

Travelogues from David and Donna's Around-the-World Trip Feb-Aug 2001

=====
This is our first group message. We are currently in Australia, preparing to sail around the Great Barrier Reef. We had 2+ wonderful weeks in New Zealand, where we did "farm stays" (i.e., a rural B&B with dinner). We saw lots of great scenery in the North Island (we will make another trip to see the South Island) and learned a lot about farming deer, sheep, and cattle.

So far all is well, although I have convinced Donna to ship back some excess clothes. She had forgotten her packing lessons from our motorcycle touring days, but has regained them after hauling around a 55 pound suitcase.

This message is short, but I can elaborate based on feedback. Since overseas calls and hook-ups to the Internet are expensive (and Donna has not hooked her camera to this computer yet), we do not have attachments (and hope to not get very many). I put everyone on BCC, just in case know one wants to know who else we are sending this to.

Based on some of the responses from the last e-mail, there are actually a few people we have not told about our travel plans. This is for those few. Our itinerary is: New Zealand (Feb), Australia (Mar), Greece and Egypt (Apr), Spain & Portugal (May), England & Scotland (Jun), Scandinavia (Jul), Finland & Russia (Aug). We then hope to travel in the motorhome to visit Donna's relatives back east in October and David's in November.

We are doing as much traveling as we can while I can still walk. So far I only need to use the cane on rough or unfamiliar ground and I can still (slowly) get up and down staircases. I have walked up to 3 km with suitable rests, so things are going OK.

We plan to check on e-mails and voice mail every 1 to 2 weeks, depending on where we are and availability of phones.

Donna is taking pictures with her camera, but they cannot be transferred to e-mail (sometime after we get home, maybe). People will just have to visit us if they want to see pictures and hear the details. We expect to move in to the main house around December; thus, the guest house will be free for visitors then.

We are finishing up on the MS Reef Endeavor, on which we spent a week cruising about the Great Barrier Reef and assorted islands. We saw lots of coral and fishes (also a reef shark and green sea turtle) on several glass bottom boat trips. We tried snorkeling, which Donna (surprise) likes and got the hang of fairly quickly. The weather has been mostly good, although a little wind one night caused Donna to wonder about ship board life. Lots of food. Donna has taken lots of pictures, even with daily editing, she may not have brought enough storage media (40,000 pictures including some video). Went ashore at Cook Town and some islands, although we often chose to go swimming in the ship's pool when others went ashore.

=====

We have completed taking the Indian-Pacific train across Australia. An interesting experience. Donna took some pictures, including wild kangaroos and horses. Saw the wedge-tailed eagle (symbol of the train), which is supposed to be the world's largest. The beds are long, but narrow. Donna had trouble sleeping in the top bunk, afraid of falling out, so we switched the first night. She said I started snoring immediately.

Minor excitement, a freight train derailed, which blocked the line to Perth. We spent the night on the train in Kalgoorlie, not moving (so Donna got some sleep). The train is probably the world's longest open sewer, so we were not supposed to use the facilities while parked, yeah right.

Crossed the Nullarbor Plain, which includes a 480 km (300 mile) stretch where there are no curves. There are also no trees, hills, people, etc. just some salt bush and grass. Donna took pictures, I read 2 600+ page novels and some other items during the trip.

Next tour is a bus trip around SW Australia. This will be our first lengthy bus tour this trip, so I will let you know how things are in a week or so.

There were fire engines outside our hotel when we arrived, but fortunately this was a false alarm.

=====

We have completed our first week long motor coach tour. We had a very good time and met a lot of nice people, a very convivial group.

We went through southwestern Australia, including mining and farming communities. WA (either Western Australia or Wait Awhile) has some very large open pit mines, mostly gold, even though they are requiring lots of stringent ecological measures. No koalas, but lots of kangaroos and emus. Several dairy, beef, and sheep farms and a few wineries. Visited a number of museums, mostly on the history of each locale; most of the towns started in the late 19th century, especially with the advent of the gold rushes (and some of the mines are still active).

By the way, in case anyone does not know, the people, institutions, history of Australia are very different than that of the USA. The language is similar, but the country has had a much different effect on the people and institutions (culture??).

We took a couple of trains and trams through forests (karri and other exotic native trees), took a skywalk where there are 600 meters of narrow steel trestle going 40 meters or so high through a forest (last remaining dingle trees, so do not walk on forest floor that interferes with their water gathering). Went into one cave, Donna walked all the way through, but I chickened out after going down about 100 steps. Saw lots of coast line, beautiful beaches and no people, traffic.

Visited Wave Rock, a large 60 million year old rock that is weathered and looks like a wave. Donna climbed part of the rock (about 12 meters high) to take some great pictures. We had buffets almost every night,

which meant lots of good food. We have been getting lots of vegetables and fruit, which will probably be scarce when we get to Europe.

Donna now agrees that WA is as beautiful and comfortable as Tasmania and Victoria, so we will try to come back here and drive around so we can see more.

We have been gone almost 6 weeks and feel no need to stop traveling. Next stop is Athens, we have been told all sorts of horror stories, but we have been getting prepared. Next stop after that is Egypt, so we may not have e-mail contact for the next month. In any case, do not let that stop anyone writing, as we will keep up as much contact as possible.

=====

=====

This is an unusual update, because we did something special today, we visited the Acropolis. Although we have a few more days in Athens and will visit some museums, I thought I would pass this along.

After driving around various monuments in the city, we stopped at the Acropolis; actually about 2/3rd's the way up the hill. We then walked the rest of the way up, with stops for commentary by the guide (fortunately, because I needed the breaks). Some of the ruins are 3500 years old, pre-dating the Greek civilization. I had quite a thrill walking around the same ground as Socrates, Thuycidides, Pericles, Plato, etc. The buildings (undergoing some restoration) are spectacular, even though 2500 years (or so) old. There is a museum that includes some recovered statuary and other masonry.

Athens does have air pollution, but the smoking pollution inside the buildings is worse. Taxis driving is not as bad as alluded to, although the driving is more reminiscent of Asia than Europe, Athens is still a large, crowded city. Pickpockets appear no worse than any other large city.

=====

Hello All,

The following is a summary of our 5 day bus tour of classical Greece.

Day 1: Left Athens and traveled along coast near seaport of Pireaus. Lots of ships (mid-size in the harbor). Crossed the Corinth canal, started by Nero (~55 AD) and completed by DeLessups (~1893) to connect the Aegean to the Adriatic and truly make the Pelopenesus an island. Stopped at the Mycenae site excavated by H. Schielmann as the grave of Agamemnon, although the site was 400 years older than that time. A very well constructed site, built sometime around 1600 BC. Visited the grave sites of the house of Atreus (Agamemnon family) that was of the

correct time period and the masonry construction inside a hill has survived 3000+ years of earthquakes. The lintel above the entrance weighs 120 tonnes and the bee-hive like dome is about 15+ meters high. No mortar, just a lot of shaped rocks (2-6 tonnes each) on top of each other.

In all cases, we are staying at the Amalia Hotels. These are large hotels (like Holiday Inns), the rooms have space, but everything is small, e.g., beds are low, I hit my head on the hanging lamp (at least once in each room), and we have to hold up the shower head to wet anything above the knees. Also, there are NO no-smoking areas (other than some public transportation) and close to 100% of the population smokes; obviously we are having some difficulty in breathing. Basic facilities and operations are primitive (but relatively clean) and almost everyone is friendly and speaks some English.

Day 2: The morning was spent driving through the mountains from the east to the west coast of the Pelopeneus. The mountains are very rocky, i.e., in many places no vegetation, and steep. Almost all arable land is cultivated, e.g., olive trees, fruit trees, olive trees, nut trees, olive trees, vineyards, olive trees. Many of the houses look quite nice and roomy. Most are elevated (to help with natural air cooling) and have extensive balconies. Whitewashed stucco walls on top of brick, with reinforced concrete pillars and beams, lots of red tile roofs, most with solar hot water heating. Visited the museum at Olympia, with has many relics from the original site of the Olympic games. Went into town and bought some jumpers as the temperature has been cool in the mornings, even Donna thought a jumper would help when walking about some sites. This was the site of the Temple of Zeus, one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world.

Day 3: Weather was cool and rainy. Donna walked around the excavations of the physical site of the original Olympics. The area was used for over 1000 years for festivities and athletics. We took the ferry across the isthmus that leads to the Corinth canal (from the Adriatic side, i.e., an overnight ferry ride to Venice). We then drove up the mountains to Delphi (actually good motorcycle roads), which is the site of the ancient oracle, as well as a religious and athletic center. Donna was able to climb the stairs to visit some of the ruins. Note, most of the destruction, both at Olympia and Delphi were caused by earthquakes and floods, although various conquerors of Greece (e.g., Romans, Franks, Venetians, Turks) carried off various sculptures and treasures.

Day 4: Weather was cool with occasional showers. We climbed around the Delphi site (operative word in climbed). For over 1000 years this was a center of political and religious meeting, of course with the attendant prophecies. Although looting of the payments had occurred, most of the physical damage was caused by earthquakes, even as recent as 1905 causing major damage. A special place because of the amazing scenery, e.g., built on the side of rugged, rocky cliffs. Drove past Thermopylae, through very rugged mountains, some that were snow capped.

Day 5: The weather was cloudy and cool, but fortunately appropriate sunshine when viewing the scenery. Visited the monastic complexes at Meteora. These are situated on high (500 to 600 meters) granite conglomerate cliffs. The scenery is spectacular, i.e., the cliffs are

a combination of Zion with Monument Valley. The monasteries were founded in the 14th - 16th centuries on ruins of hermits from earlier times. Although some plundering has occurred over the centuries, there is a large remainder of frescoes, books, codices, vestments, religious paraphernalia from the Greek Orthodox and Byzantine art eras. Donna took a picture of the statue of Leonidas at Thermopylae; however, the site of the battlefield has changed a lot in the last 2500 years and has not been preserved.

Next item is taking the cruise ship through some of the Greek islands, e.g., Crete, Rhodes, and Istanbul. We will be out of communication again for at least a week, depending on how the hotel is in Cairo.

=====

We have now completed over 8 weeks of traveling, about 1/3 of the intended length. We feel no compelling urge to rush home or any other ill effects from the traveling. We are doing well together (since Donna does almost all the work) and are really enjoying visiting all these wonderful places with each other.

We left Athens in the midst of showers; however, the weather started clearing up as soon as we were aboard. Although we did not book a large cabin (i.e., we should of, but were still in the penny-pinching mode), the cabin is adequate with 2 twin beds that are almost long and wide enough. The bathroom is cramped, although the shower is roomy (and unique for Greece, the shower head is actually above our heads and does not leak). There is smoking inside the ship (unlike the cruise ship in Australia), but fortunately not in the dining area. The game room is no smoking, so even if we were not playing cribbage, that is a place we can talk to other people and still breathe.

After leaving in the late afternoon, we sailed all night. Donna is getting her sea legs. The next morning we passed through the Dardanelle and near the WWI battle site of Gallipolli. Ancient Troy is buried somewhere near to the East.

Visited Istanbul; took tour of Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace (home of sultans), and Grand Bazaar. Good examples of Islamic art in the Blue Mosque, which is also very large. Hagia Sophia is now a museum and part are in process of restoration, e.g., uncovering mosaics done about 1000 years ago. The Palace is very large and we only saw a few exhibits. The Grand Bazaar is a giant flea market with aggressive vendors. Weather was very nice, i.e., cool, although just started to rain as we returned to the ship. Lots of smoking and poor restrooms, that you have to pay to use. Vendors quite friendly despite the current economic turmoil.

