



OurWanderYears 2018

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Cover photo: Arriving at our new home, Cypress Trail RV Resort, Ft Myers FL, November 2018.

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Relatively cold

15 Jan 2018

January 2017 was beautiful in southwest Florida. Every day in the mid-80s, sunshine, light breezes. Absolutely dreamy.

January 2018 has seen a few of those days, but has also seen rain, wind and freeze warnings. Nothing dreamy about this January.

It is 48 right now - very cold for south Florida. Still, it is only relatively cold. I sympathize with all my friends back north who are dealing with actual cold (it is 17 and snowing in Boston). I don't miss those near-zero temperatures or the white precipitation.

But I would like to see more 80s.

Our next cruise adventure

17 Jan 2018

Jett yesterday: "How did we start with a 7-day cruise and end up with a 27-day cruise?"

Yes, we booked a 27-day cruise yesterday, characterized by Jett as "the cruise of a lifetime." And since we had already blown our "budget" by choosing to go at all, we decided that we might as well go in comfort and booked a Signature Suite. We will have nearly 4 full weeks cruising, first, the Atlantic and then 16 ports in 8 countries in the Mediterranean. We will get to check some very fascinating places off of our bucket lists: Lisbon, Barcelona, Marseille, Monte Carlo,



Florence, Rome (maybe), Naples, Corfu, Dubrovnik and, most importantly, Venice. We will stay a total of 3 nights in Venice, then fly home. Total trip duration: 30 days.

The original plan was to cruise for 7 nights in the Caribbean. Then we started thinking how nice it would be to do back-to-back 7 night cruises on the same ship (Jett always liked the idea of waving goodbye to the other passengers while we stayed on board). Then, since we were talking about 14 nights I started looking at Panama Canal cruises. And because my sister has always spoken highly of transatlantic cruises, I took a peek at the 12- to 14-day cruises to Europe. And then I saw the 27-day cruise to Venice...

Damn! How cool would that be, to board the ship in Florida and disembark in Venice? Answer: very, very cool.

So, by making a deal with myself to actually work this summer, to offset some of the cost, I succumbed to the temptation.

A 27-day cruise! Can't wait!

Farewell to the Yaris

24 Jan 2018

We bought the Yaris in Nov 2013, shortly after we arrived in Ft Myers for our first Florida winter. It had become obvious that Jett was not comfortable driving the truck, so another vehicle was necessary. We considered leasing and even renting, but decided that purchasing would be the most economical option.

We had the Yaris transported north and back south again in 2014 and 2016 (we didn't come south in 2015). We transported it north one last time in April 2017, used it during our summer in New England and left it with Jett's niece when we embarked on our trip west. We decided, early last fall, to sell it to her. The transaction was completed in Dec 2017.

So we owned it for just over 4 years. It served us well. It never had a major mechanical problem and got over 35 mpg. Jett loved to drive it. It was a pleasure to own and served us well.

I suspect that we will miss it. We are renting a brand new Nissan Versa for 3 months this winter. It is okay, but it not as much fun to drive as the Yaris. We may buy another car next year.

Probably a Yaris.



Yaris

Retrospective on our 2017 travel experiences

26 Jan 2018

We traveled a LOT in 2017. I have documented our day-to-day experiences under the labels of "Third Trip North" (TTN), "New England Tour" (NET), "Second Trip West" (STW) and "Second Trip East" (STE). From the time we left Florida (14 Apr 2017) to the time we returned (20 Nov 2017) - 220 days - the longest we stayed in any one place was 3 weeks in Plymouth MA. We towed the RV 11,426 miles and stayed at 64 different RV parks where we spent about \$11,700 in campground fees. We visited 16 states that we had never been to previously, completing our lower-48 map. We put just over 20,000 miles on the truck.

A LOT of travel.

Now, two months after completing the journey, I want to reflect on what we did. I particularly want to identify the highlights and lowlights. Fortunately, there are many more highlights than lowlights. It was a great 7 months of travel.

In chronological order, some of the more memorable highlights were:

- TTN:
 - The KOA Savannah South campground with its huge population of geese. It was like living in a zoo. A fun zoo.
 - Seeing Savannah again.
 - Visiting family in VA.
- NET:
 - Visiting family in Plymouth. In particular, getting to meet nephew Brad's wife and children was a treat.
 - Doing some great genealogical research in Plymouth MA. Pilgrim Hall was awesome!
 - Having Jett's sisters visit us several times in several places during the NET.
 - 11 nights at Normandy Farms Campground in Foxboro MA. A great, great campground.
 - Wandering around the quaint shops of Newburyport MA.
 - The Escapees Chapter 3 Rally at Newfound Lake NH. The rally was smaller than we expected, but spending time with other Escapees is always fun.
 - Being treated to a 2-hour guided tour of the Wells ME region by a couple that we met at the campground.
 - The family 4th of July (with lobsterfest) at Lucas Pond in Northwood NH.
 - Participating in the Make-a-Wish festivities at Saddleback Campground.
 - Playing some EMASS Senior Softball League games and seeing David Ortiz ("Big Papi") at one of them.
 - Visiting some fascinating cemeteries in Amherst and Springfield MA.
- STW:
 - Visiting some of Jett's childhood homes and actually digging into death records in Watervliet NY.
 - The beautiful campsite on the banks of the Mohawk River.
 - Boldt Castle.

- The *Maid of the Mist* at Niagara Falls.
- Greenfield Village in Dearborn MI.
- Visiting American Jewelry and Loan, home of *Hardcore Pawn* TV series. Tacky and smaller than we expected, but still great to see.
- My 50th high school reunion in Madison WI. It was great to catch up with old friends. But how did they get to be so old?
- Visiting some of my ancestors' gravesites in WI.
- The *Field of Dreams* baseball field.
- Badlands National Park.
- Wall Drug and the Wounded Knee Museum in Wall SD. Wall Drug lived up to the hype and the museum was surprisingly moving.
- Mount Rushmore National Monument.
- Deadwood SD.
- Teddy Roosevelt National Park.
- Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.
- Yellowstone National Park. Seeing Old Faithful was a treat, but the biggest highlight was being stopped by a herd of about 300 bison.
- Mount St Helens.
- Seeing my sister and brother-in-law in Tillamook OR. Great people, wonderful town.
- STE:
 - Catfish Junction RV Park and the Snake River.
 - Salt Lake City and Temple Square. I feel I have a much better understanding of the Mormon faith after the visit.
 - Truck problems in Salina UT. Yes, I am including this as a highlight because the truck failure resulting in very few real problems for us and in fact gave us a couple of very nice, unexpected days at a tiny RV park in Salina. I think we were extremely fortunate in where this problem appeared and I have to feel good about that.
 - Arches National Park, Canyonlands National Park and Moab UT. This area is amazingly beautiful.
 - Completing our 48-state map in KS.
 - Choctaw KOA and Casino. One of the best RV parks that we have seen anywhere and a first-rate casino.
 - Visiting family in Austin TX.
 - Seeing, first-hand, the devastation of Hurricane Harvey in Rockport TX.
 - The Johnson Space Center in Houston. Great tour, great museum.
 - New Orleans. I finally got to see the Big Easy and it didn't disappoint.
 - Silver Slip Casino and Beachfront RV Campground in Waveland MS. This is a very nice casino and a wonderful, inexpensive campground.
 - The Gulf Shores AL area. Beautiful beaches, good restaurants.
 - The Port St Joe area of Florida. Interesting restaurants and shops, beautiful beaches. Laid-back attitudes.

Lowlights:

- TTN:
 - Putting a small dent into the truck's gate by backing into the pin while at KOA Savannah South.
 - The weather in April and May. We barely missed the closing of I-95 due to flooding but had to endure soggy grounds and cold, wet weather all the way north and to the end of our stay in Plymouth MA. It was a miserable period of weather.
 - Puncturing the front basement door while hitching up at Lakewood Camping Resort in Myrtle Beach. Lesson: either back in straighter or put the gate up before completing the hitch.
 - The Bear Creek Campground at Lake Compounce. The campground was fine, but being the only campers was downright spooky.
- STW:
 - The winding, undulating roads in upstate NY. Jett's stomach hated them.
 - The ridiculously overpriced site at Niagara Falls KOA.
 - Having the Google Maps miss a low bridge south of Buffalo, resulting in a 10-mile detour.
 - The rustic site (and overall creepiness) at the Woodside Lake Park, Streetsboro OH.
 - The God-awful trip from MI to WI via downtown Chicago.
 - The Corn Palace and Mitchell SD in general. A complete waste of time.
 - Putting a dent in the RV when I foolishly tried to squeeze it into a parking place at Yellowstone National Park.
 - The snowfall and freezing temperatures at West Yellowstone.
 - Breaking a valve stem while setting up in Ennis MT and almost losing a tire the next day while traveling on the interstate.
 - Missing out on Glacier National Park due to forest fires.
 - Coeur d'Alene. I feel bad listing this as a lowlight as it is a very nice little town, but my expectations were very high and I didn't see anything to justify the anticipation.
 - Failing to meet up with my nephews and niece in Tillamook.
- STE:
 - Truck problems in Salina UT, making it necessary to skip Bryce National Park, Zion National Park and Monument Valley.
 - The 200-mile detour to avoid the 11,000 foot pass on I-70. I couldn't get the courage to attempt it, with the truck still questionable and the weather very iffy (possible snowfall). We missed out on Denver, too.
 - Brownville TX and the Rio Grande Valley region. I really thought that I would like this area, but it fell flat. The Breeze Lake Campground in Brownsville was a trainwreck.

Truck maintenance nightmares – 1 of 2

2 Feb 2018

So I took my truck to [DeVoe Buick GMC](#) of Naples on Wednesday with a short list of things that needed attention:

1. Oil change.
2. Check the brakes.
3. Diagnose and, possibly, fix the shimmy that I feel at highway speeds.

I dropped the truck off at 11 am and got no phone call that afternoon. I called an hour before closing (6 pm) to find out what was going on and was told that there was "definitely a problem with the right front steering linkage" but would have to have another technician verify that in the morning. So they kept the truck overnight.

Then I realized that my softball gear was in the truck and I needed it for a 10 am game on Thursday.

So Thursday, 8 am, I am at the dealership to collect my gear. The service advisor took me back to the truck where the technician was looking at the right front tire and steering linkage. We had a brief conversation about the steering, including a recitation of the work that had been done in 2016 to get the front end aligned. His conclusion was that there was nothing wrong with the steering linkage, that the little bit of give in the linkage was normal and that all I needed was a new tire. I declined to get the tire, so they promised to do the oil change and the brake inspection and call me when the truck was ready.

No call by 2 pm, so I called DeVoe. The service advisor was "with a customer" so I left a message asking him to call me ASAP.

4 pm and still no call. I called again, asked to speak to the service manager. Got a voicemail. Left a message that if I didn't hear from him by 4:30 I would be coming to the dealership to talk to them in person.

4:30 pm I finally get a call telling me that the truck is ready. Jett and I drive over. The service advisor tells me that the brakes are fine and that, other than the recommendation that the tire be replaced, everything else is fine too. That was after they did their "27 point inspection." Total cost for its 28-hour stay at the dealership: \$89.10.

As I start the vehicle, the "change fuel filter" message pops up on the dash. Question in my head: the "27 point inspection" didn't include starting the engine? Annoying, but not a big deal.

On the way out of the dealership parking lot, the service advisor happens to be crossing the driveway. He looks at me coming towards him, flags me down and says - I am not making this up - "your tire is leaning."

I didn't know quite what he meant, so I get out, walk to where he is standing about 20 feet in front of the truck. He points at my right front tire which was, indeed, "leaning" - it had a tilt that was visible to the naked eye.

28 hours in the dealership and they couldn't diagnose a "leaning tire" which is obviously a steering linkage problem.

Incredible.

Needless to say, I will not return there to get my "leaning tire" fixed.

Truck maintenance nightmares – 2 of 2

3 Feb 2018

After my "adventures" at DeVoe Buick GMC on Wednesday and Thursday I decided that I had better get the bad tires replaced ASAP. So on Friday I drove over to the [Goodyear Collier Care Center](#) just a few miles from our park. The instructions, though not trivial, were clear:

1. Put two new Goodyear Wrangler tires on the inner rear and move the inner rear tires to the outer rear.
2. Put the spare tire on the right front and make the right front tire (which was unevenly worn but had only about 20,000 miles of use) the spare.

Due to reasons which even now I don't fully understand, I was informed that to move the inner rear tires to the outer rear would be an additional \$80. So I simplified the instructions: put the new tires on the outer rear.

I got the truck back 2 hours later and drove home without inspecting the work. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the two new tires were put on the right front and the right outer rear. The spare had not been touched. I immediately returned and had a spirited discussion with the customer service guy who told me that the spare couldn't be the original because he had *personally* seen it taken down. I told him that I knew my spare tire when I saw it and it hadn't been touched. I got pretty heated because not only had they not done as I requested, they were now calling me a liar. After I calmed down I told them to:

1. Take the spare and put it on the right front.
2. Take the new tire from the right front and put it on the left outer rear.
3. Take the left outer rear tire and make it the spare.

Another hour passed and I got the truck back, no additional charge. But this time I inspected the work. Once again they had screwed up: the left outer rear and right front tires had been swapped; the spare - AGAIN - was untouched.

This time I spoke to the manager. I told him that I had now TWICE requested that the spare be mounted as the right front tire and both times my request had been ignored or misunderstood. I resisted the urge to draw him a picture, primarily because the instructions were now as simple as could be:

1. Swap the right front and spare.

Another 30 minutes go by and I get the truck back a third time. The spare was now indeed on the right front. Yay! But the spare, rather than being the tire that had been on the right front was now the original right front tire - the unevenly worn one that had been mistakenly discarded in the first round. I once again spoke to the manager, asking why, oh why, was the right front tire discarded and the original worn tire now being used as a spare? I couldn't really complain about that because that was my original plan, but I was curious. He told me that the other tire was too old (4 years) to be used and had damage to the sidewall. He said digging the original tire out of the discard pile was the best option for the spare.

I accepted his explanation and finally - 5 hours after starting my quest for 2 new tires - went home.

But on the way home the thought occurred to me: the tire that wasn't good enough to be used as a spare was good enough to mount as the right front? Because they were going to send me home with that tire mounted had I not objected.

After 3 days of truck maintenance nightmares I had to wonder if these two "service" centers weren't conspiring to drive me insane.

Another fine (and very expensive) mess

9 Feb 2018

When we paid up front for our winter RV site in Florida I expected that our out-of-pocket expenses would be relatively low for several months. Well, we killed that thought last month when we booked our very expensive April cruise, justifiable as a "bucket list" item. Now I am facing a huge truck repair bill - probably around \$2,500.

Yes, I took the truck to another dealer, asking them to take a look at my "leaning tire." The guy at the Goodyear shop had estimated that I needed about \$800 in parts, so I was braced for a \$1,200 to \$1,500 estimate. But I was told by the GMC dealer that the problem was not limited to the right front tire; the left front tire was leaning as well. Also, the steering gear box was leaking and needed to be replaced. In short, I needed to pretty much replace the entire steering linkage. Estimated cost: \$2,100. Plus tax. Plus, I suspect, about \$100 for another alignment.

I have to do it. Just as there was no good alternative to replacing the head gasket 18 months ago, there is no good alternative to making repairs to the steering now. We need a tow vehicle and a new one is over \$60,000. Even a used one is probably \$35,000. Trade-in for the truck in it's current condition is probably less than \$10,000.

Gotta do it.

And I need to find a summer job.

Green water

18 Feb 2018

We have been noticing, for several months, that our water had a greenish tint. Sometimes it was barely noticeable and other times it looked like green tea. I tried several times to identify the source of the green and tried to compare water coming out of the tap with water coming from the ground, where we connect our water hose. I couldn't reach a firm conclusion. Until about a week ago.

One morning last week the water was particularly green, so I did the water test - a glass of water from the tap and a glass of water directly from the water supply, side-by-side in the sun. This time it was pretty obvious that the water source was clear and the tap water was green. The problem was in the internal pipes of my RV.

The plan was to, first, replace the water hose and, second, to flush the internal water lines with a sanitizer - a process similar to winterizing the lines. So I ran off to get the necessary tools and supplies. The first step was to replace the hose. Easy enough to do, but I was shocked at what came out - a dark green stream of water that actually stained the concrete. Shocking! We were drinking this crud! I have to assume that it was due to a benign



Green stain

algae as it hadn't made us ill. But it was disgusting!

Replacing the hose was trivial. Flushing and sanitizing the lines was more difficult because I had to use a hand pump. But in an hour or so the job was done and we once again had colorless drinking water.

Lingering effects of Hurricane Irma

10 Mar 2018

When we arrived at Paradise Pointe RV Resort in November, some 3 months after Hurricane Irma (Sept 16, 2017), we saw major damage to trees, along with some lesser damage to structures. Within a month most of the trees had been trimmed and the debris had been removed. I thought that was the end of the cleanup.

But I was wrong. In February - six months after Irma had passed through - there was a second round of cleanup. Apparently a number of trees had been damaged at the root level and a tree expert had determined that they would not survive. So a second round of tree cutting - not just trimming but complete tree removal - was undertaken. Once again the streets in the park were lined with arboreal debris. Some of the streets began to resemble the plains of west Texas. We are told that new trees will be planted to replace the ones that were removed.

Hasn't happened yet.



Yet another round of cleanup

Our plans for summer 2018

16 Mar 2018

We have booked a site for the summer season: [Lamb City Campground](#) in Phillipston MA. This location is a bit further west than we would like - about an hour to North Andover and nearly an hour to Worcester - but it is close to Uncle Ray's summer cabin in New Salem MA. It is also affordable - about half the price of any site we could get closer to Boston - and is highly rated.

