



OurWanderYears

2017 – 1 of 2

TTN and NET

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Cover photo: Sunset at Wells ME, July 2017.

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New Year's Eve at Gulf Waters

7 Jan 2017



New Year's Eve

Our home for the winter, the [Gulf Waters RV Resort](#) continues to impress us. Thanksgiving dinner exceeded our expectations. The meals served weekdays at the Tiki Bar have been consistently good. The breakfast yesterday was, as one of my neighbors put it, "one of the best breakfasts I have had anywhere." So we were expecting a quality evening at the New Year's Eve party. No dinner, so food was not an issue. Our biggest concern was the entertainment, a one-man band that can best be described as a karaoke singer with a guitar. Not exactly Glenn Miller or Alabama.

But the evening turned out to be a *lot* of fun. The one-man band was very good. He had an excellent voice and could mimic Elvis, Lennon, Dylan, Johnny Cash, John Fogarty - you name it, he could sing it. Well, I guess he would have had a problem with Madonna or Patsy Cline. But, overall, he was very good. And the songs were very good for dancing. The dance floor was pretty full all night. And Jett and I were out there a lot.

The party went until after midnight. That may not sound like much, but the New Year's Eve party at Seminole last year was pretty much over by 10pm.

We were at a table with all of our Tennessee friends. We all brought some hors d'oeuvres and no one went home hungry.

A fine time was had by all.



The dance floor



Chuck mugging

Pickle ball

8 Jan 2017



Pickle ball

My new sport is pickle ball. It is like playing ping pong while standing on a very large table. The court is the

same size of a badminton court (44 x 20 feet) and the games are almost always foursomes. A tennis court is 78 x 27 feet, so the recreational space is more efficiently used in pickle ball, which I am sure appeals to RV park owners. Needless to say, there is less running in pickle ball than in tennis.

Which is not to say that you don't get plenty of exercise. After my first 90-minute pickle ball session my shirt was so wet I could wring it out. I lost 3 pounds. And my legs cramped up on my for the next 24 hours. It was a workout.

The equipment consists of a paddle - usually composite but sometimes wood (if you are cheap like me) - and a ball which more closely resembles a wiffle ball than a tennis ball. A game is up to 11 and a team can score only if it is serving. Service changes if the volley is lost - to the second person on the team if the first person was serving and to the first person on the other team if the second person was serving. Figuring out who is serving is the most complicated part of the game.

I am not very good yet. I held my own on the first couple of days, but then the good players returned from Christmas vacations and I have been toast ever since. I lost 9 straight games this week. Humiliating.

But it is fun even when losing. And I will improve. Eventually.



Pickle ball equipment

“Taming a Sea-Horse” by Robert B. Parker

9 Jan 2017

[Dell Publishing, 1986](#)

There are books where the genesis of the title is obvious, like *Green Eggs and Ham*. There are books where the title is not immediately obvious, but is revealed in the reading, such as *The Hunt for Red October* or *The Red Badge of Courage*. Then there are books which, when finished, you are left scratching your head, wondering "where the heck did THAT title come from?" like *Cry, The Beloved Country*. *Taming the Sea-Horse* is one of those.

This is one of the series featuring Spenser as the very masculine PI with a heart of gold. This is the 15th in the series. If you love Spenser you will enjoy this one because he does all the Spenser-esque things that you love: punches the lights out on some bad guys, stands up to mobsters and other assorted cretins (example: he overpowers two would-be assassins, spray-paints their hair pink and sends them packing), wise-asses his way through some incredibly dangerous predicaments and, in the end, gets the girl. If you know Spenser you know that "getting the girl" does not involve sex as he is 100% monogamous and totally in love with his psychologist FWB, Susan, who he stumpfs innumerable times (which is the other reason he keeps in great shape). No, in this case the girl is a young hooker that he snatches from the clutches of some bad guys in New York who happen to have some Boston buddies. It is just the kind of thing a PI with a heart of gold would do.

The Spenser novels are all set in Boston, so if you like reading narratives involving real Boston locations and institutions, then you have another reason to like this book.

I like all those things so, despite my puzzlement over the title, I enjoyed this book very much. Not a deep plot,

but a fun ride.

7 out of 10.

New flooring

15 Jan 2017

Our RV is less than 2 years old, so the flooring that it came with was not worn out. However, Jett never liked the carpeting and, with 2 dogs who have had their share of "accidents" and a husband who tracks in a lot of dirt, the carpeting in the living room area was dirty (see the photo showing the dirty/clean line at the bottom of the sofa) and - dare I say it? - disgusting. Repeated steam cleanings did not restore the original color.

So we decided to replace the flooring in the lower level. Jett would have like to have replaced the upper level (bedroom/bath) flooring as well, but that meant devising some way to cover the edge of the steps and no good option was available (we know because we asked a flooring expert). We did, however, ask the flooring guy to stretch and tack down the carpet in the bedroom as it was beginning to ripple. Why? Because RVs are built with the flooring in place when the walls are attached, so the walls are built on top of the flooring. The assumption - not a particularly good one - is that the walls will keep the carpet from rippling.



Before

We had a lot of choices for the new flooring. We could have gone with linoleum, like the existing flooring, or real wood. But the wood option was risky (it had to be thin enough to let the slides ride over it) and we didn't much

care for vinyl - especially since it would have been impossible to install it as a single piece with no cuts. So we opted for a durable fake wood plank flooring that, we are told, will be very durable and very washable. Then it was a matter of choosing a color. We opted for planks that look gray in sunlight but show more of a light oak color in artificial light.

I wasn't sure I was going to like the change. Being a guy, living with dirty carpeting bothered me less than it bothered Jett. And as it was being installed I continued to be unsure as it looked too gray. But once completed, I liked it very much. The RV now has a brighter and definitely much cleaner feel to it.

We followed up the flooring installation with a cleaning of the remaining carpeting, specifically targeting the stains on the bedroom carpet. So we now have some very clean flooring.



Dirty/clean line



Rippling/stained bedroom carpet



The kitchen area



After

Egrets, pelicans, cranes, storks and eagles

26 Jan 2017

Our RV site at [Gulf Waters RV Resort](#) is right on a man-made pond. It is a beautiful site which we are enjoying very much. We knew that the view - of the pond, the clubhouse and the fountain - would be a constant source of pleasure and serenity. But we didn't expect to have a front-row seat to some pretty exotic bird-watching.

A few weeks back we went to the [Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge](#) on Sanibel Island, which bills itself as a great place to see exotic waterfowl. We enjoyed the trip, but didn't see many memorable birds. Our little pond, on the other hand, has been a stage for frequent, surprising appearances of birds that I have either never seen before

or never seen so nearby. The stork (at the right) is one of the most surprising. I didn't know that storks inhabited this area. In fact, I kind of believed that storks were mythological creatures that only existed in stories to deliver babies.



Crane



Pelicans



Stork



Egrets



Eagle at sunset

Just in the past week we also had egrets, cranes, ducks, pelicans (both white and gray) and cormorants in our

little pond. But the most surprising bird of all was a bald-headed eagle. It appears to be an adolescent, not huge but very beautiful. He is in the park nearly every day, sometimes fishing from the pond. One morning last week as I exited the RV with the dogs to take them on their morning walk I was surprised to see the bald eagle on the grass near the edge of the pond, eating a fish. He was no more than 100 feet away. He flew off, fish in talons, when the dogs got too close, but honored us with a fly-by: he circled the lake, then flew directly over us at a height of 20 feet. He gave the dogs the evil eye.

I think he was trying to decide if he could carry Rusty off.

“The Summons” by John Grisham

28 Jan 2017

[Doubleday, Feb 2002](#)

I think John Grisham is a very talented writer. I love his legal mystery/suspense/adventure yarns. They always keep my attention. They even keep me awake when I read late at night, which is high praise indeed.

Except this one.

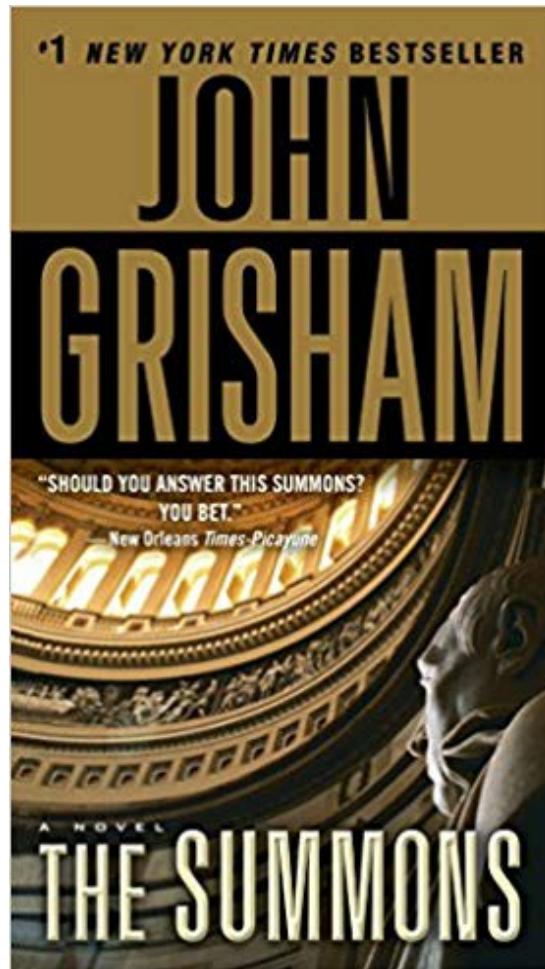
In a nutshell, this is the story of a dying southern judge who summons his two estranged sons to a meeting to discuss his estate. One son is a law professor while the other is a ne'er-do-well addict and playboy. When they arrive they find their father dead, with a hand-written one-page will that splits the estate evenly between the two. As his estate was paltry, consisting of a run-down house and a few thousand dollars in the bank, the division of the estate hardly mattered.

But some things were puzzling. Why had the man left a hand-written will when he had a perfectly valid one, written just a few months before, on file with his lawyer friend? Why summon the sons at all if there was really nothing to discuss?

Moot questions, if would seem. Until the professor son discovers \$3.1 million, in cash, in boxes in his father's home office cabinets.

Where did it come from? Was the purpose of the summons to discuss this cash? What should be done with it?

That is the central question in this book: what is to be done with the cash? The "right" thing would be to declare it as part of the estate. But then the public would ask the same question: where did it come from? As the judge had a reputation as a scrupulously honest and fair judge, his legacy would be tarnished with rumor and suspicion. Maybe he won it gambling and the son spends a quarter of the book trying to decide if that was possible. It wasn't.



So maybe just keep the money and, over time, launder it and spend it on his cherished dream: a nice private aircraft. One decision was easy: he would NOT share it with his brother because he would just use it to buy drugs and that would kill him.

One rationalization follows another. He hides the money in a storage locker, then visits the locker nearly every day to make sure the money is still safe. He begins to obsess about the money. Can't sleep. Can't focus on his work. He starts to look a bit insane, like Humphrey Bogart in [*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*](#). His obsession turns to fear when notes begin to arrive which makes it apparent that someone - no idea who - knows that he has the money.

The rest of the book is about how he tracks down the source of the money and what happens to it. As I write this I realize that it sounds better than it was. For a Grisham novel, the plot was very thin and the characters were not very interesting. This was probably my least favorite of all the Grisham novels that I have read.

3 out of 10.

Long-range planning

8 Feb 2017

We have about 2 months remaining on our winter stay in Fort Myers. So it is time to start planning... planning the trip north and then the trip out to Wisconsin for my 50th high school reunion. But we still have 16 states that we haven't visited. We can hit four - OH, MI, IN and WI - getting to the reunion, but that leaves 12 states, including WA. I think this is our opportunity to complete our 48 state map.

So I am now in the process of planning the trip north, the 3 months in New England, the trip to Wisconsin, the trip to Washington and Oregon and the trip back east. And, of course, we need to decide where we will spend the winter. That discussion includes options to spend between 3 and 6 months outside the US - perhaps in Panama or Costa Rica - to see how we might like living there if we decide to turn in the RV.

The three months in New England will actually take more planning than usual as we intend to do a "New England Tour" this year, spending no more than 3 weeks at any one RV park. The tour will include MA, NH and ME.

I booked one stop on the trip north yesterday and plan to book some of the summer sites today. The planning is underway! I will provide more details as the plans stabilize.

"Bad Luck and Trouble" by Lee Child

13 Feb 2017

[Delacorte Press, May 2007; Bantam Dell paperback edition April 2008](#)

I realized about 5 pages in that I had read this book once before. But I couldn't recall how it ended. Being unable to remember critical plot elements of a book does not speak well of it. I knew it wasn't one of the best of the Jack Reacher series because I remember the plot details of most of them vividly. But even a mediocre Jack Reacher book is better than most, so I finished it.

No, not one of the best Reachers. But fun anyway.

The plot begins with the disappearance of four of his old Army "special investigators" unit. They are all long out of the army and haven't seen each other in years, but, as they used to remind everyone, *no one messes with*

the special investigators. If someone has messed with the four, then it was the responsibility of the other four to make them pay.

One of the reasons why this is a lesser Reacher novel is that about two-thirds of the book deals with the time the remaining four spend thrashing around in the dark, trying to figure out what caused the disappearance of the other four and who might be responsible. The final third is devoted to making the culprits pay.

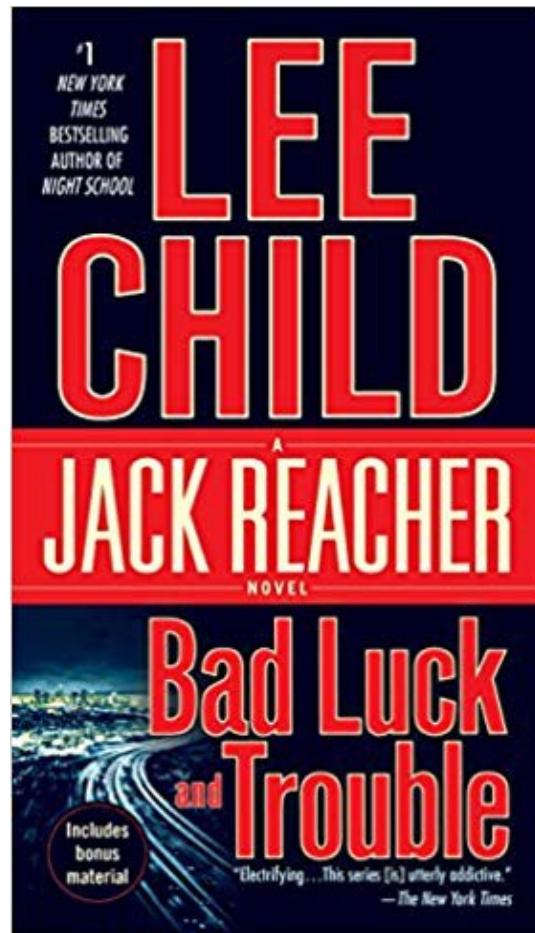
But before the payback could get underway, two more are captured and are headed to certain death. That leaves just Reacher and one other investigator - a woman - to deal with a team of 8 vicious assassins. They were clearly outnumbered. The assassins, that is, because 8-to-2 is right in Reacher's wheelhouse. It was just a matter of time, really, but some of the fun is seeing how Reacher makes it happen.

Oh, just to make things more interesting... the reason the investigators were killed is they had uncovered a plot to steal 650 high-tech shoulder-mount anti-aircraft missiles that a terrorist was planning on using to bring down commercial aircraft, at a likely cost of thousands of lives and a complete disruption of air travel in the USA. Just a little detail, really; Reacher was primarily focused on saving his two colleagues and getting payback for the death of the other four. If he happened to save the US air industry in the process, then all the better.

Naturally it all comes out right in the end, with a body count of 9 bad guys, 7 dispatched by Reacher and 2 by his lady friend.

Not a great plot, but great fun.

8 out of 10.



R.I.P. Grace (2001-2017)

19 Feb 2017

Jett and I put our beloved Grace down yesterday. As always, it was a very difficult, heartbreakin decision. She wasn't in pain, she wasn't dying. But she wasn't living, either. Life had became a constant trial for her. She never fully recovered from her first bout of vertigo in December 2015 and became even more unstable after a second attack this past December. Two nights ago she awoke me at 2am with a panicked look in her eyes. I thought she needed to relieve herself, so I took her out, in my pajamas. She did, in fact, pee immediately, but she continued to be panicked. She fell over, twice, as I walked her. When I got her back to the RV I had to spend some time comforting her. A bad dream? A sense of impending doom? I don't know. But it was obvious that she was living the final days or weeks of her life.

She became incontinent about a month ago. We tried a variety of diapers. None worked and she hated them all.



Back-seat driver



Grace, ready to roll



Dog beach in Charleston

Jett and I had, after her second vertigo attack, checked out veterinary options as we knew that her end may be near. After the 2am panic attack we talked about taking her north in April, knowing that she would have to be put down shortly after we arrived. Jett pointed out - correctly - that with her instability, having her travel 1,500 miles would be cruel.

So yesterday morning we decided that Feb 15, 2017, would be The Day. Jett called the vet and we made a final trip to the ocean, which Grace has always loved, before heading to the vet. One of my fondest memories of Grace was of her first encounter with ocean surf, in Rockport MA. She raced into the surf, barking and biting the waves, trying to herd them. She had a grand time.

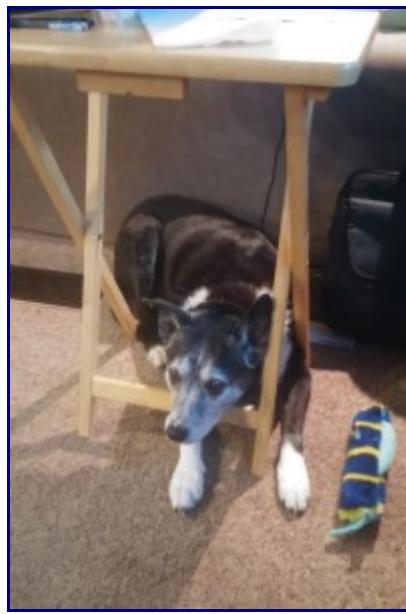
She didn't have a grand time on her final trip. She stepped in, but there was no joy. She panted, she stumbled



Swimming



In the shower



Under the table

and almost seemed to say "Yeah, nice ocean. Now let's get this over with."

She was, as always, a lady in her final minutes. The assistant - a total stranger - scooped her up to take her to another room to insert the catheter. She didn't struggle, didn't complain. When she came back Jett and I spent a few moments hugging her and telling her how much we appreciated her years of friendship and companionship. I told her to give [Cha-Cha](#) our love, should she happen to see him on the other side. She kissed me.

Then she went to sleep. Gently, quietly. Sadly.

What was it that endeared Grace to us? Well, she made an indelible impression the moment we met her. She was a 3-month-old ball of fur that we met in a shelter. She was one of a litter of seven or eight. Her siblings were all sleeping, but she was running circles around them, nipping at their paws, trying to get them to play. I was a bit dumbfounded when Jett said "I want THAT one!" I said, "Are you sure? You don't think she is a little too... crazy?"

But Jett was in love and, of course, I had to agree. I picked Cha-Cha who was 2 months older, much larger and much quieter. At the suggestion of the shelter staff, we put Grace in with Cha-Cha, to make sure he wouldn't be aggressive toward the smaller dog. We needn't have worried - Grace immediately started nipping at his paws and he backed into a corner, totally cowed. From that moment on, Grace was Alpha Dog in our pack.

Jett picked the name "Grace" in honor of a beautiful Irish song. But it was totally the wrong name for her. Dynamo, Cyclone, Chaos... all would have been more appropriate. But we stuck with Grace. She and Cha-Cha became best friends and they had 12 years together. When we lost Cha-Cha we got Rusty. But Grace merely tolerated Rusty; she was never close to him. I think she missed Cha-Cha.

Grace loved to travel, so she picked the right parents. She accompanied us on all of our RV journeys to date - over 17,000 miles. She dipped her paws into the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Gulf, as well as the Mississippi River. In her younger years she would claw at the window whenever we passed an 18-wheeler. Or, if there was no traffic to watch, she would look over my shoulder at the road ahead. She knew when it was a "travel day" - her eyes got brighter and she had more bounce in the step.

She loved the water, too. Salt water, fresh water, clean water, dirty water - didn't matter. If there was water, she was in it. When we had the house in Massachusetts we would put a kiddie pool in the back yard and she would be in and out of it all day. There was joy on her face whenever she was in the water.

In the last year of her life she developed a couple of quirks. The shower in the RV became her refuge - her preferred place to nap. She liked the shower more than she liked the sofa or the bed. And tables... she developed this affinity for tables. She found ways to entwine herself in out TV tables. Odd. But endearing.

The final days were very, very sad. We will miss her. But I take comfort in that, in her final moments, she did, in fact, prove that we gave her the right name. She died with grace.



Her farewell photo

The plan for the New England Tour (NET)

16 Feb 2017

In summers past we have picked one RV park in the Boston area and stayed there for the entire season. This has many advantages, most notably the ability to form friendships and get some significant discounts. But this year the season will be shorter as we will be leaving New England on August 1 to head out to Wisconsin for my 50th high school reunion. Also, as a result all of my genealogical research over the past year, I am keenly interested in visiting gravesites of both my ancestors and Jett's. These two factors led to the decision to split our time among a number of campground in the three months we will be in New England. We have selected 5 campgrounds in MA and 1 each in NH and ME. We have dubbed this bit of traveling - and it is not much, travel-wise - the "New England Tour" or simply NET.

We will arrive in New England on May 5. Our initial destination will be Plymouth, MA. The full itinerary is:

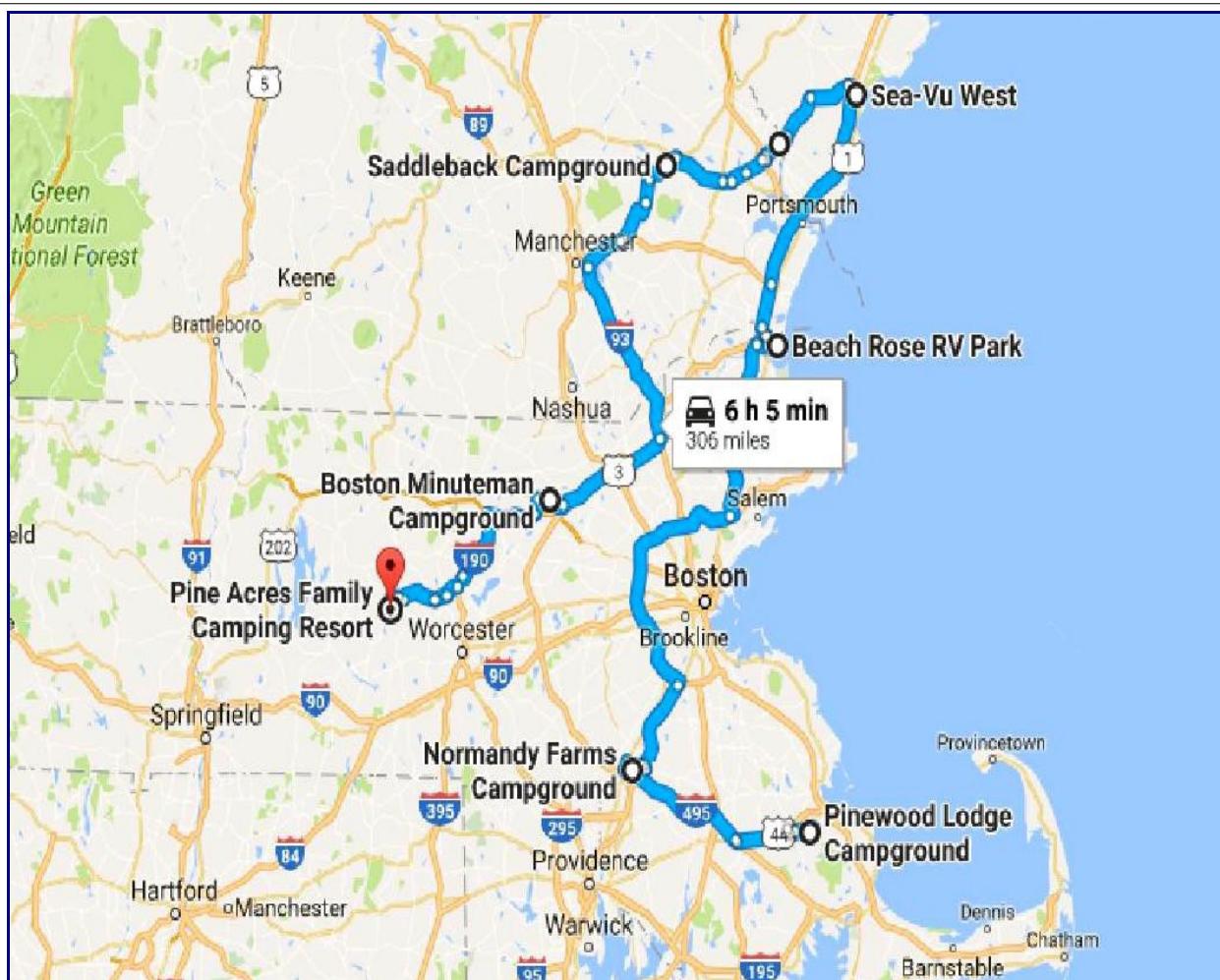
- Pinewood Lodge Campground, Plymouth, MA - 24 nights.

- Normandy Farms Campground, Foxboro, MA - 11 nights.
- Beach Rose RV Park, Salisbury, MA - 14 nights.
- Sea-Vu West, Wells, ME - 7 nights.
- Saddleback Campground, Northwood, NH - 9 nights.
- Minuteman Campground, Littleton, MA - 9 nights.
- Pine Acres Family Campground, Oakham, MA - 14 nights.

We have stayed at Normandy Farms, Saddleback, Minuteman and Pine Acres previously and look forward to return visits. Pinewood Lodge, Beach Rose and Sea-Vu West will be new and we have high hopes.

The tour will consist of 6 hops, the longest being just 82 miles. Just over 300 miles total. The roads will be mostly interstate freeways or local roads that we have traveled before. the most adventurous hop will be from Sea-Vu West to Saddleback - that will traverse some local roads the we have not seen before. But not long and not difficult.

Not a big trip, but the variety of places should make for an interesting summer.



Elvis impersonation

19 Feb 2017

No, not me... [Chris Olson](#). He came down to Ft Myers Beach to give us a pretty darn good Elvis impersonation show in the Gulf Waters community center. A crowd of almost 200 were thoroughly entertained for 2.5 hours. Despite being from Minnesota and completely Nordic, Chris sounded very much like The King and kept the crowd both entertained and involved. A good time.

This was another example of the park's entertainment being very good. Better than expected. In every case - New Year's Eve, Valentines Day or just the occasional Hump Night DJ - the music has been consistently excellent. Whoever is selecting the acts is doing a very fine job.