Visited site of Ephesus (near Kusadasi Turkey); once the second largest city in the Roman Empire and site of the 3rd largest library. City lasted about 1100 years until harbor silted up causing swamps and malaria, then 2 major earthquakes. City remained buried for about 1100 years until excavation started about 100 years ago. The latrines were well preserved and demonstrated that Europe was not as hygienic as the Romans until well into the 20th century. Since this was one of the two termini of the Silk Road, this was a major port; therefore, for the

sailors the "red light" district was across the street (and connected by underground tunnel) with the library.

The day started cool and cloudy. Took scenic bus tour of Patmos Island, site of writing of book of revelations by St. John the Divine. Several monasteries and nunneries. No street hustlers, everything to the island is brought in, including a lot of the water. Typical architecture and scenery for these northeastern Greek islands.

After leaving Patmos, the ship developed a "technical problem", i.e., could not make normal speed; therefore, the remainder of the cruise was canceled and we returned to Athens. Upon arriving we worked out to go to Cairo a day early. The parts canceled were primarily Rhodes and Crete, maybe we will get back to them some day.

=====

After the shortening of Greek island cruise, we arrived a day early in Cairo. This allowed us to set up some extra visits and have some more rest time here. Impressions of Egypt: although smoking is not banned, there is less of it and not so intrusive as Greece; there is still reconstruction in progress from the 1992 earthquake; the city is an intriguing combination of old and new, e.g., we travel in a van past donkey drawn carts, sharing the same road.

Day 1: weather is nice, warm and dry, back to wearing shorts. Visited the citadel including a spectacular mosque of Sultan Muhammad Aly, who over through the Mamelukes. Drove to Memphis, abandoned about 4000 years ago, but recent excavations have found some well preserved statues of Ramses II and his descendents, as well as the gods of Memphis, e.g., Ptah and family. Went to the "stepped pyramid", supposedly a unique example of an early 3rd or 4th dynasty pyramid that was not copied by others. Many of the supporting structures are being excavated and are in good shape, i.e., for stone buildings over 4000 years old. One of the buildings had graffiti from over 3000 years ago.

Day 2: weather a bit warmer, in fact hot in the sun by the afternoon. This was the big day and I got quite tired. First we visited a Coptic church (Greek Orthodox similar) from around the 3rd century. The wood carvings were still original, the stone columns were from older Greek or Egyptian temples (i.e., they were all different shapes and designs), and the icons (paintings) were probably early Ottoman. Interesting that in 1600 or so years, that particular church has seen little, if any human or earthquake destruction. Visited a synagogue established around the 14th century, contains both Jewish, Coptic, and Islam images. Now used as a museum, since virtually all Jews left Egypt between 1948 and 1967. Note, about 20% of the Egyptian population is Coptic. Then we went to the 3 pyramids at Gisa, they are large. With the advent of the Aswan dam, Cairo now extends right up to them, but they are impressive. I liked the Sphinx, although Donna thought the carving was going to be larger (I do not know how). Since there have been numerous new excavations and discoveries in the last 5 years, lots of stuff we thought we knew has changed, e.g., very few slaves were used in construction, since they found the workers quarters and some new tombs of the work force. Visited the museum of antiquities, which houses virtually every conceivable artifact (that had not left the country by the 19th century). Very much liked the display of tools

used for construction, including measuring devices. There were also games, hunting, and farming equipment. Oh, did we mention the treasures of Tutankaman??? There is a lot more than what was displayed on the King Tut tour of 20 years ago.

Day 3: weather overcast but comfortable. Drove to Alexandria, site of the library (accidentally partially burned by the Romans, when Julius Caesar was messing around with Cleopatra (VII), then thoroughly destroyed by the Arabs 650 years later). Went to the Greco-Roman museum, lots of interesting stuff, since this city was really founded by Alexander the Great. Visited the Citadel, built in the 14-15th century on the remains of the library. The remains of the lighthouse have been recently found and are in process of excavation, along with the possible remains of the palace of Antony & Cleopatra, which was flooded when the sea rose about 2000 years ago. Visited a "catacomb", actually a necropolis for believers in the Roman gods, just prior to the advent of Christianity (i.e., in the 1st to 4th centuries) that was hand carved out of stone with very large rooms. Went by 3 of the palaces of King Farouk, once of which is now a jewelry museum (with a very impressive collection of gold, platinum, diamond, ruby concoctions) and the other (that we could enter) is a 5-star hotel.

Egypt (so far) is a very surprising, pleasantly so. The "crime" we were warned about does not appear to exist (other than that there is a high population density here), the people are reasonably friendly (tourism is the 2nd largest industry), the historical sites are wonderful (this is one of the cradles of civilization), and the creature comforts are reasonable. Our tours have been personal, i.e., we have a van and a tour guide to show us about, not in a crowded tour bus.

Donna has also been pleasantly surprised, for example, the sharp dividing line between the greenery around the Nile and the pure desert (much more desolate than where we live), as well as the wonder of these marvelous creations of 2000 to how ever many thousands of years ago.

We have been eating well, too well as there seems to be plenty of good food everywhere. We head off for the Nile boat cruise tomorrow, getting up to meet the cab at 0315 (that is correct 3:15AM!!!!).

=====

First we did the unheard of, we met the taxi at 3:15 AM (do not ask wake up time) to get to the airport. We flew to Abu Simbel, which is the site of the famous temple of Ramses II (for LARGE seated statues on the outside). The whole temple and that of Queen Nerfertari (along side) were physically cut up and moved higher to avoid flooding by the Aswan high dam. The temples are very impressive, both in size and detail of the internal carvings (consider this was done with wood and bronze about 3200 years ago). I am glad we went, although Donna is not too sure. First, she is not feeling too good (too much fried seafood I think), then the day was hot 37C (in the morning), and we were in crowded small buses. We had been spoiled by the individual treatment of a dedicated van and guide for just us, while doing the preceding tours. Got to the boat, which is actually quite nice, e.g., marble and wood floors, good wood paneling, etc. I have to duck in most passageways and doorways and cannot stand up in the shower (i.e., the

ceiling is too low), but other than that, seems OK. Smoking is not too much of a problem. We are going downstream (sailing north) and the ride is very smooth.

We both missed a day's worth of visits due to the "Pharaoh's Revenge". Fortunately there was a pharmacy nearby that some kind hearted people went to and provided us with the cure. Donna's back started acting up, because she spent too much time sleeping, while trying to recover from the diarrhea. We visited 3 temples, Kom-Ombo, Ednu, and Esnu (actually together we only visited one). They represent a wide variety of influences, e.g., can see the advent of the Greeks, then the Romans. The temple at Esnu was the last one built for the Egyptian gods (about 250 AD) and is interesting because of the numerous hieroglyphic errors. They all had various interesting reliefs, e.g., a god creating man on a potter's wheel, raising an obelisk with ropes (i.e., similar to our windmill), medical instruments (mostly for mummification, Donna has the details), hunting a hippopotamus, signs of the Zodiac. Some still had colors, showing that the originals would have been very impressive, not just because of size and detail, but the vivid coloration.

Went to Luxor, passing through a lock on the Nile, dropped about 4 meters. Visited one tomb in the Valley of the Queens and two tombs in the Valley of the Kings. These are on the west bank of the Nile, in the City of the Dead of old Luxor/Thebes from the time of the New Kingdom. This is the time of the greatest Egyptian Empire and was about 1000-1500 years after the Pyramid builders (Old Kingdom). The Valley of the Kings is where King Tut's tomb was discovered in 1922. The other 63 known Pharaoh tombs in the valley had already been plundered, most about 3000 years ago, i.e., shortly after the fall of the Egyptian empire (about 1000 BC) with invasions from Assyrians, Persians, etc.

Next visited the temples at Karnak (the largest temple complex in history) and another temple of Luxor. These had obelisks and lots of very large columns. Most of the bas relief work had been damaged as well as the main structures, mostly from earthquakes. These temples are large, one had 134 columns, each column about 10 feet in diameter and 50 feet tall.

We were quite exhausted after all the walking and climbing, but at least our digestion appears back on track.

Some general comments on Egypt: the people are friendly and common crime is very low (now because there are armed tourist police everywhere to not have a repeat of the fundamentalist terrorist incident of a few years ago, general belief is that activity was funded by Iran as Egypt is working to become a capitalistic republic that happens to have a large Islam population, rather than a socialist theocracy). The historical monuments and artifacts are impressive, in size, scope, and artistry, especially given their great antiquity. The country is primitive, i.e., badly over populated with all resulting problems of lack of sanitation, courtesy, selfish behavior, inefficient (corrupt) bureaucracies, nonexistent community spirit and ideas of teamwork, no planning for the future and shoddy workmanship. The street vendors are much more courteous than Greece or Turkey and are willing to bargain a lot (if you do not bargain, you will pay a greatly inflated price). If we had to do again, we would plan a trip that was about 5 days longer, just to see the same things, but with a lot more

rest and relaxation time. Most of the tourist attractions have little or no sanitary or rest facilities.

After another early morning flight (leave for the airport at 6:00 AM) we are back in Cairo for our flight to Munich. The pick-up is at 3:30 AM, can you believe we (that really includes Donna) are on our way at that hour???

=====

After discussing our options on the plane, we decided to rent a car in Germany and drive around. After the smusty, crowded, littered, bustle of Egypt we needed the clean, green, uncluttered scenes of southern Germany to be by ourselves. So we started driving, sort of in the direction of Goppingen, the location of the Marklin museum. Donna & I have Marklin trains (I have had HO for about 49 years and Donna has had Z for about 15 years) and know the museum has been extensively revamped since the last time we visited there.

This first night was spent at a gasthaus, where the heat does not come on until 6:00 AM (for those that cannot guess, southern Germany is not overly warm in the middle of spring) but Donna especially is loving the cool temperatures. We like having furniture we can get up from without a "come-along", a shower to stand under without bending over, water to drink without buying; there are also the benefits of good beer and spatzle.

This will go out when ever we get to a hotel with reasonable phone connections.

Some updates, since we have been staying in a gasthaus each night, there has been no phone.

The weather has been fantastic, slight overcast, cool breezes, and warm (not hot) sunshine. The fields are green, the trees are budding, and there is a lot of snow in the mountains. We did get to the Marklin museum at Goppingen, unfortunately (or maybe fortunately), there is a big train show planned there for 5/6 May (when we will be in Spain), so most of the exhibits were missing or in process of moving. This was a new location, but we actually saw less than last time.

Went on to southern Bavaria, since we do like the palaces (not really castles) of King Ludwig II and his father, Neuschwanstein and Hohenschwangau. Since we were last here 19 years ago, things have changed (mostly for the worst). The buildings and their contents (which we had not viewed before) are as wonderful as ever, but the organization, information, and transportation around the area was the worst we have experienced.

The food has been great, the beer even better, although we have still had some problems with the smoking. Things are getting better, since the gasthaus tonight actually forbids smoking in the bedrooms or on the bedroom floor. Nights have been a little chilly and a little hard to sleep, since the comforters (the only covering) supplied on the beds, cover either my shoulders or my feet, but not both. Therefore I have to wake up and change the arrangement every 30 minutes or so, depending

on the temperature of the affected extremity. I think with a little more beer, I can find a way around the situation.