Unlike last year, we expect to spend the entire summer in MA. We might make a weekend trip somewhere, but mostly we will just reside in Phillipston. Because of this relative stability, I have signed up for summer softball.

I intend to look for a part-time job, too. We have spent a LOT of money over the past 12 months, including the money we have spent on the April cruise that we have not yet taken, so putting a few bucks back in the coffers sounds like a good idea. We will be close enough to NH for me to look for a job up there, which will save me the hassle of filing MA state taxes next year.

Since we sold the Yaris in December, we might have to buy a small, inexpensive car that we will probably just keep until we leave.

We will be in MA until Labor Day, at a minimum, but might stay longer. Maybe into October. We'll see.

We have also made plans for the trip north and where we will stay next winter in Florida. I will tell you about those plans soon.

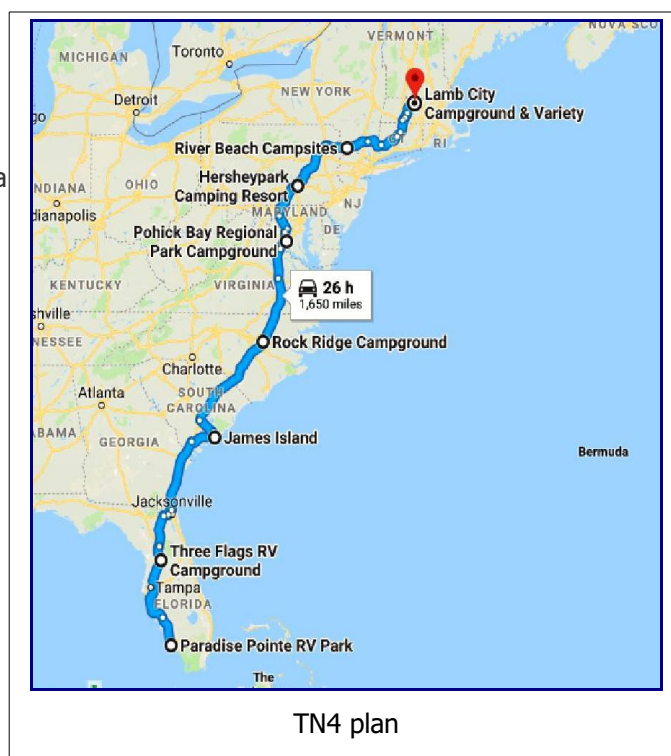
TN4 preview

23 Mar 2018

Our Fourth Trip North (TN4) is not going to be very interesting. It will be a quick trip - 1650 miles in 11 days and 7 hops - necessitated by our need to get to VA quickly to pick up Rusty who we are leaving in the care of Jett's kids while we spend their inheritance on a month-long cruise. There are really only three stops of interest:

- Charleston SC - we hope to get one day free in one of our favorite cities, hopefully with 2 nights in one of our favorite regional parks.
- Lorton VA - 4 nights to see family and reconnect with Rusty who probably will not want to even speak to us.
- Hershey PA - 2 nights to give us one free day at Hersheypark. Because we need chocolate.

As our trips go, this one is pretty simple, short and straightforward.



Brush fires

26 Mar 2018



Haze from the Greenway fire

Brush fires in March are common in southwest Florida. The Everglades may be wetlands, but they are surrounded by vast areas of grass and woodland that burn pretty freely once a fire gets started. Last year parts of Naples had to be evacuated due to fires that threatened the eastern fringe of the city. This year is pretty much the same, fueled by debris from Hurricane Irma. But no one has been evacuated yet.

For about three weeks now our skies have been filled with billowing black clouds of smoke, primarily from the Greenway fire, named after Greenway Street which branches off of US 41 just east of us. The fire itself is just a few miles north of us and when the wind blows from the north - or, worse, when there is no wind at all - the smoke settles over us like a noxious blanket. I woke 2 days ago with a headache from the smoke and the picture above was taken yesterday morning, out my rear window, when the air was calm. It can't be healthy. And it is certainly annoying.

Snow north, smoke south. What's a guy to do?

Go on a cruise!

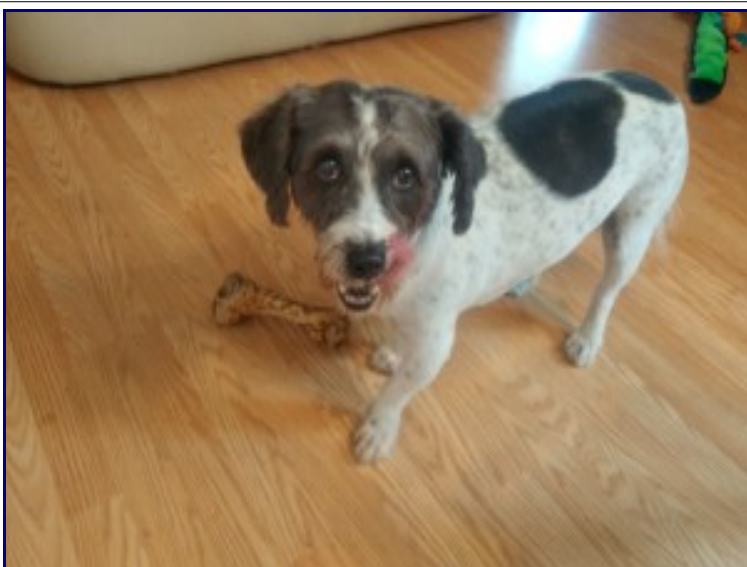
TC1: Our first transatlantic cruise - prelude

5 Apr 2018

The start of our first transatlantic cruise has arrived! For the next 27 nights we will be aboard the Holland America *Oosterdam*, first crossing the Atlantic Ocean, then cruising the Mediterranean Sea, followed by two nights on land in Venice. It should be an epic vacation!

To get started we had a day of very complex movements necessitated by the fact that we are leaving from Fort Lauderdale and are returning to Miami. And that day was preceded by an exhausting trip by rented car - without Jett - to Virginia and back, to leave Rusty in the care of Jett's sons. We considered boarding him in a kennel and even left him for a 6-hour evaluation at the kennel to see how he got along with other dogs (he was fine), but decided that we would be more comfortable with him being in the care of trusted family. The cost of the trip was equivalent to the cost of the boarding.

After 2 days in the care of his surrogate family it appears that he has forgotten all about us and may refuse to come with us when we retrieve him in 6 weeks. Ungrateful mutt!



Rusty in Virginia

The prelude to the cruise began on Wednesday March 28 when I left for Virginia. Two grueling days on the road, followed by some wonderful family time and a day with the grandchildren, Patrick and Zachary. I took them to a movie (*A Wrinkle in Time* - not recommended) and jacked them up with lots of sugar snacks. Then I took them to the local laser tag establishment to work off the sugar. I haven't played cops-and-robbers (or army) like that since I was 10, but did okay. Still, 13-year-old Patrick outscored me in both games (and killed me several times when we were on opposing teams). I did better competing with Zachary.



Zachary



Patrick

I guess I still have "it" - so long as my competition is in the second grade.

I got back to Naples on Sunday, spent Sunday night finishing taxes for my son, then on Monday mailed off the tax forms, returned the rental car, packed, said goodbye to friends in the RV park (most will have gone north by

the time we return), buttoned up the RV and departed for the [Red Carpet Inn](#) in Fort Lauderdale, the idea being to avoid the stress of a 2-hour trip (and fear of a breakdown) on the day of embarkation.

I picked the hotel primarily because it was close to the Ft Lauderdale airport, where we would get our prepaid transfer to the ship, and because the parking lot looked big enough to accommodate my behemoth truck. As for comfort, as long as it had a bed without bedbugs I would have been happy.

It turned out to be better than expected. The room was huge and clean, the bed was very comfortable, the TV and cable service were excellent and an attached restaurant, [The Reef](#) was quite good. I

had the blackened shrimp which were *very* spicy, but tasty, and a draft Sam Adams Cold Snap beer – a very nice combination.

I slept fitfully, not because of the spicy shrimp, but in anticipation of the very complex morning ahead of me. The details kept dancing around in my head. I probably got no more than 5 hours of true sleep, but it was enough. Jett slept better - and without the TV, which is unusual for her.

This is what the morning entailed:

- Get take-out breakfast for both of us (the excellent \$5.99 breakfast special – two scrambled eggs, bacon and two pancakes with butter and syrup, plus coffee) and consume it in the room.
- Do the usual morning ablutions and pack.
- Load the truck.
- Drive to the Ft Lauderdale airport and drop Jett and the luggage at Terminal 2. When we left I was planning on going to Terminal 1, but Jett, reading the fine print on the boarding pass, discovered that it was Terminal 2. Her comment: "do you even read this stuff?" Well, no. But I am glad she does.
- Drive the truck to Miami and leave it, as prearranged, at the Crowne Plaza hotel near the Miami airport. This will be convenient when we fly back into Miami at the end of the trip – a free shuttle to the hotel, jump into the truck and drive home.
- Take a taxi to the Miami Tri-Rail station to catch the 10:20 train. This was close. I didn't get the truck parked until 10:00 am, so I had only 20 minutes to get to the train. Fortunately my taxi drive drove like a maniac and I got to the station – about 2.5 miles away, but through heavy traffic – in 12 minutes.
- Take the Tri-Rail to the Ft Lauderdale airport station.
- Take the shuttle bus to Terminal 2. I got back to Jett at 11:25 – less than 2.5 hours after leaving her.
- Take the luggage inside and find the Holland America booth. It was very close – just inside the terminal.
- Take a bus to the ship. This, arguably, was the most difficult part of the morning as our seats were near a family with 4 out-of-control children. Taking children on a transatlantic voyage? Surprising.

It was a complex and stressful morning, but everything went off like clockwork. Still, I felt like I needed a vacation.

And I will be getting a good one.



Red Carpet Inn

TC1 Day 1: Embarkation

6 Apr 2018



Pushing off from the dock

The process of embarkation – passing through the passport check, filling out health forms, checking in and receiving our on-board “keys” - went very quickly and we were aboard the ship in less than 30 minutes after our bus arrived at the dock (at 12:47 pm, to be precise). But the process contained an element of angst, too, as I realized (actually, Jett realized) that I had printed only one boarding pass. Jett, rather accusingly, said “Where is *my* boarding pass?” My rather weak response was “this is what the printer gave me.” I had a vision, as we were going through the line, approaching the registration desk, of giving the agent my story, getting a cold “what an idiot” stare and then waiting an interminable time while the agent somehow got the second boarding pass printed. I couldn't do it myself because a cruise dock is not like an airport - there are no self-service kiosks. Still, I wasn't too worried as I knew that I had completed all of the online pre-departure tasks and that Jett's status as a registered passenger was securely recorded online. But I didn't know how much trouble – and recrimination – awaited me when we reached the desk.

As it turned out, there was no trouble and no recrimination. All we needed to produce at the desk was our passports. The trouble, if there was to be any, would have been earlier in the process when we had to show passports and boarding passes to “security.” But again, the cruise dock is not like an airport. The cruise dock security is not TSA; it is a bunch of hired hands who are mostly concerned with passports. Security here did not care about the details of the boarding pass – there was no checking of names or dates or ship; I just waved my one boarding pass in front of him and that was sufficient.

Makes me wonder whether the boarding pass was needed at all.

Once aboard we went straight to our cabin – a “junior suite”. It isn’t the largest cabin we have ever had, but it is quite nice. The king size bed is very comfortable, with 6 pillows. The TV is the largest we have ever had on a cruise – my estimate is 60 inches. And the bathroom has his-and-her sinks and two showers. We will inevitably contend for its use, but it is very large and very nice.

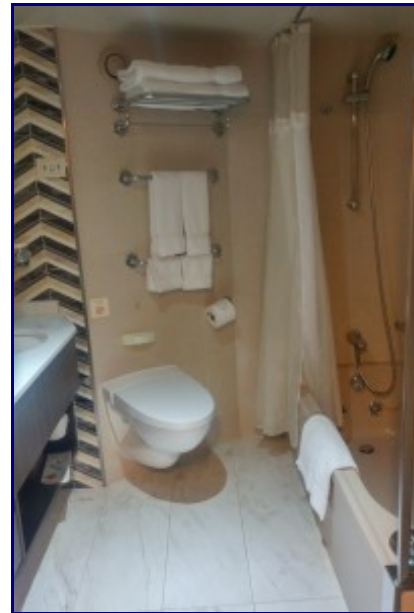
Oh – a balcony with two very comfortable chaises and a table. If the weather cooperates, I will spend a lot of time out there. Watching the ocean slip by.



Bed

A couple of nice extras: bathrobes and a powerful set of binoculars. I can sit on the verandah, dressed in a bathrobe and scan the horizon for approaching pirates. Maybe I can be the first to yell “land ho!” when we reach Madeira.

We freshened up a bit, then walked up one flight to the Lido Deck to grab a quick bite from the never-ending buffet and to find the smoking area. Sadly the “smoking lamp” was extinguished as the refueling of the ship was not finished, but Jett wasted no time finding “smoking buddies”, all of whom were jonesing for a smoke. We bided the time chatting with Jack and Carol, two almost-full-timers (they have a condo in Mexico for the winter but travel the US and Canada the rest of the year in their Class C RV). We also, later, met Mary who reminded us both of Kathy Bates. We took to referring to her afterwards as “Molly Brown” as she was very like the Unsinkable person depicted in *Titanic*. Of course thinking of the *Titanic* is exactly the wrong thing to do on embarkation day, but it was unavoidable.

Bath (2nd shower not visible)

After the required lifeboat drill at 4 pm, we returned to the Lido Deck for the “sailaway party.” On every other cruise this has been an energetic party with dancing and a steel band. No band at this one, just overpriced drinks and lots of people taking photos as we pushed off from the dock. I think we have found the first difference with a transatlantic cruise: more sedate music (chamber music seems to be the big thing, with a blues band being the only “rock” option). I think it is going to be a relatively quiet crossing. Yes, there are a few children on board, but there are absolutely no kids activities. Advice: if you want to cruise with children, steer away from transatlantic itineraries.

It turns out the the one side of the rear deck area is the only smoking area aboard the ship. On other cruises there



Aft deck smoking area

were typically three: the Lido Deck, one side of the Promenade Deck and a Cigar Bar. Only one area on this ship, which had Jett cursing. And it is outside, so if the weather turns chilly (as I expect it will), she is going to be *very* unhappy. But that day is not today.

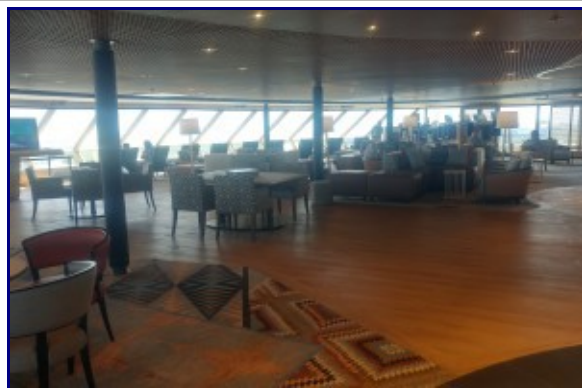
While Jett was chatting with her smoking buddies I was sent in search of a cup of cappuccino. I found it at the coffee bar in the back of the Explorer's Lounge, a fabulously opulent lounge on the top deck, overlooking the bow. It has a fantastic vista, very comfortable chairs for socializing, tables for playing cards or doing jigsaw puzzles, and current real-time displays of location, speed, wave amplitude and temperature. Time, too, which is more complicated than it sounds. We will be going through five time zone changes and onboard the clocks are adjusted at 1 pm. You need to pay attention or you could be late for an afternoon appointment.

Our dinner companions are Jeff and Judy, Bob and Dave. Jeff and Judy are Canadians, as is Dave, but Dave is also Scottish, with dual citizenship. Bob is from Alabama. The dinner conversation was lively and varied and only briefly skirted into politics and religion – topics which I am careful to avoid. The food and service were also very good. The highlight of the meal for me was dessert – banana crisp which was like apple crisp, but with bananas. Delicious.

Dave and Bob are both single and are not a couple. We have not yet determined whether they are gay, widowed, divorced or simply prefer to travel alone. Mary, who I mentioned earlier, was also traveling alone and in her case she volunteered the reason: she and her husband are taking some “alone time” which she is using to reflect on her marriage.

We did not attend the evening entertainment and instead went to bed after lounging a bit on the Lido Deck. It was a lovely evening. When we returned to our cabin we discovered the wide variety of movies that the ship makes available on demand, including many recent ones, such as this year's Best Picture, *La La Land*.

So far, so good.



Explorer's Lounge



Coffee bar



Lido Cafe dining room

TC1 Days 2 & 3: At sea

7 Apr 2018

The first full day at sea was, as expected, quiet. At breakfast I tried the buffet scrambled eggs (terrible), bacon (good) and lox (excellent). I then, while waiting for Jett's cappuccino to be made, joined in on the attack on a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. In the afternoon I attended an "international beer tasting" event that was somewhat disappointing as none of the international beers were unfamiliar (Becks, Stella Artois, Grolsch and Blue Moon) nor were they from any of the countries we would be visiting. I did, however, learn a few things about beer (e.g., ale is "top brewed" and lager is "bottom brewed").

I sat with a couple, Marty and Judy, at the beer tasting, had a lovely time getting to know them and discovered, at the end of the event, that they are our neighbors. Small ship.