The tiny stage



Chris Olson

The plan for the Third Trip North (TTN)

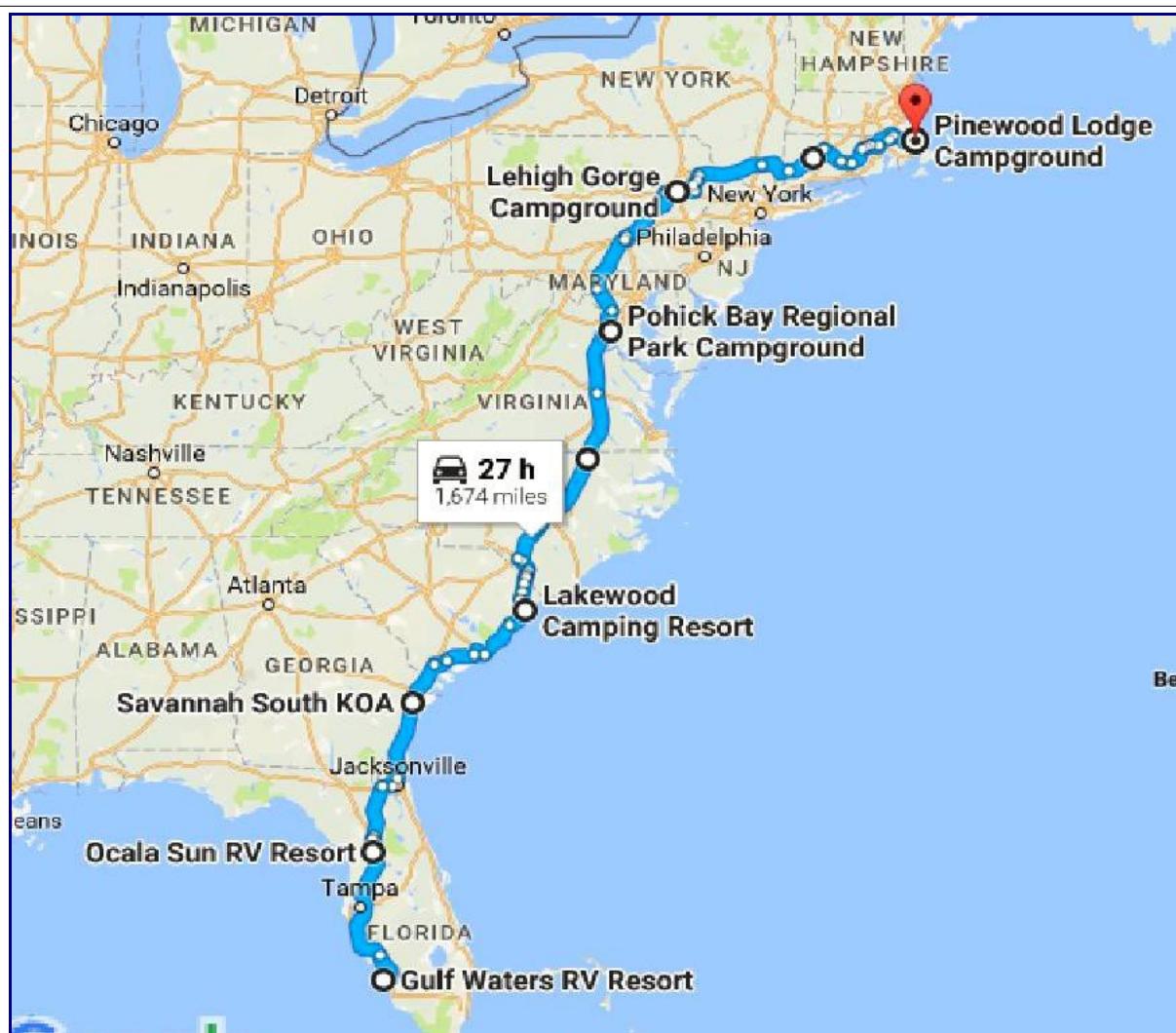
23 Feb 2017

I previously described our plan for moving about New England this summer (i.e., the [NET](#)), but we need to get back to New England before we can begin executing that plan. So this describes our plan to get back north.

We will leave Ft Myers Beach on April 14 and expect to arrive in Massachusetts on May 5. We will cover the 1,673 towing miles in 8 hops:

1. Ocala, FL - 3 nights. We leave on a Friday and don't like to travel on weekends, so we will spend the weekend in Ocala and leave on Monday. This will be a chance to see what Ocala - which is "horse country" - has to offer. We may check out the [Gypsy Gold Horse Tour](#) and/or the [Silver Springs State Park](#).
2. Savannah, GA - 3 nights. We like Savannah and are looking forward to spending a few more days there. We will get a good meal, for sure, and will likely explore its parks more, but we might also check out the [Cathedral of St John the Baptist](#).

3. Myrtle Beach, SC - 4 nights. This is mostly a beach break. We have booked an RV site right on the beach! But the park also has numerous activities and amenities and we will check them out. I would also like to look into [Broadway at the Beach](#) which sounds like a fun shopping/entertainment area.
4. Roanoke Rapids, NC - 1 night. This is just a stopover and we may do nothing more than eat and sleep. But if we have a few hours we might check out the [Roanoke Canal Museum and Trail](#).
5. Lorton, VA - 7 nights. This is a week to reconnect with Jett's family. I expect there will be family dinners and cookouts, but we should be able to get to [Mount Vernon](#). I have never been there.
6. White Haven, PA - 1 night. Another overnight. If we find time to do some horseback riding we will do it at [Deer Path Riding Stables](#).
7. Bristol, CT - 2 nights. We are hoping to have some time with my brother, a CT resident. But we will be staying at [Lake Compounce](#), an amusement park, which might be interesting in its own right. Another interesting option is the [New England Carousel Museum](#).
8. Plymouth, MA - 24 nights (the first of 7 stops in the NET). We will be in Plymouth to see family (my other brother) and to check out graveyards (mostly of Jett's ancestors). But we will also reconnect with other friends and family in the Boston area and will get some deferred chores taken care of.



The TTN will be the first of four long trips we will make in seven months, the others being the New England Tour (NET), the Second Trip West (STW) and the Second Trip East (STE). All told, we will be towing over 10,000 miles. But we will also be visiting all 16 states that we have not yet visited. Our travel map (the lower 48 anyway) should be completely filled in by October 2017.

“Nothing to Lose” by Lee Child

26 Feb 2017

[Delacort Press, 2008](#)

I love the Jack Reacher series, as you probably know. *Nothing to Lose* is the 12th in the series, of which I believe I have now read 10. They are all good, but after a while certain themes reappear. In this case the reappearing theme is Jack-Reacher-against-the-town, a theme that appeared in the first Reacher, *Killing Floor*.

The town in this case is Despair, Colorado, just a few miles west of Hope. Reacher was just traveling through, on his way to California. He left Hope and walked to Despair. Where he was promptly arrested for vagrancy and run out of town. Well, you just don't do that to Jack Reacher. Back in Hope - and in the arms of a sympathetic female officer of the law - he starts wondering why Despair was so unfriendly, so uninviting. Inquiring minds want to know.

NOTE: There is no such place as Despair CO. I checked because I wanted to put it on the itinerary for the next west coast trip.

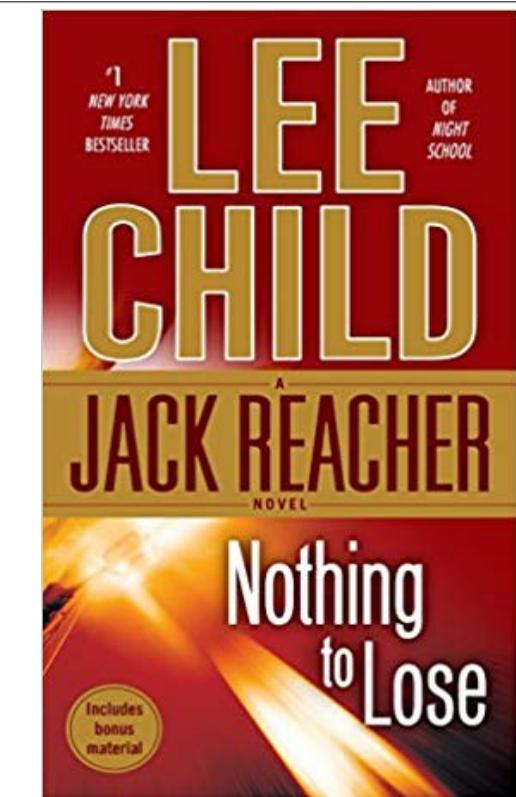
Turns out the town has a secret. Or two. Or three. It is a company town, run entirely by a 70-something born-again preacher who owns a metal recycling plant that is the only industry in Despair. And, in addition to recycling old and totaled automobiles, the plant also recycles old and damaged Humvees and tanks under contract from the Army.

All of which Reacher learns in due course when, after being warned to never return to Despair again, he returns about a dozen times, stirring up various kinds of trouble and singlehandedly taking out the entire 6-man Despair police force and burning down the police station. A one-man wrecking crew, that Jack Reacher.

On one of these numerous return trips he finds that all 200-plus residents of Despair have been deputized and they have formed a human cordon around the town, just to keep Reacher away. No problem for Reacher - he just sneaks through the cordon, then sneaks back out again. There ain't no town big enough to take on Jack Reacher. No sir-ree.

Anyway, it is preposterous and ridiculous and great fun, with a big ending that results in the recycling plant being destroyed. And then Reacher kisses the lady cop goodbye and continues on his way to California. Just a little interruption in his itinerary.

8 out of 10.



Bunco

5 Mar 2017

Jett and I learned yet another new game last night - [Bunco](#). This is a game played with 3 dice. You can read the rules if you like, but it can be learned in about 2 minutes. We played with a group of 50 players at Gulf Waters RV Resort. There is money involved - a \$5 per couple entry fee and prizes to the 3 people with the most wins, the person with the most buncos and the person who got the last bunco of the evening.

Fun, but, once again, we won nada.



Bunco about to begin



Organizer Betty with prizes

Gulf Waters RV Resort

7 Mar 2017

It is official: we are spoiled. We will never again stay long-term in an RV park as nice as the [Gulf Waters RV Resort](#). This place is a piece of heaven. We are about 6 weeks away from completing our 5-month stay and we love the place more every day.

Ah, Gulf Waters! How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...

1. The sites are wide and wonderful, with great landscaping.
2. The communal facilities (community center, swimming pool, recreational facilities and laundry/bath building) are all first-rate.
3. The activities - sports (golf, tennis, corn-hole and [pickle ball](#)) and games (e.g., [Bunco](#) and Hand-and-Foot) can keep one constantly amused.
4. The wildlife (e.g., [waterfowl and eagles](#)) are constantly entertaining.
5. The food (e.g., the [Thanksgiving buffet](#), the [New Years's Eve dinner](#), the Valentines Day dinner, the daily lunches, Tom's incredible breakfasts and Donna's homemade soups) is consistently delicious and the Tiki Bar with its \$2 drafts is always a pleasant social scene.



Our view at dusk

6. The people - the staff, the owners and the other renters - are all friendly and welcoming.

The place is not perfect. There are a few things that could be improved:

1. The water is very hard and a bit brackish. It is tolerable, but if it was any worse we would have to use bottled water for our coffee.
2. There is no dog park. There is, however, a pretty nice one just about a mile away.
3. It is expensive. It is cheaper, as everything is, in the off-season and owners pay much less - after the initial investment - than the renters. But as renters we paid about \$60 per night. That is a budget-busting sum which is even more painful when RV parks just a few miles inland are charging half that, or less. At \$60 per night we should get maid service and a chocolate on our pillows.

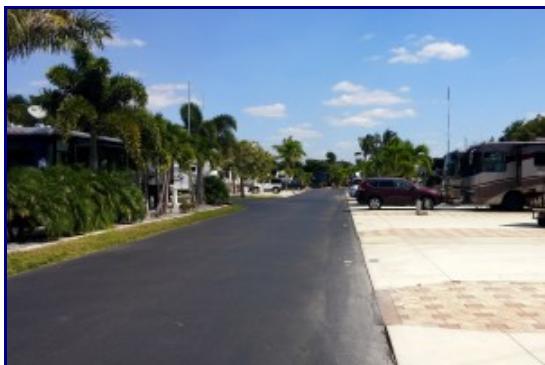
But we knew it would be expensive before we booked the stay. We regarded it as a 5-month luxury and we are not disappointed. You generally get what you pay for and that is certainly the case at Gulf Waters.



The view from our patio



The bath/laundry building



Neighbors to the east



Neighbors to the west



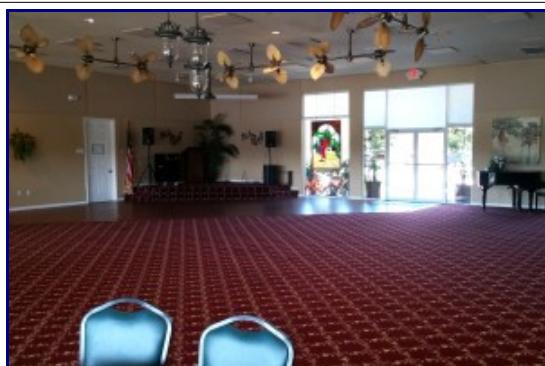
Our site from the pond



Site landscaping



Community center patio



Community center



The pool



Tiki bar



Our patio



Our RV from the back



Our patio resting area



Entrance



Office



Dog walking area



Piano/library



Tennis court

Casino Night

18 Mar 2017

Yet another fun night at Gulf Waters - Casino Night. A ticket (\$15) bought \$5000 worth of betting bucks and 5 raffle tickets. You could use them at blackjack, slots or, as I did, roulette. Two hours of play, then trade in your bucks for more raffle tickets (\$1000 per ticket). About 40 prizes - some worth upwards of \$300 - were donated. Jett and I ended the night with \$7000 - loss of \$3000, just like a real casino. I did ok betting on 0 and 00 and got 35-to-1 hits on 33 and 28, but 11 was a total bust, as was 22 and 24. Oh, well.

So we had a total of 17 raffle tickets. You might think that we would have won one of the 40 prizes, but you would be wrong. We walked out of the "casino" empty-handed. Just like a real casino.



Casino Night crowd



Roulette!



Raffle

"Gone Tomorrow" by Lee Child

18 Mar 2017

[Dell Books, 2009, Dell Mass Market Edition, 2010](#)

Yes, another Jack Reacher novel. I like them. This is the 13th in the series.

The initial premise is very simple: Jack is riding a New York City subway train in the wee hours. There are six passengers in the car, including him. Four of the other passengers are the sleepy, glazed-eyed characters that he would expect to see in the middle of the night on the subway. But the sixth passenger - a woman - has all the

earmarks of a suicide bomber. He could have gotten out at the next stop and been done with it, but that wouldn't have been Jack Reacher. So he confronts the woman as gently as possible. She is distraught, no question, but what does she have in the bag? Is it a bomb? Nope - it is a gun, which she pulls out after a brief conversation with Reacher, points it at him, then turns it on herself and blows her head off.

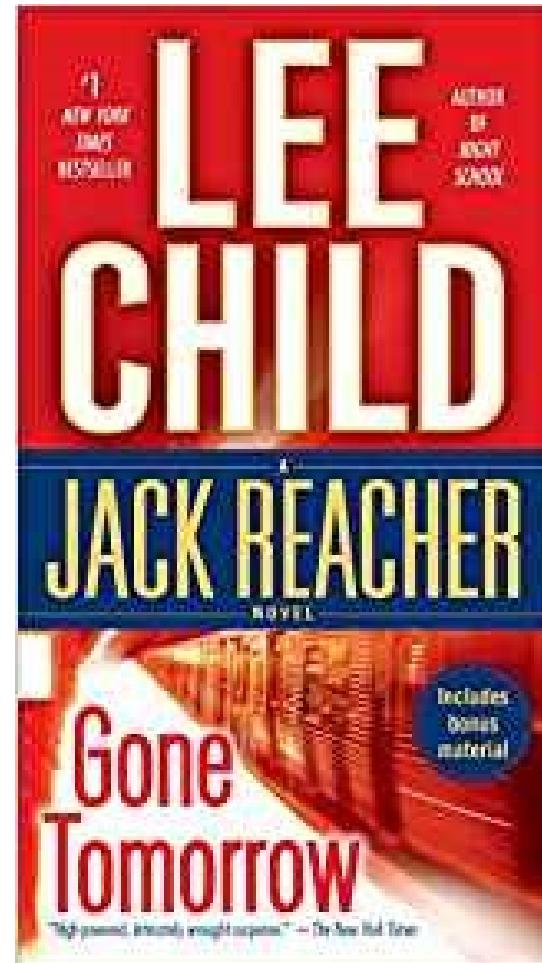
Suicide by gun on a late-night subway? Pretty unusual. Reacher is not particularly interested at first. But then the FBI and some Washington spooks show up to interview him. They seem to be convinced that the woman passed something to him - a memory stick - before she cast off her mortal coil. She didn't, but Jack was intrigued. What the heck was going on?

The plot deepens and becomes more sinister the longer he looks into it. Without giving too much away, I will tell you that it involves a guy running for the US Senate, secret Delta Force operations in Afghanistan and Muslim terrorists. As usual it is pretty much a Reacher-against-the-world situation where the feds are trying to arrest him even as the terrorists are trying to kill him. In the end he has to single-handedly take down a 19-person (or is it 20?) terrorist cell.

But Reacher can do it, no fear. He survives to move onto his 14th novel.

Great fun and one of the best Jack Reacher novels that I have read.

9 out of 10.



CenturyLink Sports Complex

24 Mar 2017

I missed the day on which tickets to the Red Sox spring training games at [JetBlue Park](#) went on sale and those tickets go very quickly. So when I realized that I couldn't get any JetBlue tickets I turned my attention to the [CenturyLink Sports Complex](#), the spring training home of the Minnesota Twins. While I am most definitely not a big Minnesota Twins fan, they do play the Boston Red Sox quite a few times each spring as they both have spring training facilities in Fort Myers. I was able to get onto the Twins ticket web site the day tickets went on sale and scored two games between the Twins and the Red Sox.

The first one was on March 11 which is early in spring training. That means you see a lot of minor league players trying very hard to make it to the "bigs". So I didn't expect to see the Red Sox opening day lineup. But, worse, this was a "split squad" game - the Red Sox played a game at JetBlue and a game at CenturyLink on the same day. So there was probably one "starting lineup" player on the Red Sox squad - catcher Christian Vasquez. The Twins showed up with a full squad, including Joe Mauer, and crushed the Red Sox 13-0. So not a great baseball game for a Red Sox fan.



CenturyLink Park



The field

But I got my first view of CenturyLink Park. It is smaller than JetBlue, but very nice. It has a quaint, turn-of-the-century look about it. And it was a bright, sunny day. So I had a good time watching the Red Sox getting drubbed.

Alligator Alley and Collier-Seminole State Park

1 Apr 2017



Walking dredge

Jett wanted to see "[Alligator Alley](#)" - the 80-mile stretch of I-75 that runs east/west between Naples and Miami. It is, in fact, the longest stretch of east/west interstate highway with a north/south (i.e., odd) route number in the country. A useless fact that perhaps you will find somewhat interesting...

So it was Jett's idea to add it to our "bucket list" of things to do before we left Fort Myers. Then she went north to visit relatives, so I ended up doing the trip myself. Or, more accurately, did it accompanied only by Rusty the Wonder Dog.

Truth be told, I only drove about 25 miles of "Alligator Alley" then drove south on FL 29 to Everglades City (nothing to see there), then made a stop at [Collier-Seminole State Park](#). About three hours of driving that Jett would have hated, so it is probably a good thing that I did it alone.

Her main interest in Alligator Alley is... big surprise... alligators. She had heard stories of reptiles lining the road. Well, I didn't see any. In fact I didn't see anything that even looked like The Everglades; it was a 25-mile stretch of interstate lined with scrub trees, like about a million other miles of interstate in this country. I didn't even see any burnt trees, which was a surprise as I-75 had been closed for 2 days just a week before due to a major

forest/grass fire.

When I turned south on FL 29 I did see a deer and, later, driving west on US 41, I saw some burnt trees and some swampland that surely had alligators galore. But there was no place to stop, so no photos.

The highlight of the trip was the Collier-Seminole State Park. We have been to several Florida state parks and they have all been very nice. This one featured the "walking dredge" that was used to build the first road across the Everglades - US 41 - back in the '20s. It is large and spider-like. A very interesting machine, at least for an engineering nerd like me.



Alligator Alley

The park also has a memorial to [Barron Collier](#), an advertising magnate and a man who at one time owned more than a million acres of Florida land, and a small replica of a Seminole Indian village. Jett would have liked that.



Barron Collier memorial



Seminole village

The Edison-Ford winter estates

5 Apr 2017

Jett and I are nearing the end of our third winter in Florida. And for three years we have had the [Edison-Ford winter estates](#) on our "to do" list. Finally, last week, we actually did the tour and got that particular item off of the list.

Thomas Edison wintered in Ft Myers for many years. Later, Henry Ford bought the adjacent estate and the two hung out together in the beautiful Florida weather. But these weren't just vacation homes - Edison, workaholic that he was, built a laboratory here and used his 10 acres of gardens to grow plants that he could study, especially latex-producing plants that he thought might be capable of producing artificial rubber.

The houses themselves are humble, considering the stature and wealth of these two men. The living rooms and dining rooms were small, the kitchens were basic and the furniture was simple - rattan on the wide porches. Edison, of course, lit his house with DC electric lights. Even his fishing boat was electric.

The house was built before the railroad reached Ft Myers, so Edison built the house with materials that arrived by boat. To accommodate these ships and, later, his fishing boat, he built a very long pier into the

Caloosahatchee River - at one point nearly 1,500 feet long.

The grounds, while populated with plants intended for research, are no less beautiful for being practical. You can barely see the house from McGregor Blvd due to the heavy foliage.

The museum at the visitor's center has many photographs of Edison and his family "relaxing" at the winter estate. In every photograph Edison is wearing a suit and tie and his family is wearing what appears to be their "Sunday finest." While it is possible that he allowed photos to be taken only when they looked their best, I found myself wincing at being so

overdressed in the Florida sun. Edison was granted over 1,000 patents in his lifetime.

But why didn't he invent shorts?



Edison gardens



The dock remains



Edison estate



Swimming pool



Rattan furniture on the porch



Edison dining room



Ford dining room



The Caloosahatchee view

We miss it already

7 Apr 2017

We have one week left in our 5-month season at [Gulf Waters RV Resort](#) and we are missing it already. We would love to come back again next year, but are committed to being somewhere else. The main reason to go to another park next year is that we want a lot of flexibility. We are hoping to go to Central America - either Costa Rica or Panama - for at least two months and would like to just leave the RV on site without paying in-season rates. Some parks offer annual lease plans that work out to less than \$500 per month. We can lease a site for a year for less than our site at Gulf Waters costs for 4 months.

Anyway, each day is one less day remaining at this place that we have loved. Each dog walk has become nostalgic - looking at the pickle ball courts that I won't be using anymore, saying goodbye to the resident bald eagle, looking at the empty sites of friends who are already gone.

It is coming to an end.

"The Escape" by David Baldacci

7 Apr 2017

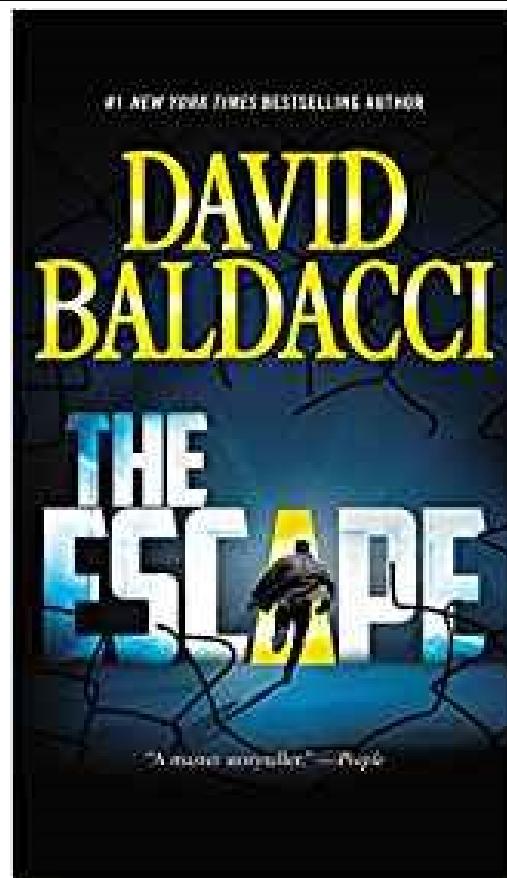
[Grand Central Publishing, New York, Nov 2014](#)

There are a lot of similarities between Lee Child's Jack Reacher and David Baldacci's John Puller. Both are military (or ex-military) - Reacher is an ex-MP and Puller is an active CID investigator. Both are tall, lean and mean. Both make women swoon. Both are brilliant at outwitting their adversaries. Both are fun to read.

And they are apparently fun to write, too, as both Child and Baldacci have produced a long series of novels featuring these heroes. I probably favor the Reacher series overall as the plots tend to be more jaw-dropping, but Baldacci's Puller plots are not far behind.

At the start of *The Escape*, Puller's brother Bob is incarcerated in the max security military prison at Leavenworth KS, convicted two years earlier of espionage. Had it not been for that small blip in his career, Bobby might have been one of the youngest one-star generals ever, so fast was his star rising. John never really believed that his brother was guilty, but neither did he have any evidence to the contrary. He was pretty much resigned to having his older brother live out his days behind bars.

Until the night the lights went out. And the backup generator failed. And the prison doors, which were supposed to lock automatically at the loss of power instead popped open. And 132 soldiers had to respond to restore order.



All quite unexpected, but no harm done once everything was stabilized and the lights were back on. But then a corpse was found in Robert Puller's cell. And it wasn't Robert Puller - or anyone else that anyone could identify. Which was the second mystery. The first was: where was Robert Puller and how did he get out, totally undetected, from the most secure military prison in the US?

Who better to figure it out than Robert's brother? Yes, he was qualified to investigate this escape and had the escapee not been his brother he might have been a logical choice. But why, in heaven's name, would the military allow the escapee's brother to be anywhere near the investigation? The explanation was pretty thin and I never really bought it, but it made for an interesting story.

So the rest of the book is devoted to answering questions. How did Robert Puller escape? Why did the backup generator fail? Was Puller wrongfully convicted? Was there a conspiracy afoot to kill him? If so, why?

The answer to "was there a conspiracy afoot to kill him" is "yes." But I won't spoil the fun. Suffice it to say that the conspiracy involves more than Robert Puller and he wasn't the only one that the conspiracy was aiming to kill. But thanks to John Puller, all ended with most safe. Just a few more deaths along the way.

Anyway, it is a fun read though a bit implausible. If you like either John Puller or Jack Reacher you will like *The Escape*.

8 out of 10.

A really fine piña colada

9 Apr 2017

On Friday Jett and I were out-and-about, running errands in preparation for the trip north. One of those errands was getting Rusty groomed. Another was getting Jett some new shoes. We finished getting the shoes before Rusty was finished being groomed, so we decided to have a late lunch at the [Bahama Breeze](#) near the shoe store.

I don't think anyone has ever claimed that the Bahama Breeze chain is due for a Michelin star. It seems to sell atmosphere more than food. But the fact is that I have never had anything there that I didn't absolutely love - both food and drinks. On this day I ordered a jerk chicken sandwich and, because it was after 3pm, decided to try the half-price "Ultimate Piña Colada." The jerk chicken was fine, as were the "Key West Nachos" that Jett and I shared. But the big winner was the piña colada. It was served in a tall glass with pineapple garnish and had a big red splotch, like the surface of Jupiter. It was a strawberry puree - probably the same stuff they use to make frozen strawberry daiquiris - with the rum and coconut flakes on top. Absolutely delicious!

I had two.

And we still made it back to the groomer before Rusty was finished.



A tall, tasty one

Fort Myers Beach

10 Apr 2017



Times Square

Jett and I have been living in Ft Myers Beach for nearly 5 months now, but we don't live on the beach. We have driven down the Estero Blvd - the only street that runs the length of the beach - but never actually saw the beach, walked the beach or dipped our toes in the Gulf of Mexico. Well, we took care of that on Saturday. It is something we should have done at the start of our stay and perhaps we could have made it a regular thing.

