

2006 Travel Summary

Wednesday 3 May 2006

Not winter, not summer, must be time to travel. We are taking the motorhome for what (we hope) are the final repairs from the accident in 2004. Our insurance company paid for the repair, just based on an estimate, in order to close the books. So first we will visit a museum in Alturas, CA then a couple of days in Bend, OR. Afterwards we will drive home, after some stops along the Columbia River gorge and parts of eastern OR we have not seen. Donna is ready for a "vacation", since the sheet rockers have been very delinquent, which causes her great distress. In any case, progress is still being made on the East Wing.

Weather has been following the winter trend, i.e., warmer than normal; days are in the 70's (sometimes high 70's) while nights are in the low 50's (when should be in the high 30's). Humidity is about right, 14% this moment, so that does not explain the low delta-T between day and night temperatures. This means we will probably have a lot of fruit this year, since we will be gone at harvest time. Last year was the only year in the last 20+ years that no fruit in the valley and that was the year we chose to stay home in the fall.

I have been busy with two projects:

1. The Harvard researchers asked me to set up a web site for my mutation (avoids problems for them with some of the idiotic laws and regulations regarding disclosing genetic information); so I have learned a little about how to make a web site. Visit www.ibmpfd.com if you are interested; comments for how to improve are welcome.
2. I will host a National Early Bird Solar Tour at our residence, visit http://www.ases.org/tour/early_bird_tours.htm for more information. I have made a CD (that copies are available of if you are really really interested) containing pictures, published and unpublished articles, schematics, etc. of our systems (and some general reference info by others).

Also been slowly cleaning some train track (after 50+ years there is an accumulation of rust and dirt) for the model train layout; that is going very slowly. I have generated (on computer) a tentative layout, at least of the track, the building, bridges, mountain, etc. locations are still in my mind. This will be an engineering (trial & error) layout, not scientific.

Donna has been doing her normal homemaker work, along with playing with Prancer (the cat). Prancer will be going on the motorhome trip with us. One of the things recovered from the underground storage area was about 900 gallons of wheat (of which about 1/2 is still good). Donna has a small stone mill (electrically operated) so has been making whole wheat flour; with her new bread maker she is now baking some great breads (once got the yeast right and corrected for our altitude).

We are still planning a fall trip, i.e., family reunion in October in SC/NC. Hopefully, not too many hurricanes this year!!!

Saturday 20 May 2006

We have now been traveling about 2 weeks. We did see the great local museum in Alturas, CA (lots of local history from the settlement of that region) and had our anniversary dinner at the local Italian restaurant (actually pretty good food). We then spent the next 5 weekdays in Bend, OR getting the motor home fixed (although the entertainment system will have to be shipped to us from Bose and we re-install). Most everything was fixed, although Donna had to replace the macerator after the first stop (seems the one I re-built did not work properly so we put the old one back in). The macerator now works exactly as originally intended (5 years later), although not on a reel anymore.

Since the East Wing was not progressing as planned (sheet rockers only working 1 day/week), we decided to spend some more time traveling. After some sight seeing along the Columbia River gorge and finding out none of the museums or underground in Pendleton, OR was handicap accessible, we decided to head to Montana. Along the way, we spent another day in Lewiston/Clarkston (ID, WA) for some antique shopping, as well as getting some stuff at Wal-Mart and Home Depot. We then drove US-12 to Missoula< MT. This road was perfect for a motorcycle, scenic and lots of curves with no potholes or gravel. Not exactly ideal for the motor home, but sure made me wish we still could ride the motorcycle.

We headed for Bozeman, MT specifically to visit the American Computer Museum (was closed for moving the last time through). Although most exhibits are in storage, this museum was one of the best we have ever been to (I found no errors or misinformation). There was a re-creation of the Greek astronomical computer from 87 BC, probably the world's first mechanical calculating device (not counting the abacus or strings with knots). There was an example of every important advance in calculating and computing, from the use of "zero" to Pascal to Babbage to Thatcher to Curta to a PDP-8, an Apple I (and other 70's era computers, e.g., Altair), parts of ENIAC and the books, e.g., original copies of the Principia, Franklin's work, Turing papers, and just lots of other stuff. This was the most pleasantly surprising museum we have been to in a long time. If you are at all interested in the history of computation and calculation, this is the best place to go. The owner/founder had to choose between Princeton or Bozeman, maybe less traffic but clearly a better location.