I read up on Barcelona (Rick Steves *Mediterranean Cruise Ports*, a wonderful guide to most of the cities where we will be docking, but excludes Portugal and most of Spain). I was amazed at the detail of the advice he provides: the Barcelona section is 98 pages long!

Both Jett and I chose the prime rib at dinner, which I thought was excellent but Jett thought was just okay. However, the spinach bacon salad that Jett accidentally ordered (she got two different salads – not sure how that happened) and passed off to me was terrific. I had Dutch apple pie for dessert, which was also very good, while Jett chose a chocolate mousse cake infused with hazelnuts which she judged to be excellent.

We hit the hay early and watched several movies: *Downsizing* with Matt Damon, which I thought was pretty good but Jett fell asleep, and the first half-hour of *La La Land* with Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling – the Best Picture of 2016 – which I didn't like at all. Maybe I will change my mind when I finish it. If I finish it.

Day 3 began with a breakfast featuring "eggs blackstone" - a concoction similar to eggs benedict but with Canadian bacon. Not bad. While Jett slept on I made my first foray into the casino and left \$30 richer. Yes, I won money at the casino – a rare event for me. I also attended two informative talks about Portugal. The first was all about the available shore excursions and I left early as I have no intention of paying for tours of either Funchal (in Madeira) or Lisbon. The second was about the cities themselves and was much more interesting. I learned that in Funchal it is possible to take a cable car to the top of the 2,000-foot mountain overlooking the city, then ride back down in a wicker basket sled guided by two men. The narrator's advice: ask to see the soles of their shoes before booking the ride, because those are the only brakes you will have. The idea sounds intriguing, but the narrator also noted that the ride leaves you far from the port and it is either a 45-minute walk or an expensive taxi ride to get back. I will probably pass. Instead I may find a bar where I can sample a couple of local Madeira wines.

We skipped dinner in the dining room on Day 3 because it was a formal night and Jett was not eager to dress up. Nor was I. Instead we "roughed it" in the Lido Deck buffet where we both had beef tenderloin (very tasty). After dinner we played Hand, Knee and Foot under the stars until a sudden shower drove us inside. As we began play a couple stopped by to ask us what game we were playing. They actually stayed to watch a hand and we made a date to teach them the game on Day 4.

As we began to play cards we discovered that Jett failed to pack the scoresheets. We had to make do with a blank sheet of paper. One of my Day 4 chores will be to find a printer where I can print a few copies.

The day ended on a downer as we tried to watch a movie and found the entire DVR operation to be unusable ("connection busy, try again later"). We are praying that this is a temporary situation because doing 24 nights with no movies for late night entertainment would be nearly unbearable.

I can see the headlines now: "Passengers Mutiny Over Faulty DVR." It will go viral.



Portugal port talk

TC1 Days 4 & 5: At sea

8 Apr 2018

First I will report two technical successes. Due to the impending Hand, Knee and Foot training session, we needed to print a set of rules and some scoresheets. So I took the laptop down to Deck 1 where there was a "business center" with 3 computers and a printer and inquired at the service desk how to use the printer. The answer was to log into my WiFi account, which meant that someone using the computer could use the printer only if they also bought WiFi time, which I found surprising. As I had an account already, that was not an impediment. But I didn't appreciate using my precious minutes trying to figure out how to configure my laptop to communicate with the ship's printer. Between setting it up and printing the documents, I used about 20 minutes of WiFi time – about \$8.

The printer also ran out of paper one page short of completion. I again waited in line to request paper and the service agent returned with 3 sheets. I smiled and said that 3 sheets would be sufficient for my purposes but the next person would be back to ask for more. She then gave me about 100 sheets.

I also took the opportunity, while at the service desk, to inquire about the television. They were surprised that I was having difficulty and assured me that there was no ship-wide outage. She filled out a service request.

Nothing happened with the TV until after lunch, but after Jett called to jack up the urgency, a repair guy appeared within 15 minutes and fixed the problem in another 10. We now have movies again! We watched *The*

Darkest Hour and more Season 1 episodes of *Downton Abbey*.

I visited the jigsaw puzzle several times – morning, noon and evening. The noonish visit was aborted because about 8 people were swarming around the table and I didn't want to be a 9th. So I went down to the casino and lost about \$50 in about 50 minutes. Not a good day at the slots. I am now down \$20 for the cruise.

We met a few more interesting people in the smoking area and heard a number of complaints about the ship. Most surprising is that there were no cigarettes for sale on the ship – the stock of cigarettes was left on the dock in Ft Lauderdale and is being flown to meet the ship in Barcelona. Thank God Jett brought enough to last her until then. But some folks are going to be mighty unhappy. I can see a black market in cigarettes forming.

It is rumored that the stock of yeast was also left on the dock, meaning that the breads at dinner are going to be unleavened. The grumbling is that the ship should never have left if it was so poorly supplied. The people who are complaining are veteran (and loyal) Holland America passengers who are saying "never again." This might be a poor cruise for the company business.

The most interesting person we met on Day 4 was Sabine, born in Bolivia of a Dutch father and a German mother, raised as Catholic while her brother was raised Lutheran and married to an Afghan Muslim. She describes herself as a "citizen of the world."

The weather deteriorated dramatically. The balmy weather and calm seas were replaced with gray skies, light rain and a rolling ship. I put on my anti-nausea wristbands for the first time.

The Hand, Knee and Foot couple were no-shows.

We dined with our regular dinner buddies, except Bob who was absent for the third straight night. We think he will not reappear, which led to a discussion of how to find a replacement. The thinking was that we needed to find a pretty young woman for Dave. That should give Jett something to do for the next few days.



Breaks in the gloom at sunset

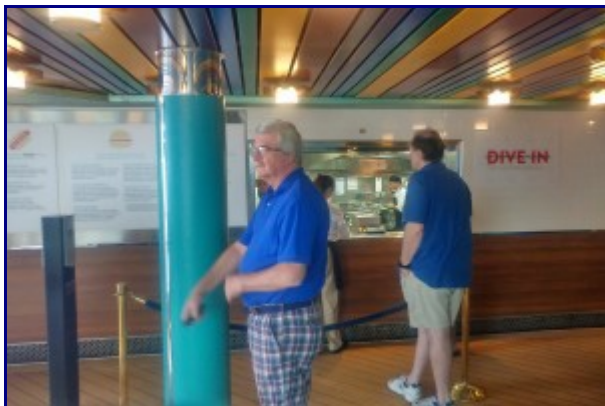
Day 5 (Saturday) continued cloudy, cool and damp, though not so rainy as Day 4 and the overcast started to break up as sunset approached. I again spent some time on the jigsaw as it neared completion, but was not present when the last piece was placed. No time was wasted in destroying it as when I returned around 4 pm a new puzzle – also 2,000 pieces – was already underway. Another foray into the casino netted another \$25 loss. The winning first day is a distant memory now as I am down about \$45.

I ate very lightly, skipping breakfast entirely and having only a Dive-In hot dog (with saurkraut!) for lunch. I have sampled both the Dive-In burger and hot dog now and they are good, but not exceptional. The hot dog is better than the burger.

Dinner for me was pot roast, and it was excellent. It was preceded by a seafood soup and was followed by a mango cream horn – a pastry filled with a mango-flavored concoction. Both also excellent.

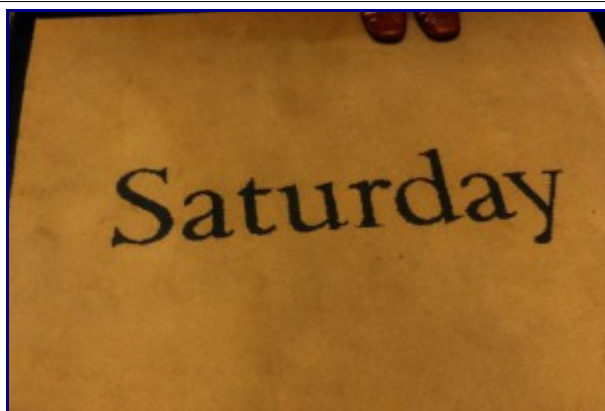
We went to bed immediately after dinner (around 10 pm) but didn't go to sleep until much later as Jett had a bout of extreme abdominal pain.

A poor end to an otherwise good day.



Dive-In

I think it took me 5 days to realize that the ship changed the rugs at the bottom of every elevator every day, keeping everyone informed of the day of the week. I was at first amused at this silliness, but soon began to realize how useful it was. Days blend together on a long voyage.



Elevator rug

TC1 Days 6 & 7: At sea

10 Apr 2018



Day 6 sunset

The sun returned for Day 6 (Sunday) which proved to be the most sedate day yet. We seem to be falling behind the clocks, which advanced another hour (3 hours in total now). We rose too late to make the Sunday brunch in

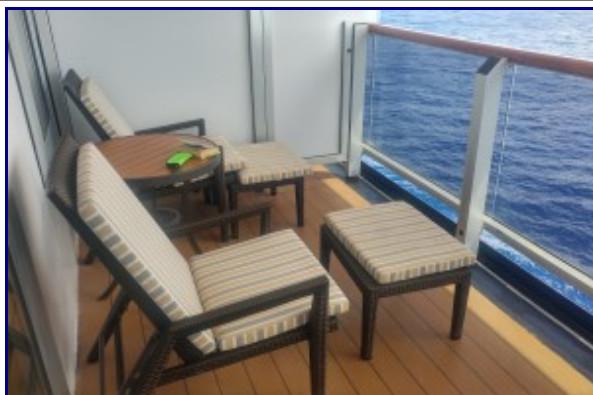
the dining room, which began at 11:30 am. Instead we had our usual coffee (black Americano for me, cappuccino with a shot of espresso for Jett) and lounged on deck, in or near the sun for most of the afternoon. I spent only an hour on the current puzzle and did not visit the casino at all, instead investing some time in the less expensive pursuit of reading.

Due to the time change, our 8 pm dinner started during the most spectacular sunset yet. The photos I took were through glass, which dulled them a bit and introduced some reflection of dining room lights, but they captured the beauty nevertheless.

Dinner was not all that interesting, which is surprising given that this was an evening when the Holland America "culinary council" exhibited their favorite recipes. I had a potato soup which was okay, but not hot enough, a jumbo shrimp salad which seemed more like an appetizer than an entree, and a pear crepe which was very tasty and very small. I left the dining room feeling less than full and, for the first time, ate something at the late night buffet. I was planning on just taking some dessert to the cabin, but we passed the pasta station and the garlic reeled me in. I ate a small plate of ziti topped with a custom marinara sauce with capers and pesto. Delicious!

We then played Hand, Knee and Foot in our room, while Season 3 of *Downton Abbey* played on the TV. We finished the game (which I won, coming from behind) at 2:30 am, further evidence of our bodies falling behind the clocks.

Day 7 (Monday) was another bright, sunny, cool day with rolling seas. I engaged in the usual activities: jigsaw, casino (another \$20 loss – down \$65 now), some reading, some hanging out in the smoking area on the Lido Deck Aft. I also spent some time on our balcony, taking advantage of the sun. The big event was the team trivia contest. My team – 5 people, including 2 retired physicians – got 14 right out of 16 questions, just one behind the two winning teams. But the annoying aspect of that is that one of the questions we missed was a medical question – what is the medical name for heartburn. Both physicians had never heard of the term so one has to wonder where the question came from.



Our balcony

We also watched more of *Downton Abbey*, completing Season 3 (poor Matthew!) and watched *The Greatest Showman* before bed. It was good enough to keep us both awake to the end, which for us is high praise.

Jett had steak at dinner while my entree was a cornflake-crusted haddock which was pretty tasty. The real star of the dinner for me, though, was dessert: banana tatin which looked like a scoop of vanilla ice cream atop a honey bun. But the "bun" was a baked half banana, curled into a circle and covered in a caramel glaze, resting on a thin biscuit. Yum!

"Speaking in Tongues" by Jeffrey Deaver

11 Apr 2018

[Pocket Books, 2000.](#)

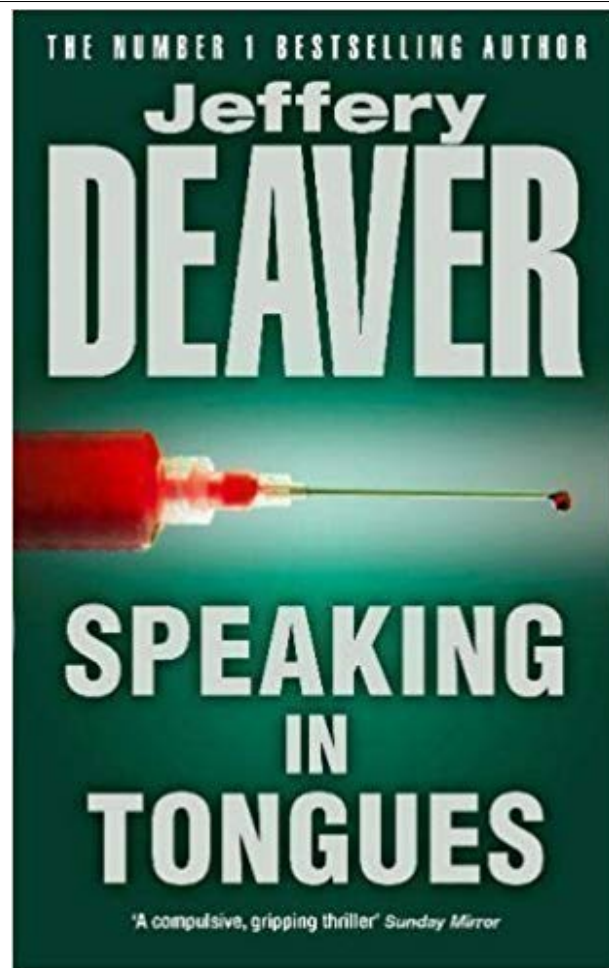
This book was special to me, not because it had great characters or plot, but because it was the first book I read using reading glasses. A few weeks ago I admitted to myself that my reading time had been greatly reduced because it was no longer a pleasure. Too much squinting, too much eye strain. So I got a pair of

reading glasses. I am still getting used to them and they are not perfect, but I can now, once again, read for hours and enjoy it.

The book. Pretty good, judging by how easily it grabbed me and hung on to the end. The story was a bit of a stretch on the believability scale, but it had some surprises and kept me guessing to the end.

Jeffery Deaver is mostly noted for his Lincoln Rhyme series of mysteries which I love. This is not one of them. The protagonist in this one is Tate Collier, a divorced lawyer, former prosecutor and father of 12-year-old Megan McCall. Poor Megan has a number of issues – including the divorce and some deep-seated anger toward her father – for which she is getting therapy. The book begins with Megan talking to a substitute therapist (her regular therapist had family issues to address) who ends the session by kidnapping her. Because he isn't a therapist at all but a psychopath of the first order.

The faux therapist, at various stages in the book, also passes himself off as a police investigator and an FBI agent. He is skilled at reading people and telling them what they want to hear. He then seduces them, kills them and/or compromises them in some way to make them useless as witnesses. He might be fun at a party, but don't go home with him.



The heart of the book deals with Megan struggling to escape from her prison – an abandoned mental health hospital – and her parents' effort to find her and to convince authorities that she has been kidnapped.

I won't spoil the ending other than to say that Megan survives and the villain doesn't. Not a great surprise there, but it is a fun read finding out how it comes about. The incredulity of some of the plot spoils it a bit, but it is still fun.

7.5 out of 10.

TC1 Days 8 & 9: At sea

12 Apr 2018

The days are starting to blend together.

The big event for me on Day 8 (Tuesday) was my first beer on board (not counting the beer tasting on Day 2).

I read on the aft deck for much of the afternoon, finishing *Speaking in Tongues* by Jeffery Deaver (described in the previous post). I worked on the second puzzle in the late afternoon and it was nearly complete when I left.

I had a jumbo shrimp cocktail and french onion soup for appetizers, both mediocre. The entree was a seafood macaroni, which was interesting but I wouldn't get it again. We watched more *Downton Abbey* after dinner.

The seas on Day 9 (Wednesday) were the roughest yet. The ship rocked-and-rolled pretty energetically. The good news was that I felt fine. No seasickness whatsoever. I was even able to read on the deck without discomfort.

The captain gave a presentation at 9 am on the work done during the two weeks of dry

dock work that immediately preceded our cruise. Unfortunately, I didn't see the notice for this talk until I got out of bed at 9:30. However, I learned a lot about the work done from others who attended. As expected, the Deck 10 lounge and coffee bar are brand new. Also, I correctly surmised that our mattress was new. But so is everyone else's – every passenger mattress was replaced. That was 17 cargo containers of mattresses.

I got to the port talk before dinner, but discovered that it was the same talk that I had heard a couple of days earlier. So I skipped out and instead went to the service desk to buy \$200 worth of euros. The current exchange rate is \$1.34 per euro.

Dinner was formal and we actually attended this one. Good thing because Dave skipped it, so if we hadn't shown up Jeff and Judy would have been all alone. We all had the filet mignon (excellent) and I had a lemon mousse with a custard sauce that was the best dessert yet.



Nearly complete puzzle



Jett and Chief of Security



Sunset at dinner

TC1 Days 10 & 11: Funchal, Madeira (Portugal) and at sea

14 Apr 2018

On Day 10 (Thursday) we awoke with the ship docked in Funchal, Madeira, an island off the coast of Morocco which is owned by Portugal. We had nothing planned for the day, so after a leisurely breakfast we left the ship

ust to feel solid ground after more than a week at sea. I had no real expectations and no plans for any specific sights to see, so we boarded the free shuttle to downtown and simply strolled around for a bit. We dined at an inexpensive restaurant near the harbor and had some sandwiches served on some of the most flavorful mini baguettes that I have ever tasted. A real treat, particularly after a week of bland breads on board the ship.