The main reason we avoid the beach is the traffic. There is just one bridge - with a single lane southbound onto the island - and it is busy whenever the sun is shining, which is most of the time. Once you are on Estero Island you need to find a place to park and can expect to pay at least \$10 for the day. Maybe more in the peak season. We avoid Cape Cod for the same reasons - don't like the traffic, don't like the cost.

But for us there was another way. The LeeTran "Beach Trolley" - a cute trolley-style bus that runs from the Summerlin Square terminal, about a quarter-mile from our RV park, right down to the beach. Cost per ride: 75 cents. So that is what we did - drove to the terminal, took the bus to the beach, took the bus back downtown, did some sightseeing, had dinner, took the bus home.

There is one other major advantage to the bus: it has a dedicated lane on the bridge. While it still gets stuck in some traffic before the bridge, having that lane all to itself probably cuts 10 minutes off the travel time most days.

Our first stop was [Bowditch Point Park](#) and Bowditch Beach where I stuck my toes in the water. Chilly but swimmable.



Bowditch Beach



Beach and pier

Then down to Times Square, the honky-tonk entertainment area near the pier. We enjoyed the sun, the music (an oldies band was playing in the square) and admired the beach, the atmosphere and the bikinis. Well, maybe Jett didn't admire the bikinis, but I did.

We then had dinner at the [Yucatan Beach Stand Bar & Grill](#). It had some atmosphere and my blackened Mahi tuna was tasty. But it came on a mushy bed of pasta with a tasteless pesto sauce. Mediocre at best. Same for Jett's burger. Not a bad place, but you can probably do better.

Final stop: the ice cream shop for some soft-serve. A small cup of soft serve for \$4.50. Again, forgettable. If you want ice cream in Ft Myers Beach, go to [Love Boat Ice Cream](#) instead. The ice cream there is superb.



Yucatan

EO Burgers

11 Apr 2017

After a forgettable meal in Fort Myers Beach, we returned to [EO Burgers](#) in the Bell Tower Shops mall in Ft Myers. We had dined there (yes, I use the term "dined" for a burger place) in the first few weeks of our stay, liked it very much, and wanted to return before we headed north. Jett was afraid that we would be disappointed this time, but she needn't have worried. The burgers were, once again, perfect and the fries and onion rings were to die for. This place, along with Ford's Garage, are the places to go for a great burger in Fort Myers.

We are puzzled, though, by the lack of customers at EO Burgers. Once again we were the only customers in the place. I don't know how they stay in business. I was actually relieved to see that they were still open. They have great burgers and deserve better.

I hope they are still there when we return.



EO burger

Gulf Waters by night

13 Apr 2017

One of the many things I love about Gulf Waters is the way many of the owners illuminate their sites. There is a fun, festive feel about the place. It reminds me of my trip to [Tivoli Gardens](#) in Copenhagen many years ago.

Just one more thing that we will miss when we leave - which is now just 24 hours away.

I didn't sleep well last night because my mind was going a mile a minute thinking of things that need to be done to prepare for the trip. We are actually pretty well prepared, so getting out should be easy. But it will mark the end of five wonderful months at Gulf Waters and the start of 7 months of travel, through 36 or 37 states, with a cumulative towing miles total in excess of 11,000. And it will be our first RV trip without Grace, which will put another layer of sadness on our departure.

But it is time to go.



Night lights

And so it begins...

14 Apr 2017

We will be leaving our home at [Gulf Waters RV Resort](#) in just a couple of hours. I have already mentioned how difficult this will be for us. We love this place and will miss it deeply. It is also the start of our first road trip without Grace and there will be additional sadness there.

This will be the start of over 7 months of nearly continuous travel. We will be making our second trip to the west coast and will be collecting overnight stays in each of the 16 states that we have not yet visited, completing our map. But it will be more than that: 11,400 towing miles through 36 state and 61 hops. Our longest stay will be

24 days in Plymouth MA in May, but no other stay will be more than 2 weeks. It is ambitious. And possibly exhausting.

But we are going to see some great places. Yellowstone, Glacier, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Arches National Parks. Many other places that we have on our "bucket list." Some genealogical research.

It will be a full - and fulfilling - trip.

Fun, too.

Follow along with us.



Ready to go

TTN Hop 1: Ft Myers Beach FL to Ocala FL

15 Apr 2017

217 miles via I-75, FL 80, FL 31, US 17, US 98, US 301, I-75 (again) and US 27.

There are times when the Google map route and the GPS route just don't jibe, for no apparent reason, and this was one of those times. Google very clearly preferred taking FL 471 north from US 98 to US 301, bypassing Dade City, but the GPS insisted that taking US 98 all the way - despite it being 5 miles longer - was superior. Because we trust the GPS to keep us out of trouble we took US 98, which cost us not only the 5 miles but also about 10 minutes in travel time due to the Dade City rush hour traffic.

I like FL 31 and US 17, but US 98 through Lakeland was a PITA. Too much traffic, too many lights. Because of all

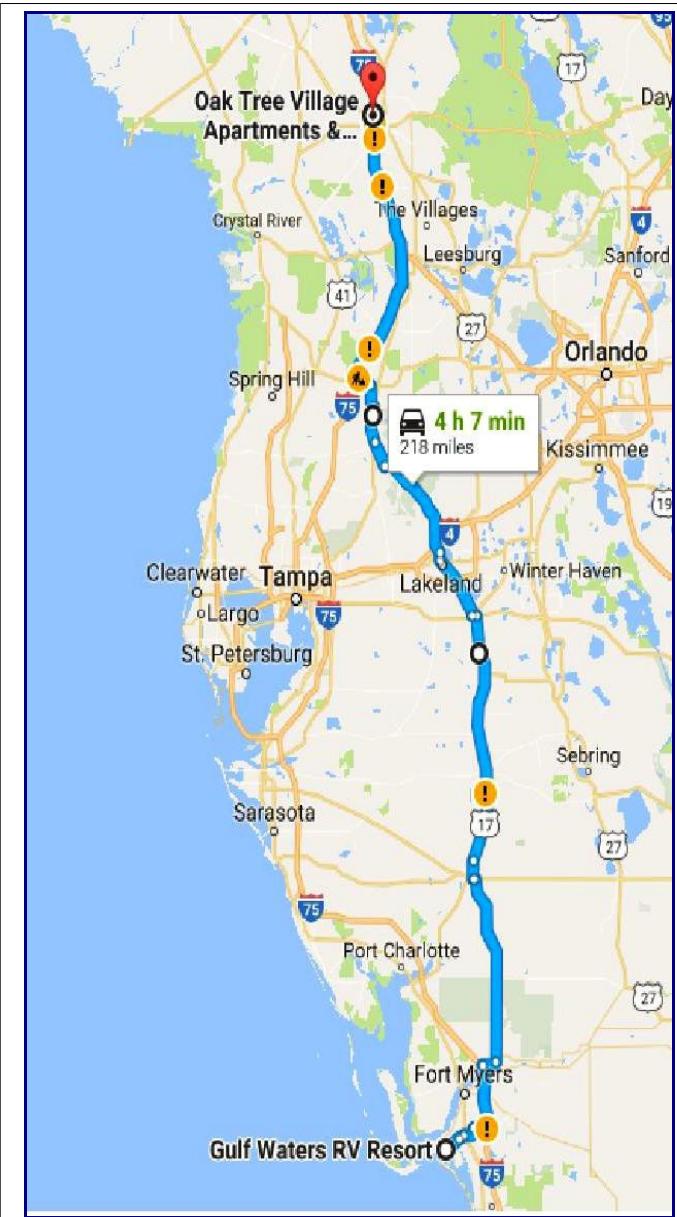
the stop-and-go, the "low fuel" light lit when we were about a half mile from our destination. Not great mileage considering that the route is very flat.

Our home for two nights is the [Oak Tree Village & Campground](#) in Ocala. If our goal had been to find a place that was the polar opposite of Gulf Waters, we would have to declare success. While the site itself is fairly large and comfortable - and a pull-through, making for easy setup - the park reminds me of a housing project. We locked our door for the first time in 6 months when we went out to dinner. Not only are the "apartments" - cheap double-wide trailers - very low class and unappealing, but the RV section of the park is filled with ancient trailers that have not moved in years. A man I met in the dog park admitted that he had lived in the RV park for 12 years and expected to die there.

Well, we are staying for just 2 nights, but we are hoping that we don't die there.

The park does have the large dog park, a new playground and a nice pool, so it is not without amenities. But it has no cable TV (we have a choice of 4 over-the-air channels) and is close enough to I-75 that we not only can hear the trucks go by, we can *feel* them go by.

We won't return.



TTN Hop 1



Our site at Oak Tree Village



The wreck next door



Apartment trailers



Pool



Dog park



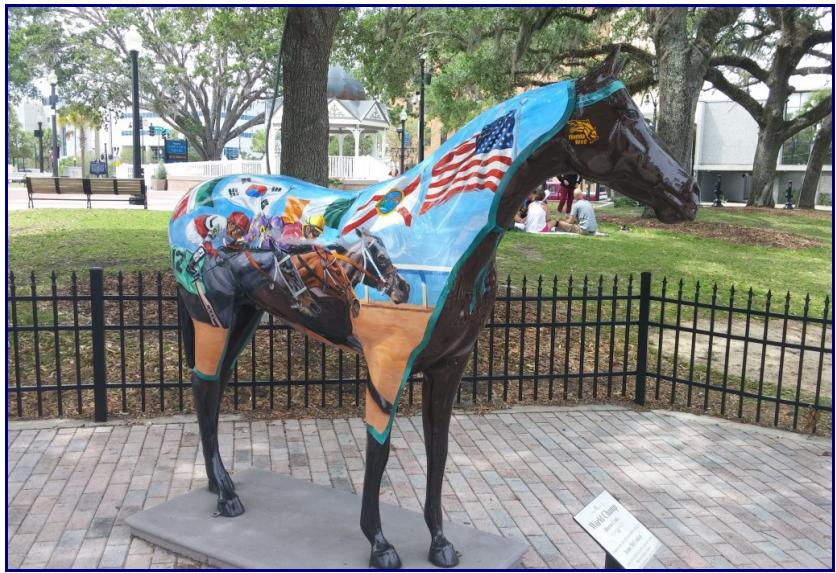
I-75

Ocala FL

16 Apr 2017

We have stayed in the vicinity of Ocala several times before, but have never explored the city. This time I planned an extra day, just to give us time to look around. My tentative plan was to visit [Silver Springs State Park](#) and, perhaps, take one of their famous glass-bottomed boat tours. We did, in fact, get to the park, but it was breezy (too breezy for a boat trip?) and Jett was not in a walking mood, so we didn't go in. A pity because the park looks very interesting. Florida has some wonderful state parks.

Instead we explored downtown [Ocala](#). It is a small downtown, so it didn't take long to see the whole thing. A craft beer festival was underway and that was



Painted horse



Painted horse



Painted horse

enticing, but the entrance price was not: \$35. Instead we walked around the perimeter and listened to some nice live music ("Sweet Home, Ocala"). We liked the painted horses that were scattered around downtown. These were the product of a 2011 public works project, the theme being to celebrate Ocala's claim to being the thoroughbred horse capital of the world.

We completed the day with a Chinese dinner at [China Lee Buffet](#). The selection was huge and the dishes I sampled were good to very good. And inexpensive - the total bill, with tip, was \$30. Jett loved it and, for once, did not have an upset stomach after dinner. Recommended.

On our way home we picked up a 100 oz insulated mug for Jett. She plans on using it to keep her crushed ice cold while traveling. And if she wants soda she can now get a 100 oz refill for \$1.59. And lots of bathroom breaks along the way...



Dining room



Chandeliers



BBQ shrimp and grits

We also dined out Friday night - at about twice the cost - at the Ivy House Restaurant, an Ocala institution that bills itself as providing "genteel Southern dining". It gets very good reviews on TripAdvisor, Yelp and Google and, overall, we were pretty impressed, too. It has a very old-fashioned décor, old-fashioned plates, traditional southern drinks (raspberry tea and lemonade) and excellent service. But some things are not quite what they appear. The furnishings were replicas, the decorations were fake plastic and even the chipped "china" was plastic. We did love the breads and salads and the green beans were very flavorful - probably sautéed in bacon

fat. But Jett's chicken entrée was ordinary and I think I made a mistake in ordering the BBQ shrimp and grits. While I enjoyed the shrimp and grits that I had last year in Charleston, this one was very, very sweet with a BBQ sauce that completely overwhelmed the delicate shrimp and grits flavors. I would not order it again.



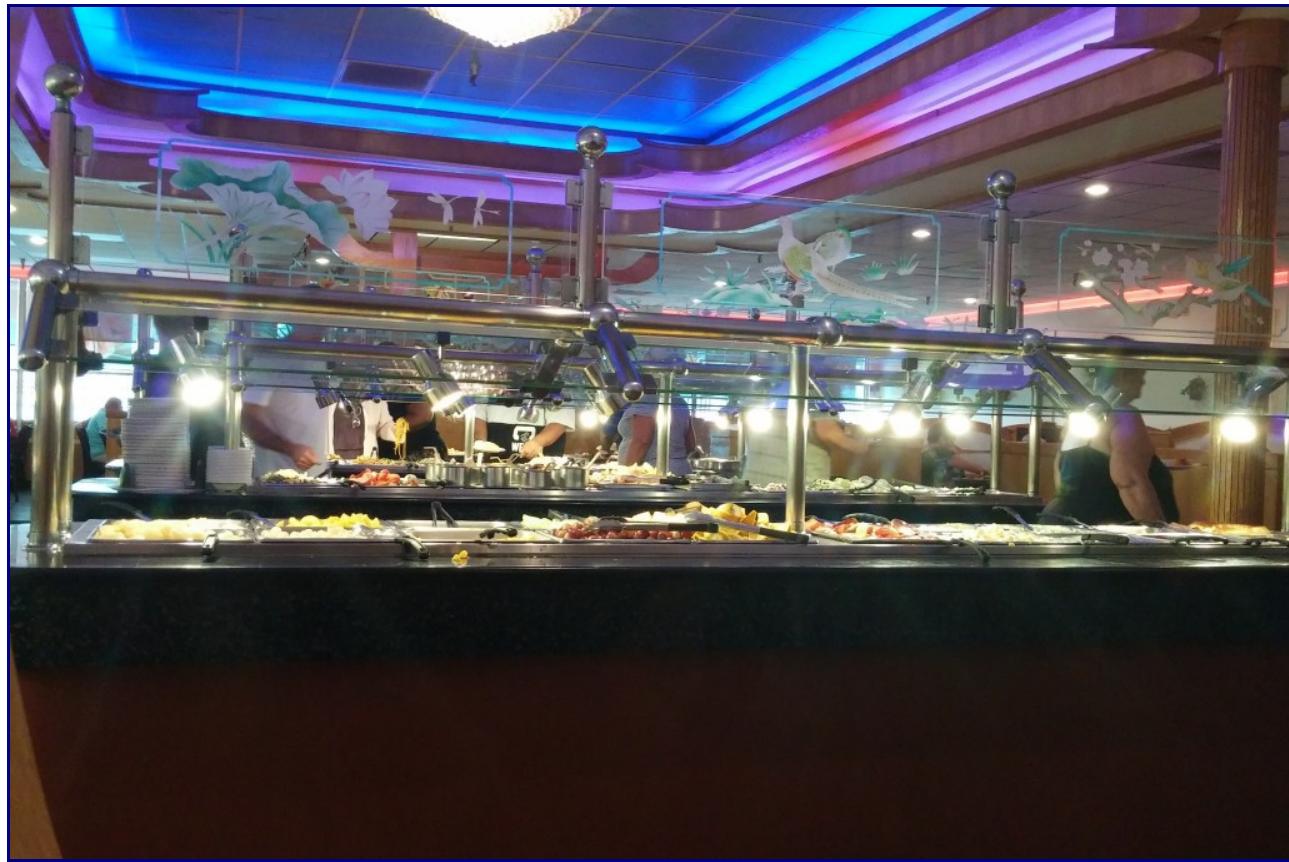
Raspberry tea



Guitar door



100 oz mug



China Lee buffet

TTN Hop 2: Ocala FL to Richmond Hill GA

17 Apr 2017

221 miles via I-75, US 301, I-10, I-295 (around Jacksonville), I-95, US 84 and US 17. Cumulative tow miles: 438.

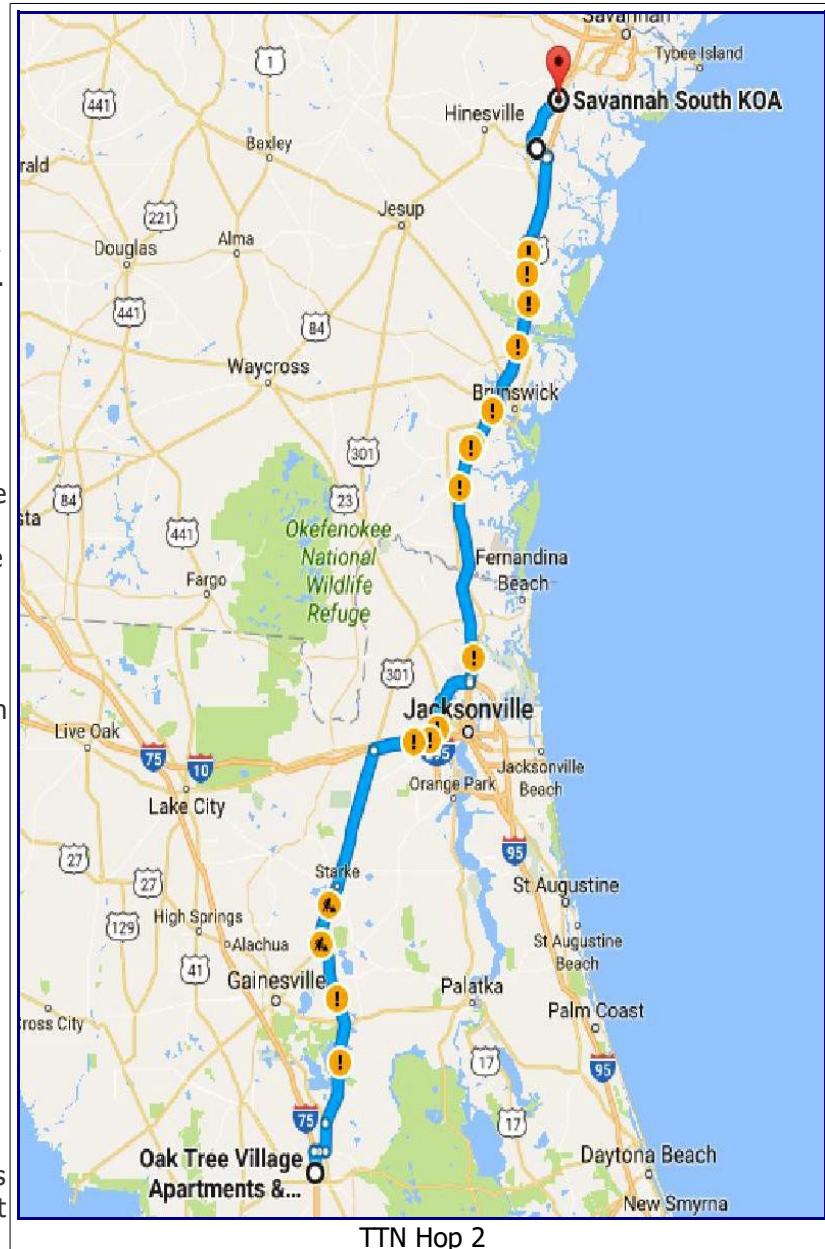
We have traveled most of this route before. Taking US 301 from Ocala to Jacksonville cuts off many miles from the I-75/I-10 route. It is a bit slower, perhaps, but not bad. And more interesting, I think.

We did have two more arguments between Google maps and the GPS. First, the GPS told us to take FL 228 from I-75 to I-295, cutting out the entire 13 mile segment on I-10. We chose to ignore it. Afterward I looked at that route on Google maps and it considered the route to be 4 minutes slower, but 2 miles shorter. As the GPS was set to pick the fastest route I can't see why it would think that route was faster.

Then, as we approached our destination in Richmond Hill GA, the GPS told us to take US 84 to US 17 north. Google maps was saying we should take I-95 all the way up to the intersection with US 17, then go south to get to our destination. This time we opted for the GPS and it cost us 2 miles. But we avoided an ugly turn across US 17 traffic, so I am happy with that tradeoff.

Google 1, GPS 1.

Our home for 4 nights is the [Savannah South KOA](#) in Richmond Hill GA. I will give a full review later, but our initial reaction is very positive - a beautiful park and a great site.



Or maybe we are just glad to not be surrounded by derelict RVs.

Headstone hunting, Savannah edition

19 Apr 2017

If you like walking through cemeteries looking at headstones, consider joining [FindAGrave.com](#). Its main purpose is to locate the final resting places of the dearly departed. But if you would like a photo of Uncle Ben's

headstone and are nowhere near his grave, you can post a photo request on FindAGrave and maybe, just maybe, someone like me will fulfill the request for you.

I found myself with a couple of spare hours yesterday in Savannah, so I took a look to see what photo requests were extant for cemeteries in or near Savannah. Much to my surprise, there were 10 photo requests for the [Colonial Park Cemetery](#), a colonial cemetery right in the heart of Savannah. I saw my opportunity and I took it.

This cemetery was one of the rare ones that has a full [plot plan](#) that can be downloaded as a PDF. Good thing, too, as I never would have found the graves without it. The problem is that most of the headstones in this cemetery are more than 200 years old and most are sandstone, meaning that there is not much left of the inscriptions after 2 centuries of weathering. But with plot plan in hand I was able to track down and photograph 5 of the graves for which photo requests had been posted. I uploaded the photos and marked each request as "fulfilled."

And I felt damn good about it. You might say that I felt fulfilled, too.



Mary Flournoy's headstone

[NOTE: When the inscription is hard to read it sometimes helps to wet it to increase the contrast. I did this on the stone in the photo. I was looking for "Mary Flournoy" and could make out - barely - the "Flournoy". But I wet the stone to get a better view of the first name. What I found was a barely legible "Mary" followed by "Willis." When I returned to FindAGrave I found that the request was for "Mary Willis Flournoy." Bingo!]

Savannah South KOA

20 Apr 2017

Our home for the past four days has been the [Savannah South KOA](#) in Richmond Hill GA. Our primary concern in getting a place near Savannah is to be near Savannah, so we really didn't look closely at the amenities of this park before we booked it. But it was a surprise. We love this place!

Some of our joy may be the result of 2 nights at a place that we really disliked. But we would have liked this park even if we had come here directly from Gulf Waters. It is clean, clean, clean. The staff is wonderful and our site had a great patio, with nice furniture, including a glider and a table with umbrella, a firepit and - most surprising of all - a propane grill. Perhaps we paid extra for these amenities - there are only 4 sites with patios on the premises - but whatever we paid, it was worth it. We loved the site.



Our patio



Our site



Pool



Rusty keeping his distance

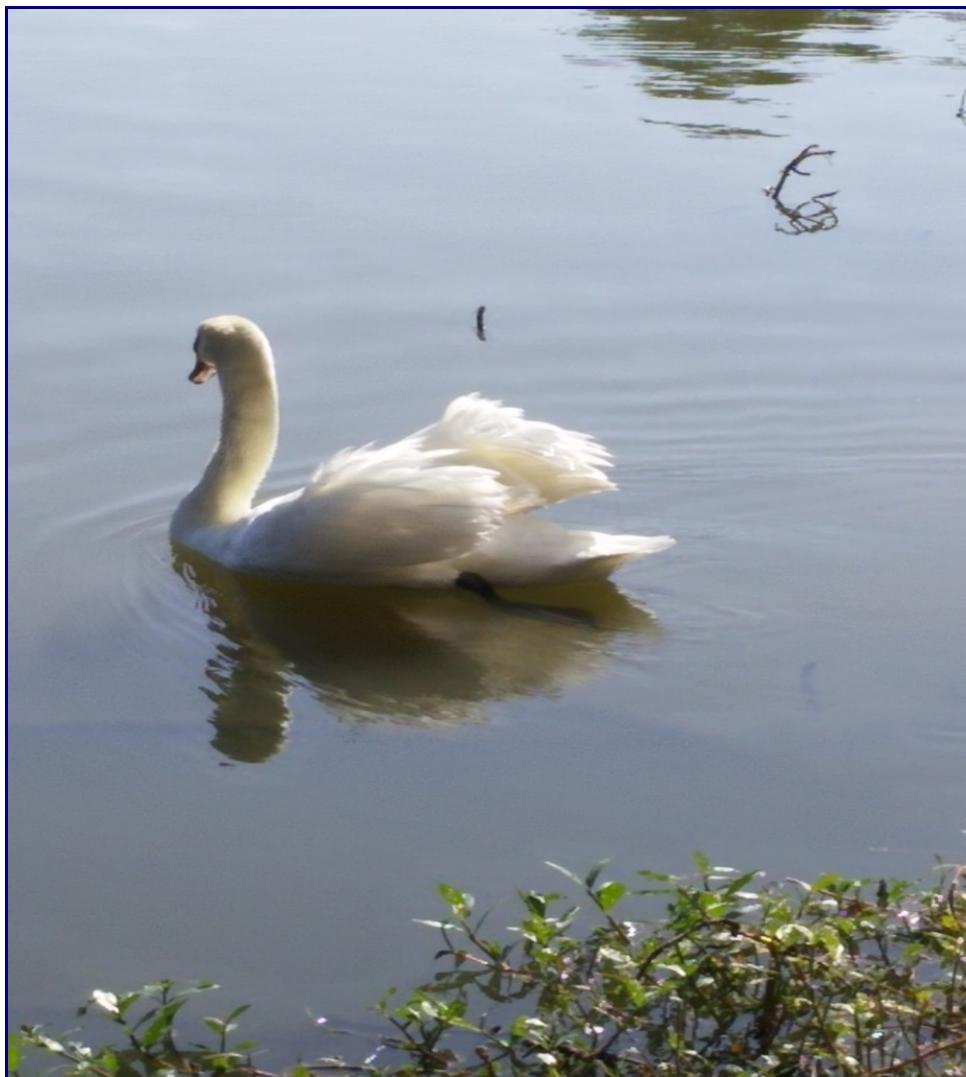


The pond

We also loved the pond and the many swans and geese that populated it. Rusty didn't quite know what to make of birds larger than he, but he had the good sense to keep his distance. If he had gotten close I am sure they would have kicked his ass.

The campground is very wooded and is completely serene. I loved walking Rusty along the pond. Or to the dog park. Rusty loved it, too.

This is probably one of the 10 best parks we have ever been in. Maybe top 5.



Swimming swan



Activity room



Dog park

TTN Hop 3: Richmond Hill GA to Myrtle Beach SC

21 Apr 2017

211 miles via US 17, I-95, and US 17 again. Cumulative tow miles: 649. Cumulative truck miles: 819.

For the third straight hop Google and the GPS disagreed. In this case it was a pretty minor disagreement: whether to take I-526 around Charleston (Google) or follow US 17 all the way through (GPS). US 17 is shorter but generally slower so, again, I am puzzled why the GPS chose it at the faster route. But I was familiar with both routes and didn't have a strong preference, so I took the GPS/US 17 option.

The route was familiar as we have done it southbound previously.

Besides several construction sites -

the worst one being a short section where I-95 was inexplicably reduced to a single lane when there was no active construction - it was an uneventful trip.

Perhaps the most significant event occurred as we were exiting the Savannah South KOA. The RV tires hit a huge pothole as I was pulling onto US 17. It was a hard, jolting hit and I feared a blowout. But the tires held. Whew!