We stopped to visit our friends in Murnau, we actually found the house after only 2 passes through the town. Today has not been a good day, since Donna has strained her back, the same old problem. I am suffering from the "Revenge of the Pharaoh's Mummy", but another large dose of antibiotic is seeming to help. Now on to Spain.

Well actually we have had our first boo-boo. As everyone knows, I do not pay much attention to days, dates, etc., especially now. Of course, Donna is very good about that, so imagine our surprise when we checked in at the airport this morning and found out we were a day early. So we are staying at the airport hotel, Donna is resting and I am catching up on e-mails, the diary, etc. Donna's back is better, so we are going to walk to the shopping mall in the airport and buy her some more pain killers.

=====

We arrived safely in Madrid. Business or first class on intra-Europe flights on Lufthansa or Iberia is marginally better than steerage. So far, Donna likes Madrid because she can read the signs. Madrid is much dirtier than Greece or Egypt and the people smoke almost as much as Greece.

On our own to celebrate our 27th anniversary, we went to the train and science museums. Both are excellent, although no captions in English. The train museum is very complete, i.e., examples of many things associated with railroading. We were fortunate enough to be there when there was a special showing of a private collection of over 1000 hand made HO scale models, mostly locomotives. There were also numerous model train dioramas, most in HO, some in N. The science museum had an eclectic collection of measuring instruments from about the 17th century onwards (until about the end of the 19th, when sanitary conditions in Spain seems to have stopped). The architecture in Madrid is very impressive, many of the buildings are works of art, especially along the roof line, e.g., with statues, molded stucco, etc.

Next day took a tour to the Valley of the Fallen and the Escorial Monastery. The first is a monumental basilica carved inside a mountain to honor the slain of the Spanish Civil War. The bones of about 40,000 (1/10 of total) are interred there. The size and artistry does not seem to be something built in the 1940's & 50's, i.e., too large and good to be the 20th century. The Escorial is a monastery complex, greatly expanded by Phillip II (of Armada fame) as a summer retreat, place of learning, and burial site. Most of the Hapsburg and Bourbon kings of Spain (and associated family members) are interred there. Wonderful maps of the possessions of Charles V and Phillip II.

Next day in the morning we took a bus tour of Madrid, seeing the various buildings. The architecture is very impressive, many of the buildings are quite decorative. Traffic is quite heavy, but since this is a relatively modern city, i.e., mostly built in the 16th century and later, things look pretty good. We then took a bus trip to Toledo (of either "Holy Toledo" or Toledo steel fame, depending on your tastes). This is the old capital of Spain after the Christian conquest. Since

this is about the only country where Christianity has replaced Islam, there is a very interesting mixture of cultures and architecture. We saw a 12th century synagogue, that had been converted to a church after the Inquisition eradicated the Jews in the 16th century (one of the main reasons for the failure of Spain to become an economic force with all the New World treasure). Toledo is also the center for the Catholic church in Spain, with a legacy back to the 6th century and a large Gothic cathedral from the 12th century.

Finally a day to see the really nice parts of Spain. Segovia has an excellently preserved portion of a Roman aqueduct (2 arches high) and a scenic 15th century restored castle-palace. Burgos has a wonderful Gothic cathedral, with many very decorative chapels, along with the supposed final (after 7 moves) burial place of El Cid (he was instrumental in the conquest of Toledo in the 11th century by the Castilians). Very scenic drive to Santandaer, through some rugged snow-capped mountains, with lots of greenery and domestic animals. Both Segovia and Burgos had nice walking streets, with trees and cobblestones and a variety of vendors, e.g., Donna got a small half-round of local cheese.

Now into Basque country, which is very mountainous (and these are rugged mountains) and covered with trees. Roads are good, with a little less traffic would be very nice for motorcycling. Visited Pamplona, made famous by Hemingway for the running with the bulls. We walked the same street, fortunately without any bulls. Next day visited the cathedral of Pilar in Zaragosa (named derived from Cesar Augusta). Also a nice archeological museum (under the plaza), showing the Roman ruins; including some of the infamous lead water pipes of 6 inches in diameter.

Tour of Barcelona, name derived from Hamil Barca of Carthage. Visited one cathedral, again large and good art. Church started by Gaude is just as unimpressive in reality as in pictures. Visited monastery and church at Montserrat, spectacular location; nice museum with some archeological items from 2000 BC of the eastern Mediterranean and a bunch of paintings by people like Dali, El Greco, Picasso, etc., none of which we thought very much of. On way to Valencia toured an old Moorish castle at Segundo that was used in the filming of "El Cid". Much more spacious and airy than English castles, although this was built much later than the great castles of Edward Longshanks. Country side is more agricultural, mostly citrus and olives, mountains are rugged, but still have trees. Beginning to see white washed houses with red tile roofs.

Drove down marvelous eastern coast from Valencia to Granada. Very rugged stone mountains with lots of terraces for growing citrus, olives, apples, vegetables, etc. Similar to USA southwest, e.g., Utah, Arizona, except much more agriculture, but topology is similar. Went by cave homes at Guadix, then saw the original Sierra Nevada, that still have a lot of snow.

Visited the Alhambra, a monastery, and the burial church for Ferdinand & Isabel. The Alhambra is actually a self-contained city, built on Roman ruins, then greatly expanded by the Moors and Castilians from the 9th through 16th century. The architecture is quite nice, in terms of spaciousness and airiness; lots of intricate work on the walls and

windows. They have a saying "better to be than seem to be" so the Moors emphasized all the decoration to be on the inside, while the outside may look quite seedy.

Spent most of two days along the Costa del Sol, a highly developed beach resort area. Gibraltar is a large shopping center, few historic sites available or documented.

Toured Seville with the largest Gothic and world's 3rd largest cathedral, including one of the supposed burial sites for Columbus. Visited the Plaza de Toros, found out the corrida is based on military equestrian exercises from the middle ages that was converted to ritualized entertainment in the 18th century. First day of hot weather, but still not too bad. Seville appears to be the nicest of the large Spanish cities, the expected good architecture and art, without as much traffic and crowds.

Toured Cordoba, site of one of the most beautiful ancient mosques. Interesting the Moors bought part then all of an existing monastery, then converted the site to a mosque. When the Castilians conquered the area in the 13th century, the mosque was partially converted to a cathedral. Visited the remains of the synagogue of Maimondes, the great Jewish physician/theologian.

Back in Madrid we visited the National Archeological museum and the Army museum. If the captions were in English we would probably be in Madrid another week, as these are wonderful museums. Spain has been home to humans and human precursors for a long time, there are also a lot of caves that have preserved marvelous artifacts, that have now been recovered. Among the collection of coins and instruments, there was a Napierian abacus (from the Scotsman John Napier, inventor of logarithms, the slide rule, etc.). The Army museum is the best I have been to; there is virtually a sample of every firearm and bladed weapon used from the 1300's through the Spanish Civil war. Additionally there are uniforms, decorations, dioramas, models, paintings, maps, engineering equipment, medical instruments (not many, as saving any life was not a Spanish military priority), cannons, and examples of weapons and errata from places Spain fought, e.g., the Arabs, Mexico, Philippines, etc.

A few things we learned about Spain:

1. Tours and other available tourist items are mostly art and architecture, very little effort is made to explain or show the history. Obviously there are references to the history, but usually only those things that had a major influence on the art or architecture. Some called our tour the ABC tour (i.e., Another Big Church). The Inquisition is ignored, although the Spanish Civil War and the multitude of repercussions are explained.
2. Spanish service (with a smile), e.g. in restaurants, hotels, etc., is an oxymoron. Many of the Spanish (except the elderly) seemed haughty, they were certainly bothered by having foreigners in their country. Although not as bad as Paris, there is some negative influence from the neighbor to the north. Food is neither temperature hot nor spicy, but we did once get some good roasted peppers and asparagus and Italian food.
3. Although tourism is the largest industry, Spain is not a place to recommend for any but the most fervent art and architecture addicts;

the furniture is too small (especially chairs and beds), there is too much smoking (no non-smoking), almost nothing in English. The good news is: the scenery is spectacular, the architecture and old buildings are wonderful, the museums very comprehensive, the roads are fine, the drivers not too bad, and there are a scillion different ways to get a ham & cheese sandwich (bocadillo).

4. The people are basically honest, i.e., we did not observe any of the things we were warned about regarding theft. Of course, much of Spain is in large cities and one must take the normal precautions when visiting almost any urban concentration.

5. We did not observe a "manana" attitude as much as a general lack of workmanship or craftsmanship in any of the practical applications. There are some good building materials, but construction is shoddy. Repairs (frequently needed) are makeshift and preventive maintenance is unheard of.

=====

We have arrived in Portugal. Although one should take care with first impressions, my first impression of Portugal is very positive. The people seem friendlier (than Spain), many speak English, hot food is actually temperature hot, the hotel staff tries to be helpful, there is a no smoking floor, menus/captions are in English. Streets are clean (i.e., not dog bathrooms like Spain), but building facades are not well maintained, e.g., peeling paint, deteriorating plaster/stucco.

On our first full day in Lisbon, we wore ourselves out visiting 3 wonderful museums. The first was the Museum of Electricity, housed in the old (first) Portuguese electrical generation plant. Had examples from the various eras of generation, including reciprocating and turbine steam engines, hydro turbines, and various types of alternators and generators. They started with an Edison type plant, meaning they used DC. The next museum was supposed to be a short walk (according to a local) that turned out to be 3 to 4 kilometers.

Next was the Maritime Museum, which is very well done. Most captions are in English and Donna could take a lot of pictures. The models were great, varying in scale from 1/20 to 1/100. The larger scales were used more on the old sailing ships, which were really well done. Lots of instruments and other artifacts from the great age of exploration, started by Prince Henry the Navigator. Everything from the cross-staff to the sextant and some explanatory books (mostly Latin, some Portuguese).

Next was the Military Museum. This did not have the vast collection of Spain's, but had lots of items specific to Portugal. The museum is in the site of the old military foundry that after a "recent" fire (i.e., in the 1600's) was converted to an arsenal. That very recently (i.e., > 150 years ago) was made into a museum. The rooms have fantastic frescoes and plastered ceilings to complement the sections on weapons and armor. There are several rooms devoted to the Peninsula and Great Wars as well as a varied collection of old artillery and artillery models. Unfortunately could not take pictures, but there are books (in English) describing the building and contents.

Left Lisbon for the tour, started down the coast. Roads are fair, but drivers are not. Scenery along coast is very nice, combination of

sandy beaches and rocky coastline. Lots of agriculture, including cork trees. Donna likes the storks, especially when standing on their huge nests. Stayed in a typical coastal resort village. Next day went to Cape St. Vincent the most SW corner of Europe. Passes by Sagres, the site of Prince Henry the Navigator's school, but all has been destroyed by earthquake or fire.

We have learned the term "not possible", which seems to be the answer for many requests, as well as descriptions of how the Portuguese view improvements. Visited a oak cork tree (Portugal is world's largest producer), can start trimming bark after 30 years, then once every 9 years for the next 300 or so. Only a part of the bark can be harvested from each tree, then there is a manufacturing process to make sheets, corks (they do make a lot of wine (Mateus) and port around here), etc.