I took a lot of photos but we bought nothing other than lunch. Until we got back to the ship, at which point Jett found a small cork purse that she simply had to have. So we laid out 30 euros (about \$40) for a purse.

My impressions of Funchal... very pretty, very clean, very affordable. I enjoyed the few hours there very much. I did not have any Madeira wine, but I did have a glass of "poncha" at lunch, which is like an alcoholic orange/lemon drink. I am told that it is made from passionfruit, but it tasted like orange and lemon to me. It was okay but I won't order it again.

The day ended on a sour note with Jett feeling sick immediately after returning to the ship. The illness rapidly developed and she skipped dinner that night. I went to the dining room alone and had a french onion soup with shredded beef – a first for me. I had spaghetti puttanesca for an entree (good) and something forgettable for dessert. I tried to attend the late show, but it was canceled due to high seas.



Jett in Funchal

Yes, high seas. The ride into Madeira was a bit bumpy, but the ride out was worse. As soon as we left the harbor the ship began to rock violently. The captain said that 30 mph winds were forecast to hit the port side all night and the following day and the resulting roll was too much for the dancers. Show cancelled.

The evening was uncomfortable for me and worse for Jett who remained very sick. The following day (Friday, Day 11) was worse. The captain reported that the winds were even worse than forecast, topping 45 mph sustained – gale force winds. We stayed in our cabin all day and I barely managed to avoid upchucking. Jett remained feverish and generally miserable. The winds calmed a little in the evening, but the ship still lurched

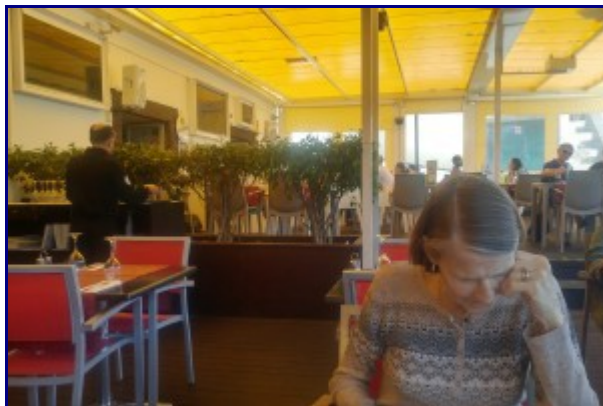
about. Not a good evening.



Flowers on the lamposts



Mosaic sidewalks



FX Restaurant



Military museum



The *Oosterdam* at rest



Funchal from the ship



Our dining table (at sea)

TC1 Day 12: Fatima and Lisbon, Portugal

15 Apr 2018

Day 12, Saturday, was the day of our scheduled trip to [Fatima](#). But Jett remained too sick to leave the cabin, so I went alone. Well, not alone, exactly. I was accompanied by three other couples and a very nice young tour guide and driver. On the 90 minute trip north to Fatima he kept up a steady stream of informative chatter which included such nuggets as it takes a cork tree over 40 years to produce income. And that once they are 6 years old they are protected as national treasures which cannot be moved or removed until they die of natural causes. Which, of course, causes many cork trees to be killed before age 6 and many others to be poisoned to death surreptitiously when they are located inconveniently.

Fatima was interesting, but without the suffocating pathos that I witnessed many years ago in Lourdes, France, where doomed people went to find miracles. The most striking thing was the path from the new cathedral to the old cathedral (well, not quite – actually to the open-air chapel where nearly continuous masses were held) that was marked by white marble. This downhill path – over 200 yards by my estimation – was a route taken by penitents on their knees. Painful to watch and, I am sure, far more painful to traverse.

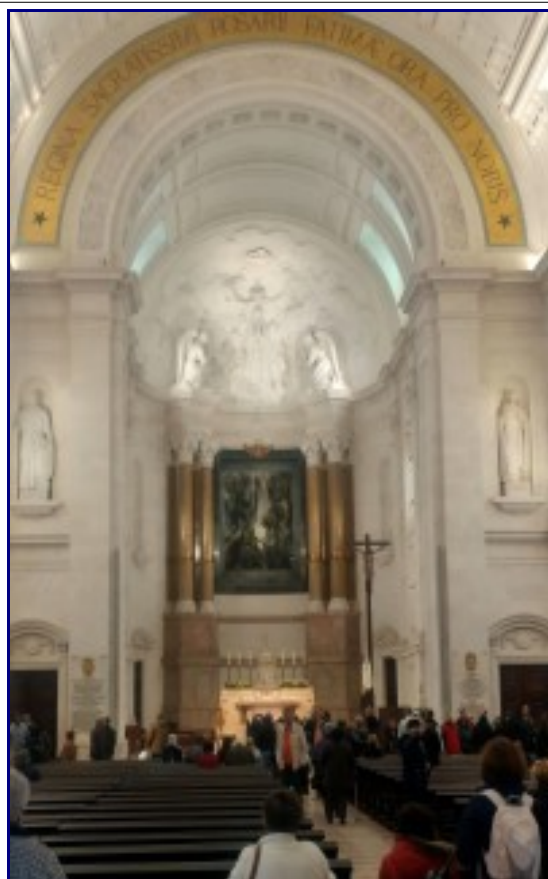


Fatima plaza and penitents on their knees

The new cathedral was huge, with over 7,000 seats. The altar was backed by a huge abstract scene in gold leaf, with an odd little red and black cutout in the lower right corner which was meant, I believe, to represent hell. It was impressive, if a little cold.

The old cathedral was much smaller but more to my liking. It featured the crypts of the three children who, in 1917, witnessed the apparition that made this little town world famous. Two died young, in 1918, of the Spanish Flu. The third lived a long and reverent life.

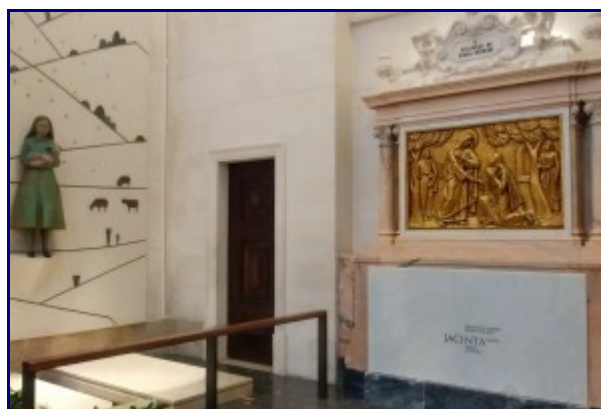
I also visited the museum which contains the many artifacts used in the annual celebration and the ones left there by visitors, including Pope Paul VI. There was a tour, but it was in Portuguese, so I didn't get much from the talk.



Old cathedral



New cathedral at Fatima



Crypt of Lucia

We stopped at a supermarket in Fatima to buy food for lunch, which we ate in the minivan as we drove back to Lisbon. I got edam cheese, chocolate croissants and water, plus a large bag of Lay's potato chips, all for less than \$6.00. I was amazed as I expected prices to be sky high in a town visited by 9 million tourists every year.

We finished the day in Lisbon, visiting the [Lisbon Cathedral](#), taking in the sights from an elevated vantage point and getting a sample of Lisbon's famous custard pastries (superb!). We also got drive-by glimpses of the President's residence, a [Roman aqueduct](#), the [Belem Tower](#) and the [Monument to the Discoveries](#).

When I returned Jett had rallied a bit and I got her out of the room long enough to grab some dinner in the Lido Cafe. But she still isn't well. If she doesn't recover on her own we may have to visit the ship's infirmary.



Overlooking Lisbon



Lisbon Cathedral



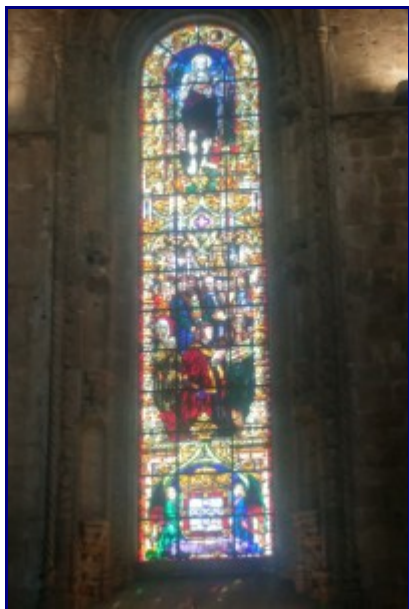
Inside Lisbon Cathdral



Roman aqueduct



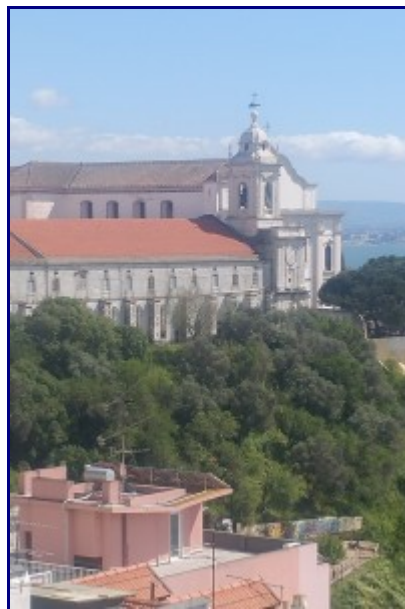
Downtown park



Stained glass



Tomb of Vasco da Gama



View to river

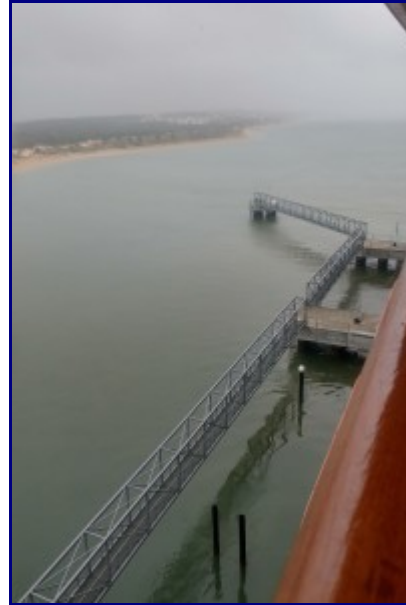
TC1 Day 13: Huelva, Spain

16 Apr 2018

I am told that Columbus embarked on his trip to the New World from Huelva, Spain, the port city for nearby Seville. I hope he had better weather than we did - cloudy and cool, with a little drizzle. The gloomy weather was compounded by Jett's continuing illness, which is now less fever and more cough. She once again spent the entire day in the cabin and, except for trips to get food and drink, I was there with her.

I had considered taking the free shuttle into Huelva, but met our neighbor in the hallway when I was returning to the cabin with tea (yes, she is drinking tea instead of coffee, which shows how sick she is). They took the shuttle into town but didn't even get off because it was Sunday and almost everything was closed.

So... another bad day. If she doesn't improve by tomorrow we will have to go to the infirmary.



Dreary Huelva

TC1 Day 14: Malaga, Spain, and the infirmary

18 Apr 2018

Malaga. This is a beautiful little port city with some great ancient fortifications and very interesting downtown and port areas. But it will always be associated in my mind with illness and loss because the day that started so well ended in disappointment in the infirmary.

Jett's illness was unabated in the morning and we had agreed that she would see a doctor if she wasn't better. But I didn't get down to client services to find out how to get medical attention until 9:55 am and learned that the infirmary was closed between 10 am and 4:30 pm when the ship was in port. So I went into town and Jett went back to bed.

I spent about 4 hours in Malaga. I had attended the port talk aboard the ship but had forgotten what the main attractions were, so I just started to wander. It didn't take long to find the cathedral, which is huge. It also charges an entrance fee and I was feeling both cheap and cathedraled-out after Fatima, so I skipped it.

I also skipped the Picasso Museum. I recalled that the museum contained mostly early works, before he became a cubist. Some people I talked to later said that there were some cubist paintings there, so I have a tiny bit of regret for not going in.



Cathedral



Roman amphitheater

I spent most of my time in the [Alcazaba](#), an 11th century Moorish palace and fortress. It is huge, beautiful and well worth the uphill walk. However, I couldn't find my way back, so I ended up taking the elevator to the street.



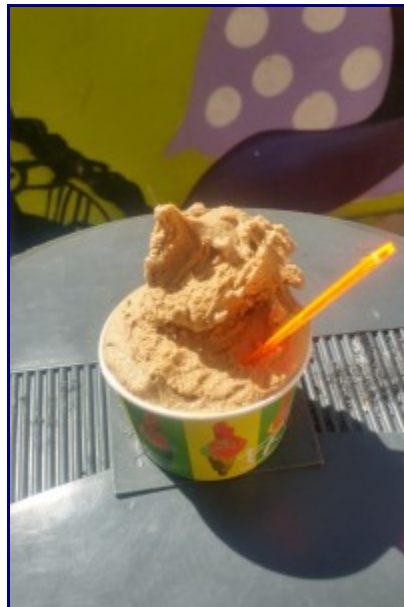
Alcazaba walls



Inside Alcazaba



Alcazaba gate

11th century pavement

Toffee and caramel ice cream



Waterfront park

At the base of the Alcazaba, in the heart of Malaga, is a Roman amphitheater dating from the first century. I treated myself to a cup of toffee caramel ice cream (not very creamy but very tasty) while admiring the ruins.

I made my way back to the ship on foot, first through a nice waterfront park, then along the marina itself. The surprise was the presence of *The World*, a "residential cruise ship" or "the largest yacht in the world." We had read about this ship. It is basically a floating condo where the cheapest unit runs about \$5 million, plus a huge HOA. The cool thing is that residents can have pets and ports are chosen by vote of the residents. Very cool to actually see it.

I then continued on to the beach - our first and only glimpse of an actual Mediterranean beach. Then back to the ship to take a nap, then go to the infirmary with Jett.

*The World*

Marina



Malaga beach

*Oosterdam and Costa Favolosa*

Which is basically where our cruise ended. Jett went in thinking she had pneumonia and was shocked to learn that her blood hemoglobin levels were so low that they didn't even register. The doctor insisted that she get to a hospital for treatment ASAP, which meant in Cartagena the next morning and not, as we would have preferred, in Barcelona the day after that. The doctor said that her condition was very serious and "could turn on a dime."

The most optimistic view was that she could get to a hospital, get an immediate blood infusion and return to the ship by the 1 pm departure. However, as I learned later, she would not be let back on board unless a doctor completed a "fitness to sail" form which certified that she was healthy enough to travel. Even without knowing that, it seemed highly unlikely that we would be able to reboard in Cartagena, so the most optimistic scenario would have her being treated and released the next morning and we would be able to scamper up to Barcelona to continue the trip. In any case, we had to act as if the cruise was over, which meant that I had to go back to the cabin (after a wonderful dinner with our tablemates who were very distressed to hear of her illness), pack up and be ready to disembark at 7 am.

I got to bed around 2 am and got, maybe, 3 hours of sleep.



Jett in the infirmary

TC1 Day 15: Cartagena, Spain, and the end of our dream cruise

19 Apr 2018

It didn't take long, once we were off the ship and in the hospital, to figure out that our cruise was over. The doctor said that Jett would be admitted for a minimum of 3 days of treatment and possibly more. That meant that the earliest we could reboard the ship would be in Monte Carlo, Monaco, which would be a long trip and would possibly require a plane trip. Given that we were far from certain whether she would be fit enough to reboard - and because no one could tell us why the hemoglobin was so low - we decided to terminate the cruise and try to get back to the US ASAP for further tests.

Which meant that I had to go back to the ship, collect the luggage, close the ship account, take the luggage through customs and try to find a hotel. As it turns out, I didn't have to get a hotel. The hospital - Perpetuo Socorro Cartagena - would let me stay in the room with Jett. They even provided meals for me (hospital food - my favorite). The most annoying thing was that I was permitted to bring only 2 cartons of cigarettes ashore, which meant that I had to donate 3 cartons. I gave 2 cartons to security people at the gate (I don't quite understand how giving cigarettes to people on shore is different than bringing cigarettes ashore) and gave the third to people in the smoking area of the ship. Our loss is their gain.



Jett in the ER

Very few of the nurses or other staff - including the ER registration desk - spoke English. We fought our way through the experience and, with the exception of my walkabout to check out the nearest hotel, stayed in the room all evening. The food was forgettable, the TV didn't work and no ice was available. Pretty miserable.

My walk to the nearest hotel was somewhat interesting, though. The hotel looked quite nice, but with all the uncertainty about how long she would be in the hospital and how we were going to get back to the US, I opted to spend the first night with Jett. I also checked out the nearby department store - [El Corte Ingles](#) - which is the largest single store that I have ever seen. Eight stories. Huge. But the cafeteria also had no iced drinks, which was what I was most urgently seeking.

I am missing the ship already.

TC1 Day 16: Cartagena, Spain

20 Apr 2018

Jett remained in the hospital on Day 16 (Wednesday). I survived a night on the hospital room sofa (more like a weight bench with very little padding). While she received 2 more units of blood, I went exploring, more to get information on ways to get out of the city than to sightsee. But I did happen across some interesting scenes in the city.

I have learned that Cartagena was founded in the 3rd century BC by the Carthaginians and the name means either "New Carthage" or, more generically, "New City." There are numerous ruins in and around the city. Most are



Ruins overlooking port

Roman, though one portion of the original fortifications from the 3rd century BC remains - the [Punic Wall](#). I passed by this wall but did not go inside to view it. Instead, I went to the train station to check out the train

options. I am thinking that the best option will be to take a train to Madrid, get a hotel overnight, then fly out of Madrid to Miami. Of course that all depends on Jett getting released from the hospital, so I couldn't book the tickets.