Prancer (the cat) has been traveling with us. Other than an infection that affected her digestion system, which apparently started before we left, and was fixed by a good vet in Bend, she has adapted to the motor home quite well. Of course, Donna does need to clean more often, as there is fur every where, but she has been no problem and a lot of help to Donna, who has to do most of the work.

The weather got very hot (for us) shortly after we got to Bend, but now in MT has cooled down (got some rain). We are now off to Butte, MT to visit some mining museums (I read a book on Anaconda on the way here and we just have to see what is left), then will head towards home. Note, this is the second RV campground with Wi-Fi, which makes things a lot easier to communicate.

Saturday 27 May 2006

This is the next to last day of our trip, we should be home Sunday evening, so no more "Travel Status" for a while. We did visit a number of museums in and around Butte, MT. Butte was considered the "richest hill on Earth" because of all the mines, especially copper. The copper mines were developed in response to the development of electricity. There is a mining museum at Montana Tech, site of the Orphan Girl mine head; as well as a number of hoists at mine heads around the town. The museum had a very good display on the history of the generation and distribution of compressed air for various uses in mining. On the other side of Butte is a very large open pit, where they are still removing copper ore, although at a much smaller scale than before. Note, open pit mining is considered to be much less expensive and a lot easier to clean up than hard rock drilling as was done in the past.

Near Butte is Anaconda, once synonymous with the best of large scale non-ferrous mining. They were bought out some decades ago and no longer exist, but once Anaconda had some of the largest copper mines and smelters in the world. Still at Anaconda is the world's tallest masonry structure, the smoke stack for the smelter, capable of discharging 3-4 million cubic feet/minute of gas (you do not even want to know what those gases were, this was long before people understood the effects of pollution). They are opening a part of the old Butte, Anaconda, and Pacific train tracks for use, but that is not until the summer.

We did visit some antique stores, books were very expensive, but found some other items that were reasonable. The scenery is quite nice at this time of year, very green, still snow on the mountain tops, and the rivers and streams are full. We also found Butte to be the home of the fried pork cutlet sandwich, actually tastes better than sounds, especially with some Colman mustard.

Friday 8 September 2006

We are leaving Monday for our fall trip, so please:

1. Do not forward humor etc., especially pictures.
2. If anyone does not want to be on distribution, let me know.
3. If anyone gets this message, but then does not get an update in a week or two, let me know (means the desktop did not transfer contacts properly to the laptop).

We are planning on being at St. Louis University around 21 September, they are doing research into my mutation. I have a Navy reunion (for DE1043) in early October in Charleston, then a family reunion in mid-October. We will then be heading home, e.g., on I-40, then Texas.

We should be home by mid-November, time for Donna to get her mother to spend the rest of the year with us. The East Wing should be pretty much complete by then, we will be moving in (with Wanda's help) over the beginning of the winter. Looking forward to the solar radiant heating in the East Wing.

We have added a tow brake for the minivan we tow, that should be the last of the "customizations". Prancer (our cat) will be traveling with her, Donna has pretty much made her an "indoor" cat now, we had a trial trip in the spring and everything was OK.

We will try to balance the trip between seeing sights and visiting friends along the way. I now have a portable wheel chair to go with the scooter, so we should be able to get around fairly well. We still only plan on driving 4-6 hours per day (total between both of us) so we will not be rapidly crossing the country.

Wednesday 20 September 2006

We are in St. Louis, first location with a wireless Internet connection for a week now. We had our normal starting difficulties, i.e., the battery in the Caravan died; then we found the wheel chair uses a different valve stem (i.e., a Presta instead of a Schrader valve). We found a Sears in Grand Junction that provided a new battery and a bicycle shop in Salina that had the right fittings. Very friendly and helpful people in Colorado.