Visited the walled city of Evora, the new walls from the mid 17th century for the Spanish wars, the old walls from Roman times. Portugal was settled in succession by the Celts, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthagians, Romans, and Moors. The land area is Roman Lusitania and the border with Spain has been the same since the 13th century. In Evora saw a Roman temple, a Romanesque church, and a baroque church. A Franciscan monastery had a room lined with the bones of about 5000 monks, the room was built in a period of 2 years during the mid 17th century. The sign over the door states something like "welcome for your bones will eventually join ours".

The next day actually got hot, but we have had wonderful weather throughout almost all the trip, noting we have completed 50% (95 days). Visited an old castle and some Roman ruins, on the drive through mountains up the central part of the country.

Drove through scenic Port wine grape country, lots of terraced hills with vineyards, some terraces only two grape vines wide. Saw palace used on Mateus wine label, also palace of first king (Alphonse) of Portugal from 12th century. Lots of buildings with nice use of granite blocks.

Toured Oporto, whose name is from the same Roman root as Portugal. Visited a church that used over 440 kilos of gold leaf decoration and the old stock market, which had some beautifully decorated rooms, floors, walls, and ceilings. Toured the Sandeman winery. Many Port wines have English or Scottish names since the Port trade was essentially founded to support England. Brandy is added to blended wine to stop the fermentation process (originally to help preserve for long sea voyages) to maintain sweetness (why this is one of Donna's favorite beverages) and to increase the alcoholic content. All grapes for both the wine and the brandy are supposed grown in the Duoro Valley that we went through yesterday. As with virtually all vineyards in Europe, these were replanted with vines from America after the diseases and insect attacks of the late 19th century.

Visited the old library at the first university of Portugal (from 12th century), 300,000 old books. Visited Conimbriga, site of 7 centuries of Roman baths, houses, etc. Included was a museum that had an example of the game of Mill (those who have traveled with me may remember this game), which appears to be at least 2000 years old, not the 700 or so I had originally claimed. Visited Tomar, a site of a Templar's

fortification, later converted into a monastery that was used by the order later headed by Prince Henry the Navigator. Lots of climbing and walking, very tiring, especially in the hot weather.

Visited tourist trap of Fatima, site of a 1917 "visitation". Visited 14th century gothic monastery at Batalha, built to commemorate a victory against the Castilians. Quite beautiful and in good shape, site of burial of Prince Henry. Visited Nazare, a picturesque fishing village, where Donna had an extensive seafood lunch. Visited Obigos, a Roman/Moor/Portuguese walled city that is now an artisan center.

Viewed Escoril, Caicais, and Sintha along Atlantic coast. Saw most western cape in Continental Europe.

Some thoughts about Portugal, in summary although the Trafalgar tour was worse, I liked Portugal better than Spain. Spain has larger, more numerous, and more spectacular historic sites and museums (and supposedly art galleries, that we do not visit), as well as a more varied landscape; however, Portugal has friendlier people and are making more of an effort to be tourist friendly, e.g., captions, books in English. Trips by car would be difficult, but not impossible, and probably much better than going by Trafalgar tours (we cannot comment on other tours, but have inferred from conversation that some could be better, while some are definitely worse). We stayed in supposedly 4-star hotels and some actually were (about 1 in 5). As long as expectations (for service, food, sanitation, comfort) are not excessive, both countries are a great place to learn about an important historical era, i.e., the ages of exploration and the conquistadors. There is also plentiful evidence of what happens to countries that do not industrialize, do not embark upon capitalism, and are not republics. Both countries have made marvelous progress in the last 25 years (since deposed the dictators), have zero or below population growth (there is a strong correlation) and in some areas are making efforts to become contributing elements of the world.

We are on to England for the next 4 weeks. I am unsure if we will be in communication, because of the different phone lines. I have an adapter, but am not sure that I will be able to use the phone to dial and subsequently connect the computer to the ISP, as I do now since the computer cannot dial the 34+ numbers necessary to hook up.

=====

We are now in merry England for the next 4 weeks. After surviving the lines at Heathrow, we finally got a car. Not the one we ordered, not even an upgrade, both were too small, we downgraded to a Renault Scenic, manual drive, which appears to be a good fit (room for both us and the luggage). After driving through lots of outside of London City Center traffic, we finally got to Greenwich.

Greenwich is a fun town for us. We arrived in time for the 1st Sunday flea market that is on a variety of streets. A good way to see the town and relieve some of our flea market-itus, that has been very itchy for a few months. Surprise, surprise we found a few books!! The next day we visited the Royal Observatory and the Maritime Museum. The observatory is why that meridian zero (GMT) is at Greenwich. From the 17th through the 20th centuries, this was the foremost location for

astronomical observations associated with navigation, including time (a great read is the book "Longitude" about Harrison's invention of accurate timepieces, e.g., the watch, to aid navigation). Although time zones started in the USA (for the railroads), Greenwich was still the center for time and navigation measurement. Needless to say we both very much enjoyed the museums.

We had Thai food the first night and Mexican the second. Not exactly traditional English food, but we were ready for a change from normal European hotel fare. Both were reasonable, i.e., better than USA East coast, but only left a taste for home. Two pitchers of margaritas helped (servings are not so large in England, but a lot more expensive).

After leaving Greenwich we headed north and east. Not seeing a lot of museums or other sites as some are still closed as too early in the season. Weather is very comfortable, even had some rain. Spending time in Suffolk and Norfolk areas, which is pastoral and agricultural. Donna likes the narrow winding roads, because they have the best views.

I like English bitter and ales and Donna is now acquiring a taste. A few pints in the evening is great for digestion. Driving is fun, especially through the roundabouts (they are vastly superior to stop signs or traffic signals in rationally populated areas). We have found Magnums here, these are an ice cream bar first found in Spain, then Portugal and they are very good. We need at least one of those a day to maintain our calcium input. Dinner in Sheringham is interesting, we are staying at a hotel with inclusive dinner and breakfast, most of the gentlemen wear a coat and tie to drinks beforehand then dinner. People are very talkative, even when Donna is wearing one of her numerous t-shirts and I am in a polo shirt.

We took a steam train, then a horse and carriage to the town of Holt. Nice little town with shops, e.g., books. Met the wife of a man who wanted to see some motocross races, so he got on his Yamaha 600, took the Chunnel, rode over the Alps, and down to southern Italy. His son (age 40) was still involved in the racing, re-building old British cycles. The election (socialists vs. arch-socialists) is all over TV, but most of the people we talk to (generally older) do not have much hope for improvement, given the agenda of both major parties, I would agree. The arch-socialists won, so the British pound is falling, maybe we can buy some things.

Saw the Muckleburgh collection, a private museum of military history for the Norfolk region from the Peninsula War through Desert Storm. Eclectic group of working vehicles, e.g., tanks, artillery, and personal memorabilia of the locals, e.g., ration books, identification cards, captured items, handmade items from used ordinance. Visited the Shire Horse farm, note a Shire can be more than 19 hands high and over 2100 pounds of working, intelligent animal. Watched a Shetland walk under the belly of a Shire and the Shetland barely ducked his head. A man with a pair of Shires could plow about an acre a day, that means walking about 11 miles. The Clydesdales are slightly smaller, but have a faster walk, but the English are quick to point out were bred in Scotland, not England.

We have been here a week, so I am sending this out. That should lessen the burden on those who (for whatever reason) have difficulty with my lengthy multi-week summaries.

=====

Donna is really enjoying the cool weather, we need to wear a jumper most of the time. The rain is usually light and only falls when we are driving, when we need to stop, the rain stops. We have the most expensive gasoline so far; New Zealand and Australia were about the same as when we left Nevada (\$2/gallon); Greece, Spain, and Portugal are about \$3/gallon, but England is close to \$4.50/gallon. The car has a 10-gallon tank, but we have filled the motorhome for less money!!!

Visited Sandringham, one of the summer palaces still in use by the royal family. A large house (Biltmore class, but much older) on about 10,000 acres of manicured lawn. No wonder there are 140 full time staff, a significant portion are just gardeners. One of the tour guides (some of the 90 part time staff) was from Greenville, South Carolina, strange where people end up. Nice collection of arms, most were gifts, as well as a significant number of the royal vehicles, i.e., since the first Daimler (British company) in 1905.

Drove lots of small roads to enjoy the countryside. This is farmland, but there are also old windmills (grain grinding). The roads are not that bad, but England believes than in every city or town that half the road is a designated parking area, so most of them rapidly become one lane. I really like the roundabouts, they make traffic flow so much easier on these roads.

We stayed in a "White Hart" hotel/pub; 1-star by British standards, I did get to fix the toilet to make usable. The restaurant area is no smoking, as well as the rooms upstairs. Still a problem in the pub area. We like both English restaurant and pub food. The servings are quite large and usually vegetables (not just potatoes) are included.

Went back to the National Railway museum in York. World Heritage just awarded this as the "Best in the World", not just railway, but best museum. The museum is greatly expanded from the last time we visited, not just in floor area, but including many more exhibits on all aspects of railways, e.g., development of rails from wood, to cast iron, to wrought iron, to steel. Virtually all development of railways for the first 50 years after the introduction of the first steam railroad in 1825 was accomplished in England and a large amount of information is available at this museum.

We have had rain and sprinkles on most days so far, but the sun is warm when peeking through the clouds. After seeing the flat lands of East Anglia and the coast, we are now into the Yorkshire dales and moors. Lots of green fields, with occasional lint (sheep) dotting the landscape. Since this is spring, the rhododendron and other flowers are in bright bloom, along the traditional greenery.

Took the North Yorkshire Moor Railway (steam locomotives) through the dales and moors, covered with heather and various pastoral scenes. Donna's hand extension (otherwise known as a camera) was in full and continuous operation. After a light lunch of asparagus soup and

pastries, we returned by the same route, except Donna got to take pictures from the other side.

After a fortnight, we finally visited a castle; the one at Pickering, which was a quite large motte and bailey. Mostly used as a hunting lodge for the kings, since the moors were haven for deer, grouse, rabbits, pigs, etc. Journeyed to Whitby via the moors, including some roads that would be nice for motorcycles, e.g., 20% grades and curves with good visibility. Donna likes the heather and sheep. Visited the site of the 13th century abbey and still used 11th century church. Whitby has quite a bit of history, not just where Captain Cook apprenticed. The was fishing, whaling, alum mining and shipping, and most important, smuggling otherwise known as free-trading.

While in one of the hidden secrets of England, the town of Whitby, we visited the house where Captain cook lived while an apprentice. The house now contains some artifacts. letters, and drawings from the voyages. Donna was thrilled to visit the Sutcliffe Gallery, which is home to photographic prints of the famous early photographer. We talked to the man who now is printing from the original plates, his father had donated them to the city of Whitby. We also had the famous (infamous???) mushy peas for lunch. These are dried peas that are soaked for 24 hours or so, then boiled, the result is a green flavorful mush. Seems to be a local favorite of the Yorkshire coast.

Visited the Whitby Museum, a wonderful collection of local artifacts, everything from the world's best fossil of a salt-water crocodile, to a stuffed passenger pigeon (these people were sailors), a collection of original Cook maps, French POW (Napoleonic war) model ships made of soup bones, a very complete collection of things in a bulb or bottle, e.g., ships, trains, dioramas; Roman coins, flint meso- and neolithic tools, etc., etc. Visited the towns of Robin Hood's Bay and Staithes (where Cook was an apprentice storekeeper, not for long). Both towns are quaint, Donna has lots of pictures, but for me were remarkable in that after walking a 800 yards or so, then one had a 300 yard walk into down; however, these 300 yards include a 75 yard change in elevation (yes, that is a 25% grade), and these cobblestone streets are 100's of years old.