I also learned that Cartagena is, today, Spain's primary naval port.

While walking around the city, I discovered that Jett was not the only one with physical problems. At one point in my 3-mile walk I had to stop and rest because my sciatica started acting up, first with pain shooting down my leg, then with my left thigh going numb. It went away, but it is cause for concern.



Ruins in archaeological park

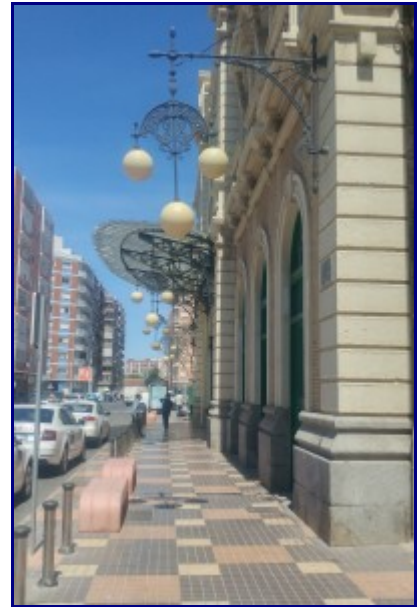
I also started sneezing and by the time I returned to the hotel, I could tell that I was getting my first cold in over two years. Not a great time to get sick. But, really, what did I expect, staying in a hospital?



19th century gate?



Shady streets



Train station

TC1 Day 17: Cartagena, Spain

21 Apr 2018

Jett passed her blood test and was released from the hospital. But it wasn't as easy as it sounds. It was a day of telephone calls, text messages and trips to the reception desk. There was a problem getting the insurance paperwork sent to the hospital, due to a miscommunication of the email address. Ultimately, I had the email containing the forms sent to me and I forwarded it to every possible combination of the email address that I could think of. One of them worked.

The paperwork consisted of 8 pages - 5 for the doctor and 3 for me. I filled out my 3 pages and had the

reception desk fax them back to the US. The doctor, however, did not get back to the hospital until the afternoon, so I spent the morning planning our escape route: train to Madrid, overnight in Madrid at the hotel at the train station, taxi to the airport, nonstop flight to Miami. Easy. But I couldn't book anything until the doctor released her.

The doctor appeared around 3 pm and did, in fact, release her. I was not there at the time (I was out shopping), but saw him in the hallway shortly thereafter. He assured me that the paperwork had been sent to the US, that he had received a phone call confirming that everything was fine and that arrangements were being made to drive us to the airport. The first two pieces of news were comforting but the third was disturbing. Why were they telling the doctor about my travel arrangements when no one had spoken to me?

This left me a little suspicious, so I decided to check with the reception desk that the report in fact had been sent. Besides, I needed a copy of the report. When I got to the desk I found the person who spoke the best English on the phone, exasperated, saying "I don't understand you." I checked with the supervisor who said that he was talking with the insurance people and that they had a problem with the report because it was incomplete. It turns out that the "incomplete" was the 3 pages that I had sent earlier. The insurance company seemed to have difficulty collating the two portions that had been sent separately. Rather than argue about it, I added my three pages to the doctor's 5 and sent them all as a batch.

Then we had to wait for the insurance company. First they had to confirm that the forms had been filled out completely (they had). Then we had to wait for their medical team to review the doctor forms and approve her for travel. That took until about 6 pm. Finally, at 6:30 we got our bags out of the room and down to the reception area and I paid the bill. Just as we were about to get a taxi I got a phone call from the insurance company informing me that their medical team had decided that Jett needed a travel nurse. And that travel arrangements would be forthcoming.

So much for the train/plane plans.

We were pretty deflated. All we could do is get a hotel room. And wait.

The good part of all this, if there is one, is the cost. Somewhat irrelevant as it is all covered by our travel insurance, but the three days in the hospital, with four units of blood, totaled less than \$2,000. In the US I am sure it would have been over \$5,000.

TC1 Days 18 & 19: Cartagena, Spain

22 Apr 2018

On the morning of Day 18 (Friday) I learned, via a phone call, that the plan for our extraction, in the company of a nurse companion, involved a 3-hour ride by car to Valencia, a 3-hour flight to Frankfurt and a 9-hour flight to Miami. This thrilled me not at all. I believe the term I used to the travel consultant was "insane." I tried to convince them that this itinerary would do more to kill Jett than traveling without a nurse. I tried to get an explanation as to why this itinerary was superior to a more direct one via Madrid, in the daytime, which would cut about 2 hours off of the flight times and would cost about \$1000 less. Deaf ears.

In subsequent phone calls I learned that the nurse would arrive about 9 pm Saturday.

All of this was done while both Jett and I suffered through a day with severe head colds. We got out of the room (I should say rooms - more on this in a minute) long enough to eat lunch at a nearby cafeteria and dinner at the hotel restaurant but otherwise hunkered down and napped.

I said "rooms" because all doubles were booked at the hotel for Friday night, so we had to stay in two single rooms. I was able to get a double again for Saturday and Sunday nights. Yes, we have a room for Sunday even

though we will be stealing away at 1 am like thieves in the night.

By Saturday morning our colds had improved a bit. We switched rooms at noon, then went out for a stroll and had lunch at a sidewalk café near the train station. After lunch we bought a couple of items at the nearby supermarket which was a very interesting place. Strange items (e.g., a package of baby eels that looked like worms - yummy!) and some very surprising prices (e.g., less than 59 cents for a baguette - a loaf of French bread).

After lunch Jett napped and I did some sightseeing, first visiting the [Punic Wall](#), then climbing over 200 steps past the [Cartagena Cathedral](#) and up to the [Castillo de la Concepción](#) which has a museum and some panoramic views of the city. Finally I descended past the [Roman Theater](#) (very cool) and returned to the hotel for a nap.



Ancient crypt under the Punic Wall

The cathedral is a recent ruin - it was bombed in 1939 during the [Spanish Civil War](#).

We went to a new café for dinner and Jett tried the tapas - a first (and probably last) for us. One of the tapas plates was sliced ham swimming in olive oil. Ew. For dessert Jett tried "Grandma's cake" which was so sweet that we understood why Granny had no teeth. My custard was better, but bland.

We got back to the room by 8:30 pm and awaited the arrival of the nurse. She knocked on our door at 9 pm, right on time. Her name was Tish and she checked Jett's vitals and we chatted a bit about Jett's condition, what she would be doing for us on the trip back (pretty much everything, as it turned out) and about her nursing experiences in general. We liked her a lot and I am not saying that just because I gave her the blog address (Hi, Tish!).

She agreed that the 1 am pickup for a 7 am flight out of Valencia was insane and promised to try to get it changed. I wasn't optimistic that she would be any more successful than I had been, but I was glad that she

shared my view. If the plan proceeds, the trip Monday is going to be very difficult.



Punic Wall



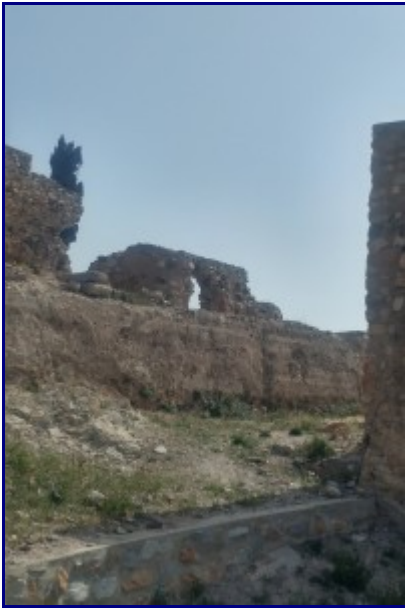
Dessert



Peacock at the castle



Roman theater



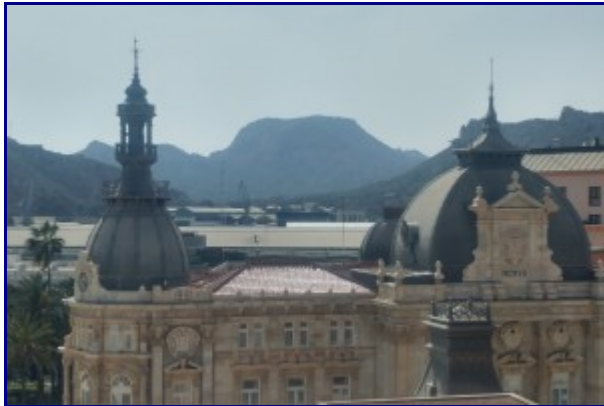
Ruins above the theater



Beautiful residence



Narrow streets



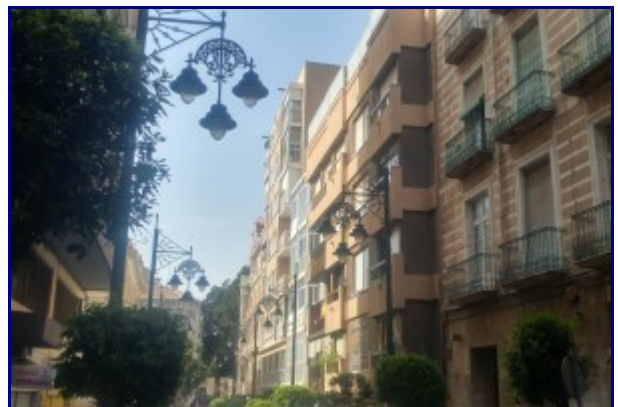
Panoramic view



Ruins of Cartagena Cathedral



Theater from below



Street scene featuring cool streetlights

TC1 Day 20: Cartagena, Spain

24 Apr 2018

Day 20 (Sunday) was a waiting game - waiting for the extraction trip to begin. Jett was feeling a bit better, so she went down to the hotel bar for coffee and to write letters while I blogged. Then I joined her and we strolled down the street (a nice, sunny day, about 70 degrees). We made it as far as the Roman theater, which made me feel good because it meant that Jett got to see *something* that qualifies as a tourist site on this disaster of a trip. We had lunch at a café along the way and dropped in on a Sunday afternoon party with live music in San Francisco Plaza.

We also visited the remains of the first-century AD Roman roads that marked the center of Cartagena. We took a break at the intersection and

tried to imagine what that corner might have looked like in the time of Christ. Quite different, I am sure.

One of the better days of the trip.



Music in the plaza on Sunday



Main road of Roman Cartagena



Strolling the pedestrian mall



Gran Hotel



Town Hall?

We had several messages from Tish in the morning which proved that she was doing her best to improve the itinerary, but, as expected, was not having any success. By noon the opportunity to switch the itinerary disappeared as I had to commit to taking the room for Sunday night.

In the afternoon we sat in the sun at the outside area of the hotel bar and I had a beer. Then we went upstairs to nap. We hoped to get to a local Mexican restaurant for dinner but, being Sunday, most places were closed. So we dined at the bar again then went back to the room to await the arrival of the van that would take us on the 3-hour trip to the airport in Valencia. We tried to sleep but were not successful.

By 12:30 am we were packed, had checked out of the room and were waiting in the lobby.

We were not looking forward to the trip, but it was time to get this disaster of a trip behind us.

TC1 Day 21: Cartagena, Spain, to Naples FL

25 Apr 2018

Day 21 (Monday) - the day of our extraction from our forced exile in Cartagena, Spain.

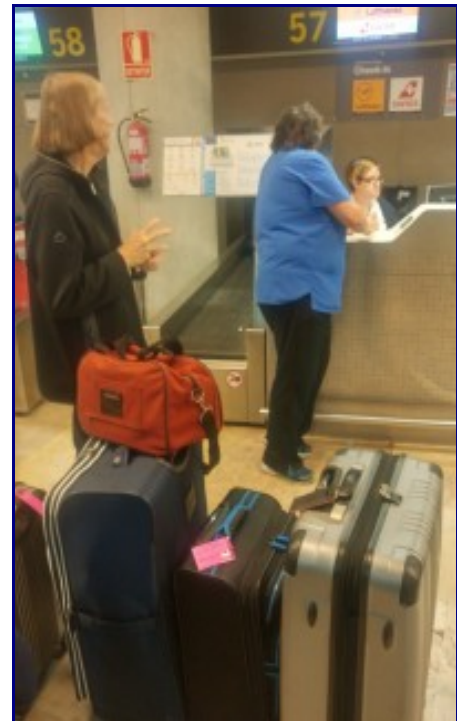
Nothing against you, Cartagena, but it felt good to leave you behind.

The extraction began with a 3-hour auto trip to the airport in Valencia. The van and the driver were arranged by Tish, our travel nurse/angel. They arrived at our hotel right on time at 1 am. I thought the trip would be quiet and I would nap, but I underestimated the loquaciousness of Tish and Jett. And, yes, I joined in from time to time. So the trip went very quickly.

Tish handled all the check-in details and checked our 4 bags through to Miami. She tried - and failed - to get an upgrade for me, but I credit her with the attempt. So I sat in economy while they sat in business. The fact that Jett was in a wheelchair got us priority boarding. I was in a row with just 2 seats and no one sat in the other seat, so I had plenty of space for the nearly 3-hour trip to Frankfurt.

Jett had to walk down 16 steps when we arrived at Frankfurt and despite being assisted into the little bus that they had waiting for us (and only us), she nearly fell. Close call.

The bus dropped us off at a special needs office which turned out to be at the wrong end of this huge airport. When we got a wheelchair and pusher we had only an hour to boarding. Still, we thought we would have plenty of time to get to the VIP lounge for their legendary fresh German pretzels. But we didn't count on the customs snafu.



Tish checking us in at Valencia

FYI: Make sure your passport get stamped when you enter an EU country. We entered, unexpectedly, when we departed the ship at Cartagena. The customs guy there - in an office the size of a telephone booth - was more concerned about getting rid of my excess cigarettes than in stamping our passports. Result: when we got to Frankfurt and went through customs there on our way out of the EU there was no stamp. Which immediately got us the attention of the police. They asked us, over and over again, why there was no stamp. And I said, over and over again, because the customs guy in Cartagena didn't give us one. The police mulled this for a while, as the clock ticked down to our departure. Finally they gave us our passports and let us through, saying "You were never in Europe." Like if anyone stopped us before getting on the plane we could just say "we aren't really here." But I count it as a victory as they could have easily kept us until they got some kind of confirmation from Cartagena that we were telling the truth. Which would have cost us at least another day. So Thank You,

Frankfurt polizei!

The rest of the trip was very long - 9.5 hours to Miami - but surprisingly pleasant and very interesting. Our plane was an A320-800 and the airline was Lufthansa. Incredible plane - two decks of seating - run by an airline with legendary service. It was a pleasure from start to finish.

Again, I was separated from Tish and Jett, who flew business class. I flew in "premium economy class" which is, of course, an oxymoron. But it was, hands down, the finest "economy" seating that I have ever had. Big seats, free headphones (very comfortable, very fine quality), complimentary blanket, pillow and a video entertainment system unlike any I have ever seen. I

had a choice of hundreds of movies, live shows, sports, documentaries... many other categories that I never got to. And video games. All free.

And the food and snacks. Lunch served first, then dinner before we landed. Each with a choice of chicken or vegetarian (Jett had beef in business class). Free wine, soft drinks, mixed drinks, beer - you name it, they had it. Free. Glassware, real silverware, cloth napkin. The food was delicious and very filling. Between meals the attendants came by at least 4 times offering orange juice or water. This is in addition to the free bottle of water that was at the seat when I arrived.

I did not want for anything other than sleep. I really intended to nap, but started watching *Star Wars - The Last Jedi* (not great, but I feel like I checked a box on my "cultural necessities" list), then started on *The Shape of Water*. That was more enjoyable, but is admittedly a weird movie. I may have napped briefly then before launching into *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*, which I think was the best of the three. Complex characters, great acting, kept my attention.

Then I played some video games and before I knew it we were landing in Miami. A quick disembarkation, a speedy trip through customs, a ride by van (again, arranged by Tish) to the hotel where the truck was waiting, some quick goodbyes and we were off to Naples.

With a stop at Burger King. Had to get a Whopper.

Two hours later we were at our RV which was waiting quietly for us. It took a few moments to get it all back in operating order (I had detached the water and pulled in the slides), but Jett was soon napping. I was in bed by 9 pm (3 am body time) - 26 hours after leaving Cartagena.

And so our aborted "dream cruise" ended - not with a bang but a very tired whimper. And a Whopper.



A320-800

TC1 wrapup

26 Apr 2018

The best one-word summary for our first transatlantic cruise (TC1) is "disaster." Of the 16 ports on the itinerary, I saw 4 and Jett saw 2. I saw none of the ports that were the real attractions of the trip: Livorno (Florence), Civitavecchia (Rome), Naples, Dubrovnik and Venice. And while the transatlantic portion was mostly smooth and enjoyable, Jett's low energy levels kept us away from the evening shows. The big on-board activities for us were watching TV (yes, we binge-watched the entire *Downton Abbey* series again) and, for me, jigsaw puzzling. Fun activities, but not what I had in mind for a transatlantic cruise.

We did meet some interesting people. I have no expectation that they will see this as I neglected to give them any kind of contact information when I left the ship, but I want to thank our dinner tablemates for providing some of the best times we had on board. And the people we met in the smoking area were all interesting in their own ways.

The ports I visited - Funchal, Madeira (with Jett), Lisbon, Malaga and Cartagena (with Jett) - were all very nice. I would say that they all exceeded my expectations, largely because I had none. As I said before, these were not the expected highlights of the trip so I did not research them much. All were clean, colorful and full of beautiful old buildings or ruins. I learned quite a bit about each and wouldn't mind returning to them all.