Due to the car situation, we made quick time to CO and visited our JEDEC friends outside of Salina. Anyone knowing Fred will be aware that he and I spent the afternoon on JEDEC definitions while Wanda and Donna went shopping. We hope to be back next year, for a longer time (and probably a longer JEDEC meeting). Their part of CO is nicknamed the "banana belt" and we could tell why, the climate was very comfortable, even though surrounded by 14,000 + foot mountains in a 7000 + foot valley. Very scenic!!!

We took US50 through CO and Kansas, instead of the Interstate. US50 is wonderful in NV and just as good in CO. We stopped in Dodge City (I had not been there since about 1958) and visited Ft. Dodge (nice small museum) and the Boot Hill museum in Dodge City. All reconstructed now, but still some interesting views on how bison and cattle were processed in the 1870's and 1880's. Of course, there was the Long Branch where we each had a sarsaparilla, but no Marshall Dillon.

On to Ft. Leavenworth, although (in)famous for the military prison, is actually the longest serving military facility west of the Mississippi. Served as the supply source for most of the western forts until the demise of the Indians. The museum has an excellent chronology of the history of western exploration, most of which started from or went through Ft. Leavenworth (also the oldest settlement in KS). The old military prison was demolished last year, but one can still view (from a distance) the still existing federal maximum security prison. I learned the military prison was the site of the execution of 14 German POWs (after VE day) among the others that were executed there, over the 100+ year history. The military corrections system is considered to be one of the foremost for rehabilitation, when possible.

Prancer (the cat) is doing well, much better than last trip where she started out sick. We have been mostly eating in the motor home (Donna's cooking!!!!), so not much to report on the food. There are a lot of antique stores in MO, but most pricing is per the Internet, so not near as much fun.

The weather has been fine, most days in the 60's or 70's; which is perfect for Donna. No rain yet, although we had a lot of wind driving through KS. Many nights we have had to use the heaters already, which is much better than keeping the AC on.

Wednesday 4 October 2006

After leaving St. Louis, where we had a very good interaction with the medical staff, we headed toward Louisville, KY. We had planned on staying there, but since there was a circus in town there were no campsites, so we moved on to Frankfort, KY. That night we had 6" of rain (about 3 years worth at home); Louisville also had hail and high wind, so we got lucky. The next morning the campground recommended we move to higher ground as the creek (a river in NV) was about to overflow. So we spent the next night "dry-camping" in a high school parking lot.

Frankfort has the KY military museum, which has the only display I have seen of the reason the Army adopted the M1911 (.45 cal automatic). Obviously an excellent museum on the history of military activities in KY, including a re-construction of how musket/rifle ammunition was made during the Civil War. The town had some nice antique and old book stores.

I-64 from Louisville, KY to Lexington, VA is strongly recommended for the good road surface and lots of scenery, not counting the hills and dales one rode over and snaked through. We went to Lexington to see the VA horse farm, which has a very good museum for horse drawn farm implements, especially plows and harrows. The George C. Marshall museum at VMI has lots of interesting displays on the phenomenal career of Marshall.

Next we stayed near Lake Gaston, NC to visit my LPO (Bruce) from my submarine days. We went to the army quartermaster museum and women's army museum at Ft. Lee. The quartermaster museum is quite comprehensive, not only a large display about graves registration (probably the worst job one can have), but also had an example of my cereal bowl (that I have been using for the last 50 years).

We went to the Barge and Canal Museum in Roanoke Rapids, NC; which has some excellent info on the main transportation and power system in the area, pre-railroads. Quite a bit of engineering went into making the canals, locks, and aqueducts to transport the river craft in the late 1700 and early 1900's.

We just spent some time near Darlington, SC; where we visited my mother's grave stone; as well as visiting a cousin who had lots of family history info (now very important for the mutation). We ate at Joe's Grill, which was sort of my first "hang-out", i.e., to get beer and food, in high school.

Next is the DE-1043 reunion in Charleston, SC; then the family reunion near my sister in Monroe, NC.

Monday 18 October 2006

We have now completed about 1/2 our trip, driven ~ 4000 miles with the motorhome and ~1700 miles with the van. We have been gone ~ 33 days. Both the Navy and family reunions were attended and were very worthwhile.