Our home for 4 nights will be the Lakewood Camping Resort in Myrtle Beach SC. I paid a little extra for the privilege of an "oceanfront" site. I guess I had visions of looking out my window and watching the surf. But all we see is a huge dune barrier. Disappointing.

I will provide a full campground review in a few days.



TTN Hop 3

Lakewood Camping Resort, Myrtle Beach SC

23 Apr 2017

We are three days into our 4-day stay at the [Lakewood Camping Resort](#) in Myrtle Beach SC. We paid a bit extra for an "oceanfront" site, meaning that we are the closest RV to the ocean. But it doesn't mean that we can see the ocean; there is an 8-foot-high sand berm between us and the surf. We can hear it but we can't see it. That is a bit disappointing. I thought we would be able to sit at our table and watch the surf.

Oh well. We get the salt spray, so it is a good thing that we are here for just a few days. Otherwise the truck might develop rust spots.

It is going to rain today and tomorrow, which will make the teardown tomorrow morning unpleasant. But it will

wash the salt off.

Lakewood is about a quarter-mile north of [Ocean Lakes Campground](#) where we stayed after [STS Hop 7](#). We liked Ocean Lakes a lot. Lakewood is very similar in many ways. Both are huge (1,800 sites at Lakewood) and have wonderful beaches and facilities, including water parks. Anyone with kids would have a great time at either place.

The big difference is service. Ocean Lakes has it; Lakewood doesn't. Oh, check-in was fine and the staff is pleasant enough. But we are left scratching our heads at the inability of staff to answer simple questions:

- "Where can we dispose of trash?" "Um, hold on, let me check."
- "Do you recycle?" "Um, hold on, let me check." Then the answer ("no") turns out to be incorrect - there are recycling bins at every bathhouse.
- "Is the fish fry place open today?" "Um, hold on, let me check."
- (At the ice cream shop) "Can I mix flavors in the milk shake?" The answer - "no" - was both surprising and incorrect (verified by checking at the other ice cream shop near the office).

Does no one train these people?

The other difference is that Lakewood has very few pull-through sites while Ocean Lakes has very few that aren't. Pull-through sites are better because they are easier to get in and out of.

Our back-in site was a bit of a challenge and was too small to fit the truck. But since we were oceanfront, I could simply back the truck up against the dune berm.



Our site at Lakewood



Truck parked



Indoor pool



Fish fry

There are two pools - an indoor pool and an outdoor pool. Both look very nice. The food trucks, near the indoor

pool, right on the beach, served tasty food. No complaints there. The fish fry - Pollock, with fries, slaw and iced tea for \$10 - was both delicious and economical. It was all-you-can-eat, but one plate was plenty for me.



Beach

TTN Hop 4: Myrtle Beach SC to Roanoke Rapids NC

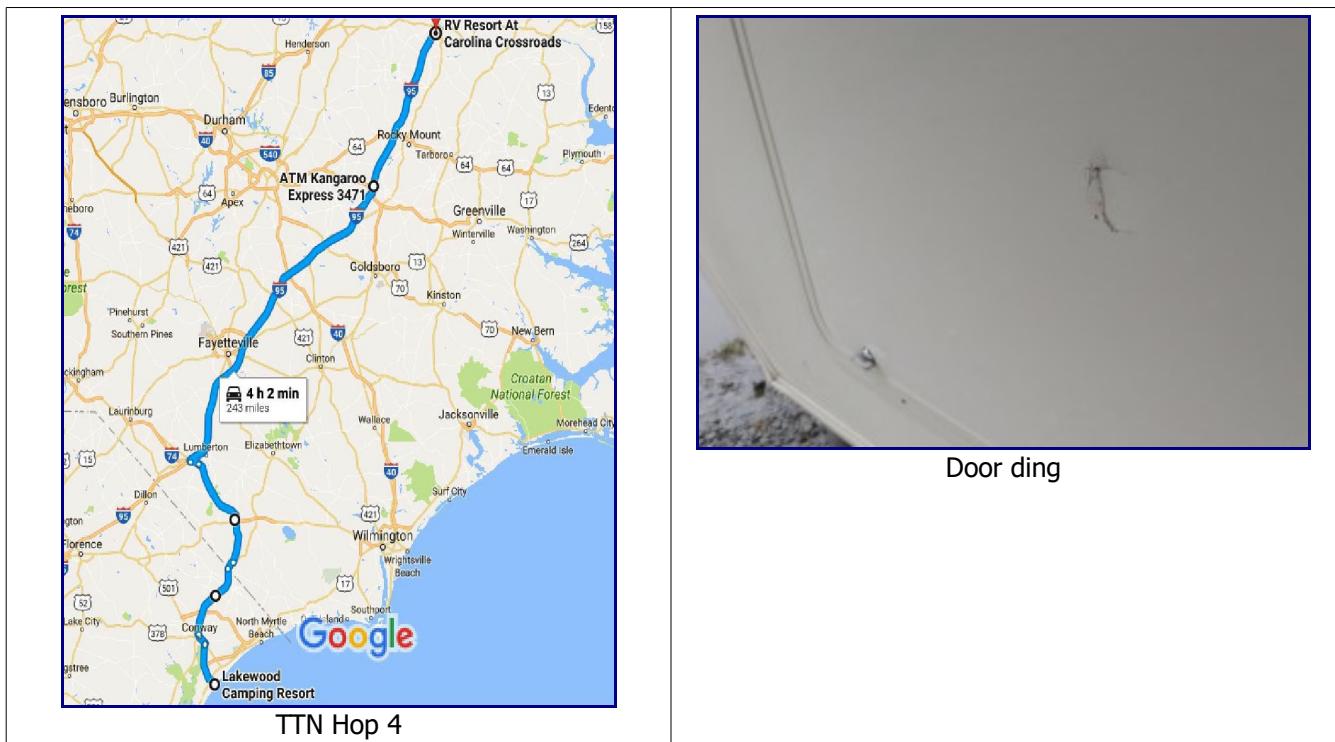
24 Apr 2017

244 miles via SC 544, US Business 501, US 701, NC 410, US 74 and I-95 with a refueling stop. Cumulative tow miles: 893. Cumulative truck miles: 1104.

There were a number of events and conditions that made this hop interesting, starting with the rain. It rained all day - heavily at times. That alone made it one of the more difficult hops in our four years of travel. Second, I had to hitch up with the truck at an angle (see photo) and misjudged how much room I had with the tailgate down. I thought I could do it. I was wrong. The result was that the corner of the tailgate crunched a hole in the skin of the front basement. The first real ding of the trip. And hopefully the last.

Second, I decided that rather than top off the fuel in the morning I would stop for fuel on the way, after about 190 miles. As the hop exceeded our tank range of 240 miles there was a good chance that we would have had to stop anyway and use our 5-gallon reserve. Plus we now may be able to finish Hop 5 without refueling again. But I will probably top off in the morning, just to make tomorrow less stressful.

Third, the site given to us at our destination, [The RV Resort at Carolina Crossroads](#), was under about 2 inches



water. We had to call the office and request another site.

Fourth, when I deployed the awning I discovered that a tree frog - presumably the same one we had seen in Ft Myers - was in the rail. It was alive, but if the thing has not eaten in 10 days he must be happy to be freed.

Finally, we had the usual disagreement between the GPS and our chosen Google map route. In this case we followed the Google map until the GPS seemed to be in agreement, then started following the GPS, about the time we crossed into North Carolina. It routed us onto US 74, which was expected. Except that it was actually *old* US 74 - a narrow road which arguably would cut off a mile. If we hadn't encountered a detour. Getting back to NC 410 and then onto the *new* US 74 cost us about a mile. Not a big deal but yet another case where the "best" route was certainly not.



TTN Hop 5: Roanoke Rapids NC to Lorton VA

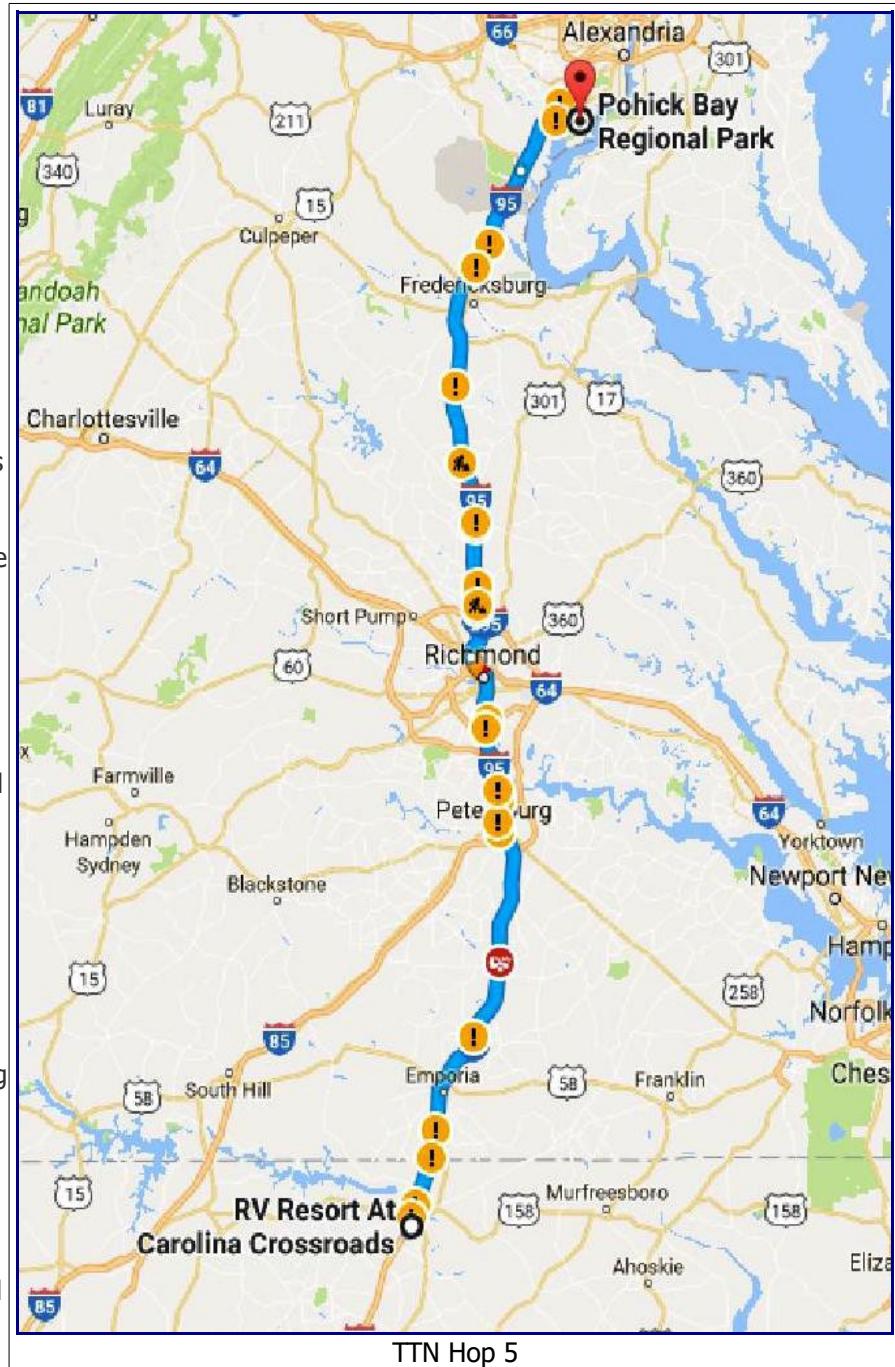
26 Apr 2017

182 miles via I-95 and local roads.
Cumulative tow miles: 1075.

This was a simple trip up I-95 - a route that we have traveled several times before - so there was nothing new on the route. But it was, again, mostly in the rain, which made it a little more challenging. No incidents, though. And, surprisingly, no significant delays on I-95. A pretty smooth trip.

Our overnight stay was at the [RV Resort and Carolina Crossroads](#). This is a new park just a mile from an I-95 exit, so it was convenient. We didn't walk around much because we were trying to survive a deluge (Raleigh, just 80 miles southwest, had over 8" of rain and was in a state of emergency), but it has a nice pool. In good weather it is a very nice overnight option. But most of the roads and sites are gravel and they tend to puddle. The site we were given initially had a small concrete patio that was under 2" of water. We requested another site and were given the adjacent one. Later I saw a sign on the office door that said that the park had "No Vacancy" - except for our first site which was "under water." Good thing we arrived early.

The deluge continued in the morning. I felt sorry for those who had to leave early as the rain was heavy until 9:30am, then tapered off. I also felt sorry for those headed south because I-95 was closed due to flooding near where we had



refueled the day before. But by the time we were ready to leave, around 11am, the rain was reduced to a drizzle. There were even a few sunny breaks, resulting in a nice rainbow as I was refueling.

As we arrived at our destination - the [Pohick Bay Regional Park Campground](#) - we did have a minor incident. I chose to park in the leftmost of three lanes at the office as I checked in, to give other vehicles ample room to get by my rig. But as I pulled out I realized that I was dangerously close to the back edge of the office as I made the left turn into the campground. I had to pull forward, very close to a small bush, to make it safely

around the corner. As I was making the turn I felt a rumble. Jett checked out her side and said that I was "running over a rock wall" which sounded pretty alarming. Well, I was indeed running over some rocks, but just loosely place ones, not ones cemented into a wall. Because the ground was so soft I knocked most of them out of place. It was messy, but no real damage done. I stopped to replace the rocks.

Next time I will park in the middle lane.



RV Resort at Carolina Crossroads



Rainbow

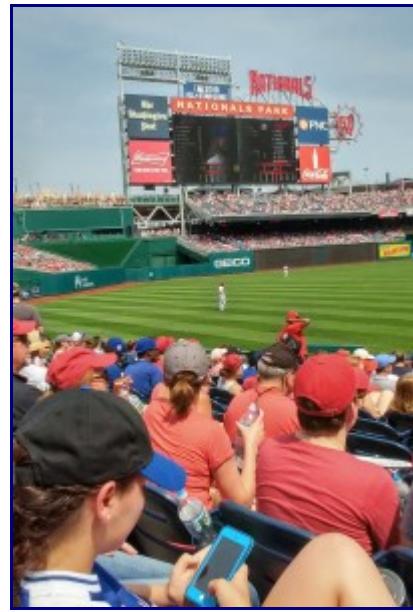
Nationals Park

2 May 2017

Stepson Devin sacrificed himself last Saturday when he arranged an outing to Nationals Park, to watch the Washington Nationals host the New York Mets. Devin is, to put it kindly, not a baseball fan. Three hours in the sun watching a baseball game was pretty much slow torture for him. But I appreciated the kind gesture and enjoyed the game a lot.



View from our parking spot



Outfield and scoreboard

If it matters, New York beat Washington 5-4. It was a well-played game, with good pitching and just one error. Four home runs (two by Michael Conforto, who I really need to get on one of my fantasy league teams). But the big attraction for me was Nationals Park, one of the newer parks in the majors. While not as cozy as Fenway or as cute as Camden Yards, I found it to be a good stadium which offered obstruction-free views for nearly all the 46,000 seats (including the 10,000 that were empty).



Nationals Park, game underway

The big surprise for me was the location of the park. I guess I had assumed that it was north of the city, near

the Redskins Stadium on the Beltway. But it is in downtown DC, within walking distance of the Capitol. A nice, urban ballpark.

The other surprise was that, on the way home, Marine One, the President's helicopter, flew about 100 feet over our heads as we crossed the Potomac. Devin said it was a common sight, but I had never seen it before. An interesting end to an interesting afternoon.

“The Appeal” by John Grisham

2 May 2017

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Spoiler alert: I am going to give away the ending, so if you want to read the book you had better look away.

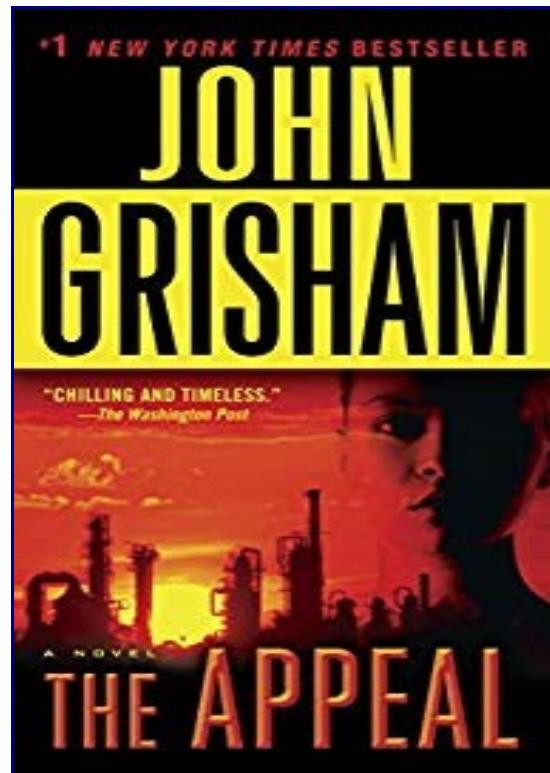
If you want a book in which the bad guys win - big time - and the good guys all get screwed - big time - I have just the book for you: *The Appeal* by John Grisham.

The story centers around a product liability case. A chemical company dumped carcinogenic chemicals illegally for 20 years. When the chemicals got into the aquifer and people began dying of cancer, they closed the plant and moved operations to Mexico. A mom-and-pop legal team sued them on behalf of a client who lost both her husband and her child to cancer. After a year of litigation that cost the lawyers everything they owned, plus \$400K in debt, they won a huge (\$42 million) verdict. But the chemical company - whose CEO was a billionaire - vowed to never pay a cent. To ensure this, they decided to buy a seat on the Mississippi Supreme Court, a cynical ploy that thrust a backwoods Bible-thumping lawyer into the election, funded with millions from the chemical company, all carefully laundered to keep any hint of the company's backing away from the press.

Sadly, the cynical ploy worked. The pawn was elected and he dutifully overturned a series of product liability cases. The \$42 million case finally appeared before the court. They ruled, 5-4 with the new guy casting the deciding vote, to overturn the case. Result: the rich CEO became even richer, the mom-and-pop lawyers declared bankruptcy and people continued to die because there was no money for a cleanup.

I think Grisham was trying to write a "realistic" story that highlighted the problem with elected judges. I guess he succeeded. But the result was a very depressing story that I can't recommend. If it wasn't so well written I would give it a 1.

2 out of 10.



TTN Hop 6: Lorton VA to White Haven PA

2 May 2017

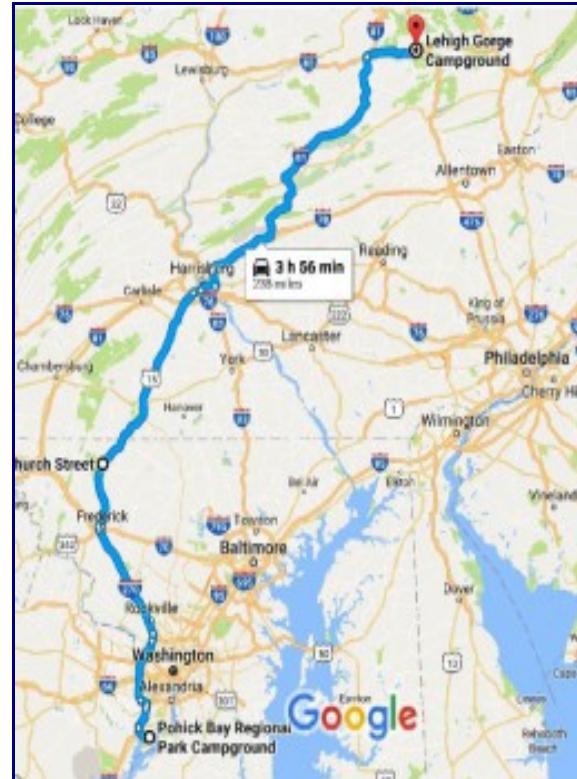
238 miles via I-95, I-495 (around DC), I-270, US 15, I-83, I-81 and I-80 with a refueling stop in MD.

Cumulative tow miles: 1313. Cumulative truck miles: 1721.

Going through PA is the lesser of two evils: the other choice would be to go through NJ, which we will avoid at any cost due to the traffic and the tolls. But we don't like PA much, either. The roads are rough and there are hills.

We had a lot of rough roads and hills on this hop. Plus a 5-mile section of stop-and-go (mostly stop) traffic on I-83 due to construction. We made it, but it wasn't much fun. There were a few nice vistas on I-83 - a section of road which I don't believe we ever traveled before. But mostly we listened to a book on tape and let the miles roll by.

The refueling stop was challenging. We stopped at a Sheetz station which was much smaller than a truck stop. I had to thread my way around the back of the building to get back on the road. But I am glad I chose that stop, in MD, because the diesel prices jumped about 50 cents per gallon after we crossed into Pennsylvania.



TTN Hop 6

The biggest surprise on this hop was the change in the foliage. In VA the trees were pretty much in full foliage (with lots of pollen). By the time we approached White Haven the trees were just budding. It was almost as if we had traveled through summer into fall. The temperature also dropped - from about 75 when we left Lorton to about 60 when we arrived in White Haven. Windy, too. Jett immediately closed all the windows, put on a sweatshirt and turned on the heat.

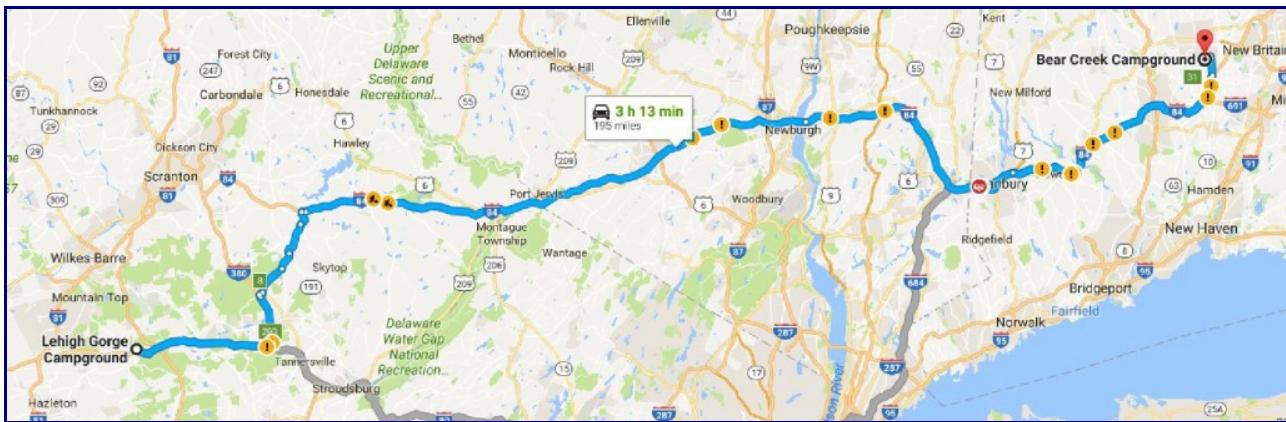
The [Pohick Bay Regional Park Campground](#) was, as always, wonderful. Our site was large, with a nice table and fire ring. We had campfires two nights, with the requisite s'mores. There were a lot of children at Pohick over the weekend - more than I have ever seen there before - but they were, for the most part, well-behaved. We did our laundry and ate out with family many times. Too many times. I gained about 5 pounds during the week.

TTN Hop 7: White Haven PA to Bristol CT

3 May 2017

198 miles via I-80, I-380, PA 423, PA 191, PA 507, I-84 and CT 229. 198 miles. Cumulative tow miles: 1511. Cumulative truck miles: 1920.

This hop was 198 miles and 75% of those miles - 149 miles - were on I-84. Which meant a very bumpy ride. Although I-84 is constantly under construction (major work in Waterbury this year), it is always rough. This time the ride was so rough that one of the chairs - probably the dining room chair - jumped up and broke the glass globe on the wall sconce. I think if all of our travel was on I-84 the RV would shake itself apart.



TTN Hop 7

Jett asked why we take I-84. Because it is better than I-95.

The sad fact is that most of the major roads in New England are in poor repair and not very RV-friendly.

The interesting miles on this hop were the 15 miles on PA 423, PA 191 and PA 507 through Tobyhanna and Newfoundland. These are interesting little towns that would be scenic any time of year. But in the spring, with flowering dogwood trees and various colorful bushes, they are beautiful. If I hadn't been towing 8 tons of RV, I would have stopped and taken some photos.

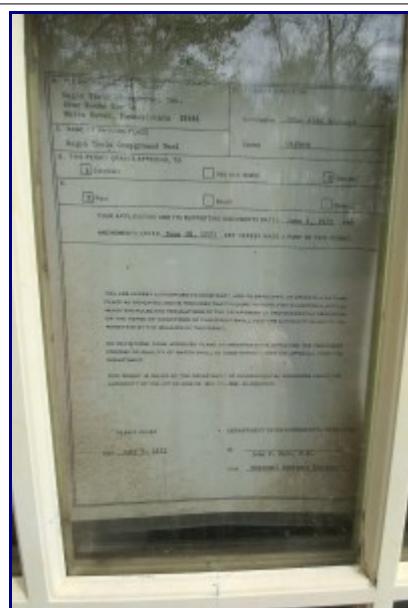
The weather continued to be cool. The high was 65 and the day started with a little cold rain. We definitely aren't in Florida anymore.



Broken sconce



Sconce-less fixture



Ancient permit

Our overnight stop was at the Lehigh Gorge Campground in White Haven PA. This park is conveniently located less than a mile from an I-80 exit. The park is basic, with many long-term residents in mostly very old trailers, but the owners have provided a row of pull-through sites for transient travelers. The site was gravel and not very level (the front landing gear was fully retracted to get level) but the utilities were very good. The big surprise was the cable: good reception and 75 channels. Jett loved that.

We didn't care about the pool, the playground or the laundry, but the park has all of those. The pool is unique in that it is heated by a wood-burning furnace. The storage shed next to the furnace had a "bathing place permit"

posted. I guess the local government licenses commercial swimming pools. But the posted permit was dated July 9, 1973 - almost 44 years ago! I guess you don't need to renew the permit very often.



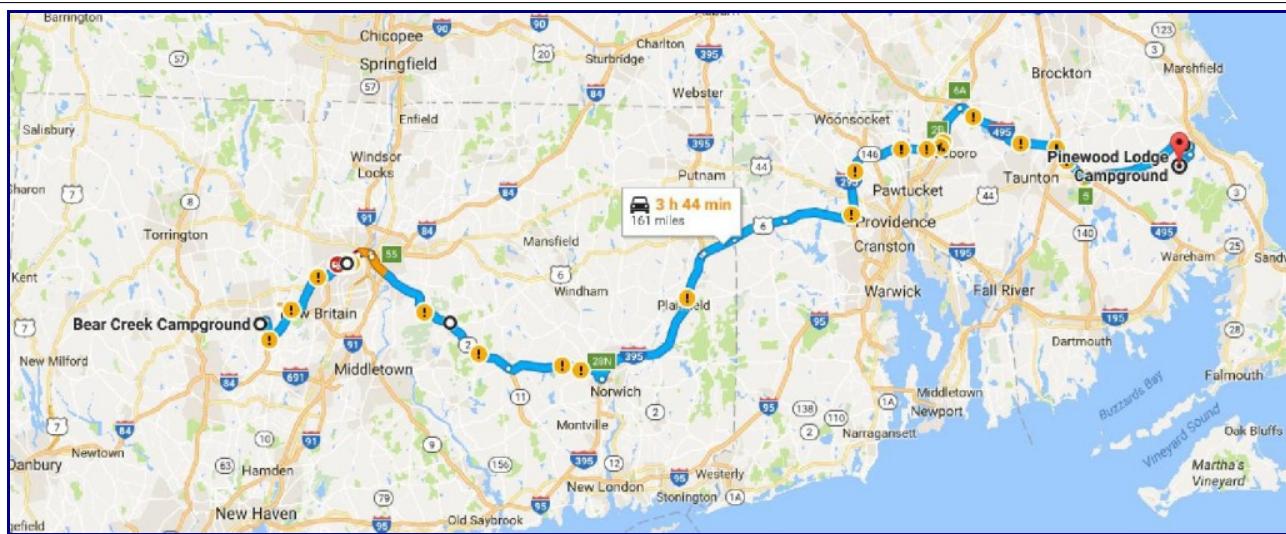
Lehigh Gorge sites



Wood furnace for the pool

TTN Hop 8: Bristol CT to Plymouth MA

7 May 2017



TTN Hop 8

161 miles via CT 229, I-84, CT 2, I-395 (toward Worcester), US 6, I-295 (around Providence), I-95, I-495 (around Boston) and US 44. Cumulative tow miles: 1672. Cumulative truck miles: 2184.