One of the positive aspects of Jett's hospitalization (stay with me folks, I am grasping here) was an extended stay in Cartagena, Spain. I don't know what I would have done with the planned short day there (the ship left at 1 pm), but it probably would have been just a quick walk up to the castle at the top of the hill near the cruise terminal. Maybe a visit to the Roman Theater. But because we stayed 5 days I was able to see much more. And learn much more. This is a great city for learning about ancient history.

Other positives? The flight home and the surprising benefits of trip insurance. The flight home - described in my previous post - was an unexpected (and much-needed) joy and the trip insurance provided benefits that I had not anticipated, most notably our intrepid travel nurse Tish. Her presence made the last day of the journey so much easier and for that we are grateful.

The negative? Illness. Jett is seriously ill and while the treatment she got in Spain was effective it was not a cure. We will need to do further tests and, hopefully, arrive at a long-term solution. But while departing the cruise when we did was deeply disappointing (Jett shed a lot of tears), it may have saved her life. The doctors both on the ship and in Cartagena could not understand how she could still be standing and functioning with her hemoglobin so low.

If there is a lesson to be learned from all of this (besides to check your hemoglobin level regularly) it is this: buy the best trip insurance available. Two levels - gold and platinum - were offered and the difference in price was not huge - a few hundred dollars. I remember, when choosing between the two, focusing on the relative benefits of cancellation prior to embarking - gold provided about 50% reimbursement and platinum 80%. For a trip as pricey as this one, that difference alone made platinum worthwhile. And, at the time, with Jett not feeling very well, I figured that the real risk was not going at all. I thought that once we embarked we would complete the journey.

Well, our trip was interrupted and I can tell you that from the moment we got off the ship to the time we got safely back home, I thanked my lucky stars many times for choosing the platinum plan. Consider that the medical costs - about \$5,000 - were covered in full. The airline fares home - business class for Jett, which were over \$11,000 for her ticket alone - were also covered in full. So far the benefits of the travel insurance are probably pushing \$20,000 for us and Tish probably added another \$20,000 to the costs for the insurance company. I haven't filed the claim yet for all of the other expenses - hotel, meals, taxis - and the cost of the unused portion of the cruise itself. The total cost to the insurance company may exceed \$50,000.

The decision to take the platinum trip insurance proved to be one of my best ever.

As American Express would say... don't leave home without it.

Our last night at Paradise Pointe

6 May 2018

We arrived Nov 20. We depart May 7. We have been at [Paradise Pointe RV Resort](#) for about 5 months, not counting our aborted cruise time. Time for a review.



Our last night, ready to go

Capsule summary: it was ok. How's that for lukewarm? It is a perfectly fine park, but is more oriented toward people living in "park models" than vagabond people like us. The park has a fair number of sites - maybe 15% of its 365 sites or about 55 - that are occupied by full-time, year-round residents. Most other parks we have stayed at seasonally either do not stay open year-round or do not allow seasonal residents to stay more than 6 months. This "permanent" population changes the character of the park and, from the perspective of a transient seasonal resident, not for the better as they tend to form cliques. There were fewer activities than we enjoyed last year at [Gulf Waters](#). We were less active, overall. Bottom line was that we enjoyed our season less this year than last.

We have to take some of the blame. Jett was not feeling well most of the winter, so even when we went to a dance, we left early. I didn't try real hard to join in on activities. For example, I never once went to the Euchre card events. I did try to play poker, but quickly got discouraged when my cards stunk. We didn't try to start any new activities, such as a genealogy club. We were stick-in-the-muds and it is not surprising that we didn't have a great time

But another factor was the English/French split. Many residents - probably more than a third - were French Canadian. The ones I met could speak English adequately, with a few exceptions. And they were lovely people. But there was a bit of an us-vs-them feel. Not hostility, just separation. The French-speaking people kept to themselves at dances. They did join in on things like poker and golf outings, but usually in small groups, so that they could speak their native language when they wanted to do so. I can't fault them for this - I would do the same in Quebec, I suppose. But it affected our view of the park as a friendly, unified place.

Another factor was that, unlike Gulf Waters where we arrived belonging to a group of people from Tennessee who adopted us (thanks, guys), we had to make new friends here. We can do that, but it takes some effort and it was made difficult by Jett's chronic illness. We were fortunate in being placed initially next to Alan and Rojean

and, next to them, John and Joy. Those two couples - and their friends Dick and Dee and John's brother Mike - formed our only close social circle. They were a lot of fun and we appreciate being included in their "happy hours" and parties. But overall Paradise Pointe was, for us, not as much fun as Gulf Waters.

The facilities were very nice. The clubhouse was large and very functional. It had a community bulletin board (with event signup sheets) and a paperback exchange - pretty standard stuff for residential RV parks. It had a mail room and a laundry room, both small but adequate. The dog park was dusty but otherwise nice and the pickleball courts and the pool were excellent. Negatives? The cable TV was pretty basic, often went out and had only analog feeds, which translates to "not very good picture quality." The twice-a-week garbage collection was adequate but the park has absolutely no recycling - I traveled 15 miles at least once a month to recycle our paper, plastic and glass.

So everything was ok - better than ok, really - but I don't think there is anything I will miss. Except for John, Joy, Alan and Rojean.

TN4 Hop 1: Naples FL to Wildwood FL

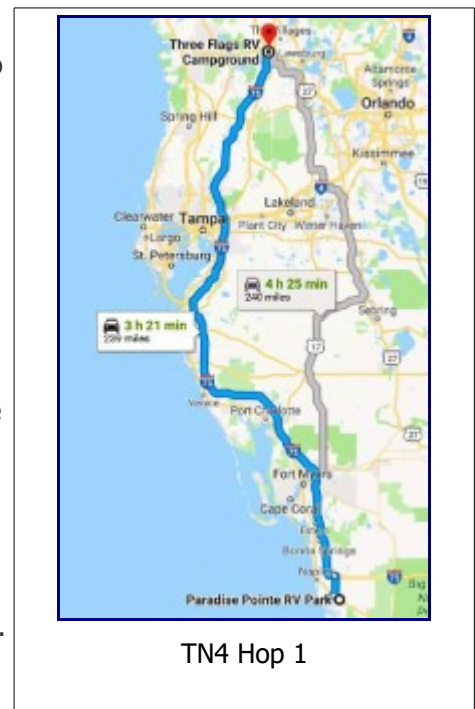
7 May 2018

239 miles mostly via I-75. Truck miles: 242. Cumulative tow miles: 239. Cumulative truck miles: 242.

We have traveled I-75 many times before - and I traveled the 50 miles between Naples and Ft Myers twice a week all winter to play softball - so there was nothing new here. The weather was nice (and hot!) and the traffic was only moderate (one of the advantages of waiting until May to head north). We stopped at a rest area for about 20 minutes but otherwise made the trip non-stop. It was an easy trip and well-planned with respect to fuel: the low fuel light lit up just as we exited I-75.

The most interesting part of the trip was the rest stop. I took the opportunity to check tire pressures. Our truck tires have a maximum pressure rating of 80 psi and the RV specifies no more than 110 psi. I filled the tires yesterday to 75 and 100 psi, respectively, thinking that even with heating the pressures would not go over the max. Wrong! The truck tires were all running at about 82 and the RV tires ranged between 115 and 120 psi. So I let air out of all the tires, bringing the truck down to about 78 and the RV down to about 108. I will check the pressures again in the morning, when they are cold.

We are spending the night in Wildwood at the [Three Flags RV Campground](#), an RV park with no cable TV and no over-the-air reception. Break out the *Perry Mason* DVDs! We still have most of Season 8 to watch.



TN4 Hop 1

Seems like a pretty nice campground otherwise, but we don't require much for an overnight stay.

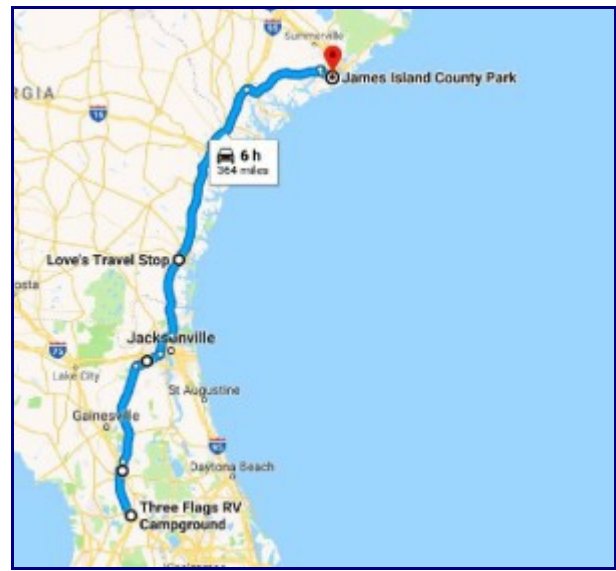
TN4 Hop 2: Wildwood FL to Charleston SC

9 May 2018

364 miles via I-75, FL 326, US 301, FL 228, I-295 (around Jacksonville), I-95, US 17 and some local roads to the destination, with a refueling/lunch stop in Brunswick GA. Truck miles: 373. Cumulative tow miles: 603. Cumulative truck miles: 615.

This was one of the longest hops we have ever experienced. It was over 6 hours door-to-door. The weather was good and the traffic was moderate. The route was mostly one we have taken several times before, so no surprises there. However, the FL 228 segment was new. It was a route suggested by the GPS and I took it because it bypassed the nasty US 301/I-10 interchange which often is backed up for a half-mile or more. FL 228 had some lights, but was 4 lanes almost all the way, so I think it was a good choice.

The only nasty part of the trip occurred on I-75 just south of FL 326. An 18-wheel car carrier passed me on the right, then cut me off pulling into my lane. And when I say "cut me off" I mean that we would have collided had I not slammed on the brakes. Idiot. Obviously in a hurry, traveling well over the 70 mph limit. So I couldn't catch him to give him the one-finger salute.



TN4 Hop 2

We normally try to keep the hops to a single tank of fuel, which is about 240 miles. But on this trip we were tightly constrained by time: we wanted to get to VA by Friday May 18 to pick up Rusty and have a weekend with family. And we don't like to do back-to-back one-night stops. So the only alternative was to have two long hops separated by 2 nights somewhere. That somewhere was Charleston, which we love and where we can get some first-rate fried green tomatoes.

We had lunch at our refueling stop in Brunswick GA. We were visited there by some of the brassiest birds we have ever encountered. Obviously they were accustomed to people feeding them. If we hadn't closed our windows I think they may very well have flown right into the cab and taken the sandwiches from our hands. They perched on our side view mirrors and stared in at us as we were eating. Shades of *The Birds*!

Our home for the 2 nights is the [Campground at James Island](#), a county park just south of downtown Charleston. We stayed here once before several years ago. It is a superb campground with huge sites, lots of visual separation from neighbors, very friendly staff and first-rate walking and biking trails. It also has the finest dog park we have ever seen, with two beaches. Of course we didn't have Rusty with us. But he isn't a swimmer so mostly this stop is nostalgic as we remember the joy Grace had frolicking in the water.



Brassy bird

It also has an "outdoor activity center" which includes a disc golf course (tough - narrow fairways and LOTS of trees) and climbing towers. The disc golf was free, but I had to register to play. The course goes deep into the

woods and I can imagine people getting lost in there, so they probably want to know whether they need to send out a search party. Or have a name to attach to a body if I was attacked by a bear. I don't know, but it was certainly a first in my disc golf experience.

I also met a gentleman who organizes national disc golf tournaments. He had a trunk full of discs and he gave me a couple, so not only was the disc golf free, but I ended up plus-2 on my disc count. Pretty nice.



Our site



Climbing tower

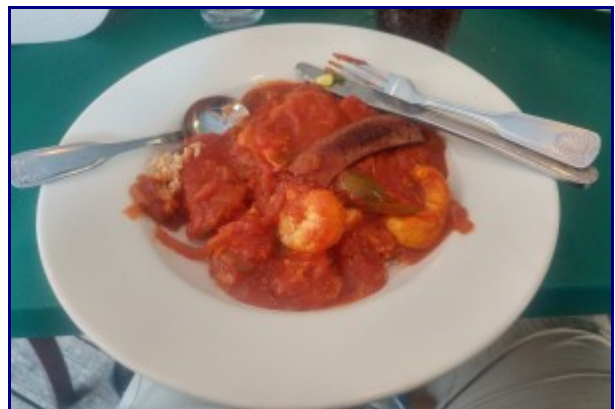
Charleston SC

10 May 2018

We love Charleston. We like Savannah, too, and Savannah is easier to get to because of its proximity to I-95, but Charleston is worth the extra effort. I have written before on all the things we like about Charleston, so I will just describe our day there.

Our main goal was the fried green tomatoes at [Tommy Condon's](#) and we got those as an appetizer. They never disappoint. I followed that with a jambalaya that just about burned my lips off - very, very spicy. Probably too spicy, but I had a pint of Kilkeny Ale to soothe my palate. I finished it and, contrary to Jett's prediction, did not have to swallow any Tums before bed.

We visited the [Charleston City Market](#) before dinner and purchased several gifts there. Jett also got a new everyday pendant - a sailor's compass - and I got the best Arnold Palmer (tea/lemonade mix) ever. Tangy yet sweet. Perfect. I also got a chocolate bar with bits of bacon and potato chips which I had for dessert. Also delicious.



Jambalaya

We wandered the streets for a bit before heading back to the RV. No matter how many times I walk around Charleston I always find some striking new views to snap. I include a few here.

Love this city!



Phillips spire from Circular Church



One of the many churches



Gnarled tree on walkway



Anchor decoration

TN4 Hop 3: Charleston SC to Wilson NC

11 May 2018

299 miles via US 17, I-26, I-95 and US 301 with a refueling stop in Florence SC. Truck miles: 316: Cumulative tow miles: 902. Cumulative truck miles: 931.

Well, we always like an adventure. And this trip is becoming an adventure.

I thought I detected a wobble in the steering as we approached Charleston on Tuesday and continued to feel it when we went into Charleston on Wednesday. Thursday, on our way to Wilson NC, it became so pronounced that I pulled off in a rest area to check all the lug nuts and look for looseness in the steering. Lugs were fine and I could find no looseness. Next theory: the right front tire was out of round. I carefully checked the tread and, sure enough, I found a spot where the tread was bulged on the inside. This could account for the "wobble" feel.

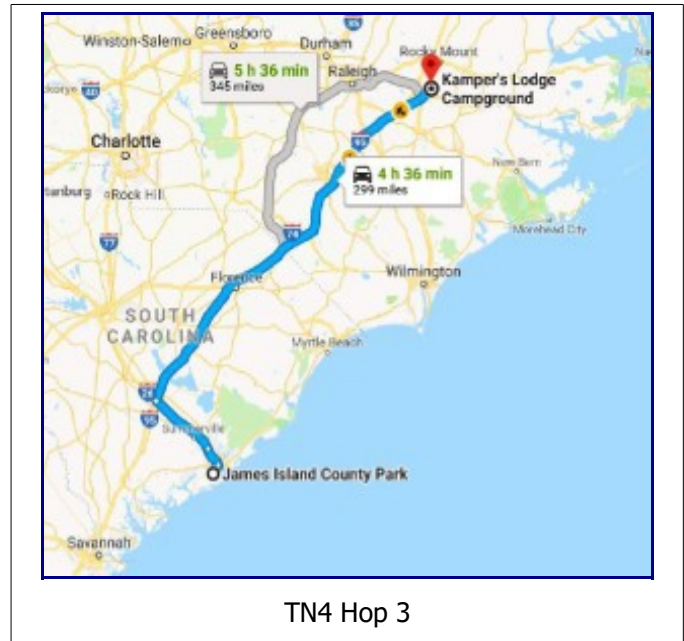
Jett and I discussed the options. The most straightforward solution was to change it myself. However, I had never changed a tire on the truck and was not comfortable with the idea. The next option would be to drive to the refueling stop - a Pilot truck

stop about 30 miles away - and try to find someone there to change the tire. The third option - and the one we eventually chose - was to drive to Pilot and call AAA to change the tire. We would eat lunch while waiting.

We got to the Pilot. I called AAA and Jett went in search of snacks. I backed the RV into a space in the truck parking area (very nicely, if I say so myself), unhitched and refueled. I returned to the RV, ate my lunch and then tried (and failed) to get the spare down from the undercarriage. Before I could figure it out the AAA guy appeared and showed me how to do it. He proceeded to change the tire, commented on how the tire was indeed out of round and was on his way. And, shortly thereafter, so were we. A 50 minute stop to refuel, have lunch and get a tire changed.

I felt like I was in pit row.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. Our home for the evening was the [Kamper's Lodge Campground](#), a small RV park on US 301 just north of Wilson. We didn't get much of an opportunity to check out the amenities in the park because just about the time we got set up the skies opened and we were treated to a pretty impressive thunderstorm with torrential downpours and scary lightning. But it lasted only about an hour.



TN4 Hop 3

TN4 Hop 4: Wilson NC to Lorton VA

12 May 2018

237 miles via US 301, US 64, I-95, I-295 (around Richmond) and VA 242. Truck miles: 254. Cumulative tow miles: 1139. Cumulative truck miles: 1185.

The first "adventure" of the day occurred as I was on my way to fill the tank: the "check engine" light came on

as I was idling at a traffic signal. The engine immediately went into "safe mode" which meant that I basically had no acceleration. I pulled over (difficult because I was in a construction zone) and repeatedly turned the engine off, let it rest, then restarted the engine. I had to do that about 8 times before the engine resumed normal operation. I gingerly made it one more block to the Shell station, filled up and then made it back to the RV park without falling back into safe mode.

