

2005 Travel Summary

Sunday 5 June 2005

After about 10 days we have arrived in Elkhart, IN. Tomorrow we will find the status of the motor home, although I am not optimistic that either the repairs will be complete or satisfactory, even after 9 months of effort.

We had a number of scenic and educational stops along the way. I-70 through UT and CO in the spring is even prettier than the summer (although we did get snowed upon crossing the Continental Divide (although mostly rain). We visited a number of excellent museums, including the National Mining Museum in Leadville, CO; an exhibition for coal mining in Oak Creek, CO; the National Renewable Energy Laboratory Visitors Center near Golden, CO. We went by some train exhibits in Georgetown, CO; the CO Railroad Museum in Golden, CO; the Forney Transportation Museum in Denver (including one of the 8 remaining Big Boy's (the 4-8-8-4 articulated largest locomotive ever built)). We went to the Buffalo Bill grave and memorabilia collection, since we have been to a number of other Buffalo Bill museum's, finding out the Wild West show was once in Darlington and Florence, SC; where some of my relatives undoubtedly went (based on stories I have heard).

Since we have a John Deere utility tractor we visited the John Deere pavilion, which contains many examples of both new and historical farm equipment. Probably the most interesting exhibit was a display showing the increase in both the industrialized and emerging world's population, compared with the amount of farmland available; needless to say, not very encouraging.

Last, but not least, we visited the Rock Island Arsenal (Rock Island, IL), which has one of the most complete collections of military small arms available, at least since the advent of the flintlock. The categorization and identification is excellent, apparently there is huge number of documents that are being electronically encoded. The stone buildings were magnificent, although virtually all have been converted from manufacturing (e.g., leather goods, weapons, caissons) to administration, (still an active Army base).

Oh yes, we did stop at some antique stores along the way and have added some miscellaneous little items to our collection. I have used the scooter more on this trip than before, but is becoming more necessary, to carry me as well as fill the basket. We have found some more slide rules, measuring tools, a few Bosson heads, and miscellaneous stuff we want to use sometime.

Tuesday 14 June 2005

Not much to report, except the we have finally received the repaired (mostly) motorhome. Although almost ready when we got to Elkhart, IN took another 9 days before all items we repaired or operational to our satisfaction. The process control and quality control systems for this type of manufacturing (although Monaco is one of the better ones) are still many decades behind comparable industries of similar constraints.

All major systems except the Vigia automatic tire air pressure system are operational. Donna will have to manually check air pressure, then we will have to find a high enough pressure pump (if required) until the Vigia system is replaced. Will have to go to CA in September or thereabouts for that.

The motorhome looks great, there is virtually no indication of the accident or the severity. The only observable item is one scratch left on one cabinet door. The new paint perfectly matches the old paint, the new entry door actually operates better (although we did lose our travel map of where this motorhome has been, will get another).

I now need to use the lift to get in (and out of) the motorhome, which also means Donna is now doing most (all on occasion) of the external hookups; with a little more practice, she will have all of that down pat. I now do some of the inside operations, which are not near as strenuous or difficult.

We did replace the 4 rear tires (not covered by insurance) and we are very glad we did. One of the inside rear tires was near failure(i.e., maybe only days or weeks of normal usage) from cracking in the side wall, which may be part of the same manufacturing defect and failure mechanism as the accident causing tire failure. Someone (either Goodyear or insurance) will also do failure analysis. The tread depth and wear patterns were normal (for age and mileage), showing the Vigia air pressure system was working correctly.

No museums to report on, although we did go to a few antique shops. There is an antique mall in Michiana (north of South Bend) that has one booth devoted for mechanical measuring and calculation instruments that is virtually a museum. A lot of other stuff in the area is Amish wood working, most of which is too big to readily transport (and the wood would not do very well in our high desert anyway).

The heat, humidity, and smoking are all very aggravating; will be glad to get back west where the weather and air are better.

Schedule now is to visit the Upper Peninsula of MI (where neither of us has ever been) then head west. We do want to stop near Mt. Rushmore (been over 20 years since we last saw Crazy Horse), but still get home shortly after the 4th of July.