This was a relatively short hop (3.5 hours, including a short rest stop) along some roads that we have traveled before, but also a few new ones (CT 2 and US 6). CT 2 was pleasant but US 6 (between I-395 and I-295) was a nightmare - arguably the worst road we have ever traveled. "Rough" doesn't begin to describe it. The macadam surface was so cracked and pitted that a gravel road would have been more pleasant. Fortunately it was a fairly short segment - about 20 miles. But 20 miles of misery.

And it was all done in the rain. A constant, all-day rain that varied between drizzle and downpour. There were short periods when I could shut off the wipers, but not many.

We stayed 2 nights at the [Bear Creek Campground at Lake Compounce](#) in Bristol CT. [Lake Compounce](#) is an amusement park which I can't describe because it was not yet open for the season while we were there. As the campground exists mostly to cater to amusement park customers, it was not surprising that it was mostly vacant. But it *was* a surprise when we looked out of our window after our first night there and found that we were alone - the only RV in the park. That was, in our four years of traveling, a unique experience.

This is a relatively new park - not yet 3 years old. The facilities were modern, the sites were huge, the office store very large and well-stocked. In addition to the RV sites (all pull-throughs), the park has cabins, huts, tent sites and a few tipis.



Office



Tipis



Cabins



Loneliness

Ancient Burying Ground, Hartford CT

9 May 2017

I have been spending a LOT of time researching and documenting Jett's ancestry. Much more time than I have been spending on my own ancestry because, frankly, her family is much more interesting than mine. But last week, when we were in CT for two nights, I took the opportunity to check out some of the cemeteries in and near Hartford where some of my ancestors are reportedly buried. In particular, I was very interested in seeing the [Ancient Burying Ground](#) in Hartford CT where at least 5 of my distant great-grandparents are said to be buried:

- Thomas Bliss Sr (9th great-grandfather) - died 1639
- James Ensign (9th great-grandfather) - died 1680

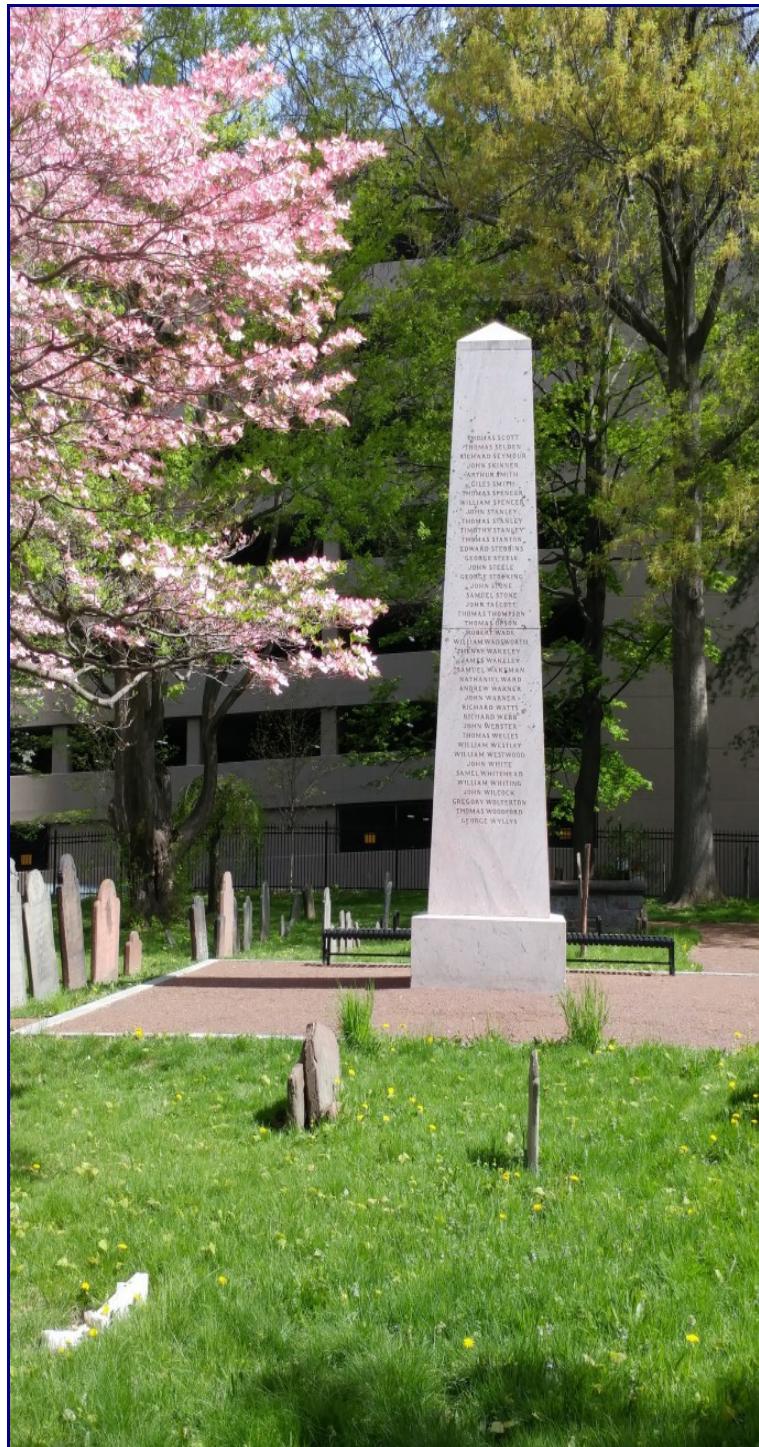
- Sarah Elson Ensign (9th great-grandmother) - died 1676
- Sarah Beardings Spencer (9th great-grandfather) - died 1685
- John Steele Sr (11th great-grandfather) - died 1685

Great-grandfathers Bliss, Ensign and Steele are included in the group of people who founded Hartford, so their names appear on the [Founder's Monument](#) that was erected in the cemetery in 1837 and was replaced with a new one in 1986. The wives of these men were also founders, of course, but 17th-century women were definitely second-class citizens.

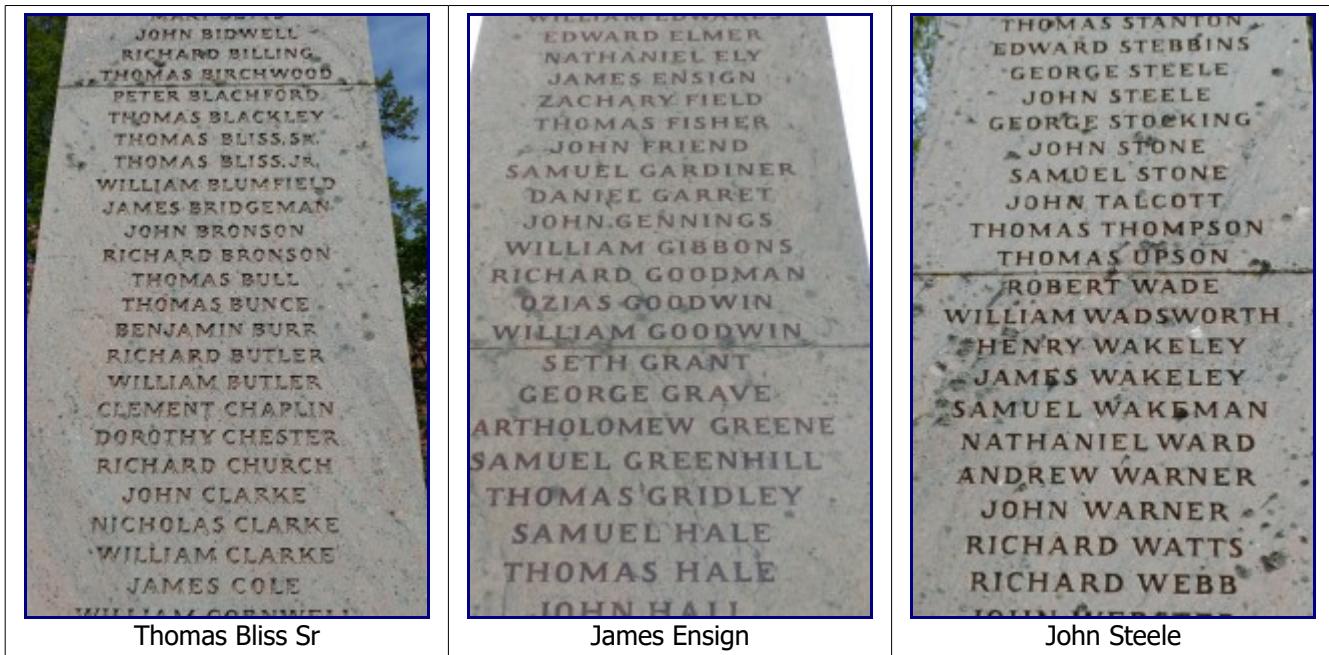
I was hopeful of finding at least one of the individual headstones for these people, but I was disappointed. It is possible that not all of the "founders" are buried here. For example, Thomas Bliss Sr reportedly died in 1639, just 3 years after the founding of Hartford and a year before the establishment of the cemetery.

I also checked out the Old Suffield Cemetery in Suffield CT where at least six of my ancestors are reportedly buried. This cemetery is not quite so ancient, founded in 1743. But I was no more successful here, finding none of my ancestor's headstones. Worse, I later found a list of headstone inscriptions, made in 1934, and none of my ancestors are listed there, either. I am wondering now if there might not be an error in the identification of the cemetery. Perhaps there is another old cemetery nearby. Further research is needed.

Update: I was definitely at the wrong cemetery. I searched the West Suffield (or "new") cemetery while I should have been looking at the Old Suffield Cemetery. Both are located on Mountain Rd, which is why I ended up in the wrong place.

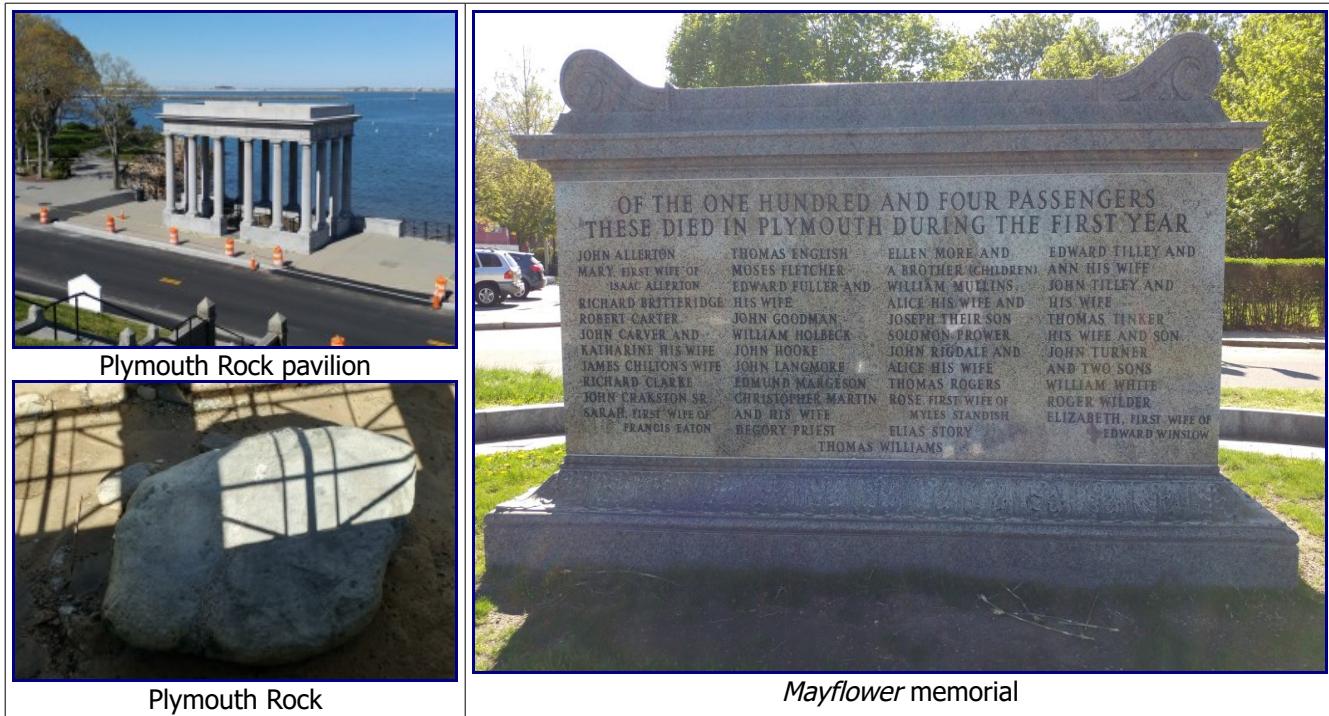


Founder's obelisk



Plymouth MA

11 May 2017



Yesterday I braved the 55-degree chill and drove to downtown Plymouth MA with the intent of searching for the graves of Jett's *Mayflower* ancestors. Those who died in the horrible first winter are all buried on [Coles Hill](#) overlooking Plymouth harbor. But there are no headstones. It is not a traditional cemetery; it is just a small steep hill on which the Pilgrims were buried. I was initially disappointed as I had hoped to find individual graves, but upon reflection I fully understand. Those people were in flat-out survival mode. It was winter and



Burial Hill

they were starving. Just getting people buried - half their number died - was a major undertaking. I am sure marking their graves for posterity was pretty low on their priority list.

The hill is near the Plymouth Rock pavilion which houses Plymouth Rock - ostensibly the rock on which the



Plymouth from Burial Hill

Pilgrims first set foot on shore in Plymouth. I am skeptical, of course, that anyone bothered to mark the location where they first set foot. And in any case it is NOT the first place where they set foot in America as they landed first near the tip of Cape Cod, then worked their way along the shore of Massachusetts Bay until they found a

suitable location for a settlement. The rock itself is unimposing, being about 5 feet long and 3 feet wide and tall. Like a billion other rocks along this shore. I took a photo, but it was late afternoon and the lighting was terrible.

Jett has at least one ancestor - Elizabeth Walker Warren, died 1673 - who is buried in a nearby cemetery in Plymouth - [Burial Hill](#), the first "real" cemetery in Plymouth. It is a large cemetery and, being very old, many of the headstones are illegible. I had no realistic expectation of finding her headstone, but it was a beautiful cemetery with spectacular views over downtown Plymouth and out to sea. Walking through a cemetery like this and taking the time to reflect on the courage and fortitude of the early settlers is never a waste of time.



View from Coles Hill Burial Ground

TTN wrapup

13 May 2017

The Third Trip North (Ft Myers Beach FL to Plymouth MA) is now history. The salient statistics are:

- 21 nights
- 8 hops
- 2,184 total miles
- 1,672 tow miles
- \$1,117.63 campground fees (\$53.22 per night)
- \$523.72 fuel and tolls (\$23.81 per day)

Highlights:

- Time with family in VA
- China Lee Buffet in Ocala FL
- Savannah South KOA
- Angelo's Steak and Pasta in Myrtle Beach SC
- Scenic back roads in PA
- Ancient Burying Ground in Hartford CT
- Diesel fuel prices (under \$2.50 per gallon except in PA)
- No major dings

Lowlights:

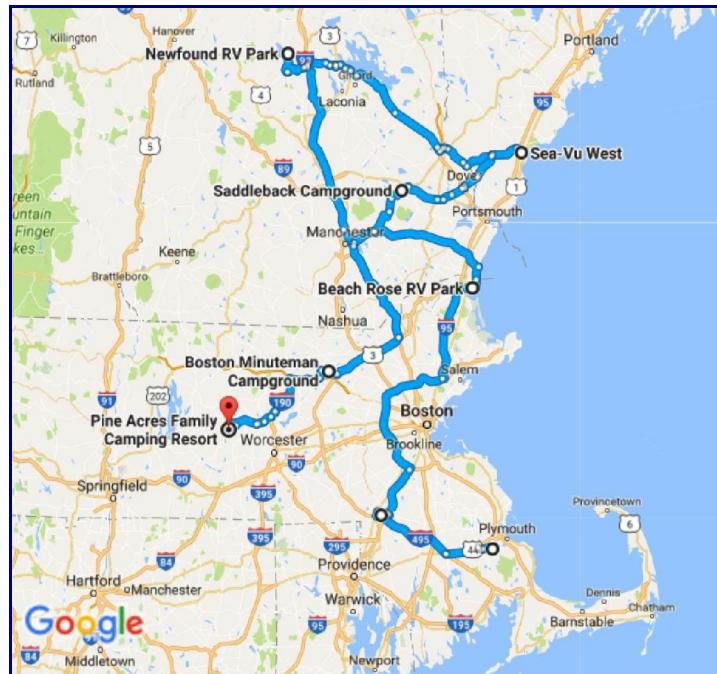
- Verizon Wireless (replacing my router with an even less functional one)
- Oak Tree Village in Ocala FL (a really nasty campground)
- Weather (cold, dreary and wet from NC to MA)
- A couple of minor dings (most notably the puncture of the front basement door)
- Lots of disagreements between Google maps and GPS routes
- I-84 in CT and US 6 in MA

New England Tour (NET) preview - revised

13 May 2017

The "New England Tour" is how we are describing our summer in New England. In previous years we stayed all summer in a fixed location - the Minuteman Campground in Littleton MA. This year we will stay at that campground for just 9 nights; we will travel to 7 other spots for the rest of our stay and will leave earlier than usual - the end of July. So, briefly, this is what the NET looks like:

1. [Pinewood Lodge Campground](#), Plymouth MA, for 24 nights. This is the longest stay on the NET. The primary reason for hanging out in southeast Massachusetts is to give me a base to do some genealogical research - primarily for Jett's *Mayflower* ancestors, but also some of mine. My brother is also nearby and this will be an opportunity to catch up with him.



New England Tour plan

2. [Normandy Farms Campground](#), Foxboro MA for 11 nights. We have stayed here before and love it. We

are looking forward to enjoying the beautiful pools (if the weather improves), the snack bar, the disc golf course and the other amenities.

3. [Beach Rose RV Park](#), Salisbury MA for 10 nights. This will be a good base for doing genealogical research on Jett's Salem and Rowley ancestors and will get us close to Rockport for our annual visit. This seems to be the best of the Cape Ann campgrounds, so we thought we would give it a try.
4. [Newfound RV Park](#), Bridgewater NH for 3 nights. This is a quick trip to central NH, near Newfound Lake, to attend the Escapees Northeast Chapter 3 rally. We attended one of these rallies before, up in Maine, and enjoyed ourselves immensely, so we are looking forward to renewing some acquaintances.
5. [Sea-Vu West](#), Wells ME for 8 nights. We have long wanted to spend some time on the Maine coast and this will give us a few days near some great beaches as well as the beautiful beach towns of Ogunquit and Kennebunk. It is also near the gravesites of some of Jett's Maine pioneer ancestors.
6. [Saddleback Campground](#), Northwood MA for 9 nights. This takes us back to where it all started in the summer of 2012. It is very close to our sister-in-law's summer cottage (where we expect to spend a lovely July 4th holiday). It is also close to a place where we can, if we choose, get some RV repairs done. We could stay with our sister-in-law for a couple of days if necessary (right, sis?).
7. [Minuteman Campground](#), Littleton MA for 9 nights. This is our old summer "home" so it will be nice to see the owners and, we hope, some old friends. It is also relatively close to Boston so we will probably schedule some medical and dental appointments. Fun.
8. [Pine Acres Family Camping Resort](#), Oakham MA for 14 nights. This is near Worcester where both Jett's brother and my son live, so there will be some family time. It will also be a time to prepare for our next trip, the Second Trip West (STW). There are also more graves to find in the area near Worcester.

The path looks torturous, but in truth it is a rather short journey - just 445 miles. We arrive May 5 (we are at the Pinewood Lodge Campground now) and depart August 1. The hops are short but the stays are long, totaling 88 nights. So while we are traveling more than usual this summer, it won't be a lot of driving.

And we get to see parts of New England that we haven't seen before, even though we have lived in the area most of our lives.

Rain. Cold rain.

14 May 2017

It is raining now. It has been raining steadily since midnight. The forecast is for an all-day rain. With a forecast high of 48.

It has rained nearly every day since we left Virginia. And it has been unseasonably cold, too. It is getting to us.

Jett yesterday: "Next year let's come north later."

That actually would fit well with our nascent plan to spend some time in Central America next winter. We are committed to being in Florida for 6 months, starting in mid-November. But it doesn't have to be 6 consecutive months. We could stay 4 months, go to Panama for a month, then return for 2 more months in Florida. That would have us leaving Florida in late June. It will be very warm in Florida then. But it will also be warm all the way north.

Which sounds pretty good right now.

Plymouth by night

24 May 2017



Plymouth Harbor

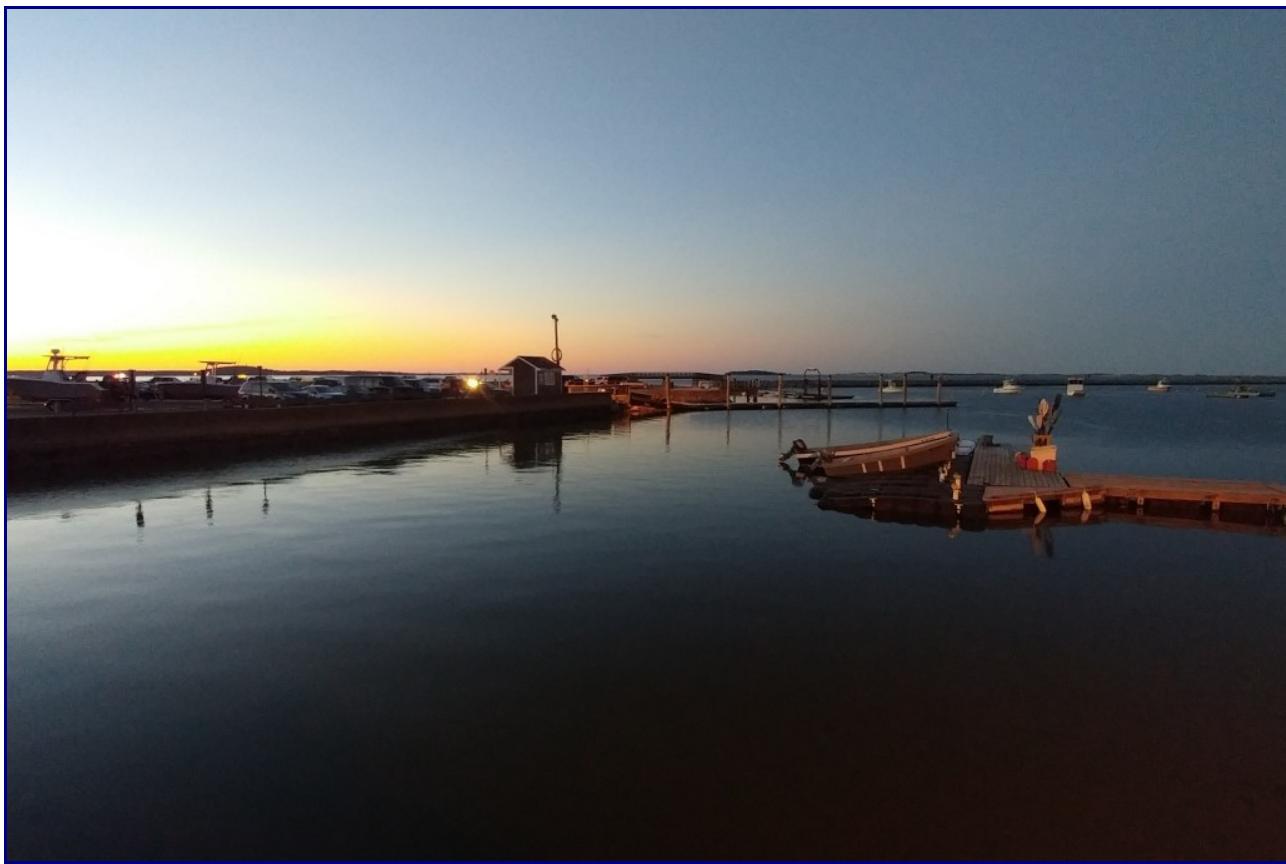
On Saturday afternoon I visited [Burial Hill](#) again, looking for the elusive grave of Elizabeth Walker Warren, which I did not find. But I encountered some of Jett's distant relatives who were also searching for her grave. We had a nice chat about her and about genealogy in general.

Later my brother Dennis joined me and we spent a few minutes walking through the cemetery together (he had never been there, despite living just 15 minutes away for over 35 years). Then we went off in search of a place to dine. We wandered the streets of downtown Plymouth as dusk arrived and I got to see how Plymouth came alive on a Saturday night. There are many restaurants and even more pubs, some with live music. We ended up at the [Lobster Hut](#), on the Town Wharf and had a very nice seafood dinner. And we enjoyed some of the music from the adjacent very active pub.

The harbor is lined with lobster art - a public art project reminiscent of the painted horses in Ocala. The real treat, though, was watching nighttime settle over the harbor. Though chilly, the sky was quite clear and the sunset was gorgeous.



Dinner at the Lobster Hut



Sunset over Plymouth Harbor

Pilgrim Hall

24 May 2017

We were blessed with a break in the rain Wednesday (the only day this week that we haven't been drenched) and used the "good" weather to venture into downtown Plymouth to visit [Pilgrim Hall](#), a small museum celebrating the arrival of the *Mayflower* and the early history of the Pilgrims in Plymouth. I wasn't expecting much. Our primary goal was to find the portrait of Elizabeth Paddy Wensley (1641-1711), one of Jett's 8th great-grandmothers. We found it, easily, but found much more, too. This turned out to be a very nice little museum.

One of the unexpected pleasures was a very informative 12-minute film about the *Mayflower*. It was presented in a small room that included



White rocker

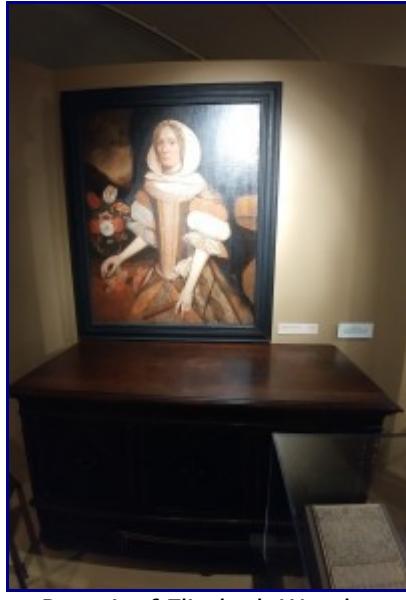
artifacts that survived the journey - another surprise. I guess I had assumed that nothing would be left after 400 years. One of the artifacts was a rocker brought over by a very pregnant Susannah White - one of Jett's *Mayflower* ancestors and a 9th great-grandmother. To see a rocker that likely once held her 8th great-

grandfather, Resolved White (who was 6 years old in 1620) and definitely held her great-uncle, Peregrine White, the first English child born in the Plymouth Colony, really put a personal touch on the visit.