After chatting with Jett (not a happy conversation) we decided that I should go to the office and warn them that we might be there another night), then go to find a diesel mechanic to take a look. The office person was not happy to hear that we might not be able to move as someone was booked into the site for the weekend. The mechanic (at [Brad's Diesel and Auto Repair](#)) was happy to run the diagnostics - after I agreed to an \$85 diagnostic fee. He found three codes stored in the

engine's computer - all relating to injector electrical connections. No huge surprise as that is a chronic problem on the truck. He looked at one harness connector and said that it looked a little loose, so he pushed on it. Hard to say if that had any effect as the engine was running fine at that point - the engine light had even gone away. He cleared the codes and I went into the office to pay my \$85 fee. After listening to the boss yammer on for about 15 minutes about trucks and truck modifications with a friend, he finally got around to asking me what I needed (no sense of urgency in Wilson NC). When the mechanic said I was there to pay the \$85 diagnostic fee, he waved his hand like he was shooing flies and told me I was good to go. I guess collecting \$85 was beneath him. And odd way to run a business, but I was grateful.

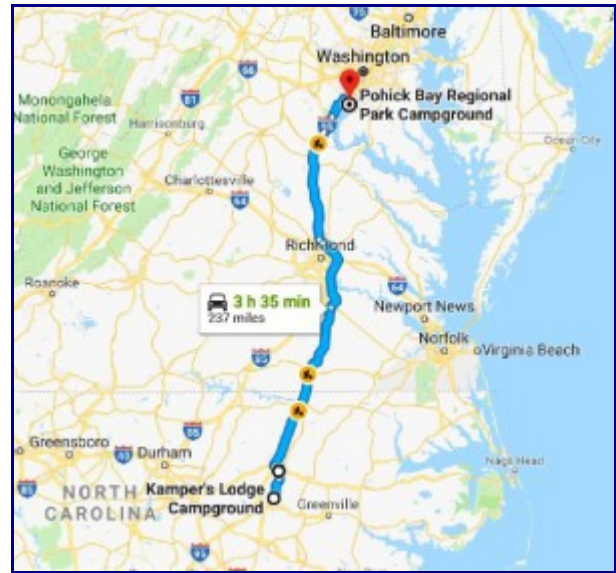
So we were pretty much in the same situation we were in a couple of years earlier in Stony Brook VA - the truck might be ok, but there was no way to tell without trying. As the mechanic said then: "If you get 20 miles without out the light coming on, just keep on going." So we hitched up and drove 20 white-knuckle miles to I-95 and everything was fine, so we kept going.

Other than the usual stop-and-go traffic near DC, the rest of the trip was uneventful. Until we got to the [Pohick Bay Regional Park Campground](#). Check-in was easy but backing into the site was a bit of a challenge because it was so sloped. But we got the RV leveled, hooked up the electricity and deployed the slides. Everything was going great - until I went out to hook up the water. No water source. I walked to the office and they confirmed that the site was "electric only" - no water. Yikes! Five days with no water? Untenable. I asked if any water/electric sites were available but they said that they were completely booked through Saturday night. I will try again on Saturday and will hopefully find an alternate site for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Either that or find a way to get the fresh water tank filled.

I really believed that I had booked a water/electric site. A terrible mistake on my part.

So we are operating on a half-tank of fresh water. I got a couple gallons of drinking water to use in the coffee maker and will have to shower/shave at the public showers. Haven't done that in a while.

This has not been the smoothest trip north.



TN4 Hop 4

TN4 Hop 5: Lorton VA to Gettysburg PA

17 May 2018

97 miles via VA 242, I-95, I-495 (around Washington), I-270, US 15 and local roads. Truck miles: 224. Cumulative tow miles: 1236. Cumulative truck miles: 1409.

The trip itself was uneventful, but was on a dreary, rainy day. The drama came when we arrived at our destination - the [Gettysburg Campground](#) - where we were informed that they would be closing on Thursday (our departure day - just an overnight stop) due to expected flooding. They took my phone number and said they would call if the creek rose faster than expected. There was a *slight* chance that I would have to leave in the middle of the night. Fortunately that was not necessary.

There was also water-related drama during our 5 nights at the [Pohick Bay Regional Park Campground](#) but it involved our fresh water supply. I mentioned earlier that I accidentally booked an "electric only" site, so we had only the fresh water that we carried in with us - probably about 30 gallons. That would be 6 gallons per day. I tried to get moved to a water-and-electric site but was unsuccessful. So we conserved - I took a couple of showers at the bathhouse and the showers we took in the RV were limited to about 1 minute. We cheated a bit by using bottled water in the coffeemaker. We made it - 5 days on 30 gallons - but it wasn't fun and I won't do it again.

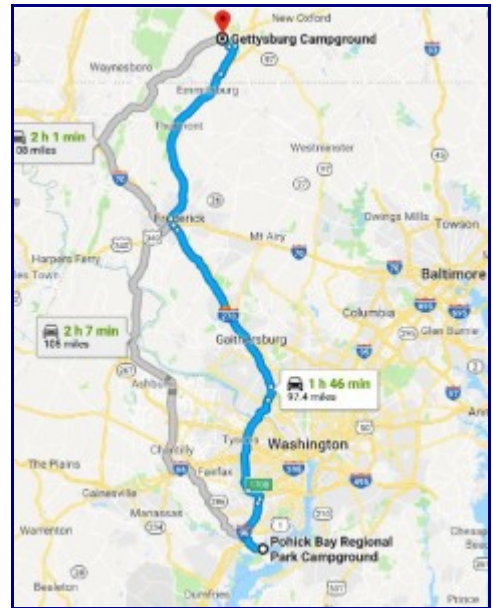
Pohick is becoming more and more popular and I will need to book a site far in advance. Hopefully Site 71 - the best site in the park. I probably shouldn't mention that as my tens of readers will now know what to ask for when they head that way.

It was a rainy 5 days. While we did get some sun, every day ended with a thunderstorm. It was drizzling when we pulled out and I had to leave the firewood that I bought but couldn't use. Not great weather, but at least I-95 wasn't closed due to flooding as it was last spring.

Because of the weather most of our family activities were indoors, including a lot of restaurant dinners. I gained about 5 pounds. I will need to shed those before my softball game next Monday.

The rain is going to continue all the way to Massachusetts. The forecast for our arrival on Friday: rain, followed by more rain Saturday and Sunday. Welcome home.

We did get to see a lot of grandson Zachary, including watching him play a baseball game (a tough 4-0 loss). It is always a treat to spend time with this fine young man. And his parents and aunt and uncle. Thanks, all!



TN4 Hop 5



Hibachi dinner



Zachary at the plate



Zachary at the skateboard park



Rusty relaxing with Uncle Josh

TN4 Hop 6: Gettysburg PA to Milford PA

18 May 2018

200 miles via PA 116, US 30, US 15, I-83, I-81, I-78, PA 33, US 22 and US 209. Truck miles: 212. Cumulative tow miles: 1436. Cumulative truck miles: 1621.

Another rainy day, but at least it became less rainy as the day went on. Gettysburg was at the northern edge of a flood zone, so we got out of there just in time.

The route was complicated (as Jett noted about a dozen times as she tried, without success, to reconcile the printed map with the GPS directions) but we managed to navigate it without getting lost. Most of the route was highway that we have traveled before. As always, the Pennsylvania roads were narrow, crowded and in poor repair. Not my favorite state for travel.

Our home for the evening was the [River Beach Campsites](#) which is, first and foremost, a base for canoe and kayak excursions down the Delaware River, and is

only secondarily an RV campground. We stayed here at least once before and I had some positive memories of the place, though its primary attraction is its location: on the Delaware River, near an entrance to I-84, within one tank of Boston. Well, I rescind those positive memories. There is just nothing to recommend this place. The sites are uneven and, after a rainy week, very muddy. There is no cable TV and absolutely no over-the-air TV. There is spotty Verizon service, no sewer hookups, no garbage collection, no recycling. That it is conveniently located is not sufficient.

I need to find a better option.



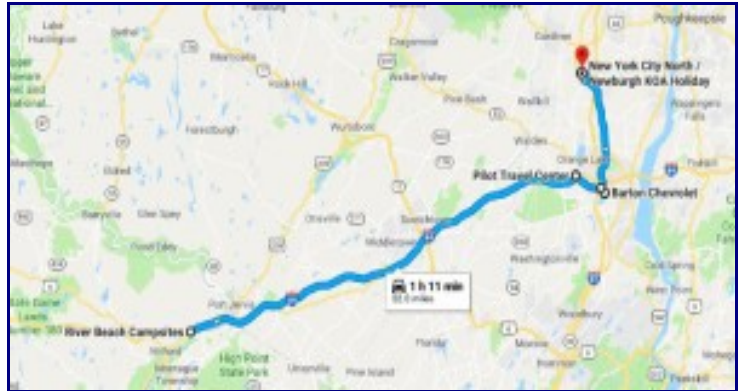
TN4 Hop 6

TN4 Hop 7: Milford PA to Newburgh NY

19 May 2018

38 miles via I-84. Truck miles: 52. Cumulative tow miles: 1504. Cumulative truck miles: 1673.

This was supposed to be the last hop of the TN4. Not so. 37 miles into the trip the "check engine" light once again reappeared. And was persistent. We waited, on the side of the very busy I-84, for about 25 minutes before the light went off. The good news, if there is any, is that we were able to pull over at the top of Exit 6 and that a Pilot Truck Center was located at that exit. When I got the engine restarted, We were able to take the exit ramp, wait at the bottom through a light cycle, make a left turn and travel about a tenth of a mile to the light for the turn into the truck stop. Then the engine failed again.



TN4 Hop 7

We had to wait about 10 minutes in the left turn lane, hazard lights blinking, until the engine restarted normally and I was able to pull into the truck stop. Where the light came on once again.

Three failures in a mile. I suppose we could have made it to Massachusetts a quarter of a mile at a time, but it would have taken a week.

Time to get this annoying problem fixed for real.

I went into the truck stop and talked to the mechanic. He had no diagnostic equipment, but gave me the number of a guy who did. I called the number and he appeared within 20 minutes. Diagnosed the problem as a voltage issue on injector 2 - same problem we had in NC. No surprise there. Paid him \$100 for that bit of information (cash - it would have been \$200 on a credit card - don't tell the IRS), got permission from the truck stop manager to park the RV overnight, got it parked, found a local GMC/Chevy dealership 3 miles away and drove there in "safe mode". The truck actually can travel in safe mode, but sounds like hell and is useless as a tow vehicle. I talked to the service guy at the dealership. There was no real hope of fixing the problem before Monday (they had one "diesel guy" who



The \$100 diagnosis

was swamped) and very likely wouldn't be looked at before Tuesday. So... get a rental car (the service guy called Enterprise for us), take what we needed from the truck (not much - some sewer hookup stuff and the dog), book a site at the closest RV park (a KOA 10 miles away), make arrangements to haul the RV there the next day (the RV park had no sites on Friday), get a hotel room for the night, go back to the truck stop to get what we needed overnight and drive to the hotel. Then find a pizza place for dinner.

Tough hop. We will lose everything that we have in the freezer. We were smart enough to dump the ice so that we wouldn't come back to a pool of water on the floor tomorrow.

Oh - almost forgot the other "fun" aspect of this day: the broken glass. When we pulled out of the River Beach Campsites park, the right RV tires dropped into a pretty deep hole. I saw the RV rock behind me as I made the

turn. The severe dip/tilt/rock was enough to toss the recliner about 2 feet and throw open one of the kitchen cabinet doors, allowing two glasses to tumble out onto the countertop, break and spread glass all over everything. Just a little insult on top of the injury.

This was arguably the worst hop in our 5+ years of traveling. To come on the heels of our disastrous cruise makes it even more painful.

We had to call Lamb City (our summer campground) and tell them that our arrival would be delayed indefinitely. They were sympathetic, but still insisted on full payment of the balance. I guess I would call that limited sympathy.



Broken glass

Jett says that we should be grateful for the good fortune that we had - we were able to get the rig into the truck stop and make arrangements to fix the truck and stay in Newburgh, all within a few hours. I guess. But let's say that I have limited gratitude.

TN4 road trip

24 May 2018

The truck was left for repair while we rented a car and drove to Boston for two nights in the Quality Inn in Lexington MA. The road trip was necessary because we had two critically important commitments: my first summer softball game on Monday and Jett's appointment with her doctor on Tuesday. Both went reasonably well: my team won both games, though I can't take much of the credit, and Jett got lots of blood taken for a battery of tests. We are keeping our fingers crossed on both the truck and the blood tests.

As you can see from the photo below, the weather for the softball game was sunny and warm - a perfect softball day. This was just a stroke of luck because it rained all the way to Boston and rained all the way back to Newburgh. The traffic on the return trip was terrible. A miserable 5-hour trip.



First softball game



Summer rat

We had a couple of hours to kill on Tuesday morning - Jett's doctor appointment was at 1:30 pm - so I went out in search of a used car. We wanted an inexpensive car that we could use while we are in MA - a "summer rat." Buying and selling should be cheaper than renting. Unless we run into mechanical problems, of course.

I found a 2008 Ford Fusion that looked like it would meet our needs, so I took Jett to see it. She loved it. So within the course of an hour we had bought it. We will take possession on Saturday.

It wasn't part of the original TN4 plan, but it turned out to be a pretty productive road trip.

TN4 Hop 8: Newburgh NY to Phillipston MA

31 Dec 2018

190 miles via NY 32, I-87, I-90, MA 21 and US 202. Truck miles: 267. Cumulative tow miles: 1694. Cumulative truck miles: 1930.

This was a hop that, like the stay in Newburgh, was not in our plan. The original, ill-fated Hop 7 would have taken I-84 to I-91 up into MA. But from Newburgh the I-87 route was basically the same time, though 10 miles longer and about \$20 more expensive due to tolls. But having traversed I-84 twice on our "road trip" and enjoying it not at all, I opted for the longer, more expensive route.

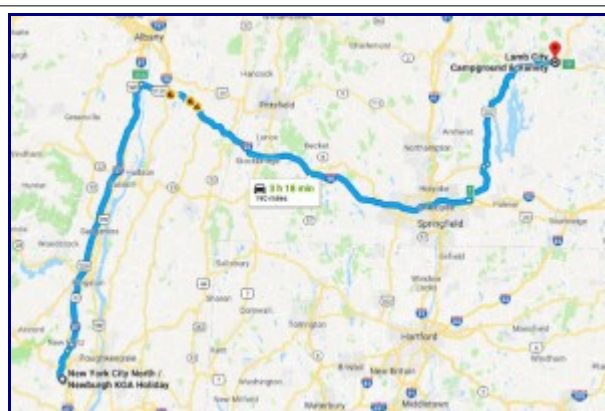
I am glad I did as it was a scenic route on a beautiful day. The traffic was, relative to I-84, light and the navigation was simple. The first 20 miles were, as usual, white-knuckle because it would have been disastrous if the engine problem reappeared. It didn't. But I didn't start to relax until we had gone about 50

miles. At that point Jett called the campground - the [New York City North/Newburgh KOA Holiday](#) - to let them know that we had vacated the site a day early. We kept our reservation for as long as we thought there was a chance we would have to return.

The KOA was a port in a storm. I chose it because it was closest to my truck, so I really didn't care what it had to offer. I didn't look around with a critical eye. But it is a nice little campground. A few too many long-term residents for my taste, but maybe they are waiting for their trucks to be fixed, too. We were next to a lovely couple who were attending his *65th* class reunion at West Point. Wow.

So it appears that the truck has been fixed. I won't fully believe that until I haul the RV back down to Florida without encountering an engine problem. But I am cautiously optimistic as the service rep showed me a service bulletin which described my symptoms perfectly.

And only \$861 to fix it. A bargain.



TN4 Hop 8

Update on Jett's health

25 May 2018

Her most recent blood tests show that her hemoglobin is holding steady at a low-normal level. Her doctor is putting her on B12 supplements and will monitor her condition closely. So while we still don't know the cause for the near-catastrophic drop in hemoglobin while on the cruise, the fact that it has recovered and seems to be a manageable condition is very encouraging.

TN4 wrapup

10 Jun 2018

I am belatedly doing the post-mortem on the Fourth Trip North (TN4). By the numbers: 17 nights in 8 hops, 1664 tow miles, 1930 truck miles, \$757.93 in campground fees (\$44.58 per night). The campground total does not include the 2 nights we spent in the Quality Inn in Lexington MA and if I were to provide a total cost I would have to include the 5 days we had to rent a car in Newburgh NY and fuel, not only to get to the destination but also to make that trip by rental car to Lexington so that Jett could make her medical appointment.

In short, this was not the trip that was planned. The main feature was mechanical problems with the truck - first in NC then again in NY. The failure in NY caused a 5-day delay in reaching the destination. It also resulted in unexpected expenditures of over \$1,500 for hotels, an 8th campground and a rental car. Those problems were definitely the main "lowlights", but not the only lowlights. Once again we were plagued by rainy weather all the way from VA to MA, including a threat of flooding in PA. The highlights? Visiting family in VA and an always-pleasant stay at James Island in Charleston. God, we love that park and love that city!



TN4 Actual

We also picked up Rusty along the way in VA. Many thanks to Jett's sons for taking such good care of him. He almost didn't want to leave.

We left NY with a repaired truck and hopes that we would have a reliable (and maintenance-free) truck all summer. Well, those hopes were dashed a week later. I will describe those separately.

This was probably the most difficult north/south trip ever. We need a problem-free trip south in the fall to feel confident that we have a reliable truck.