Sunday 19 June 2005

We have good news and bad news. The bad news is the second day after leaving Elkhart we had two more major problems, the macerator (the pump for sewage) stopped working and the windshield wipers failed. We needed the windshield wipers for the rain, the good news is that there was significant cooling; the bad news is I did not see much when crossing the Mackinac Straights bridge (not that I look much on a bridge anyway).

Since this is the beginning of the RV season, all repair facilities (within hundreds of miles, yes we checked) were booked; so we just had to spend more time in the Upper Peninsula (of MI); oh well, throw us in the briar patch. While the weather was cool (in the 60's) we drove around

(there are a lot of woods up here almost all white pine and birch) and went to a couple of museums.

The maritime museums are excellent, one in an old lighthouse facility for the "graveyard of Lake Superior", commemorating the loss of ship and life for the last 350 years or so of commerce on the lake. The other was in a retired ore freighter (about the same size as the Edmund Fitzgerald, e.g., over 700 feet long) about the history of maritime activities on the lake and general commerce to the sea.

When the weather improved we took a boat tour of the Soo Locks, actually went through one of the locks on the 150th year (to the day) anniversary of a commercial lock at that site. Some of these locks are the longest in the world (e.g., over 1300 feet) to take care of the 1000+ foot freighters used on the lakes. We also took a boat trip to see the Pictured Rocks shore line of south Lake Superior, now all part of a National Park. Quite scenic.

This coming week we will get the motorhome repaired and try to visit the western UP; there are several mining museums.

Tuesday 28 June 2005

We seem to have finally gotten all the motorhome problems fixed. Our planned itinerary has been greatly disturbed, but we are still going to try to see some things.

We very much enjoyed the Upper Peninsula of MI, despite the weather. The "yoopers" (UP'ers) look down upon (quite rightfully) the "trolls" of the rest of the state, i.e., the high population density areas. The yoopers are very friendly and even have a noticeable accent.

We visited the largest Cornish steam engine built in the USA, used for pumping out mines between 1890-1914. The flywheel is 40 feet in diameter and weights 160 tons, rotated at 10 rpm to pump out 300 gpm from as deep as 1484 feet (7 stages of pumps connected to the same (very long) drive shaft). We also tried a yooper pasty (pass-tee), based on the old Cornish pastie, but they have changed the spelling and pronunciation so not to be confused with the exotic dancer decoration.

We did meet my cousin Margaret and her husband Robert at one of the RV repair facilities (we needed, their RV is doing just fine), they are spending the summer in the UP, which is cooler than their normal abode in NC

On to WI, where we visited a buddy (Phil & family) from my Navy submarine days. We went to the Oshkosh Experimental Aviation Association museum, which has a very extensive collection of experimental aircraft, e.g., the first P-51 prototype, examples of Piper Cubs (first versions), and lots of other propeller driven aircraft, mostly from the 1930's. There was other memorabilia documenting the emergence of the aircraft industry, e.g., early electronics, maintenance items, how airfields were made. Lots of fun to go with another couple, as the guys could concentrate on items that were not always as interesting to the women.

Unfortunately, we were not able to spend more time in WI, e.g., the maritime museum, the Baraboo circus museum, antique stores, cheese factories, because of the numerous unforecast delays associated with the long list of additional repairs.

We are now in ND on our way to SD and MT where we will see some things, then homeward bound.

Saturday 2 July 2005

Although we did not miss the poor road surfaces, high temps, and high humidity east of the Mississippi; once we crossed we got into the rain. Strangely enough the last time we were in ND 5 years ago, they were also having flooding. Still a pleasure to drive on the better surfaced roads in ND in the rain, than the potholes of IN, MI, and WI.

We came back to the region around SD with Mount Rushmore. We had last been here 21+ years ago on the motorcycle (the furthest east we ever rode on the motorcycle). The area has become more commercialized, but not excessively so yet. The Crazy Horse memorial has seen significant changes, the face is now clearly delineated. There are still several hundred million more tons of rock to remove, but since this is a private project there is no fixed schedule. Lead & Deadwood are still worth visiting, just expanded. The National Woodcarvers museum shows a lot of the work of Dr. Niblock, not quite the same level as Moony Warther, but still quite remarkable.