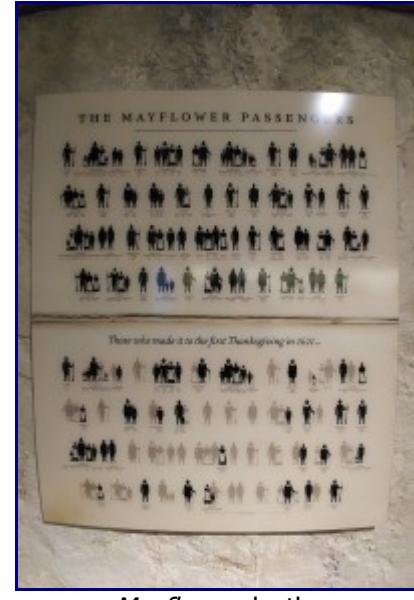


Lower hall

The museum also had a temporary exhibit of wedding dresses through the years, from Pilgrim times to the present. That interested Jett more than it interested me. But there were some very nice paintings of the *Mayflower* journey and Pilgrim life, the Bible owned by John Alden (another ancestor) and an early copy of Longfellow's epic poem, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, which is about John Alden and Priscilla Mullins. Another opportunity to reflect: if that "courtship" hadn't taken an unexpected turn that resulted in Alden and Mullins marrying, Jett would not be here today.



Portrait of Elizabeth Wensley



Mayflower deaths

The final unexpected pleasure was the gift shop. They had a coffee mug depicting the Alden/Mullins marriage, some really nice T-shirts and postcards and a variety of other things that we just had to have. I think we dropped about \$150 in there.

All-in-all, a very nice time in a very nice museum. Recommended.



Alden Bible



Courtship copy

"The Affair" by Lee Child

24 May 2017

[Delacorte Press, New York, 2012](#)

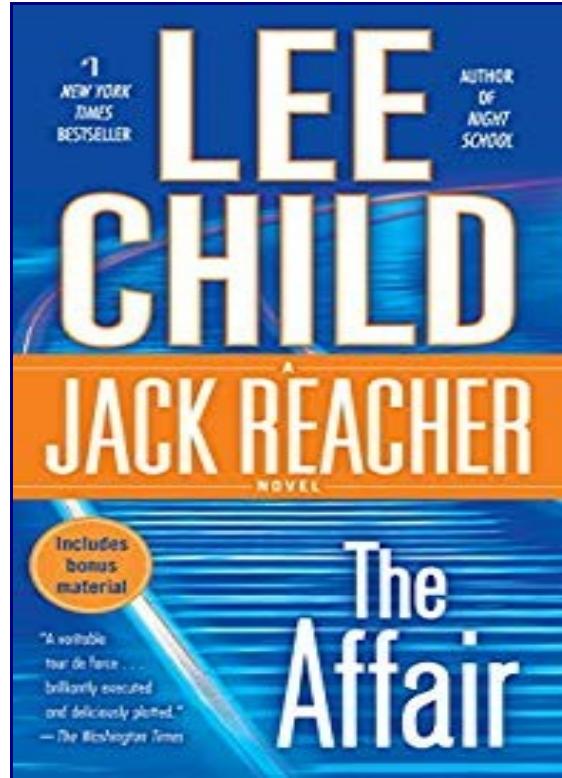
You probably know by now that I love the Jack Reacher series of mystery/adventure books by Lee Child. I like them so much that I have a different scale for them when reviewing them. "The Affair" is about a 4 out of 10 on the Reacher scale but a 7 out of 10 on the generic book scale.

The reasons I like this book are the usual Jack Reacher ones: it is well-written, it has a lot of twists and turns, it has a beautiful woman that Reacher beds, it has Reacher easily winning a 6-on-1 fist fight and it has Jack Reacher giving attitude (and getting away with it) to everyone he meets. In this book, set in 1997, he is still in the army and is assigned to sniff around the periphery of a murder investigation in a small town in Mississippi that the army fears may implicate a soldier from the nearby Fort Kelham army base.

The reasons that I don't like this book are that (1) the plot is thinner than usual, (2) the resolution, though final because the perp ends up dead, is unsatisfying because the logic that ties him to the victim(s) is tenuous and (3) the violence is more gratuitous than usual. At one point Reacher kills a militiaman just to "send a message" to the rest of the militia force. Strong message, sure, but necessary? Hardly.

Related to the gratuitous violence is the ease with which Reacher gets away with his bad behavior. He commits multiple felonies (including the aforesaid murder) with the full knowledge - and in some cases in the company of - the local sheriff, yet is never charged in any of them.

I like Reacher, but I need him to be more hero and less thug.



7 out of 10

Finding some of Jett's early immigrant ancestors

30 May 2017



Myles Standish grave

We came to Plymouth for 24 days with the intention of visiting some cemeteries where some of Jett's early immigrant ancestors are buried. The incessant rain got in the way and we didn't visit as many sites as I hoped we would, but we did find some really significant sites.

First and foremost, we visited both the second (and final) home of John and Priscilla Alden, two of her *Mayflower* ancestors. They are buried in the Myles Standish Burial Ground where the most celebrated resident is, unsurprisingly, Myles Standish. His



Myles Standish monument



Myles Standish homestead

burial site is not only marked by a large rock with his name engraved on it, but is surrounded by cannon, as befits the military leader of the *Mayflower* contingent. Standish is not one of Jett's ancestors, but he does figure prominently in her history as, if Longfellow is to be believed, he had designs on the young Priscilla. That all three are interred together seems somehow weirdly appropriate.

I also visited the site of the Aldens' home in Duxbury. It lies on the property of Duxbury High School and abuts the soccer field. It is also surrounded by a disc golf course (which I did not play). I doubt if John and Priscilla ever imagined that their



John Alden gravesite



Priscilla Alden gravesite

homestead would someday be surrounded by athletic teens and leisure activities. I doubt that they even understood the concept of "leisure time."

The most striking thing about the foundation is its size: 30 feet by 10 feet - 300 square feet. Smaller than my RV. I am well aware that it is possible to live in a small space, but I didn't realize just how tiny these colonial homes were. The living space was even smaller than the foundation suggests as nearly a quarter was reserved for a root cellar.

Since it was nearby, I also took a quick peek at the Myles Standish Monument which sits atop a hill overlooking Plymouth Harbor in Duxbury. Standish was clearly a towering figure in the Plymouth Colony and was instrumental in training the Pilgrims in the use of firearms. Interactions with the Indians were friendly in the early days, but turned violent some 50 years later. The fact that the colony survived is largely due to his efforts.

He had a home in Duxbury, too, not far from the Alden house. While the Aldens chose to build near a lake, Standish built on a bluff overlooking the harbor. He could see Plymouth Village, but couldn't get there quickly - it was a long way by land. I suspect that he had a boat and sailed there if he needed to "go to town." He got his fresh water from a spring near the edge of the bluff.

My other success, on my final day in Plymouth, was finding the headstones of the 4 Jett ancestors who are buried in the Hillcrest Cemetery in Plympton MA. I knew that these headstones existed as photos of all four are published in findagrave.com, but I wanted to find them and get my own photos. The ancestors were:

- William and Joanna Coomer (6th great-grandparents)
- Luke and Martha Perkins (7th great-grandparents)

These were 18th-century graves, so the headstones, for the most part, were in pretty good shape. A bit hard to read (especially Martha's, which was tilting forward), but it was nice to actually find some headstones, given my recent failures.

My greatest disappointment was not getting to Eastham to look for the 17 ancestors that are reportedly buried there. But Eastham is on Cape Cod and going to Cape Cod on a holiday weekend is akin to a suicide mission. We heard on the radio, as we were heading out of Plymouth, that the traffic backup of cars trying to leave the Cape was 11 miles long. Thanks, but no thanks.



Luke Perkins



Martha Perkins



William Coomer



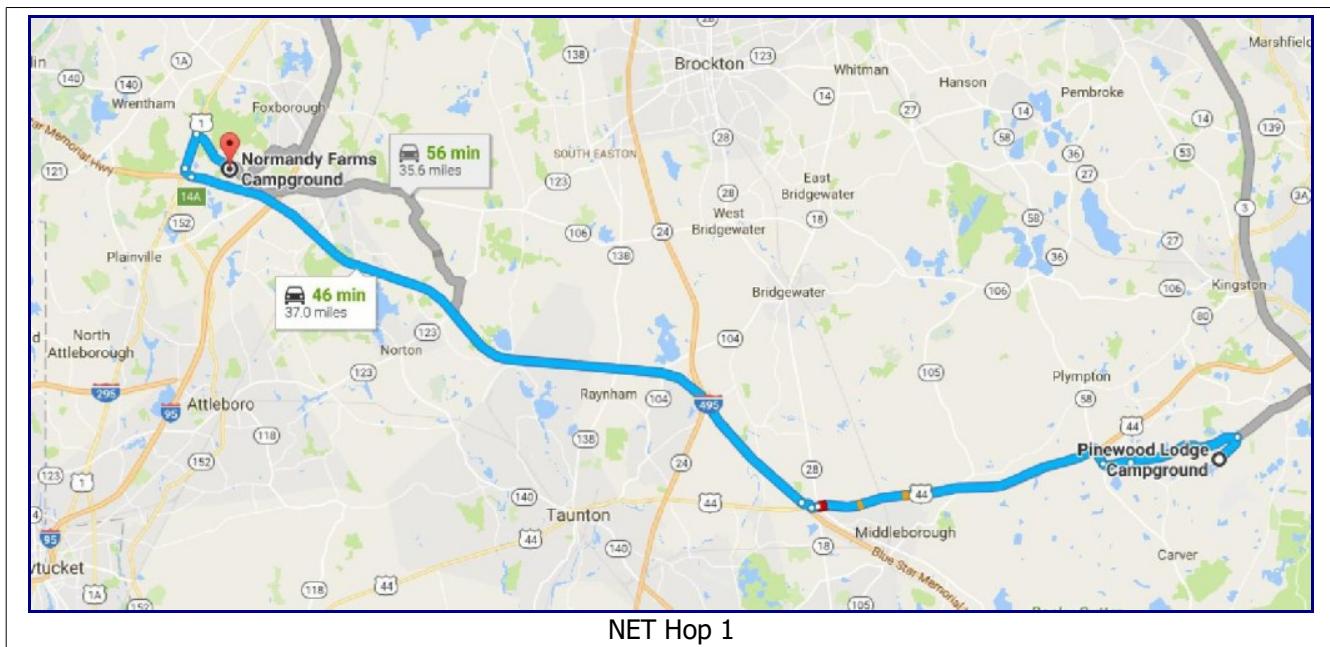
Joanna Coomer

NET Hop 1: Plymouth MA to Foxboro MA

30 May 2017

38 miles via (mostly) US 44, I-495 (around Boston) and US 1. Cumulative tow miles: 38. Cumulative truck miles: 874.

Outside of the 3 GTW hops that were made to get the RV to/from the repair shop in San Jose (28, 31 and 19 miles, respectively), this was our shortest hop ever. It only took about an hour over roads we have traveled before, so there were no sights to comment on. The only two noteworthy things about the trip were (1) the nasty Memorial Day traffic returning from Cape Cod on I-495 (we had about 8 miles of stop-and-go traffic) and



(2) the jerk who pulled out in front of me as I was traveling at 67 mph on I-495 that had to brake hard to avoid. Idiot.

The NET (New England Tour, to remind the readers with short-term memory problems) is a bit different from our other journeys in that it is really a long-term stay but spread over multiple places. Because we are generally staying for a week or more at each stop and then traveling a relatively short distance to the next stop, the cumulative truck miles are going to be high. We started counting miles for the NET the moment the TTN ended, so this first hop includes all the miles that I drove the truck during the 24 days that we were in residence in Plymouth.

Our home campground in Plymouth was the [Pinewood Lodge Campground](#). Our memories of this campground will be forever tainted by the horrible weather that we had there - measurable rain on probably 18 of the 24 days. And cold. Very cold. Some days were more than 20 degrees below normal. We used a lot of propane keeping warm. Huddling in the RV while a hard cold rain drenched us was not how we envisioned spending May in Massachusetts.

Our first resolution for 2018: don't come north until Memorial Day. We have asked ourselves, many times, why we left sunny and warm Florida to come north to the cold rain. We have looked at the weather map longingly many times over the past month, wishing we were basking in the 90-plus heat of southwest Florida.

Despite the rain, our impressions of Pinewood Lodge were mostly favorable. We felt at home there and, given an opportunity, will return in the future.

Things we liked about the campground:

- The site (#66). It was large, level and wooded, with a nice campfire ring (that we actually used!). Very quiet. Nice neighbors.
- The lake and the beach. Not that we could use them, given the weather, but I can easily imagine that



they would be great in the summer.

- The lodge/activity hall. There were games for the kids (which probably kept some parents sane in the wet weather) and a full bar for the adults (which also may have helped).
- The location. Being just 10 minutes from downtown Plymouth and 15 minutes from my brother's Duxbury home was great for our purposes. And I really liked Plymouth.



Our campsite (#66)



Beach

As always, there were things we didn't like, too:

- It is very expensive. I think the 3 Memorial Weekend days may have been the most expensive ever - over \$100 per night. That is due to a high base rate, compounded by a pet fee of \$10 per night. And when we had visitors we had to pay a "day use fee" of \$10 per visitor. I love my brother and his family, but that tested the depth of my love.
- The sites are covered with pine schmutz that got into everything. We put down our outdoor carpet, but that quickly got covered, too. We had to sweep out the RV every day. And remove the pine tar from my shoes.
- Other than the beach there are few recreational facilities. No tennis courts, no pickle ball courts, no cornhole court. There are some horseshoe pits and boat rentals. And the kiddie playground is adequate.
- No dog park.
- No recycling
- Almost no laundry facilities. There were a small number (4?) of beat-up washers in a lean-to connected to a bathhouse.
- The bathhouses (which we didn't use) were basic (e.g., screen doors with vinyl curtains on the showers).

But, overall, not bad. I would rate it as a 7 on a 10 scale.

Booked through Labor Day

2 Jun 2017

I made our final summer campground reservation yesterday, so we now have a complete, confirmed itinerary through Labor Day:

- Now - Jun 9: Foxboro (or Foxborough, take your pick) MA

- Jun 9 - Jun 19: Salisbury MA (Cape Ann)
- Jun 19 - Jun 22: Bridgewater NH (Escapees rally at Newfound Lake)
- Jun 22 - Jun 30: Wells ME (near the beach)
- Jun 30 - Jul 9: Northwood NH (and Lucas Pond)
- Jul 9 - Jul 18: Littleton MA
- Jul 18 - Aug 1: Oakham MA
- Aug 1 - Aug 7: Glenville NY (near Albany)
- Aug 7 - Aug 9: Clayton NY (1000 Islands area)
- Aug 9 - Aug 12: Grand Island NY (Niagara Falls)
- Aug 12 - Aug 14: Streetsboro OH
- Aug 14 - Aug 18: New Hudson MI (near Detroit)
- Aug 18 - Aug 20: Michigan City IN (near the Indiana dunes)
- Aug 20 - Aug 29: Madison WI (50th high school reunion)
- Aug 29 - Aug 30: Rochester MN
- Aug 30 - Aug 31: Spirit Lake IA
- Aug 31 - Sep 1: Mitchell SD (Corn Palace)
- Sep 1 - Sep 4: Interior SD (Badlands)

Whew! That is a boatload of hops. Lots of setup/teardown. But we get 7 new states for our map: OH, MI, IN, WI, MN, IA and SD which will boost our total to 39. And we get to see (among other things), the [Thousand Islands](#) area of NY, [Niagara Falls](#), the [Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore](#), the [Corn Palace](#) and the [Badlands](#). We will also have fun in my childhood home town, [Madison](#), and at the rally at [Newfound Lake](#) in NH, for sure.

Should be a nice RV summer.

The beat(ing) goes on...

6 Jun 2017

More rain. More gloom. More chill. With blustery wind today. Miserable, miserable weather. The forecasters say it will be nicer this weekend. But they may just be saying that to prevent mass suicide.

50 degrees at 1pm on June 6th. Sheesh.

Big Papi sighting

9 Jun 2017

On Wednesday, when the skies started to clear, I traveled to Wayland MA with the hope of participating in a pick-up game with other senior softball players - a weekly event of the [Eastern Massachusetts Senior Softball League \(EMASS\)](#). Well, not enough players showed up for a game, so I just got to take some swings and loosen my arm. But there was some strange activity at the park - a film crew of 20 or more people, all gearing up to do something - I had no idea what. Then, suddenly, who should walk onto the field but David Ortiz - "Big Papi" - the most storied Red Sox baseball player of the past decade. Apparently he - and the crew - were there to film a

commercial with the topic being "things Big Papi wants to do in retirement." One of those things, apparently, is playing senior softball.

I found out later that Big Papi had surprised the ongoing league game (in the background in the photo) by walking onto the field and asking if he could take a few swings. So the game stopped and Fred - an octogenarian pitcher for one of the teams - fed him some meatballs that he absolutely crushed. I am told that one landed more than 400 feet away, near the backstop of the other field.

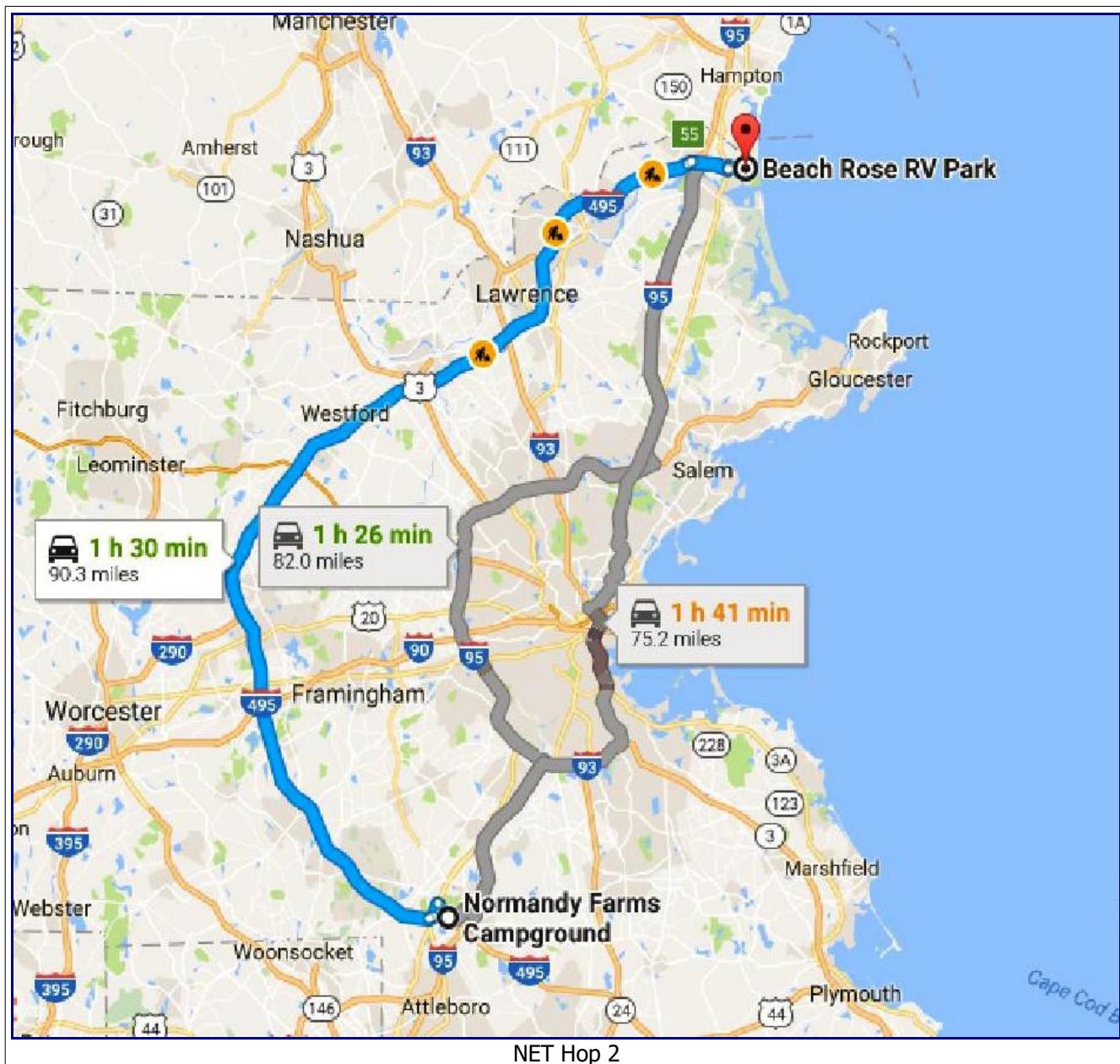
If Big Papi is going to play senior softball (it will be a few years from now as you have to be 55 to join), then I want him on *my* team.



Big Papi

NET Hop 2: Foxboro MA to Salisbury MA

10 Jun 2017



91 miles via US-1, I-495 (around Boston), US-1 (again) and US-1A. Cumulative tow miles: 129. Truck miles: 245. Cumulative truck miles: 1119.

This was an easy, short hop with all but about 10 miles being on I-495. The weather was good and the traffic was moderate. A piece of cake.

Jett followed in the Yaris, going via I-95 instead of I-495, thereby cutting a few miles off of her trip. But the travel time was similar.

Our home for the past 11 days was the [Normandy Farms Family Campground](#) in Foxborough (or Foxborough, if you

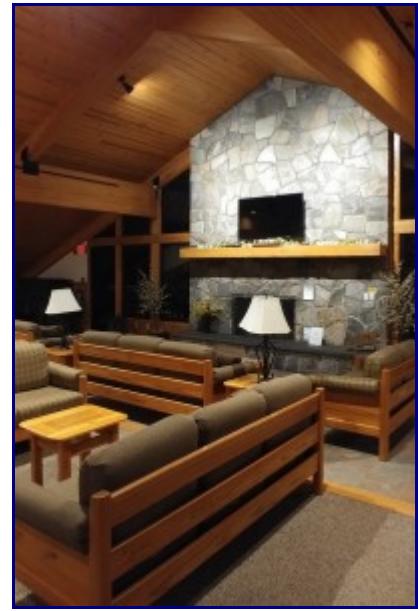
prefer) MA, just a few miles south of [Gillette Stadium](#), home field of the **NFL CHAMPION** New England Patriots. The Patriots started their conditioning workouts while we were there and I guess we could have gone there and watched some millionaires doing jumping jacks, but we passed.

At the present time the Normandy Farms website claims that the Travel Channel has included them in a list of the 13 best campgrounds in the world. We can't dispute that as it is in our personal list of the top 2 campgrounds we have stayed at in our 4 years of travel (the other being Gulf Waters). Adjectives that come to mind when describing this place are "superb", "clean", "professionally-run" and "exceptional." Oh, yeah... "expensive." It ain't cheap, folks. But you get your money's worth.

First, the facilities. Our site was large enough for our rig and our two vehicles, with enough space left over to fit in our outdoor carpet, our grill and about 6 visitor vehicles. And the sites are staggered so that I could keep the shades up on both side-facing rear windows and see nothing but trees. Also, a huge recreation center featuring an indoor pool, an adults-only loft, an exercise room and an arcade. Three more outdoor pools. At least two playgrounds, a basketball court, a beach volleyball court, some first-rate bocce courts, the best outdoor horseshoe pits that I have ever seen, a softball field, a baseball field (where the staff set up soccer nets), shuffleboard courts, pickleball courts (still under



Dog park

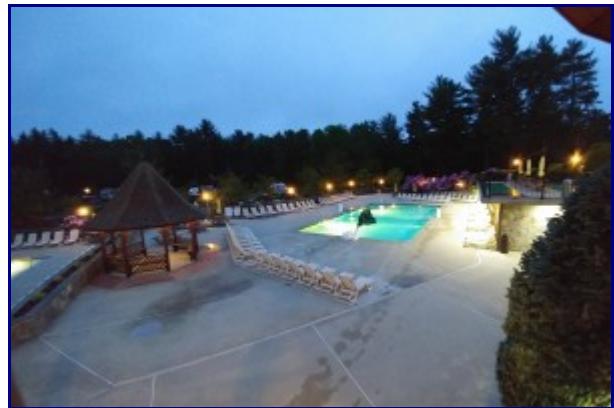


Adult loft

construction), a huge dog park (over an acre, with a dog washing station), a fishing pond, a great campground store and, most surprisingly, a first-rate disc golf course and a BMX bike track.



Indoor pool



Outdoor pool at dusk

Second, the staff. I don't know who trains these people but they are doing a great job. Despite most of the office staff being young, they were courteous, pleasant, efficient and very professional. No attitude or gum-chewing here.

The only negative thing about our stay at Normandy Farms was the weather. Simply horrible. Most days were cold and wet. We spent at least 4 of the 11 days hunkered down in the RV, with the heat on and the rain beating on the roof. But we did have a few light-rain days (I am not sure that any were completely dry) so I was



Our site



BMX track

able to get out to three cemeteries. And Jett's sisters came to visit and we had some rousing card games. So it

wasn't a washout by any means. But it sure could have been better.

There is also a small but very nice slots-only [Plainridge Park Casino](#) about 5 miles away where I was able, against all odds (literally) to win money. Jett lost, though, so it was pretty much a wash.

Salisbury Beach State Reservation

13 Jun 2017



The beach

I had an hour to kill yesterday while Jett was napping, so I decided to run down to the [Salisbury Beach State Reservation](#) - just a half-mile away - to take a peek. The place was packed over the weekend with traffic backed up a half mile trying to get into the parking lot, so I was wondering what the attraction was. I assumed it was a beach and not much else.