We started off with a day from the "Hound of the Baskervilles", heavy mist while driving through the moors. We eventually found the railway museum at Darlington, terminus of the first railway. Included was "Locomotion" (by Stephenson, not Little Eva), the first railway's first locomotive, 176 years old. Also went to the Hackworth railway museum (he worked for then succeeded Stepheson as the Chief Engineer at the Stockton & Darlington railway) and is notable for a number of inventions, e.g., locomotive safety valve, linked gear drive (previously was chain), etc. This museum was great in that the manager (sole full time employee) kept talking with us and showing us things an hour after normal closing.

This is a little longer than intended, but we did not have a phone connection for a few days.

Some additional impressions of England: they are definitely feeling the crush of more people, all the furniture in restaurants is now small (so that can fit more in, because still have not changed operations to

allow more than one group to use a table per evening), most showers have a separate little unit that heats the water and constricts the flow; people are just as friendly and unhurried as ever, lots of children (see population problem above) that look as wholesome as ever, and still courteous drivers (especially in the country).

=====

Even though now in Scotland, I do have to relate some things from England on the way here. I forgot to mention that yesterday at the Hackworth museum, the curator actually took out of the case to show me up close a specially handmade slide-rule (by a craftsman named Hawthorn) that was used to design some of the locomotives. The slide-rule (which was still a recent invention) had 4 scales, but engraved in both sides were tables, combination of Handbook of Chemistry & Physics with Mechanical Engineers tables.

The next day was rainy, with occasional mist until we got to Lindisfarne. We arrived enough after high tide that we could take the causeway (the road is closed for several hours twice a day for the tides) and the rain stopped as soon as we walked out to the site of the first Christian monastery in England. The monks came from Iona in Scotland, who had come from Ireland to convert the Britons and Angles. Some of the major work to retain knowledge during the Dark Ages was performed here.

We are now in Edinburgh meeting with some friends we met on our Western Australia tour. That is the best thing about tours, the people you meet. You are with them long enough to establish a relationship that can continue over time, especially with e-mail and the ease of modern travel. We had dinner (twice) with the Mitchell's (including a wee bit of haggis), the couple we met on our Western Australia trip and have kept in e-mail touch with.

Visited the Royal Museum and the Museum of Scotland; yes we like museums. They included the best collection of scientific measuring instruments from the 18th through 19th centuries that we have seen, with emphasis, of course, of the contributions from the Scots. There were historical items as well, although very little emphasis on the wars with the English (and associated repercussions) or of any of the major contributions of the Scots for settling and industrializing with the United States (some minor mentions of Canada). For those that have not been to Edinburgh recently, there have been changes, e.g., more traffic, less parking, the Royal Mile is now mostly tourist shops (conventional stuff) or coffee cafes. Pollution, both from smoking and automobiles, is really evident on the buildings.

Strangely enough, since we arrived in Scotland, the sun has peeked out of the clouds virtually every day. We had mostly overcast in England, although our last visit to Scotland 13 years ago was almost all sunshine for 2 weeks, we did not think that would happen again. We still feed fortunate with our ongoing good weather, mostly cool and minimal rain.

We have crossed the Humber and Firth of Forth bridges, both are suspension of the same approximate size as the Golden Gate. Visited Aberdour Castle, really a fortified mansion. Once upon a time had

extensive gardens, now just large and beautiful. Visited St. Andrews Castle and Cathedral, both in ruins from various religious wars. This location was central, both for initial establishment of the church in Scotland, for education (a university in 1214), then the reformation (and associated blood-letting). The castle was very interesting in that in 1879 they found the mines and successful counter-mines from the 1546 siege. We went past a (the) golf links, but saw no reason to stop (we also passed both the British and Scottish Golf museums, but again saw no reason to stop). Visited Arbroath Abbey, site of the Scottish (last successful) Declaration of Independence in 1320. The abbot's house had an old mill game scribed on a piece of stone (see comments from Portugal trip).

We spent the night at a B&B, former "bothy" for salmon fishermen. 3 miles to the nearest beer, but the sun does not set until after 2200 hours, so plenty of light. Visited Castle Dunnottar, in a great seaside setting. Not only are the ruins spectacular, but there were seagulls, puffins, and a pod of dolphins. There were also 179 steps and that was just to get down to the entrance, those were in concrete, walking back up to the castle was on cobblestone. The site was first fortified by the Picts, but everyone from the Vikings to William Wallace to Cromwell had burned the buildings down, so a lot of rebuilding had gone on.

Visited the Maritime Museum in Aberdeen, site of the construction of one of my favorite clippers, the Thermopylae (by the developers of the "clipper" or Aberdeen bow; the company used wave tanks with water and turpentine to design the hull for minimum resistance). Lots of information on the North Sea oil operations, which is centered here. Aberdeen looks about as good as a city can, lots of spires, mostly of granite and the walls are not blackened with pollution. The drive along the coast has been marvelous, lots of green fields and sparkling ocean. Slight hills with none of the rugged barrenness of western Scotland.

We have now driven about 1100 miles in England and Scotland, much less per day than previous trips, but we are very much enjoying spending time in given locations. One cannot say enough about the friendly people, plentiful food, great beer (bitter), and mostly courteous drivers. We came here for some relaxation after the hectic bus tours and this is just the right place.

=====

We are in our last restful week before starting the tours again. Some observations: we have seen a lot of caravans and caravan parks (caravans are small (really small) travel trailers); there are also mobile home parks, mostly for vacationers near the beaches; Scotland seems financially a little better off than England, better care of roads, roadsides, availability of signs, neatness of yards and houses. Although BBC outside of the UK has a great news channel, the BBC in the UK, especially radio is almost useless, little news, DJ's with verbal diarrhea, and infrequent (very infrequent) music (even if count some of the noise that some call music). BBC TV has had a few good history shows (about every other night) and there is a good quiz show called the "Weakest Link", with a very satirical hostess. "Hoof & Mouth" has definitely affected the tourist business, especially in areas that have

a lot of "walkers". Seems a lot more people from the UK are staying in the UK for holidays, very few from North America, and some Europeans. The UK is badly over crowded, they still live in the past, and living off past investments; therefore, there are a lot of social problems cropping up. Given the money from the North Sea oil fields, the excessive bureaucracy, and very socialistic government, there are lots of problems that are making the news, in terms of crime, violence and social unrest. I am not optimistic about Europe in general for the future, so one should travel here as soon as one can, before the problems get too much worse.

In Fraserburgh visited the lighthouse museum. This was the location of the first lighthouse in Scotland, built into an old castle. The museum is excellent, with a tour of the old works and good explanations of the engineering contributions from the Stevenson family (multiple generations). Note, the first generations worked with and competed with George Stephenson of railroading fame (but not related) and also produced Robert Louis Stevenson. Visited the heritage center for Fraserburgh, which has a quite interesting history, e.g., home of the English samurai (Glover) who brought modern ships to Japan and helped found Mitsubishi after supplying arms to overthrow the shogun in the Meiji restoration, Marconi set up one of the first radio stations here, lots of development of the herring industry (fishing is still very active), and site of the first Scottish official lifeboat station. I was surprised that Fraserburgh did not use windmills, as there is a lot of wind, but since last year they had winds >140 mph, there would be some construction issues.

Visited Huntly, Kildrummy, and Glenburchet castles, i.e., the appropriate ruins. Between them there was some involvement in the wars of independence (13th and 14th centuries), the reformation (16th century), the civil war (17th century), and assorted feuds. The countryside was excellent, a lot of wind made for whitecaps along the ocean, then lots of fields, forests, gorse, heather, sheep, rabbits, etc., inland. Donna used all 3 batteries in her camera today.

Believe it or not, we voluntarily spent the night in a church. This one serves a useful purpose, in that the 1869 church has been converted into a hotel, including restaurant and bar. There is even supposed to be a ghost. I had a glass of Glenfiddich single malt whiskey, which is really good. I never liked Scotch (being raised on bourbon), but this single malt is very good. Now have two points to validate the conclusion, since had some Edradour single malt the last time we were here (13 years ago).

Visited Balmoral Estates, another royal family summer retreat, built in the late 19th century. Visited Scone palace, which is also the site of the original "boot" hill, used for the coronation of the Scottish kings. Marvelous collection of 17th and 18th century art, especially the statues in ivory and the varieties of porcelain.

Although we stayed near the Wallace Memorial, we decided to not make the climb again. I wanted to show Donna the exhibit, now that Donna has seen the movie and has some understanding of Wallace, but neither of us felt like making the long, long climb up the hill, then the tower. So we spent a lot of time at Stirling Castle/Palace, a renaissance group of buildings while the Stuarts were still in

Scotland. There was also a museum for the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, a regiment that has had an interesting history, from the Napoleonic wars, the Birkenhead Drill, the battle of New Orleans, the Boer war, etc. Took a narrow gauge railway to the highest adhesion train station in the UK (at 1498 feet), which transported lead; so we went to the lead mining museum, with miner's cottages (re-furnished) from the 18th and 19th centuries. Lead mining in this area has occurred since Roman times.

Visited the English coalmining museum, which was an old colliery that has been converted to the museum. This coalmine was opened around the time of the American Revolution and closed about 10 years ago. There were good examples of the various types of mining performed in the area for the last 1000 (yes 1000) years. Mining in England was very different than in the USA and coal mining is different than the hard rock mining we are used to in the west. We only went 450 feet down into the mine (using a lift), but this was a very different life than any we have today. Spent the night at the Waterton Park Hotel, site of an early (first??) nature park. 21 acres had been enclosed by an early naturalist on the site of a fortified home set in an artificial lake, very nice, walked across an old bridge to the dining room.

Visited Beverly (which means a clearing in the woods made by beavers), containing the Army (British) Transport Museum and the Minster. The museum was excellent, which examples of army transport (land, sea, air) mostly from the 20th century, although some items went back to the Crimean War (first global mechanized war). Not only were there a lot of vehicles, e.g., trucks, trains, boats, but numerous examples of what was carried, e.g., tanks, and all sorts of peripheral equipment, e.g., mobile blacksmith shops, chains and shackles, operating manuals, letters, maps, photographs, and lots of other interesting items. The Beverly Minster is perhaps the best preserved and most beautiful gothic church we have seen. Very little damage since constructed in the 13th century on the ruins of a 7th century church (founded by monk from the Whitby Abbey), especially to the statuary and stained glass (although some from later centuries).

Visited the old Spurn lightship moored in the Hull marina. Visited the maritime museum, which contains excellent examples of the fishing, whaling, and ship building industries. Lots of models, paintings, scrimshaw, and tools to illustrate the last 3 centuries of seaside life.

We are at Heathrow, heading for Copenhagen. Although we did not have the hectic pace of a tour, we still managed to view a few new things in England and Scotland. We have cumulatively spent about 4 months over here over the past 20 years and we are still finding lots of great places to visit. We drove a little over 2000 miles on this trip, which means I have driven well over 10,000 miles in the UK and we know there are lots of roads with great vistas and sites yet to see.