We stayed in Sturgis, site of the motorcycle rally that doubles the population of the state in August. The rally is an off-shoot of the 4th Cavalry converting to Indians and Harleys in the late 1930's. The museum at Ft. Meade is fantastic. Among other things this is the site where the Star Spangled Banner became the National Anthem (officially in 1932, but after the commandant at the prompting of his wife started the playing at retreat in the early 1900's). Although not as extensive as the cavalry museum we visited at Ft. Riley, KS last year; this certainly adds some details and has some interesting tie-ins with the exploration of the region, as well as the 7th Cavalry, i.e., Comanche the horse recovered here after the Little Big Horn.

We visited the Rockpile Museum in Gillette, WY. This county is the source of about 25-30% of the coal mined in the USA. They use strip mining for the 50-150 foot thick seams of soft bituminous with negligible sulphur so extensively used for power production. Some really big trucks and other equipment in use.

Thursday 14 July 2005

Well, we are mostly at home, Donna is in the Bay Area visiting the dentist. I am at home, cat-sitting; note, another cat adopted us 1.5 or so years ago. Prancer is her name and she is becoming quite domesticated under Donna's tutelage. My job is to keep her brushed (she has long hair) while Donna is away. Of course, if I do not provide her the required attention, on her terms, she so informs me. Fortunately, this is mostly an outdoor cat, i.e., appears to be a good mouser, and likes time for herself.

We had another problem crop up on the motorhome, so we made a beeline home from SD. We now have about 10 problems that will be worked on in September, when we will take a trip to our regular upgrade (and repair) facility in Bend, OR. The Beaver plant is no longer there, but CoachMasters does quite well. A quick stop near LA on the way home to get the Vigia fixed, then Donna is off with her mother on an East Coast (part of New England anyway) foliage trip. We may get one more short trip in the motorhome in when Donna gets back, before winterizing, but that depends on how she feels and how the construction is going.

We are getting quite good at taking the new truck and a trailer to pick up construction supplies, e.g., lumber, rebar, insulation. etc. In case anyone does not know, we subscribe to the Sarah Winchester school of longevity; as long as you are building something, you should live longer. The new truck (RAM 2500 extended cab) has an automatic transmission (I was really getting worried about my left leg and the clutch) and is heavy duty, e.g., diesel. Mileage with the automatic is not quite as good as the old truck, but there is a lot more horsepower and the top speed is much higher and a lot more comfortable, both ease of ride and quiet.

Although we managed to miss most of the heat on the beeline home, we got some heat when we got here; high 90's during the day, with humidity < 10% and a breeze is bearable, but still hot to work in. Fortunately the temps drop to the high 50's or low 60's at night, so we still need a blanket (one for Donna, two for me). The swamp coolers are turned off at night, both to keep the humidity down to reasonable in the house, as well as not freeze us out in the morning.

Hopefully, my brother is coming to visit next week (while his wife is taking a course at UCLA, only about a 7 hour drive from here in the summer). We will then be home until around the 9th of September, should anyone want to brave the heat to get here. Since we have replaced the windows and stucco'ed the outside, the guest house is really quite comfortable, winter or summer.

Tuesday 13 September 2005

Although we only intend to be gone for about 2 weeks and the purpose of the trip is to have the "final" (from the accident) repairs done for the motorhome, we are likely to see some things anyway.

The first day we went to Reno to have the CAT place do PMs, which we probably should have done before leaving IN last spring, but were so irritated at that time, we just wanted to get on the road. As expected, there was not much wrong, but the normal PMs (e.g., filter changes, oil, coolant, etc.) should have been done immediately after the motorhome was road worthy.

We have found a great RV campground, especially if you like golf, in Likely, CA. Can see the stars and hear the coyotes. Next we stayed in Tionesta, CA in order to visit Lava Beds National Monument. This means hundreds of cubic miles of various types of volcanic rock from basalt to obsidian. This is also the site of the Modoc Indian war, noted as the only Indian war in which an army general was killed.

We have spent the last couple of days around Bend, OR; one of Donna's favorite places, since there is no sales tax. Repairs on the motorhome are going per schedule, so we should be leaving here tomorrow.

FYI, I am using a wireless network card to send this e-mail, so I am moving into the more modern forms of networking.