Well, it is certainly a beach - a very nice, sandy beach - but it is also a huge campground. 438 sites, mostly for RVs but some tent-only sites, too. They are all water/electric (no sewer), but the park has a huge 4-lane dump station for emptying your tanks as you leave. The summer rates for an RV site are under \$35 a day,



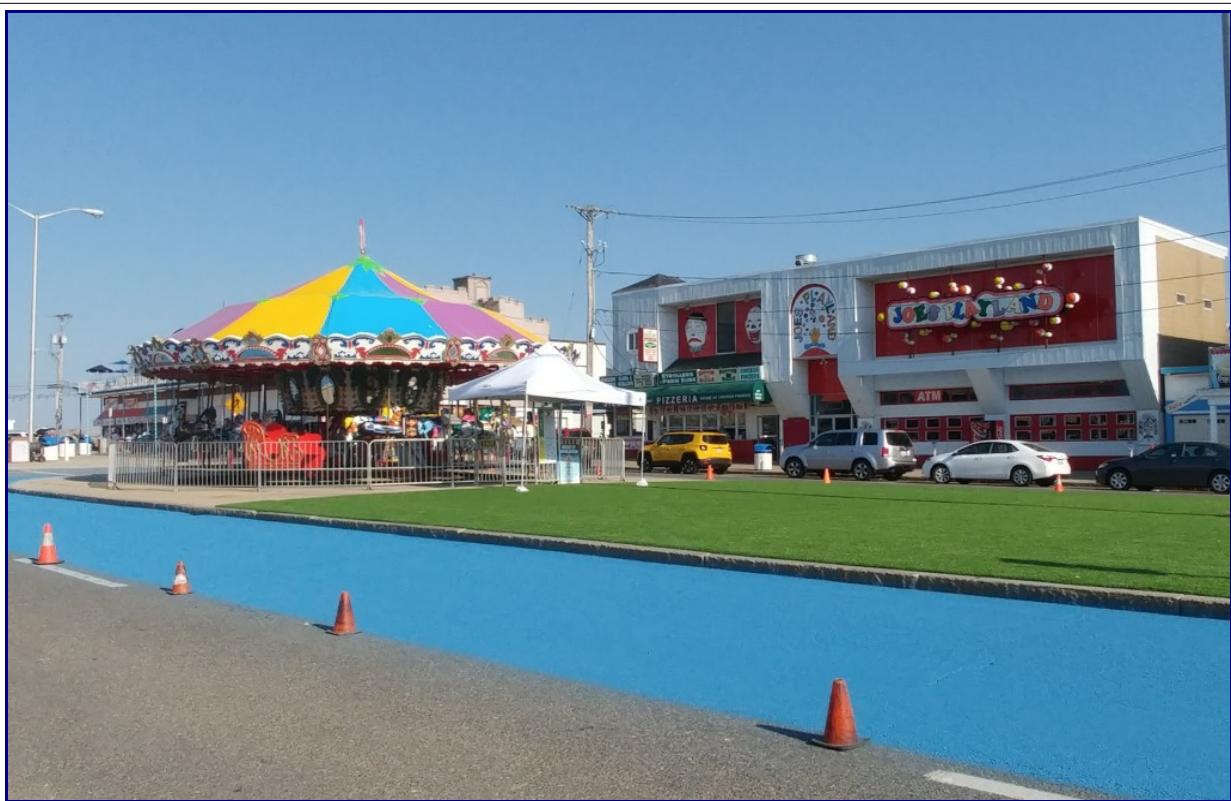
TV trucks

making it very affordable (most private RV parks in Massachusetts charge over \$50 per day) and it is very close to the beach. An easy walk. The problem, for us, is that there is a 40-foot limit on the RV length (we are 42) and there is a 14-day limit on the number of days you use the campground during the summer season. But for people who want a very nice campground for a short stay near the beach in MA, this is a great option.

The other problem for us, as seniors, is that the \$10 annual senior pass for day use is limited to MA residents. Ah, finally a downside to being FL residents.

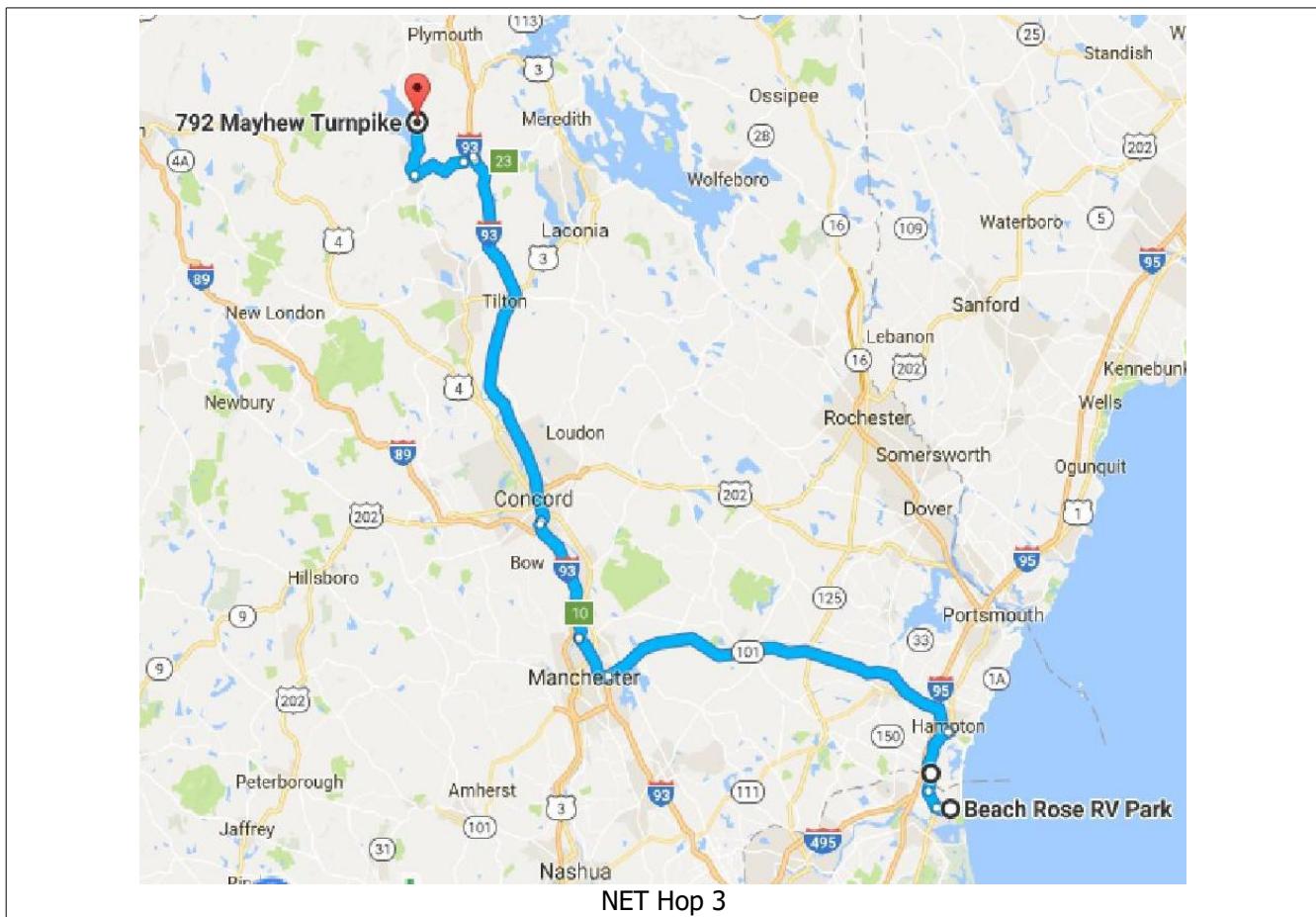


Since the reservation is very near "downtown" Salisbury Beach - a small honkytonk beach town - I dropped by there for a few minutes, too. I was surprised to see a bunch of remote TV station vans set up and broadcasting. As it was after 5pm it was obvious that they were doing live segments from Salisbury Beach. I wondered what the story was. Well, it turns out that the body of a fisherman who had gone missing a few days before washed up on the beach that afternoon. Must have been an unpleasant surprise for the families and the small children who were trying to get a break from the 94-degree heat.



NET Hop 3: Salisbury MA to Bridgewater NH

20 Jun 2017



102 miles via US 1, NH 101, I-93.HN 104 and NH 3A. Cumulative tow miles: 231. Truck miles: 368. Cumulative truck miles: 1487.

This was an easy hop that took just under 2 hours. The most difficult part was US 1, which we took simply to avoid the toll (and the traffic) on I-95 entering NH. But there was a lot of construction on US 1 which made for some tight lanes in a couple of places. But we didn't hit anything.

The other difficult section was on I-93 north of the I-89 intersection. The road was fine, but we ran into an intense thunderstorm. We had to cut our speed to 50 mph and watch very carefully for traffic slowing in front of us. It was about 20 minutes of white-knuckle driving.

Our home for 10 days in Salisbury MA was the [Beach Rose RV Park](#). We were given the one-and-only pull-through (out of about 50 sites), which was great - it gave us a picnic area without a neighbor and certainly eased the job of getting in and getting out again. The park was adequate for our purposes. It had 2 dog parks, which Rusty enjoyed. The pool was nice but, as usual, we didn't use it. There was a basic laundry which we also didn't use. Mostly we used the park as a base of operations to visit places on the North Shore of MA - mostly cemeteries but also beaches (Salisbury Beach and Hampton Beach) - and to visit with family. Jett's siblings came by on our final Saturday and we broke out the tequila which we have carried with us for years and have never touched. A bunch of seniors sitting around, doing tequila shots. A sight to behold.



Our site



Large dog park



Pool



Laundry



Waterfront park



Sybil and Rusty



Newburyport



Park



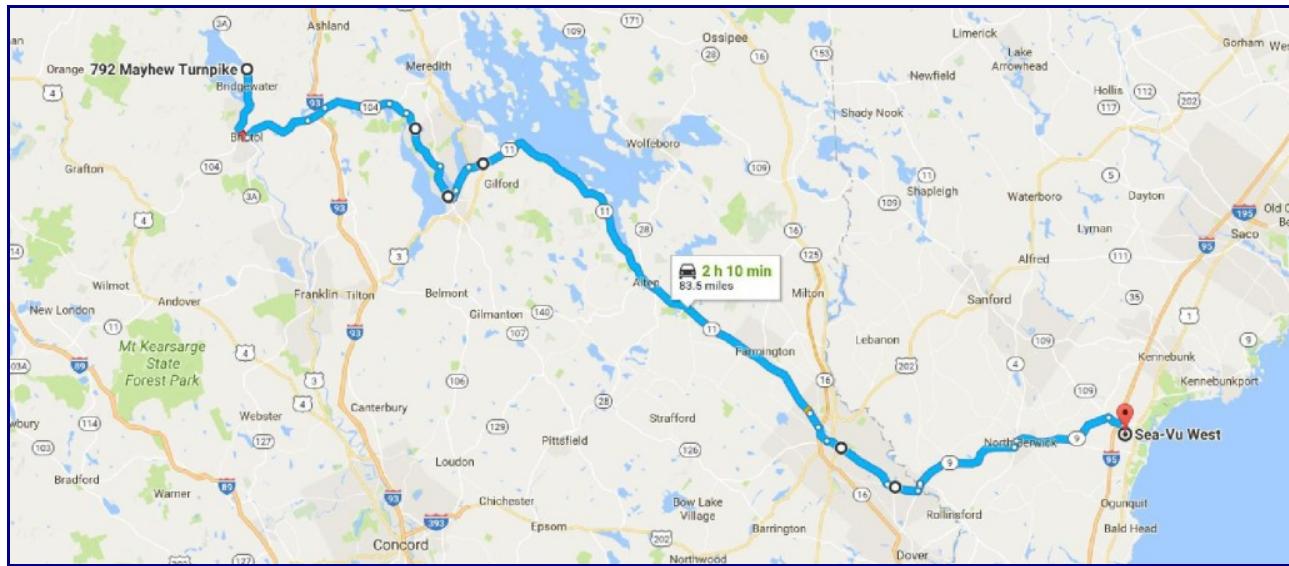
Newburyport wharf

Then we went out to dinner at the [Black Cow](#) in Newburyport. An excellent dinner in a nice restaurant right on the water. Very nice.

Newburyport is a very scenic small town. Very colonial, of course, but it has managed to retain its colonial character better than most. The downtown area is thriving and is filled with interesting small businesses. There is a great toy store and some wonderful, aromatic bakeries. If you are in the area, definitely stop by.

NET Hop 4: Bridgewater NH to Wells ME

24 Jun 2017



84 miles via NH 3A, NH 104, NH 106, NH 11, NH 108, NH 236, ME 9 and ME 109. Cumulative tow miles: 315.

Truck miles: 117. Cumulative truck miles: 1604.

On paper this should have been a quick, easy trip. Google said it would take 2 hours and the roads, while secondary, were well-traveled state routes.

First problem: one thing you can absolutely take to the bank is that secondary roads, in New Hampshire, in June, will be pretty broken up due to the winter frost heaves. That was the case for most of this route. The 10 miles on NH 11 northwest of Alton Bay were particularly nasty. That road produced a tossed salad in our refrigerator's vegetable bin.

Second problem: the route picked by Google was almost identical in time to two other wildly different routes. There was no dominant route. When we set the destination in the GPS it violently disagreed with Google on how best to get there. Navigating by map is much more difficult than navigating by GPS. I tried. I endured the countless recriminating "recalculating" notices but even after 15 miles down the Google route the GPS disagreed. I eventually missed a turn, gave up on the map and followed the GPS. It matched about 80% of my expected route but inexplicably took me through the heart of Rochester, one of the larger cities in NH, when it seemed that a shorter route would have avoided it. Bottom line: the route I traveled was about 6 miles and 25 minutes longer than the route I intended to take.

Despite all that, it was a fairly pleasant ride with nice scenery much of the way. And it was a beautiful June day - low 70s, puffy clouds dotting the sky. Better than a day in the office.

Our home for the 3-day Escapees Chapter 3 rally was the [Newfound RV Park](#) in Bridgewater NH. This park is quite small - only about 50 sites. But most are pull-thrus and each has a picnic table and a fire ring. There is some shade, a dog park, a small playground and a short walk through the woods along a babbling brook. It also has a small recreation center with a pool table, a ping-pong table and a give-and-take library. No pool, but Newfound Lake is nearby.

The pull-thru sites are short. We had to park the truck across the front of the RV. But it was adequate.



The most surprising thing about the park was the cable TV. You had to get a decoder box from the office and attach it to one TV. Some people couldn't do it, either because their RV television connectors were not accessible or because they were technically challenged. We got ours attached and were surprised to find that we had over 70 channels, most being digital and crystal clear. And there was an on-screen program directory and program information. It was, for three days, like having a satellite dish. Jett was in TV heaven.

Even more surprising was that I was handed the box with the cable gear with no deposit required. Those boxes can't be cheap, but the office didn't even ask which site I was on.

Trust. You don't get that very often on the road.

The rally was a lot of fun. It was low-key and smaller than we expected - just 8 rigs. There was a breakfast each morning and a pot-luck supper the second night which featured pork roast and slow-cooked chicken pot pie (without the crust, of course). As pot-luck dinners go, this one was near the top.

Frankly, the best thing about the rally was the people, which is a tribute to the quality of the people who are brave enough to RV in the northeast. I heard many interesting stories and got quite a few recommendations on places to visit on our trip west this fall. We even got some free musical entertainment from two very accomplished guitarists/singers.

Two more things that made this hop a pleasure: doing laundry at the [Wizards of Wash](#) laundromat and having pizza at [Pat's Pizza](#), both in Bristol NH. The laundromat wasn't fancy but the machines were great, the staff was friendly and helpful and, best of all from my perspective, there was a community 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. I put 24 pieces in place and before I knew it the laundry was dry and ready to be folded. We went to Pat's afterward, on the recommendation of the laundromat staff. I had calzone and Jett had pizza. Jett's assessment: "best pizza crust EVER." And we hit the happy hour window so I had two beers for the price of one. That is what I call a perfect laundromat date night.



Musical entertainment



Meeting/game room



Not-very-full park



Pat's pizza and calzone

Finding the Oldfields Cemetery

25 Jun 2017

I tried to find the Oldfields Cemetery in South Berwick ME on Friday. I did find it, but the "adventure" I had in locating it was a cautionary tale on the use of GPS.

My first thought was to simply Google it. Yes, Google knew of its existence (though there was some dispute over whether it was "Oldfields" or "Old Fields") and graciously offered a map showing its location, plus a route to get there. I got in my truck, map in hand, and set the GPS. It, too, knew of its existence and offered a route to it. So off I went.



Oldfields Cemetery

The problem arose when I got to Brattle St in South Berwick. Both the GPS and Google Maps treated the long driveway leading to the private home at 21 Brattle St as a piece of the public way. Well, I hope the people who lived there didn't mind me using their driveway to turn around. Lesson: the GPS can be wrong. I have learned this lesson before, but apparently need a refresher lesson from time to time.

So I wandered around the neighborhood for a while, assuming that it must be nearby (similar to what I did in Beverly last week - which I now think was a mistake). Failing to find it through visual means, I parked and thought about it for a minute. I recalled that



Weird tree

findagrave.com offers GPS coordinates for most cemeteries. I looked up the cemetery on my phone, then figured out how to enter the coordinates on my GPS (a first for me). The GPS calculated a route and told me that the cemetery was about a half mile away. As I was already about a half mile from where the GPS first said I would find the cemetery (and in the opposite direction), the net error was about a mile.

The coordinates are (43.21721, -70.80926) if you want to find it for yourself.

The cemetery was actually about a tenth of a mile down a narrow road that ended at a brook where the bridge was out. Vine Road - not Brattle St. I could find it again now, but I probably won't be going back.

It is actually a pretty spooky old cemetery. Not in great shape - lots of broken headstones and long grass. And I found only one of the 7 headstones of Jett's ancestors who are reportedly buried there (Eunice Curtis Cutts, a 5th great-grandmother). But I felt a sense of accomplishment anyway.

Somewhat unexpected was a memorial stone at the entrance paying tribute to William Chadbourne, one of Jett's 9th great-grandfathers.



Eunice Cutts headstone



Chadbourne memorial

The hidden cost of headstone hunting

2 Jul 2017

I enjoy headstone hunting for several reasons:

- It is a bit of a treasure hunt - I always feel great when I find an old headstone marking an ancestor's gravesite.
- It is esthetically pleasing - most of the old cemeteries are quite scenic.
- It is free.

Well, *almost* free. As I discovered a couple of weeks ago, there is a hidden cost to headstone hunting.

On a sunny day I wear my sunglasses which are just clip-ons for my prescription glasses. When I need to look closely at a headstone I take them off and hang them in the collar of my shirt. They are pretty secure there and if for some reason they slip out, I feel and/or hear them fall.

So I spent about 90 minutes at the Highland Cemetery in Ipswich recently. And while the day was sunny the cemetery was mostly shaded. I took my glasses off at the start and didn't put them on until I had finished walking the cemetery, which covered over an acre. Or, more to the point, I tried to put them on but they weren't there. I had lost my glasses somewhere in the acre of headstones.

I spent an additional 30 minutes retracing my route, carefully scanning the grass. Nothing.

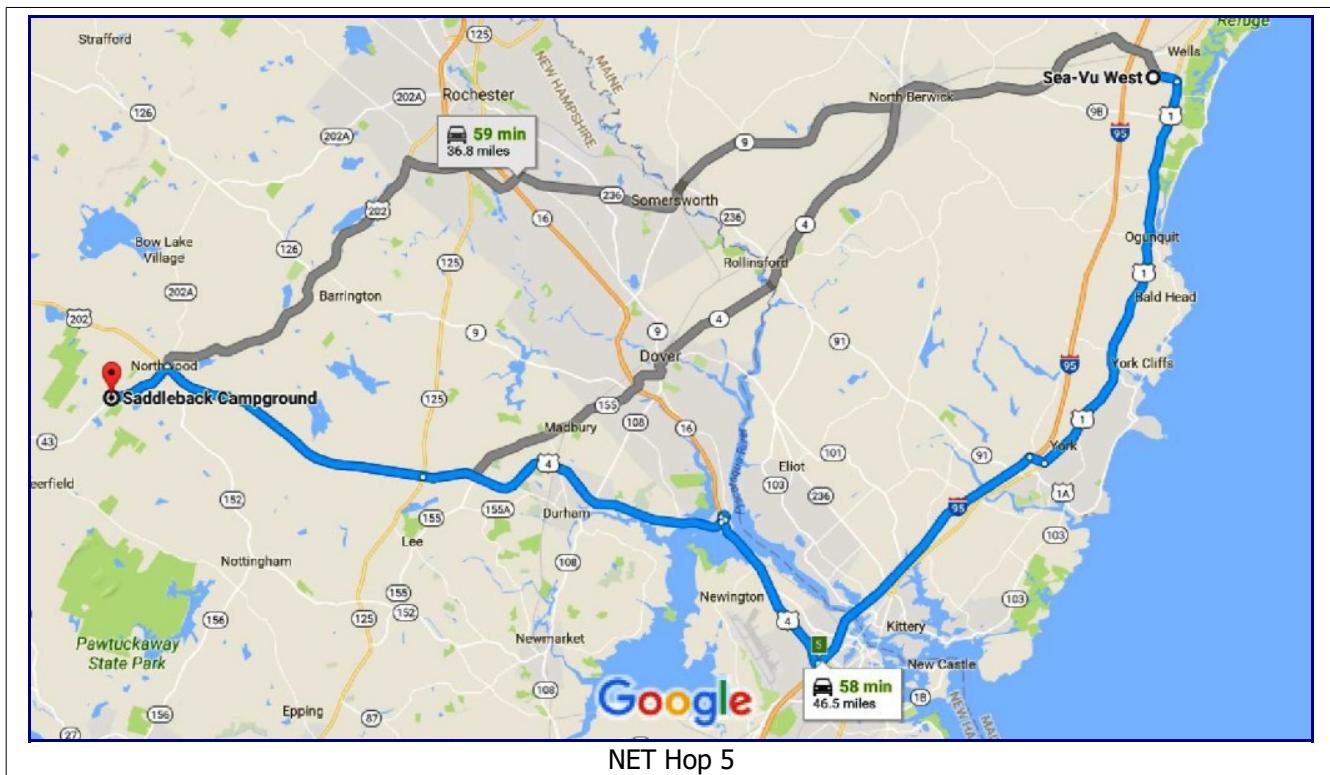
The cost of replacing the glasses: about \$400.

I will henceforth leave the glasses in the truck and use cheap non-prescription sunglasses if it is sunny.

Some lessons are learned the hard way.

NET Hop 5: Wells ME to Northwood NH

2 Jul 2017



47 miles via US-1, I-95, US 4 and NH 43. Cumulative tow miles: 362. Truck miles: 426. Cumulative truck miles: 2030.

This wasn't the shortest route, but it was the easiest route. The other routes involved some sharp turns and traversing dense residential areas. The chosen route was mostly 4-lane highway. An easy trip, except for the 5-minute downpour and the tight quarter-mile through downtown Ogunquit. Traffic was light which was a surprise considering that it was the Friday before the 4th. I guess we got out ahead of the pack.

Our home for the 8 nights in Wells was the [Sea-Vu West Premier RV Resort](#). This is one of at least 3 Sea-Vu campgrounds in Wells. The original, on US 1 in Wells, looked cramped. Sea-Vu South, just south of West, was newer and looked - as far as I could see from the road - about the same as West. West was my choice primarily because of the high ratings in [Good Sam](#).

We would rate the park a bit lower.

First the good things:

- Our site was large, shaded and backed onto greenery.
- The park was very clean and well-maintained.
- The pool was large with plenty of chairs.

The bad things:

- The office staff was unfriendly and not very helpful.
- The small dog park was at the other end of the facility, past all the park models.

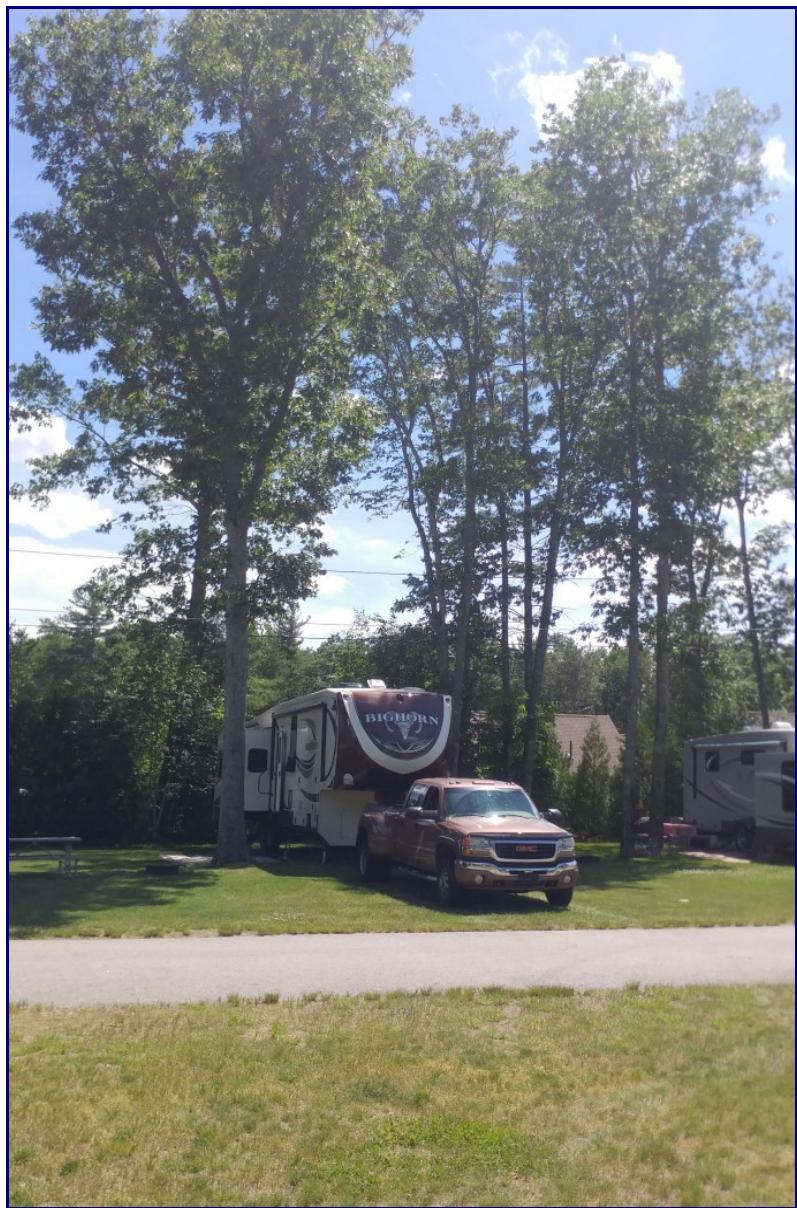
- The park was about 75% park models with seasonal residents who were not very friendly to transient campers such as us.
- The WiFi connectivity - both on the park's free WiFi and my own Verizon router - was terrible. Among the worst we have seen in 5 years of travel. I couldn't upload pictures and finally gave up on trying to do anything on the internet. Just too frustrating.
- The electricity went out for over 4 hours one day. While this was not the campground's fault, they were not very proactive about informing campers of the status. I had to contact the utility directly to find out what was going on.

The seasonal/transient tension is something we saw last year at Apple Island. Somehow the seasonal residents view transients as second-class citizens and tend to either ignore them or, worse, be rude to them. In my case I was walking Rusty to the dog park one morning and a seasonal resident was out watering his little patch of grass. Mind you, I was in the street, but Rusty was near the edge of the grass. The resident said to me "I hope your dog isn't going to piss on my grass." I swore at him under my breath and walked on. No sense getting into a physical altercation with a man armed with a water hose.

Speaking of grass, the park seems to have some odd rules about what residents can do to their property. Patios and walkways made with brick pavers were everywhere and apparently are okay. But no concrete walks and, oddly, no driveways of any kind - everyone parked on their precious grass. That struck me as very odd.

The bottom line is that I would rate this park at about 5 on a 10 scale. We won't be returning.

Maybe others feel the same. I was surprised that the transient area was only about 40% occupied on the weekend - the last weekend in June when most kids



Our site



The surprisingly empty transient area

were out of school. I think most parks would expect to be booked solid on that weekend.

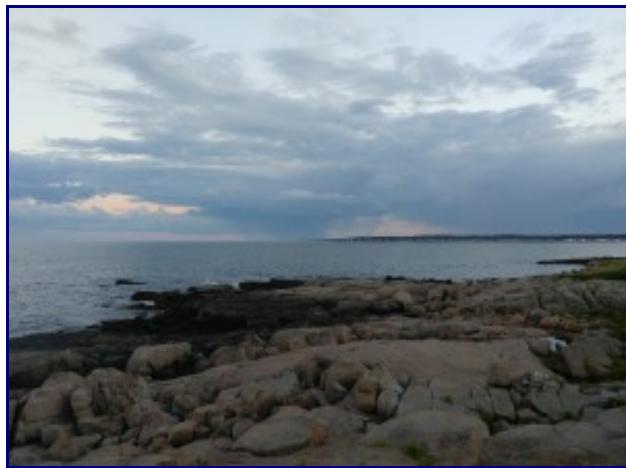
Wells ME and the Maine coast

8 Jul 2017



Sunset along Wells Beach

One of the main (Maine?) reasons for staying in [Wells](#) was to explore the area and, possibly, actually get to the beach. Unfortunately, Jett was a bit under the weather during our stay so we didn't do as much exploring as we had hoped. I did get to a couple of cemeteries and wandered about a bit on my own, but, fortunately, we were treated to a 2-hour guided tour by campground neighbors Tom and Lynda who had lived in the area their entire lives. It was a sunset tour, so while I got a very nice sunset shot near Wells Beach (the sun sets in the west, of course, so the beach was in the other direction but, trust me, it was there), most of the shots were fairly dark. But it was a wonderful tour nonetheless, featuring [Ogunquit](#), Wells Beach, [Cape Neddick Light](#) and [Dunne's Ice Cream](#).