While in Charleston, SC we got a special tour of the CSS Hunley exhibit. Very impressive the technology implement 140 years ago, along with the courage and persistence of the crew. We visited the USS Yorktown at Patriots Point, although I could not visit the destroyer, submarine, or cutter also there. The Hornet is an Essex class carrier from WWII, with a lot of museums and aircraft. Of course, I could not visit most of the ship, but still very much enjoyed what we could see.

We took side trips to McClellandville and Georgetown, as well as driving around Charleston.

After visiting with my brother Mark, we had a family reunion where my sister Maureen works (a retirement center). Things went very well, I am somewhat pleased to report my younger brother Robert is now a much better pool player than I am (so is my brother-in-law Charlie).

We spent a day touring Brattonsville, a pre-revolutionary war village. Many of the buildings have been preserved (or restored) and were used for filming of the Mel Gibson movie "The Patriot" (about some occurrences in that neck of the woods during the revolution). The location has sheep and cattle, along with draft horses and cotton fields, all of which Donna enjoyed. The Brattons were several generations of doctors, so there were a number of medical items on display, which Donna really enjoyed.

We are now in Chattanooga, TN. Today we spent at the Chickamauga battlefield site and museum, site of the oldest and largest military national park in the USA, commemorating the bloodiest 2-day battle of the Civil War. There were numerous deer on the battlefield, so Donna could take pictures of something other than the very rugged terrain and 1400+ monuments and plaques.

Next planned stop is the Jack Daniels distillery, gee I wonder why??

Sunday 29 October 2006

We have been mostly driving for the last few weeks and visiting friends, so not much to describe.

We did get to the Jack Daniels distillery (they are the largest whiskey maker in the world) and had a very nice personally guided tour of the various accessible areas (hey, there is an advantage to mobility impairment). The following photograph was take of us, near one of the bottling plants. Tennessee whiskey is different from Kentucky bourbon in that the brew is filtered before aging and the treatment of the aging casks is different.



We then drove to Lake Athens, TX (yes takes us much more than one day from Lynchburg, TN), where we stayed at a very nice RV park with a marina and very good restaurant (best country-fried steak I have had in a long time and I do have them frequently). We visited the TX Freshwater Hatchery Museum, which was next door. Not that I like fish that much, but the museum was very informative. Donna especially liked the "paddlefish", a very ancient member of the catfish family that is really weird looking (almost all the fish here are alive). There are displays of "stuffed fish" (of fish story fame) of really large members of a variety of types (bass, catfish, gar).

There probably will not be another status until we get home, as mostly from now on we are driving and visiting friends along the way.

Wednesday 20 December 2006

We have had a busy time since getting home, so I have been re-miss in not sending a status update. Obviously, we are now at home (safely with no incidents). Prancer (the cat) was very happy to get outside again, although Donna is limiting her time (not much of a problem, since Prancer wants to come back in fairly quickly anyway).

We have had unusually cold weather, i.e., still fall and been down to ~ 0 °F already, which is colder than anytime last winter. We have had snow on the ground (~1") for the last 5 days, which is also very unusual. The temperature has not gotten above 31 °F for the last 3 days, even in the winter we are usually in the 40's-50's.

Donna's mother Wanda is staying with us through the holidays, i.e., from before Thanksgiving to after New Year's; along with Kramer (who is not allowed out). Kramer is quite happy to visit, especially when Gary (our neighbor) and I are playing pool.

All of us went to Scotty's Castle in the Northern end of Death Valley last week. We did a loop, which included 30+ miles of gravel road, but got to see a lot of countryside. Although the house has not changed much since our last visit (20+ years ago), the infrastructure is quite comprehensive now. Although Scotty's Castle is only about 60 miles or so as the crow flies south of us, the round trip was 230 miles, including the gravel road.

We have not moved into the East Wing yet, there is a problem with the heating circulation pump. So the East Wing is quite cold, given the outside temperatures and not adding heat. We have moved some furniture in, e.g., in the offices and reading room. The East Wing looks really good, the new laminate flooring type is great. Should have the problems fixed by the time we get back from taking Wanda home.