highways, byways and skyways, rain and shine, beaches and mountains and desert and snow; and through hot and dry and humid and ice and cold; after caves and carnivals, hiking, biking, sailing, fear and fun; after getting stuck and near misses and minor breakdowns and fixing everything along the way;



Good ol' Oregon



Do we really, REALLY have to go back?



Early evening stroll along the Oregon surf

and remembering big starry nights, and glorious morning sunrises and warm welcoming sunsets throughout countryside and towns and cities across the US and Canada; and recalling all the museums, forts, historical towns, parks and visitor centers, bridges, towers, palaces, monuments, lighthouses, seaports, churches, farms, battlefields and more; and learning so much more about US & Canadian history; after having the opportunity to hook up with distant kinfolk and to meet and make new friends all along the way, plus having the special time and experiences and memories just between the two of us, ... we're home.

PS - Within minutes of parking the rig, we had hopped into the car with Paul, Jackson, Sarah and Tour, and met Tommy at Sail Sand Point for a beautiful, sunny afternoon of sailing in our perfect Pacific NW. I guess it's reassuring that of all the places we've seen and experienced this past

year, we still like it here the best.

It's good to be back!



Three miles and five minutes to go



Wednesday, July 2, 2014

Epilogue

You didn't think our trip was over just like THAT, did you?

We arrived back to our Bothell home in the early afternoon on May 31st. Now that our shakedown cruise was complete we felt ready to take on a REAL pleasure trip with grandson Jackson and our yellow lab, Tour. So after a few days of sleeping in a big bed and taking long, hot showers we were back on the road again.

Jackson, now five, has always been an excellent travel companion and we certainly enjoy our time with him (as the photos may hint). Our destination on this leg was to Priest Lake, in Idaho. My good college buddy Bettina has



I guess they're waiting for a breakfast bell or something



Fun with art



Hey now, here's a shared interest!







At home in the woods

a family cabin right on the lake, and we would meet up with them there in a few days. Then, over the following weekend, Paul and Charissa drove over from their home in Spokane and joined us all for a great time. Jackson did some canoeing with his parents, art stuff with me, and Thayer helped him build a model gaff rigged sailboat. Toasting marshmallows over a beach campfire and making S'mores was required, of course.

After the weekend and everyone else had to head back to home or work, we drove farther up the lake shore and found a quiet little place in the woods to stay for a few days. Long walks, more S'mores, bear trap projects, popcorn and movies (favorites were 'Despicable Me' 1 & 2) and just hanging out together made the time pass all too quickly.



Family outing



Digging a bear trap



What's with these two?

Whenever we get back to civilization after little outings with Jackson we've continued a tradition of stopping at the first decent looking breakfast joint and trying to eat all their pancakes. Well, at least Jackson does. I've never seen such serious eating from a little boy, you would think we don't feed him at all!

Sadly, we had to start heading back to Spokane at some point. Along the way we stopped and Jackson picked out his belated birthday present from us, a model rocket. He and Thayer had been discussing all types of rocket stuff and Jackson wanted to build one large enough to take the



"How are those blueberry pancakes, Jackson?"

two of them up. I certainly wasn't going with them! Thayer talked him into starting with a smaller one and working up from that. When we got to Spokane they built it and we all went to a big open field to launch it. Pretty exciting.

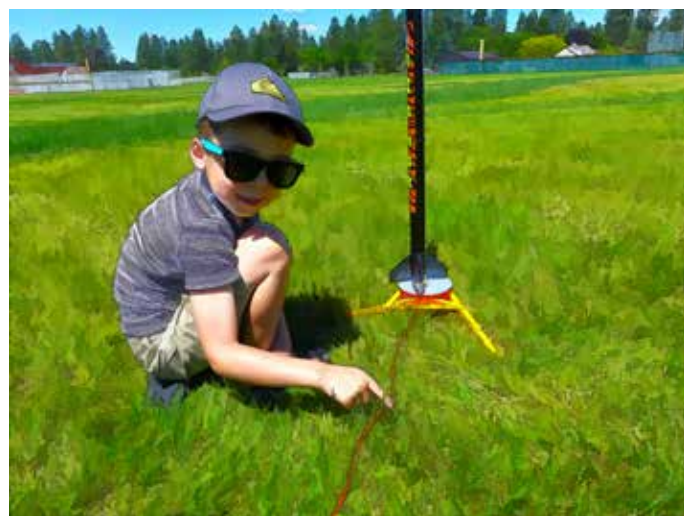
After leaving Jackson with his parents and saying our goodbye's, we started for home, stopping along the way to visit with Thayer's folks for a few days.

When we did get back to our house we had to admit that our big Rialta Adventure was truly at its end. I'm glad that we spent it with family as we turned the last page.





Rocket Science 101



Final check before launch



Uh, ...these people are distant relatives. Right.



Jackson, Charissa & Saila (still in the wrapper)



Thayer's parents



*Thank-you for reading my journal. I hope it in-  
spires you to take your own year off and find your  
own special places!*

*How it all added up:*

*Departed July 18, 2013 - Finished July 1, 2014*

*We traveled 19,870 miles;*

*Used 1,115.58 gallons of gas (\$3985.98);*

*Averaged 17.811 mpg*

*Spent 58 nights with Boondockers*

*info: <https://www.boondockerswelcome.com>*

*Paid camping spots: less than \$100*

*Living expenses: \$9,014.02 or ~\$25.75/day*

*incl gas: \$13,000 or ~\$37.14/day*

*Memorable sunsets: lost count*

*Regrets: Brought too much firewood and clothing*

*Brought too few wheel bearings*

*Wish we had more time*