Rocky shore at Wells

So while we didn't see as much as we planned, I saw enough to say that I like the area. It would be a good place to spend some time in the summer. Except for the water, which is friggin' frigid. If you want warm water, stick to the Gulf of Mexico.



Cape Neddick light

Dunne's Ice Cream

NET Hop 6: Northwood NH to Littleton MA

11 Jul 2017

69 miles via NH 43, NH 101, I-93, I-495 (around Boston) and MA 3A. Cumulative tow miles: 431. Truck miles: 545. Cumulative truck miles: 2575.

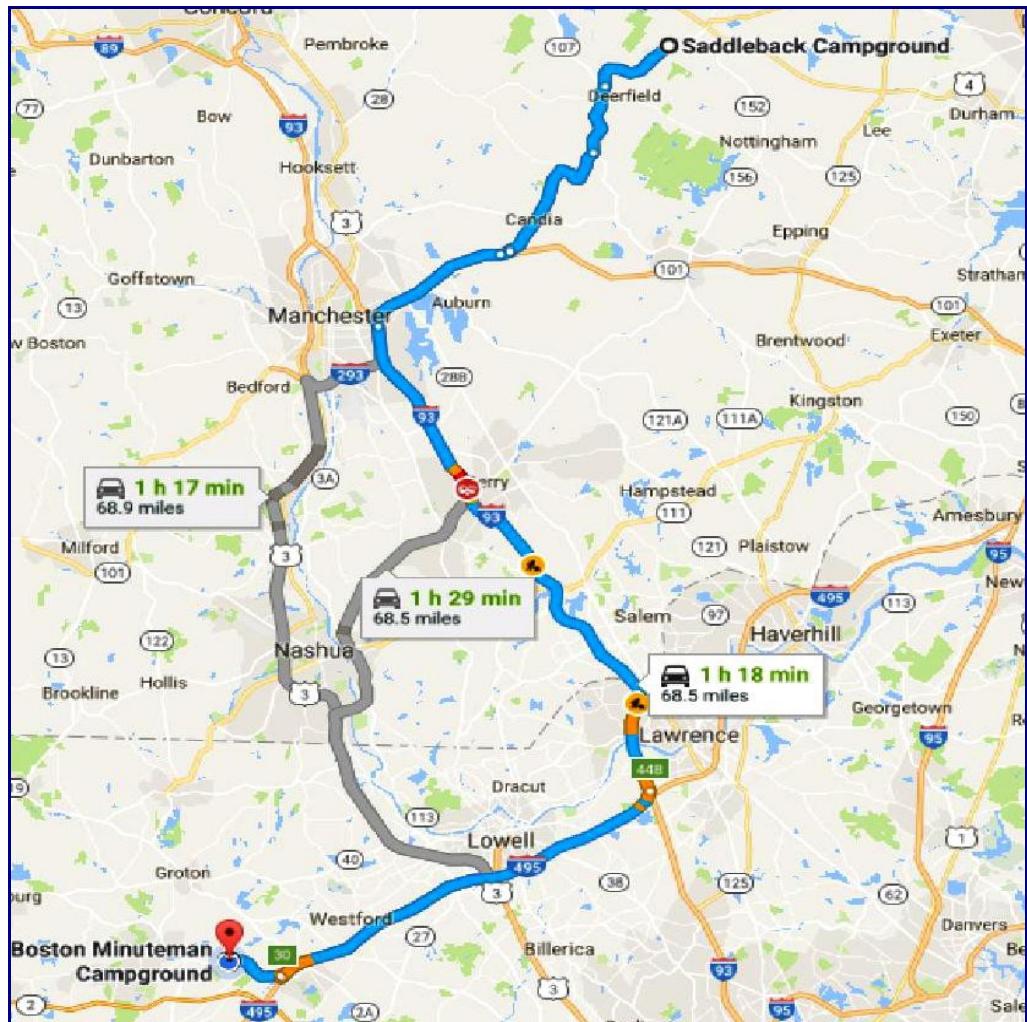
This was a very easy, quick hop. I actually expected the traffic to be brutal as I thought many people would have been ending a week-long 4th of July vacation on Sunday. But traffic was, if anything, light. No stop-and-go stretches at all. I barely had to use the brakes. A pleasure.

Our home for 9 nights in NH was the [Saddleback Campground](#) - the campground where we started our RV lifestyle 5 years ago in the summer of 2012. Then, as now, we chose the campground because it was very near the summer cottage of Jett's sister. It was a very adequate first campground, but we had nothing to compare it to. We now can compare it to dozens of other campgrounds.

It has changed very little in 5 years. The things we liked then - the solitude, the cute pond, the friendly hosts (even though the hosts are different now than they were then) - are still the things we like now. The things we didn't like much then - the difficult, sometimes cramped, sites, the lack of sewer service on most sites and very limited TV antenna reception - are still the things we don't like much now. In 2012 we paid for cable TV, but that wasn't an option this time, so we survived mostly by watching DVDs.

Unlike our 2012 site which had limited a sewer hookup (gray water only), we had no sewer hookup at all this time. We survived quite well without it, getting a pumpout just before we departed. The pumpout extracted over 100 gallons of sewage, but as our total tank capacity is 200 gallons, we weren't pushing it. This was a surprise as I really thought a week would be our limit, but we made it 9 days without difficulty.

The weather, while not perfect, was better than we have seen for any week so far this summer. Several downpours and thunder interrupted the otherwise sunny and warm weather (though I still had to don a jacket most mornings). Spending time with Jett's family on Lucas Pond was a joy, as always. I will post those photos separately.





Our site, across the pond



The pond



Cutting the Make-a-Wish cake

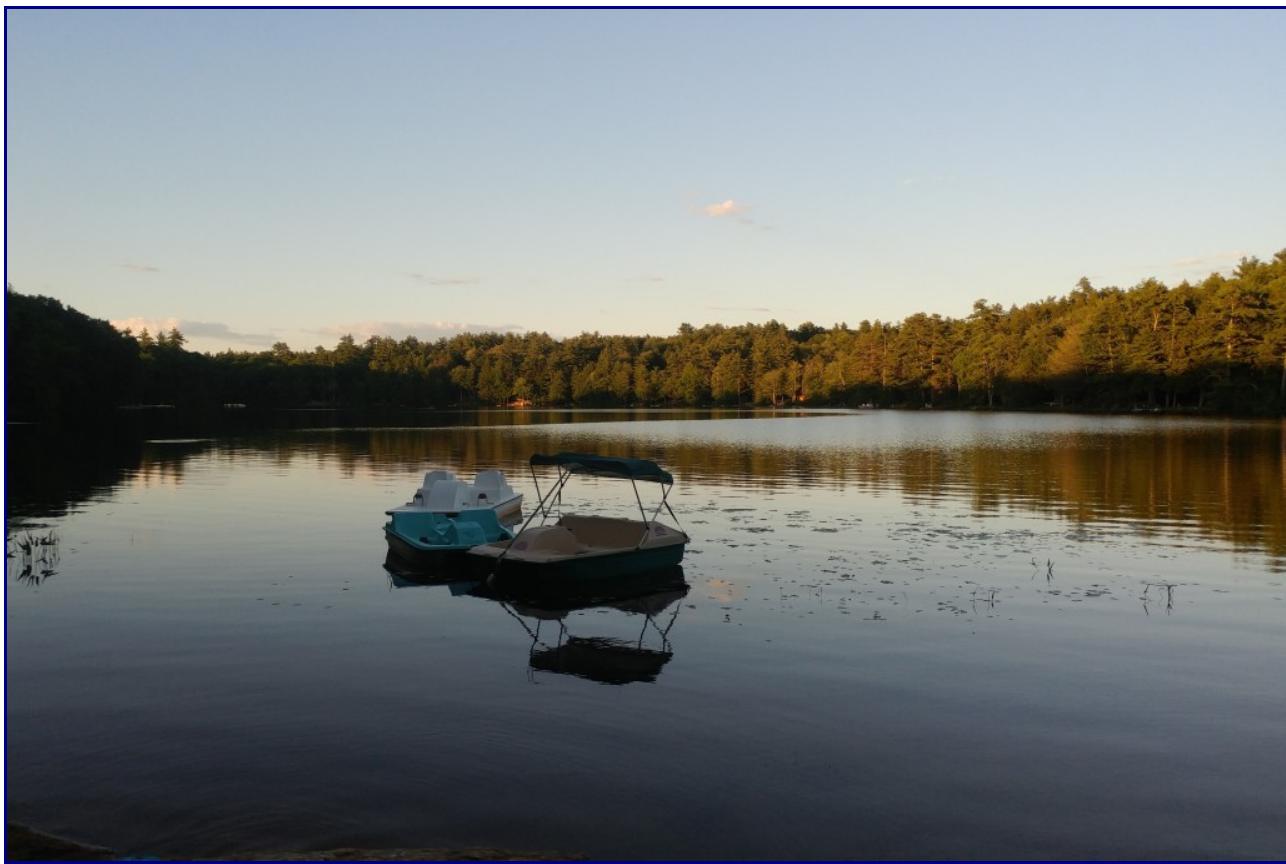


The donated trailer

The 4th with family

16 Jul 2017

The New England weather this summer has been... mixed. No, that is too kind. It has been crappy. It has been wet and it has been cold. The days with no rain at all have been scarce. We set a "record low high" on July 14 with a high of 66. Crappy.



Lucas Pond

But, between the raindrops, we managed to have a pretty good 4th of July at Lucas Pond, Northwood NH, with Jett's family. We ate a lot a good food. And a fair amount of other food, too. The grills were running Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday (the 4th). Hamburgers, hot dogs, steak tips, marinated chicken breasts. Cole slaw, potato salad, potato chips and a variety of potluck side dishes. No one went hungry.

Coming all the way from VA were Jett's sons, Joshua and Devin, plus their boys, Patrick (visiting from CA) and Zachary. Joining them were cousins Chance (with Emily and their newborn daughter), Riley and Jacob. Jett's sisters and her nieces. A full house.



Sybil, Christine and Zachary

Apparently concerned that we hadn't eaten enough, Devin treated us all to a lobster fest on the 4th, followed by a trip to [Johnson's](#) for ice cream (where the kiddie size would feed a classroom).

While there, niece Allison was notified of the birth of her first grandchild in GA. I got a picture of her getting her first ever (with many to follow) photos of her grandchild. Sweet moment.



Allison's first grandchild photo



Jimmy with Briella



Devin expounding



Jett with Rusty



Lobsterfest toast



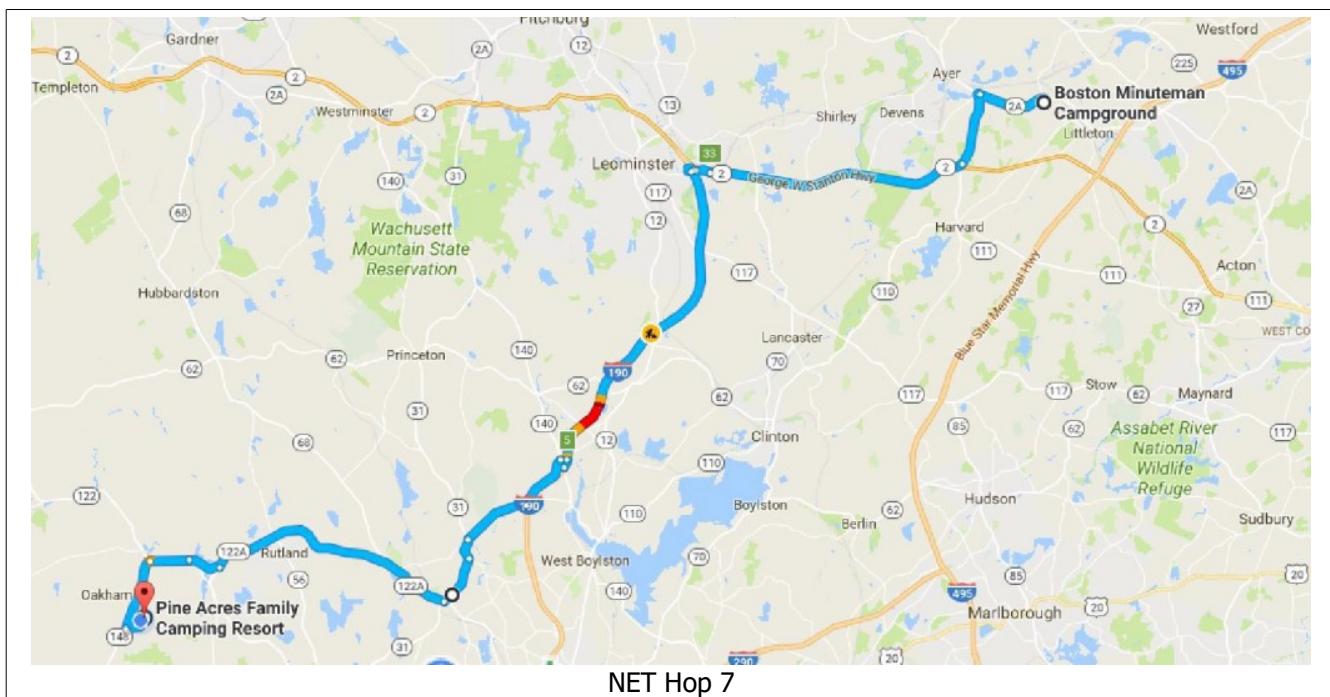
Zachary, Patrick and Josh

NET Hop 7: Littleton MA to Oakham MA

21 Jul 2017

40 miles via MA 2A, MA 2, I-190, MA 31, MA 122A and MA 148. Cumulative tow miles: 471. Truck miles: 461. Cumulative truck miles: 3036.

We have been to [Pine Acres Family Campground](#) several times. We have stayed at [Boston Minuteman Campground](#) many times. But we have never traveled directly from Minuteman to Pine Acres, so the route was new. And even though it was a short trip - just 40 miles - it was long enough to have a disagreement between Google and our GPS. Worse, Google and GPS had completely different names for the street we were supposed



to turn on after exiting I-190. I was confused but remembered that it was a quick left, so I took the one that seemed right and, fortunately, was correct. Jett was following in the Yaris, so I couldn't blame a navigation error on her. It was all on me. Pressure.

This is the last hop in the New England Tour (NET). But I will defer a wrapup until the "tour" is truly over - when we leave on August 1.

We spent 9 days at Minuteman and it remains one of our favorite places. We regret not booking a longer stay. One of the regrets was that we got to [Kimball Farm](#) just once for ice cream and not at all for dinner. I had a special flavor - Peanut Butter Butterfinger. Yes, it was as good as it sounds. But their seafood is always a treat and we didn't get any this time around. Sad.

Jett's sisters once again came for a visit and the highlight (other than the cutthroat Hand, Knee and Foot card games) was a Sunday brunch at the [Westford Regency](#). Their brunch isn't cheap but it is first-rate. I had some very fresh lox and a couple of slices of to-die-for ham. I won't mention all the other items, but I will say that it was not a good day for my weight loss goals.

Our site (80) was great, except for backing in. The large rock claimed both caps on our sewer line storage pipe. No major problem, but a "ding" for sure. I will have to figure out a good way to repair the damage.

Speaking of damage, I applied my engineering intellect to the problem of the "map basement" support strut, the problem being that the top end of the strut was pulling out of the relatively soft door panel. I decided that I needed to reinforce what the screws were going into, so I got a metal plate, drilled 3 holes, screwed the plate into the door, then screwed the strut into the plate. Works like a charm. So far.





Site 80

A visit from Liliani

26 Jul 2017

I finally got to spend some time with my granddaughter, Liliani, on Saturday. It has been 10 months since I last saw her, which is certainly not because I didn't want to see her; it was a negative consequence of our decision to wander around New England this summer. It wasn't until we got to Littleton that we were within an hour of her and the timing for that stay just didn't work. But Oakham is just 30 minutes from her home, so we finally got together.

I just about didn't recognize her. She has grown about 6 inches in those 10 months. And cut her hair. She is now a young woman. But still very sweet, very shy. She is always a pleasure to have around. Which is more than can be said for many 11-year-olds.

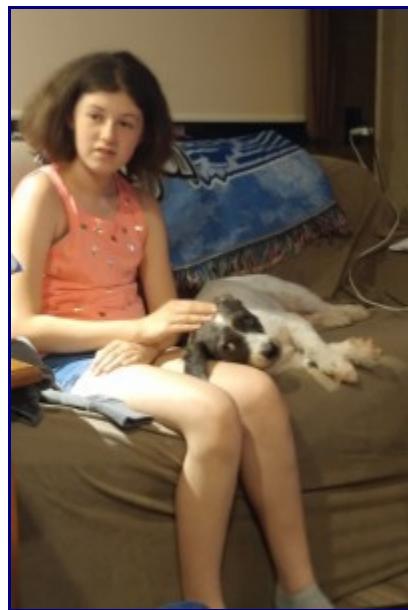
We didn't do anything super exciting. We went to the pool, played miniature golf, wandered around the campground, had a chicken tender lunch, dinner at the [Black & White Grille](#) and a McDonald's breakfast. Jett taught her a new card game. Quiet pleasures.



Swimming



Playing mini-golf



With Rusty



In a super-sized chair



Liliani

Second Trip West (STW) preview

28 Jul 2017

We are four days away from embarking on our second cross-country trip. This one will, like the first, include Tillamook OR as a stop, but, unlike the first trip (the Great Trip West or GTW), this time Tillamook will be the final destination. The route is designed to hit many of the states that we have not yet visited: Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and Washington - 12 states, leaving just 4 of the lower 48 unvisited. The towing distance will be nearly 4200 miles over 22 hops and 60 days.

The trip is organized into 3 segments.

STW Segment 1



The first segment is from Oakham MA to Madison WI. About 1400 miles over 7 hops and 27 days. Things we will see and do include:

- Genealogical research in the Albany area.
- A short visit to the beautiful [Thousand Islands](#) region of upstate New York.
- Three days in the Niagara Falls area.
- Two days near Mayfield OH where I hope to find some ancestor headstones.
- A few days in the Detroit area where, among other things, we will visit [Greenfield Village](#).
- Two days near the [Indiana Dunes](#).
- Eight days in my hometown, Madison WI. We will attend my 50th high school reunion (yes, I am that old), see some relatives and friends and probably spend a day in the [Wisconsin Dells](#).

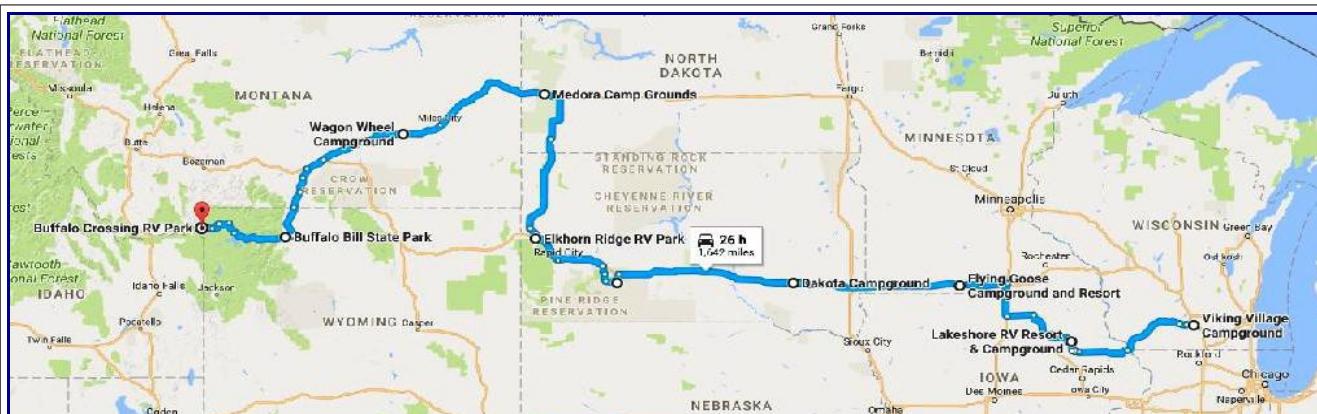
STW Segment 2

About 1650 miles from Madison WI to West Yellowstone MT over 9 hops and 20 days. Highlights:

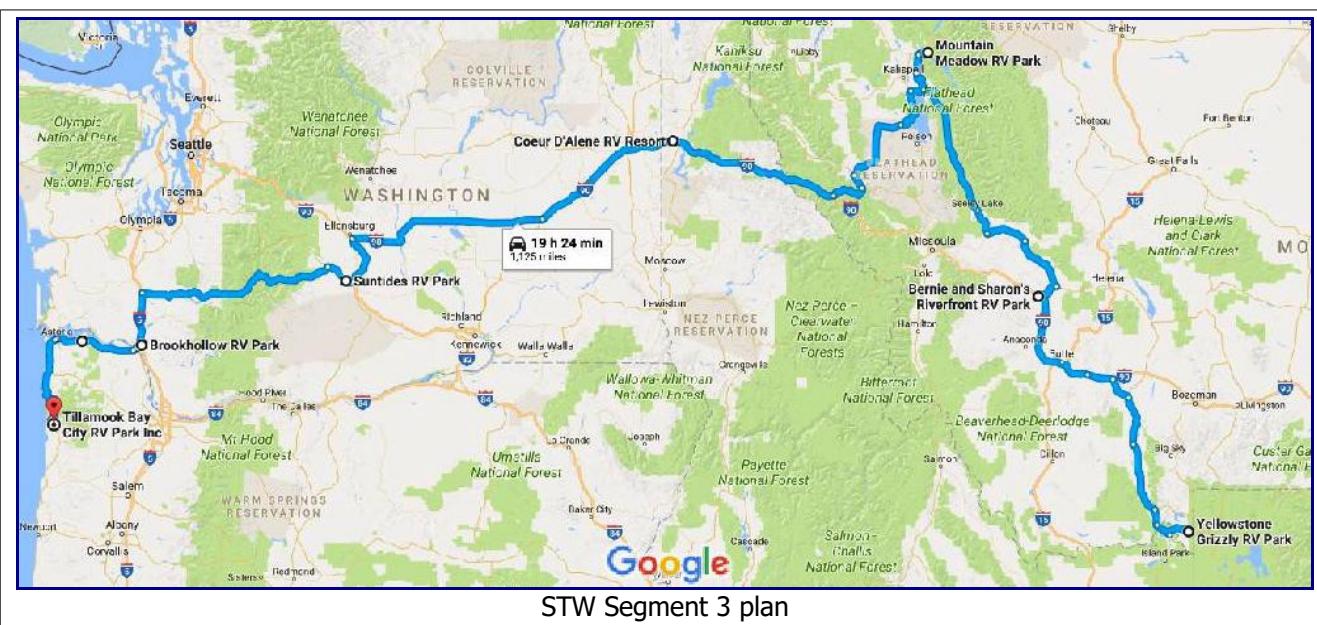
- A visit to the [Field of Dreams movie site](#) in Iowa.

- A possible side trip to New Ulm MN, the setting of [New in Town](#), one of Jett's favorite movies. However, the movie was not actually filmed there, so it probably won't happen.
- [Badlands National Park](#).
- [Mount Rushmore National Monument](#).
- Sturgis SD, home of the nation's greatest biker rally.
- [Theodore Roosevelt National Park](#).
- [Yellowstone National Park](#).

Obviously, this segment is heavy on national parks. These are all on our "bucket list" of national parks we want to see.



STW Segment 3



The third and final segment of the STW is about 1100 miles over 6 hops and 13 days. Highlights:

- [Glacier National Park](#).

- Coeur d'Alene ID. We are told that this is a charming town.
- [Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument](#).
- Tillamook. Cheese and family. We will get to meet my sister's first grandchild.

It will be an interesting trip full of sights we have never seen. It will be a lot of driving, with a 13-year-old truck. But the truck has been operating beautifully and it should do fine. I will keep my fingers crossed and my camera ready.

Transponder use

31 Jul 2017

We have had a transponder, used to pay tolls on the Massachusetts Turnpike and other MA toll roads, for nearly 10 years. Over time the region in which the transponder can be used has grown and now covers most of the northeast. We can now automatically pay tolls when driving the Yaris anywhere between Massachusetts and Florida. We used it this summer in NH and ME, too.

But we could never legally use it for the truck. The tolls everywhere are different for a Yaris and a GMC diesel dually - dramatically different in some cases, as we discovered this summer in Maine. We drove the truck over a 12-mile segment of the Maine Turnpike and paid \$7.50 rather than the \$3.00 auto rate. I thought this was outrageous - paying 2.5 times as much just because the truck has 2 extra tires.

But there is a convenience factor, for sure. And for that reason I decided to get a transponder for the truck. Obtaining the device was a breeze, handled by the friendly staff at the E-ZPass office. And I learned something that makes the outrageous tolls somewhat less outrageous: the toll is the same when the truck is towing the 5th wheel. That rule applies anywhere in MA, NH and ME, so I could have hauled the rig up the same 12-mile segment in Maine for the same \$7.50 toll.

However, that does not apply outside of MA, NH and ME. We are about to embark on a journey that will take us west, potentially along tollroads in NY, OH, IN and IL. I don't know what the tolls will be there. I am hoping that those states still have cash lanes. If they don't then I am going to find out the hard way - by getting a bill in the mail - how expensive those states are.

NET wrapup

31 Jul 2017

Today is the last day of the New England Tour (NET). Time to look back.

By the numbers: 88 days in 8 different campgrounds. Towing miles: 471 over 7 hops. Cumulative truck miles: 4293. Campground fees: approximately \$5,500 (about \$62.50 per night). Yes, RV campsites in New England are expensive.

Highlights:

- Seeing family. The NET was spectacularly successful in this respect. We saw brothers, sisters, sons, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and various other relatives. Hardly a weekend went by where we didn't see family.
- Playing softball. Though I could not commit to a team due to my need to leave Aug 1, I was able to play a "fill in" role on several teams, performing very well. And saw Big Papi one day.

- Finding headstones. While most visits to cemeteries were failures, I had some very satisfying successes: Jett's paternal grandmother, a pair of great-grandparents, some of Jett's colonial relatives, including some of her *Mayflower* ancestors and a bunch of others. On my side of the ledger, I found one of my most famous ancestors, [Gov John Webster](#) of CT, plus some of my ancestors who founded Hartford CT and Woburn MA.
- Catching up with old friends.
- Attending the Escapees Chapter 3 rally at Newfound Lake NH.
- [Pilgrim Hall](#) in Plymouth MA.

Lowlights:

- Cold, wet weather. May and most of June were unseasonably chilly and very wet. July was better, but we still had the heat on several nights and had one night toward the end of July where we could see our breath. There was very little "beach weather."
- The annoying seasonal residents at [Sea-Vu West](#) in Wells ME. The people there had a very strong dislike of transients like us. Well, we formed a very strong dislike of both this campground and its residents. There is 0% chance that we will ever go back there.
- Health. I was fine, but Jett suffered through a pinched nerve and other physical issues that sucked the fun out of many of her days. Some relatives also had significant health issues. Tough to get old.