=====

We are at day 126 into our trip, with 54 days to go (we are around-the-world in 180 days, give or take a few hours). We are now in Copenhagen, which is a very nice, clean city (clean for a city, not like a town in the country). The buildings are very clean, especially

the gold and marble decorations along the roofline. Different buildings are painted in different subdued colors, so even though most are 4-5 stories high and made of brick, stone, and stucco, each is distinctive. Our hotel is near the docks, so we saw a number of sailing ships, a lot with 2 masts, one with 3 masts and square rigged on the foremast), to give you an idea of their size. Denmark uses a lot of windmills for power generation, all the ones we have seen so far use propellers (like ours, except a lot bigger). There are a lot of bicycles, which have their own lanes with traffic lights. A lot of smoking, but not as bad as southern Europe.

The weather has turned warmer, we really are in summer. I am wearing shorts, but not hot enough yet for Donna to wear them. Only about 36 people on this tour, so looks like we will get the back seat (since the bus seats 48) for ourselves and not be stuffed into the other seats. This tour director has listened to our requests, e.g., no-smoking, my dietary allergies, and at least stated he will try to comply.

Rode to Stockholm, in relative comfort on the bus. Passed by the Danish Riviera, lots of nice houses, then one of the castles that formerly controlled the straits between Denmark and Sweden. Donna saw several moose, which are so numerous that they need to be culled each year (about 20,000 are used for food, etc.), no more wolves to keep the population in control and the use of roadways to cull is frowned upon. Found out that parts of Sweden and Finland are rising about 1 inch per century, which totals quite a bit since the recession of the last ice age (10-12,000 years ago). There are lots of lakes and forests.

Bus tour of Stockholm well illustrated the cleanliness and beauty of the city (actually Scandinavia in general, little graffiti, litter, pollution). Most buildings are from the 16th -19th centuries, made of brick and stone, with good statuary and other art work. Toured City Hall, a magnificent brick building built in the early 20th century, but using older architectural styles. The bricks are called "big bricks" (actually an unpronounceable word in Swedish), since they are handmade and weigh about 14 pounds each. Very interesting frescoes carved, some by hand (i.e., using fingers and thumbs) and some by tools in wet stucco. Some of the stucco contained pulverized brick, to add color and texture. Visited the Drottningholm Palace, still partially used by the royal family. As with the rest of Sweden, everything is open, clean, and airy. Lots of wood carvings and paintings of very serious children and other members of the royal family.

Visited Sigtuna, probably the oldest organized town in Sweden, site of the first capital and brick Christian church. The visited Uppsala, a rival to Sigtuna and site of the first cathedral. Gothic, since built from the 13th through 15th centuries, but much lighter in tone than, e.g., not so ornate, light colors, less heavy stained glass. Also visited the university started in the 15th century. Donna really liked the dissection auditorium, just like those in the Frankenstein movies, where the doctor is performing in front of the students. Various scientific instruments, this is the home of Linneaus, Celsius, and Angstrom. We saw a first edition of the Principia (Newton) and wonderful Art Cabinet (a gift from Augsburg to Gustavos Adolphus in the early 17th century), containing a 1000+ artifacts, like chess and mill games. We are spending the night in Falun, site of possibly the world's oldest corporation, a copper mining company in existence since

1288. One of the outputs, copper vitriol, is a main ingredient in the "barn red" paint used on virtually all building in rural Sweden (also a very good preservative). Saw lots of wheat, hay, potato fields, even though only 7% of the land area can be cultivated.

Visited old church on Lake Siljan, where (to be) King Gustavos Wasa started a revolution to free Sweden from Denmark in 1521. Visited the site where one of the symbols of Sweden, the Dala horses are hand-carved and painted. Entered Norway, which has similar topology to Sweden, i.e., forested hills (up to about 4000 feet high), but more agriculture because of the warming effects of the Gulf Stream (apples, cherries, strawberries, apricots, potatoes). We did get a dissertation on the social system in Sweden and how that has bankrupted the country (they are not even eligible to use the Euro because of their shaky economics). Another example of how socialism (i.e., what Democrats have been trying to do in the US) is economically not long term viable and eventually destroys the economy of the country and the well being of the inhabitants.

After being in Scandinavia for about a week, we have only two issues: 1. very difficult to get sleep when is only dark for 2-4 hours per day, i.e., last night Donna took a picture of the moon in broad daylight, but the time was after midnight. 2. even more difficult to sleep when cannot close the curtains since the only source of air is the window, which must be wide open to get any air movement or fresh air in the room, the hotels have no source of ventilation, unless you can borrow a room fan from the front desk (only a few hotels have that service). At the Geiranger fjord, people were water-skiing at 10:30 at night, because both bright daylight (even in the narrow confines of the fjord) and the weather is warm (although the water is still cold, cold, cold).

Visited a stave church in Lom; this was built over 800 years ago out of wood and is in excellent preservation. The Vikings, who were then being converted, used similar techniques as they did to build their ships, including shaping live wood for later harvest and curing wood before chopping. Saw our first of the magnificent fjords, via a long windy road etched in the side of a mountain, that is much more suitable to a motorcycle than a bus (an aside, for those of us that like motorcycling, the roads in Norway are scenic, well maintained, curvy, and hilly; however, there is some traffic, but since there are a fair number (well-clad in euro-leather suits) of riders, the drivers are reasonably courteous). There is still snow on the top of some of the hills, the rivers are full, but the air temperatures are very comfortable. The rivers are green, caused by the refraction of light from the erosion by-products (mostly granite).

We had a tour of some fjords and steep, windy 1.5 lane mountain roads, including the Trollstigen (troll's ladder), which has numerous hairpins down the side of a 1000 meter cliff. There are uncountable waterfalls of various lengths and volumes. Even where the water is running down the side of a hill (mountain), the water appears as white as the snow nearby. Norway has incredible scenery and nice summer temperatures, although the days are often cloudy and threaten to rain. Although there is a lot of fish, there are also meats and some vegetables, so I continue to eat well.

We are off to the rest of Norway and Denmark by bus, but I thought I better send this off before the summary became too long.

=====

This part may be shorter and a little redundant. Donna is in ecstasy because of all the wonderful scenery, fjords, waterfalls, forests, lakes, mountains, sheep, cattle, goats, clouds, etc. Oh yes, there was a glacier today, the largest in Europe. Although each of these items (well many of them) are magnificent, there is no value in repeating the same things (or trying to think of new ways to convey the same message).

Today we took a ferry and saw some of the old abandoned farms. How they built them on the sides of the hills in the first place is an interesting engineering question. The children were tied so they would not fall off the side, which would be a several hundred foot drop into the fjord. They primarily raised fruit trees, although how they got a basket to market is another perplexing question. We did see the glacier, that has retreated several kilometers in the 20th century, but the last few winters (e.g., 80 feet of snow) may be adding to the growth. Ah yes, the vagaries of global warming.

Took a 1 hour 45 minute boat ride up a couple of fjords. In addition to the normal spectacular scenery we saw seals and porpoises. The lack of wildlife, other than seagulls continued. We see no animals other than domesticated sheep, goats, cattle; we see no rabbits, squirrels, birds, insects, reptiles. Perhaps most surprising is how green the country side is, not just the pine trees, but all the undergrowth. Afterwards we took the Flam railway, the world's steepest adhesion narrow gauge railroad, 20 tunnels totaling 6 km in the 20 km length, at a 5.5% grade (normal railways rarely exceed 2%). We then took another train to Bergen, where we visited the Hansa Museum, Bergen was one of the 4 major outposts. We had some cured moose for lunch, one of Donna's picnics where we pick up some meat, some cheese, some drink (we have had more Coca-cola in the last 5 months, than the previous 5 years).

Another day of fjords, ferries, waterfalls, farms, orchards, and scenery. Got a few showers, but nothing to interfere with viewing the scenery. Next day visited a stone mason and silver smith. Took a cable ferry (uses a wire cable to guide the ferry) over to a snack place where had strawberry waffles. Norway has a lot of strawberries and cherries (Donna has about 1 basket a day). Visited the stave church in Heddal, the largest still standing (800+ year old wood structure). Only damage from the reformation was painting over some early wall frescoes. Still used by the local congregation.

We finally got a day of museums (have you not missed the descriptions?). After a walk in the park of a famous sculptor, lots of bronze and granite figures, we went to three ship museums. The first contains the remains of the first 3 Viking ships discovered (at least 9 now), they were from burial sites and provide superb examples of how the ships were made and what they carried over 1000 years ago (note, when taking 30 years to build a ship (counting tree forming time) one does not burn it!!). One was a queen's pleasure ship, but the other two were of the types that sailed to North American, the Black Sea, and

the Mediterranean. We then visited the Kon-Tiki and RaII, as well as other items from Thor Heyerdahl's great seafaring adventures. Last was the Fram, a wooden sailing ship (with an auxiliary motor) that has sailed further north and south than any other surface vessel. This was the ship used in Amundsen's trip to the South Pole, as well as various expeditions around the Arctic. Lots of information on various Norwegian polar expeditions and explorations. We did get a city tour of Oslo, which makes one want to come back for a longer stay.

Visited the Hans Christian Anderson museum in Odense, located in the house where he was raised. Took a city tour of Copenhagen, which has a number of museums worth visiting. We did see the statue of the "Little Mermaid". This was the last day of the fjord adventure tour with Trafalgar; this tour was operated significantly better than the Trafalgar tours in Spain and Portugal. Obviously we are more comfortable in northern European, rather than Mediterranean countries, but the tour director was significantly better.

We are now off to pick up the ferry that will take us via the North Sea to many of the fjords in Norway.

Thanks,

"buddha belly" & "wide load"

We figured the descriptions of ourselves after these 4+ months of traveling are more appropriate than our names, they certainly will conjure a more accurate view of how we appear.

=====

We flew from Copenhagen back to Oslo, then took the 7 hour train ride from Oslo back to Bergen. The train passes by fjords and snow capped mountains, forests, and villages. A very pretty ride, we learned "express" means you are to rapidly get off the train at the various stops. On the train I read a good history of Denmark, which also contains a lot of the history of Norway and Sweden (both were part of Denmark at one time). I learned quite a bit about why Scandinavia is different than so much of the rest of Europe. Since the weather was raining until almost Bergen, I did not miss a lot of scenery. Since the trolley had run out of sandwiches by the time it got to us, the Norwegian couple in the next seats gave us some sandwiches they had from a wedding, note the wedding lasted 3 days, so they had had plenty to eat.

Boarded the ferry and found we have a very nice handicap cabin; there are safety bars and easy access to the shower. The beds fold up, one into a couch, so there is a fair amount of room. The beds are comfortable, i.e., long enough and firm. The porthole (actually rectangular) provides the same type of view as other cabins. This ferry has a number of the amenities of a cruise ship. Most of the ship is non-smoking, at least inside, so meals and drinks (before/after) are no problem.

The ferry makes numerous stops for an hour or so to off-load goods and people. There are a few tourist stops, where we board busses to see the sights, then re-board the ferry along the coast. For example, we

got to re-do the Trollstigen, even though the weather was different, the road and cliffs are still impressive. Visited the Ringve music museum in Trondheim, contains many types of instruments from the 1700's on. The guides actually play some of the instruments, so you can hear the difference between a clavichord, spinet, square piano, harmonium, hurdy-gurdy, etc.

Weather has been mostly overcast and cool, especially in the wind, i.e., on deck. Crossed the Arctic Circle (66°33' north), so we are now in the Land of the Midnight Sun (during the summer). For the last day or so, we have had 1 to 2 hours of dusk (i.e., between sun setting and rising), now the sun will be visible all the time.

Went down the Trollfjord in broad daylight (only 1:00 AM), when the trolls came out to play. Donna has pictures. Easy to stay up, when the sun is brighter at midnight than noon (there are less clouds). Visited Tromsø, e.g., a church, a statue of Amundsen (starting harbor for many arctic expeditions), and a memorial to the sinking of the "Tirpitz".

Visited the North Cape, 71°10'21" north latitude (about the northernmost point in Europe). We were about 150 km north of the tree line, i.e., only ferns, bushes, lichens, flowers for the reindeer to eat. Very rugged scenery, but most was covered in a heavy fog (the normal summer condition). Other than the wind and the wet, the weather was nice, e.g., about 50°F. The "Scarnhorst" was sunk near here in 1943. Later we saw the mast for zeppelins Norge and Italia docked during their passages over the North Pole.

Visited the old fort (guns never fired in anger in over 400 years of usage) at Vardo, at 31° east, the same longitude as Istanbul. Has a beam upon which royalty has carved or written their names since Christian IV of Denmark in 1599. Visited Hammerfest, the northernmost city (>5000 population) in the world, about the same latitude as Point Barrow Alaska. Visited Trondenes Church built on the site of the first christianization of Norway (near a lake where one was baptized or not allowed to surface). There was also an excellent museum that showed how settlement followed trade, e.g., for fish. We had an excellent tour guide who showed how fish (herring and cod), using the Gulf Stream, became a major industry (2nd largest in Norway after oil; 8% (fish) to 45% of exports). We went to the Hurtigruden museum (the name of this route along the coast of Norway), to celebrate the ~110 years of operation, which has contributed significantly to the growth of Norway.

Toured Lofoton Islands, center of cod fishing and major source of "stockfish" (dried cod) for the rest Europe for the last 1000+ years. Very rugged coastline and very humid, days in the summer have been known to warm to 15C (59F), but the water is rarely over 10C (50F). Visited museum at Rorvik on fishing and farming life, pre-mechanization. Good examples of tools and methods used in working households and villages.

Toured Trondheim, Donna thinks would be a nice city to come back to. Nidaros Cathedral, built in the 12th century, is the largest Romanesque/gothic church in Scandinavia. Restored, starting, in 1869,

there is beautiful new stained glass, lots of gargoyles, and nice stone work.

We are back in Bergen, just in time for the tall ships, but that is another tale.

=====

Arrived in Bergen for the weekend of the "Cutty Sark Tall Ship's Race"; therefore, there are lots of sloops, ketches, yawls, brigs, brigantines, barques, barquentines, and ships (up to and including 4 masts) in the harbor. A veritable forest of masts, yardarms, and sails (reefed or furled). We passed a few sailing in when we were on the ferry. The town is packed with visitors (and sailors) along with a horde of booths with various wares.

Although supposed to rain all the time in Bergen we have cloudy skies, which is good, since the sun is hot this far north. We are out of the "midnight sun", but there still is a lot of daylight. We visited the archeological museum of Bergen, which has relics of the history of the town since Viking times. There was an impressive section on the "Urban Code" from the 13th century, which is one of the first modern law codices, e.g., separation of church & state, public vs. private crime punishment (e.g., private feuds or vengeance for murder no longer allowed).

Took the train from Bergen back to Oslo, a 7 hour ride in bright sunshine and more marvelous scenery. Took a flight from Oslo to Stockholm, again with nice sunshine. We are still amazed how bright and hot the sun can be this far north, you can get red very easy. Of course, the normal European lack of ventilation does not help things, next trip we are going to bring our own fan. I think the several outbreaks of Legionnaires disease recently are probably due to the insufficient equipment to circulate air (not cool, just move).

We finally got to the Wasa museum, which even Donna agrees is better than expected. The Wasa was launched in 1628, sailed about 400 yards, capsized, and was recovered in 1961. The sinking is a perfect example of when a senior executive, i.e., the king, over rules the technical staff. The ship is in incredible good condition (function of the type of water in which she sank) with lots of artifacts of the times. There had even been time to carve a "mill" game board on the top of a barrel (same game as found in Portugal from the Romans); I did explain to them the game as they had the wrong name on the label. The wooden carving on the exterior is incredible, mostly of Roman emperors and Greek mythology. The museum is very well set up to view the ship, artifacts, and history. We went to the lighthouse ship and icebreaker ships, from early 20th century. We also went to the small boat museum, that had a collection of steam and sail boats for the last 200 years or so, there was even a collection of torpedoes, mostly from the 19th century, including an original Whitehead.

Visited the Royal Palace, built during the 18th century on the foundation of a medieval castle that burned in 1697. The interior is quite decorative, especially the wood carving and marquetry. The armory contains the clothes that both Gustavos Adolphus and Charles XII were wearing when killed in battle (1632 & 1718 respectively) as well

as a variety of weapons and armor from that period of the Swedish Empire of the North. The treasury contained lots of bejeweled crowns, swords, and other royal regalia. In addition to the standard security precautions, one has to descend a winding staircase 3 flights into the bowels of the old castle's foundations, e.g., 6 to 9 foot thick masonry walls.

Visited technology museum, which also included a communications museum (Sweden is the home of LM Ericsson). Showed a number of examples of Polham machines, the earliest automatic machine tools (18th century); he also founded one of the first technical colleges, i.e., not theology or law. Good examples of the evolution of machines, e.g., tools, engines, transportation, for the first 100 to 100 years of the Industrial Revolution. The communication museum had excellent sections on optical, telegraph, telephone, radio, television, and mobile equipment and systems, with acknowledgement of the various scientists who developed the tools and theories.

Visited the maritime museum. Included was one of the best collections of 20th century ship models we have seen. There were excellent models and tools of ship building for the 17th-19th century, e.g., a loom for sail making. There was a good exhibit of the Swedish-American liners (models and pictures).

Visited the History museum, with artifact from the stone ages through the middle ages. There was an extremely good collection of gold and silver items. Apparently lots of people buried their family treasures and did not return to claim them. Donna really liked the jewelry sections. There was also a good collection of rune stones.

Summary of Scandinavia:

1. We like the area, the people are friendly and the summer climate is nice.
2. Norway is the best, for scenery, use of English, restrictions on smoking, tourist friendly.
3. If we can come again, we will rent a car, as the roads are fine.
4. Since this is the least densely populated part of Europe, you see the most amount of courtesy and civil behavior (relative to the rest of Europe, but still well behind New Zealand, Australia, or Western US).
5. Ventilation is European norm (i.e., non-existent), so a good time to be here is late spring or early fall, when natural air movement is better.
6. The area is expensive, but the food is diversified and plentiful and the hotel rooms are reasonably comfortable.
7. There is a lot of history, since this area was never conquered by the Celts or Romans, there are a lot of differences from the rest of Europe. Of course, the scenery is fantastic, especially the coast of Norway.

We are now on the Finland and our Trafalgar tour of Russia and the Baltics.

=====

We safely arrived in Helsinki, with nice cool weather and some sunshine. We walked around a flea and produce market, but did not buy

a thing. Pea pods are now in season, the peas are eaten directly from the shell, not cooked, as a form of snack.

Next day we went to Sveaborg, a group of islands that were made into a fortress, starting in the mid-18th century. The area is now a large (very large) recreation park. Although somewhat devastated by the allied bombardment during the Crimean war, there are very extensive buildings and fortifications remaining. There are several museums, which naturally we visited. One on the building of the fortress, one on the manning of the fortress, and one containing weapons from the Winter and Continuation Wars (1940-1944) between Finland and the USSR. Most of the weapons were German (purchased), Soviet (captured), or British (purchased), but the trucks were Fords. We also went aboard the sole remaining Finnish submarine (built 1930's, German design), which during Finnish-Soviet wars was used for coastal defense (sank one ship) and reconnaissance. Took city tour, in the rain; nice clean city, but streets are crowded with traffic and parked cars. Their central heating system (municipal hot water) is also used to warm some sidewalks to melt the snow.

After an early rising (0530), we were on our way to Russia. The border crossing was not too bad, only took 1 hour at the main check point (the other 4 check points were incidental). The roads so far have been fine, although a little bumpy in the cities, e.g., light rail and trolley tracks. The country is clean but dilapidated. Wooden buildings need paint, stucco and concrete need repairs. Old buildings are wood, but most new construction is brick or pre-formed concrete. Not much to see so far off the road, as everything is covered with forest.

Took the city tour of St. Petersburg, the 2nd largest city in Russia. Although buildings are dilapidated (i.e., lack of maintenance), things are relatively clean and pollution free. There are some traffic problems (but not bad for a city this size and a lot better than Silicon Valley). There are numerous parks, squares, and statues, as well as the canals and rivers between the 40-odd islands. St. Petersburg is a relatively new city (founded 1703) and had to be significantly re-built after the 900 day siege of Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War. Given the government until recently, they have done a pretty good job of retaining the charm and beauty of the major buildings, while adding more modern conveniences. We also toured the summer palace of Catherine the Great in the town of Pushkin. This has been magnificently restored from the devastation of the war. A lot of walking, so we left the conducted tour and we went on our own so I could have some more rest stops.

Although we were told bad things about Russian food and accommodation, so far they have been excellent. Not only is the food good (we do like cabbage and beetroot), especially the soups, but there is a lot of it. The hotel is one of the best we have had anywhere. We will see how things are in the 2 other cities we visit in Russia, but first impressions are very positive. Donna does not like the street vendors (at least they are not as pushy as Egypt or Turkey), but that is a minor inconvenience. Although there were some sprinkles, the temperatures are cool, which is very nice.

Visited the Peter & Paul fortress, which includes the cathedral that is the burial site for the Romanov's. Starting with Peter the Great until Nicolas and Alexandra, whose remains (recovered from a mine shaft in Siberia, were validated with DNA testing) were interred in 1998. Also included were those of Anatasia, although the remains of the son and one other daughter were not found. The restoration work is ongoing for the upcoming 300th anniversary, there were piles of wood about, all of much better quality (especially dimensional) that we are used to seeing in the USA. We then visited the Yusupov palace (e.g., Hearst and Vanderbilt eat your hearts out), which was also the site of numerous acts that finally murdered Rasputin. A lot of work has gone into restoration, which is magnificent, and a lot of the original works of art and decoration were saved (unfortunately not the pool table). The library is reduced in size (not as many books), but still marvelous. The basements are like catacombs.

Visited the Hermitage, the world's largest art gallery, e.g., >3,000,000 items. Of more interest to us were the buildings, especially the Winter Palace. This was the winter home of the Romanov's and the art collection started by Catherine the Great. We did not see it all, (but we did walk about 3 miles through some of the rooms) the Winter Palace has over 1,000 rooms and several of the ones we visited were over 10,000 square feet each (there are no typo's in those numbers). A lot has been restored since the war, but most of the contents were saved. Now included are some of the items "liberated" by the Soviets in the aftermath of WWII. As in other Russian buildings, we have found the floor (mostly marquetry and parquetry) to be exquisite and the plaster work (mostly figures and designs) to be the best. Lots of mirrors, windows (double glazed, even 250 years ago), gilded everything, and very tall (>25 feet) ceilings.

We got the first day of sunshine in a week or more. You could see the city air pollution line for the first time, but that does not appear any worse than any other city this size. Smoking is not as bad as we feared, not that much worse than the rest of Europe, but appears mostly with the young, as a function of heavy advertising (to smoke). There are quite a few new cars and most of the city buses are electrified trolleys. The people look healthy, dress well, and there are stores with goods in them (not just the tourist shops). There is limited selection and not a lot of service or convenience, sort of like western Europe in the 50's. You can still see the tolls of suffering in the faces of the older people, but most of the young appear cheerful and more optimistic. This is also one of those few countries where the young ladies are quite attractive.

Visited the Peterhof, the summer palace starting with Peter the Great. The usual great paintings, gilded carvings, parquet, moldings, etc. What is special are the fountains, lots of water, gilded statues, cascades, and gardens. Called the Russian Versailles, from the gardens and fountains one can see why. We had some sunshine today, which made the fountains even better. Then the drive to Novgorod, the roads were worse, but not near as bad as predicted. The hotel is very nice. In Novgorod, the oldest Russian city (sort of Finn/Slav peasants and Nordic rulers from the 9th century), we walked through the Kremlin (city fortress). Saw the millennium statue (for the city, from the 19th century), that though a marvelous series of coincidences, mostly survived the Nazi occupation.

We took the long journey to Moscow, the road is about like the eastern half of I-10 and the scenery is similar to the south, lots of forests and crooked, unpainted wooden buildings. On the road we passed a couple of T-34's set in parks. We did get the interesting juxtaposition of some tank caltrops marking the line of furthest Nazi advance into Moscow with a big Ikea store in the background. We did get a rest stop, where the men were requested to use the facilities, i.e., go to the nearest tree. Infrastructure outside of the largest cities is still not available. We got to Moscow and had a city orientation tour. The city (for a large city) is relatively clean, not much pollution, and the traffic is not bad. In general, we have found Russia (sample of 3 cities and 500 km of roads) to be cleaner and less hassle than southern Europe. Although many of the people, especially anyone over about 30, have difficulty in smiling, there is no sign of the hostility or arrogance of France or Spain. We have been warned about the pickpockets, but given the way the shops, street vendors, and open air markets work, you can tell people are generally honest and trusting; they have just not had time yet to adjust to the capitalist work ethic and concepts of customer service.

We walked about Red Square; Lenin's Tomb is closed and some restoration work is being done on one of the churches, but the rest of the buildings look great. We had scattered sunshine, so the golden orbs of the gilded cupolas were really shining. There are now a number of churches in Russia, mostly Orthodox. Near St. Petersburg, because of the influence of Peter the Great, many of the churches had spires, but we are now in the region where the painted or gilded "onion domes" dominate. We saw a very interesting most statue of Peter the Great, with lots of ship hulls in the base. Russia has a lot of statues and most of them are quite good, many commemorate the past, i.e., not the "modern art" we saw in Scandinavia.

Visited an Orthodox monastery, actually a bunch of churches surrounded by a large wall. Donna has a good picture of "how many monks does it take to raise a ladder?". Visited the Kremlin, again a lot of churches. Also visited the armory, which has an eclectic collection of clothing, carriages, Faberge eggs, utensils, and a few examples of 13th-18th century arms. Funny how the Russians have great art for forks and eggs, but their weapons are very plain, all the decorated ones were imported from Turkey or Western Europe (or captured). The highlight of the day was the circus ON ICE. Lots of gymnastics, trapeze work, and other very athletic activities.

The first impressions seem correct. Given where they have come from, I think the Russia we saw is in much better shape than we expected. The hotel rooms were better than most of Europe (although maintenance and service are still in the learning stage, the basic workmanship in construction is pretty good), the food is fine, there is limited English (but most of the people seemed to communicate when necessary), traffic is bearable. I would certainly recommend a tour of Russia over Spain and Portugal, probably also Greece, Turkey, and Egypt. Those countries have more history or scenery, but the detractions are worse. I also think that Russia will even be better in a few more years, after there has been more a chance to get used to a capitalist work ethic, reduce some of the corruption, and people take the risk to invest in

the future a little more. We do not like the beggars and street vendors, but those are givens for large cities and tourist areas.

Had a long day of riding through Vyasma, Smolensk, to Minsk (all famous from both Napoleonic War and WWII). We are spending the night in Minsk, Belarus (a "republic" formed in 1919, now a country for the first time in history). Tomorrow we head to Lithuania, where I hope to send this out and we will have only a week before we go home.

We are now in the last week of our great adventure. We completed the strenuous week in Russia, long days, lots of driving, lots of walking and standing, now to some recuperation time before the long plane ride home. The border crossing at Belarus (including exiting Russia) only took 1.5 hours. We drove through the countryside of Lithuania, mostly agricultural, hay, corn, wheat, and pastoral.

We went to the castle at Trakai (the capital before 1323), a restored fortress on an island from the 13th century made of stone and brick. There were also historical exhibits inside, but few English captions. Started with stone age tools though household items of the 18th century, e.g., seals, pipes, furniture. The people seem reserved, but nice, and are large (i.e., NBA players like Sabonis) and have recovered from 45 years (1945-90) of Soviet domination fairly well.

We took the city orientation tour of Vilnius, mostly walking between a lot of churches restored after the Soviets left (in 1990). The town was not badly damaged by either the Napoleonic wars or those of the 20th century, so there are a lot of buildings from the 15th century onwards. Most of the construction is brick, e.g., one church used 33 different sizes, and they do not have earthquakes here, so the buildings are still around. We went to an amber museum, since a lot of the Baltic amber is found near here. The museum is in the basement, that was excavated in 1998 (or so) and they found an oven for making ceramics from the 17th century.

Based on first impressions, we are going to like the Baltic states. The services are adequate, the architecture diverse, some history, clean agricultural areas, not too crowded, either with natives or tourists, and eating places, etc. are no-smoking. The street vendors are not pushy, the waitresses smile, and English is understood in most places. Lithuania has been a pleasant surprise and I am beginning to think the Baltic states are a well kept secret.

Walked the city orientation tour of old town Riga, reasonably well preserved from the devastation of the 2 world wars. A charming city, with clear roots to the agricultural past of Latvia. Lots of restoration work has been done and more is in progress. Although items are a little costly, the country seems well on its way to prosperity. We also went to the outdoor museum that contains buildings from all over Latvia from the last 3 centuries or so. Very good examples of farm life buildings and equipment, makes you very glad to be alive today and not in the past. We have stayed at a very good hotel, among the best of the entire trip and have had very good meals. We had a "typical" Latvian feast for lunch, consisting of sauerkraut soup, sauerkraut, sausage, rolled beef, pork ribs, potatoes, beer (a Latvian

without beer is like a dog without a tail, according to the locals), and a cottage cheese cake (pan bread) for dessert. There were lots of museums to visit that we should come back to, especially since they are supposed to have English captions.

Drove through Latvia to Estonia near the coastline. More forest and agricultural land, lots of single-family dwellings, few examples of the massive Soviet tenement complexes. Estonia appears the most prosperous of the Baltic states (function of smallest population and support from Finland). We are tired enough to not walk the old city tour, we have seen enough of big churches, cobblestones, and old buildings. Time to rest for the journey home.

Returned to Helsinki on the ferry from Tallinn, had just enough time to visit the produce/flea market one more time, no sightseeing. Passport control in/out of Russia, Belarus, and the Baltic states is a bit of a pain, but that should improve in the next few years. Next message should be from Quad D.

Returned to Helsinki on the ferry from Tallinn, had just enough time to visit the produce/flea market one more time, no sightseeing. Passport control in/out of Russia, Belarus, and the Baltic states is a bit of a pain, but that should improve in the next few years. Next message should be from Quad D.

This note will summarize some of the numerical aspects of our trip:

1. Duration: 177 days (unless I miscounted somewhere).
2. Lengths: air: 35,000 miles; bus: 20,000 miles; ship: 10,000 miles; car: 5,000 miles. Error of -5% to +10%.
3. Countries visited: New Zealand, Australia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Germany, Spain, Portugal, England, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. 19 in total (we do not count the 9 hour layover in the Singapore airport).
4. Favorite areas:
 - A. Scenery: Norway, Australia, Spain (we did not get to South Island of New Zealand)
 - B. History: England, Greece, Egypt
 - C. People: New Zealand, Australia, Scotland
 - D. Beer: England, Germany, Scotland
 - E. Food: New Zealand, England, Germany
 - F. Accommodations: New Zealand, Australia, Scotland
 - G. Books: England, Scotland, Norway (we shipped back about 20 boxes of books and some shirts)
 - H. Shirts: Australia, Norway, England
 - I. Museums: England, Sweden, Portugal (note, the archeological museums in Athens and Cairo were fantastic, but the only ones in those countries, e.g., in England you have the York train museum and lots more; Portugal over Spain because of some use of English in Portugal)
 - J. Traveler facilities (Laundromats, post offices, grocery stores): Australia, New Zealand, England
 - K. Jewelry: Egypt, Norway, Russia
 - L. Souvenirs: Norway, Egypt, Turkey
 - M. Palaces: Russia, England, Spain
 - N. Ease/speed of e-mail: Australia, New Zealand, Norway

O. Ease of mailing boxes: England, Australia, New Zealand
P. Best surprises: Norway even better than expected and the Baltic states are great.

Q. Biggest disappointment: Trafalgar tours, especially the uncomfortable seating in the buses.

R. Best ice cream: New Zealand (best in world from a grocery store), Magnums (various locations)

5. SAS and Lufthansa business class for inter-European flights is worthless, same seats, service, boarding, etc. as steerage. Lufthansa first class international is not as good as United but a lot better than steerage or business class.

6. The tour companies were quite varied. Australia was best, buses are relatively comfortable, stops are fine, itinerary useful, a definite recommendation to use any of the companies ATS, APT, or AAT (although driving by car in most of the country is better). Egypt out of Cairo was fine, because we had a van just for us. Greece had a shorter bus, but still more room than any in Europe. The Trafalgar itineraries were fine, the busses were terrible (to worst), accommodations were OK (given in Europe there is minimum ventilation, poor beds, marginal facilities (some exceptions for Scandinavia)). Greece, Egypt, Russia all must be done by tour bus. We would have been better off doing Scandinavia and Iberia by car. Future trips (assuming they happen) to New Zealand, Australia, or Norway will involve car rental. Of course, Germany and the UK will only be car rentals.

7. Although by the end, we were glad to be going home, especially to see the progress on our house, we are very glad to have made this trip now. In general, my health has held up, although I have noticeably deteriorated since we left. I still hope to have enough mobility left to make one or two more international trips.

8. The 6-month trip now seems a little long (but we did have the time pressure of my health). Around the 5-month mark we started getting crotchety and intolerant of minor inconveniences, although once we recognized that, we made a conscious effort to overcome those emotions. We miss the solitude and silence of our own home and location, as well as the general friendliness and courtesy of most people in the USA. We did plan for rest days, but still we got tired (me more than Donna) and had to find time to not do/see things and just rest. The computer was essential, both to stay in touch, record thoughts, and to play games (30 minutes is about the max one can watch CNN or BBC).

9. You know you have been traveling too long when: you start to drink tap water in Egypt or Russia; you start to put the toothpaste on the brush before taking the cap off; you consider your tour name tag part of your normal dressing routine; you know the seat rotation for other tour members.

10. Other items learned: pack light, you can always buy shirts along the way; bring "baggies" or equivalent to put things in, e.g., food, including the twist ties; mail things home, e.g., books, shirts; allow plenty of rest time; bring vitamins, etc. and use them; drink lots of water (but check the source).

=====