Cruise claims

10 Jun 2018

Our insurance claims for the aborted cruise total \$13,601.97, not counting the \$202.34 that was automatically refunded by TAP when we cancelled our airline tickets from Venice. There were four separate claims:

- \$394.00 to AIG (airline insurance carrier) for the non-refunded portion of the Venice airfare.
- \$9,253.86 to Aon (cruise insurance) for trip interruption.
- \$2,963.29 to Humana for medical expenses while out of the country (80% coverage).
- \$990.82 to Aon (cruise insurance) for non-reimbursed (20%) medical expenses.

Not all claims have been paid, but so far the only expenses that have been denied have been the hotel and meals expenses that were incurred in Cartagena while waiting for the arrival of our travel nurse.

I still have my fingers crossed, but it is looking good that the cruise, while being a medical and vacation disaster,

won't be a financial disaster as well.

"No Safe House" by Linwood Barclay

27 Jun 2018

[Copyright 2014 Barclay Perspectives, Inc. Published by Penguin Random House.](#)

I will give Barclay credit for coming up with a plot that I have never encountered before. A small-time gangster goes into the "private banking" business, taking in cash and other valuables from people who don't want them where the authorities might find them should their properties be searched. He takes a percentage off the top and he hides the booty where no one would think to look: in the attics of unsuspecting neighbors. But his scheme encounters a problem when one of his stashes is stolen - obviously an inside job - and, in the course of the robbery, the son of one of his henchmen - who is there on a totally unrelated criminal purpose (taking a hot car for a joy ride) - is killed by the robber. Accompanying the would-be joy rider is the underage daughter of a high school teacher.

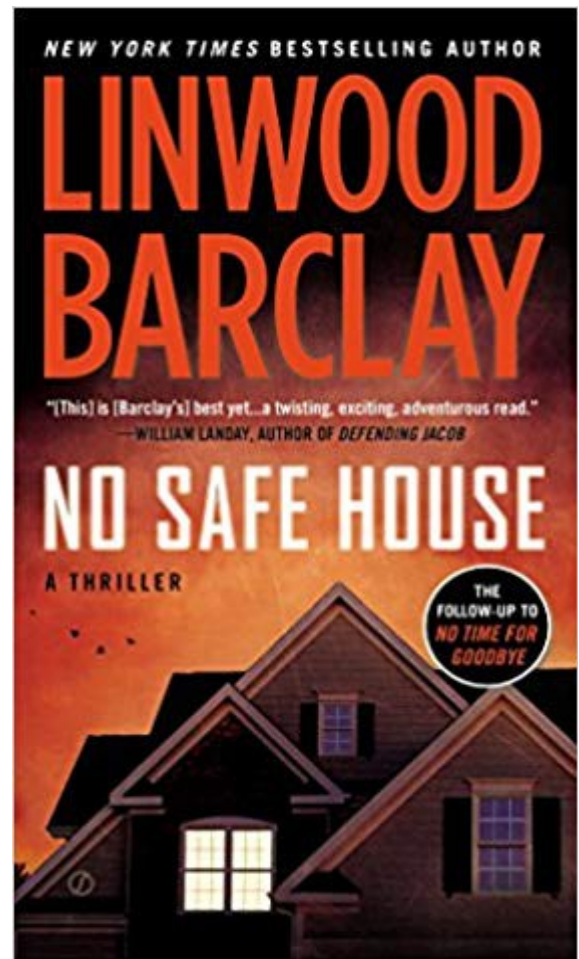
Things rapidly spiral out of control, for the gangster, his henchmen, the people supporting the private banking enterprise and especially the teacher and his family. The body count eventually reaches 6, plus three earlier deaths that are eventually linked. The second biggest question is: how is the teacher going to get out of this mess?

But the biggest question is: why the hell would a gangster store booty in the attics of unsuspecting people? Why not just bury it in the woods, with the GPS locations carefully noted? It would have been simpler and safer (fewer people aware of the criminal activities, much less chance of being caught in the houses). At one point in the book the gangster admits that it was all a pretty dumb idea.

Barclay ties up everything nicely. Perhaps too nicely, with too many coincidences. I think he is a decent writer but I had a very hard time keeping with the story, maybe because the whole idea was so ridiculous. But I slogged through and the final 100 pages went pretty quickly.

If you don't mind a head-scratching plot, the rest of the book was okay.

5 out of 10.



"The Sacred Vault" by Andy McDermott

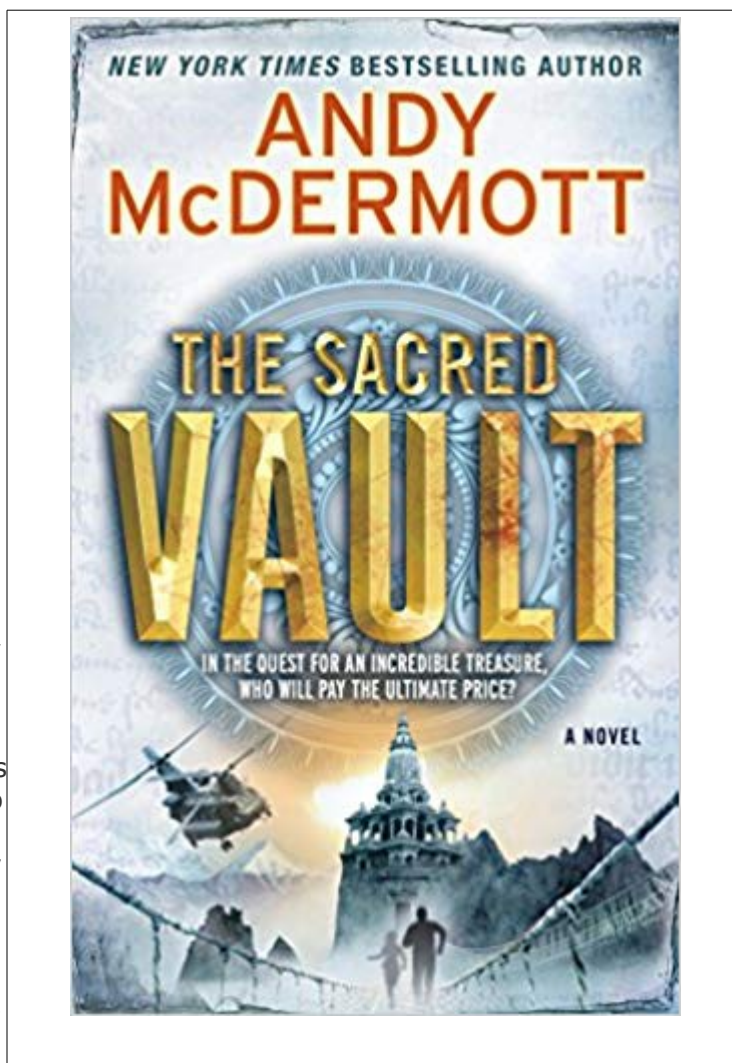
28 Jul 2018

[2011 Bantam Books Mass Market Edition](#)

This is a book of epic adventure, #6 in the series featuring archaeologists Nina Wilde and Eddie Chase. These books are reminiscent of the Clive Cussler novels in that they involve fantastic locations and non-stop action. And a huge body count. In this book I counted 87 deaths, plus however many people were killed in a terrorist attack on a G20 meeting of world leaders. That is 87 deaths in 500 pages or about 1 death every 6 pages.

The plot involves a search for the Sacred Vault of Shiva, a legendary place that contains, so the story goes, the Shiva-Vedas, stone tablets containing the wisdom of the Hindu god Shiva. An Indian billionaire wants them because he believes that with the wisdom of Shiva - and his control of worldwide information flow via his Qexia search engine - he can bring an end to the current final stage in the Hindu cycle of existence, the Kali Yuga era - an end that would embroil the entire world in war, death and destruction but would also usher in a new era of peace and enlightenment. Khoil, the Indian billionaire, wants to be in charge when the new era begins and also wants to do everything he can to hasten its arrival, which he believes can be best achieved by killing all the world leaders meeting for the G20.

So the fate of the world hangs in the balance. It is the Indian billionaire and his army of mercenaries against two archaeologists and a few close friends. Guess who wins?



How they win is kind of fun, if you are willing to suspend your disbelief. In addition to the Shiva-Vedas, the sacred vault contains a wide assortment of amazing ancient fighting machines, including some rocket-powered gliders at least 1000 years old. One of the gliders is used to escape the mercenaries. Yes, the heroes board an ancient flying machine and it not only is still functional, but manages to safely transport them out of the Himalayas despite being chased - and shot at - by a helicopter gunship.

See what I mean about suspending disbelief? Pretty ridiculous, really, but the book was a fun summer read.

Still, I would take a Clive Cussler book over an Andy McDermott book any day.

5 out of 10.

Camping World "diagnostics"

29 Jul 2018

When we bought our fifth wheel in May 2015 we purchased an extended warranty plan that would give us "stem-to-stern" coverage for 6 years. Recently we found a reason to use the plan: a cable on one of our black water tank valves broke, making our half bath unusable. We thought this would also be a good time to address our chronic inverter problem: the inverter that exists solely to power our residential refrigerator while traveling (to keep our food cold) has never, ever worked. Not once. Every time the compressor starts up the inverter is overloaded and switches off.

Jett had a list of 6 other things that she wanted to have a RV technician look at and, based on the results of the diagnostic work, we would decide whether to fix them. So we made a date to haul the RV the 80 miles to the Camping World in Colchester NH with the expectation that they would keep it for 3 days, fix the 2 critical issues and give us estimates for fixing the others.

The only mention of a cost for the diagnostics was a statement that if the repair was not covered by the warranty then the diagnostic cost would be ours. Fine.

So we duly dropped the RV off. The next morning we got a call "reminding" us that there would be a separate flat-rate diagnostic cost of \$67 per item. So... 8 items, \$67 each... \$536. I dropped two items - sticky windows which I felt pretty strongly could not be fixed; that is just how the windows were. I should have dropped the living room shades issue as it would have been cheaper to just replace the shades rather than paying \$67 to learn that the shades needed to be replaced. I also should have dropped the problem with the awning tilt control as the control part - a knob - could probably be replaced for under \$20. But I didn't. They did fix the knob while diagnosing it, so there was no additional cost there. But not dropping the shades issue was just stupid. A waste of money.

But what did I learn about the two critical issues?

- The "diagnostic" work on the black water tanks seemed to consist of the technician pushing on the control cable on the #1 tank (we have 2) and correctly determining that the valve was jammed open. I could have told him that for free. He apparently never tried the control on the #2 tank (the broken one). I guess it would have cost me an extra \$67 to have him try both controls (they are right next to each other). He correctly determined that to fix the frozen one would require dropping the bottom shield and replacing the valve. Again, I could have told him that. What did I learn? Nothing. We didn't even get the broken valve issue correctly reported to the insurance company.
- The technician said that the inverter was failing due to a weak battery. This makes absolutely no sense because (1) the problem existed even when the battery was new and (2) the error code on the inverter indicates an overload, not a low voltage. If the technician had any diagnostic skill he would have put a new battery into the loop and tested the inverter again. His writeup said that we should replace the battery (less than 3 years old - they should last at least 5 years) and bring the RV back so he can try again. Idiot. No useful information at all.

My diagnostics cost was \$405. That is over \$400 to learn... nothing. A total waste of money. Worse, we learned that they would make no attempt to fix either issue until the insurance company ruled on whether the problems were covered. We would have to pick up the RV and bring it back in a few weeks.

I am not eager to do that. I think I need to do my own diagnostic work and, perhaps, hire an on-site RV repair guy to deal with the black tank issue. As for the inverter, if I determine that it is, in fact, faulty, I will deal with the insurance company myself.

I really don't want to go back to Camping World.

"The Big Dig" by Linda Barnes

2 Aug 2018

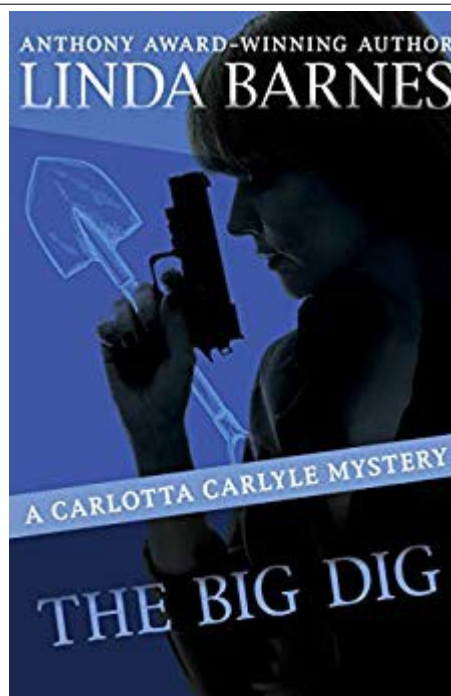
[Copyright 2002 by Linda Appleblatt Barnes. Published by St Martin's Press, New York.](#)

This was my first Linda Barnes mystery and I was impressed. She is a very good writer - describes people, places and events vividly and moves the story line along rapidly. I never got bored reading this one.

The protagonist is Carlotta Carlyle, a private investigator who mostly operates independently but in this case was subbing for an agency doing undercover work on Boston's "Big Dig" - the \$14 billion Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel construction project. She was tasked with searching for theft and graft on one of the many construction sites, but soon was investigating the death of a construction worker who was a whistleblower. She also took another job searching for a young woman who had gone missing. The two cases, which initially seemed totally independent, soon converged in a surprising way.

I liked this book very much. Never a dull moment. No crazy coincidences. No huge body count. Just a story that got more interesting with every page.

8 out of 10.



Printing the blog

12 Aug 2018

I haven't been blogging much lately, partly because there hasn't been a lot to blog about (I have been doing a lot of genealogy and the weather has been terrible, so I have been sitting inside, on the computer, a lot). But I recently finished a time-consuming second pass through my ancestors and have started visiting some cemeteries. I have also, in the past week, been spending a lot of time figuring out how to get this blog into print. Jett has been "encouraging" me for some time to get this done. So... I am now doing it.

I was hoping that I could just contract with some service that could print directly from the files on bluehost.com. However, my attempt at doing this failed and, in retrospect, might not have been a great idea to start with, because a blog doesn't necessarily translate to print form very well. I then found a service that was just a publisher - I send a PDF file and they will print and bind it. So I started looking into how much effort would be involved to produce a PDF from the contents of the blog.

I decided that I wanted a separate volume of each year of the blog. I started the blog in October 2011, so the 2011 volume would be small and would be a good test. Over the course of two days, I produced a PDF file containing all of my 2011 posts. It came out to 26 pages. I sent it off and ordered 10 copies at a total delivered cost of about \$58. Now I am working on 2012, which will likely be over 100 pages. If the 2011 book looks good I will be ready to publish 2012 by the time I get it.

Then 5 more volumes, probably each over 100 pages.

Good thing the weather sucks because I will be spending a lot of time indoors over the next couple of months.

Sciatica

28 Aug 2018

I have had [sciatica](#) before - back when we were living in Somerville, circa 2003. I got up one morning and just about collapsed from the sudden pain that shot down my leg. That episode was relatively short-lived, lasting just a couple of weeks, and was helped with exercise and PT. This time... more chronic. I first noticed some back pain after I returned from the long car trip to drop Rusty off in VA in advance of our cruise. Then I REALLY noticed a problem the day when I tried to walk to downtown Cartagena from Jett's hospital room in Spain - I got about a quarter-mile down the road and noticed that my left buttock and thigh were burning and going numb. I rested and slowed down my walk, but the pain never completely disappeared.

This summer I have had to endure some level of back/leg pain nearly every day. It has affected my softball (my batting average is terrible) and hampers my ability to play disc golf or do anything, really, that involves walking. When Jett and I went to St Anthony's Feast in the North End of Boston last Friday it was slow going. The good news(?) is that Jett's pace was as slow as mine, so I didn't slow her down.

I keep hoping that the pain will just go away, as it has in the past, but I am coming to grips with the realization that I may be hoping in vain. I see a doctor in a few weeks. Let's see what he says.

St Anthony's Feast

1 Sep 2018

St Anthony's Feast is an annual event in the Italian North End of Boston. We like to attend, primarily for the food but also it is a darn good excuse to get into the city on one of the last summer weekends - it is always scheduled for the last weekend before Labor Day. This year we went on Friday, to avoid the weekend crowds. The weather cooperated by being clear, warm and not too humid.

We parked the car at the Alewife T station and took the subway in. For years this was my regular commute, so it was very comfortable for me. Jett, on the other hand, hated it. I believe her comment was "I can't believe that you could stand this."

We took the Red Line to Downtown Crossing and changed to the Orange Line for 2 stops to Haymarket. Being Friday, the open-air fruit and vegetable market was operating. We bought a few things on our return trip - cheap asparagus (\$1) and some nectarines. There is a reason that the produce is so cheap: it is all nearing the "sell by" date. We ended up discarding the asparagus. The nectarines were eaten, but they, too, were past their prime.



Copping a squat on the Greenway

The North End is separated from downtown Boston by the [Rose Kennedy Greenway](#), a very nice strip of parkland

built over the underground expressway the resulted from the [Big Dig](#). This is not only a fine place to have a picnic, but also affords some nice views of downtown Boston.

The foodstuff that we most crave when we go to St Anthony's is fried artichoke hearts. We just love a good, freshly fried artichoke heart. This year we could not find any for sale at the street vendors, so we decided to have a light lunch at [Massamino's](#) restaurant. We ordered the fried artichokes as an appetizer (excellent!) and split a chicken piccata entrée (the best I have ever had). We dined *al fresco* and watched the fair traffic as we dined. It was a very nice lunch.

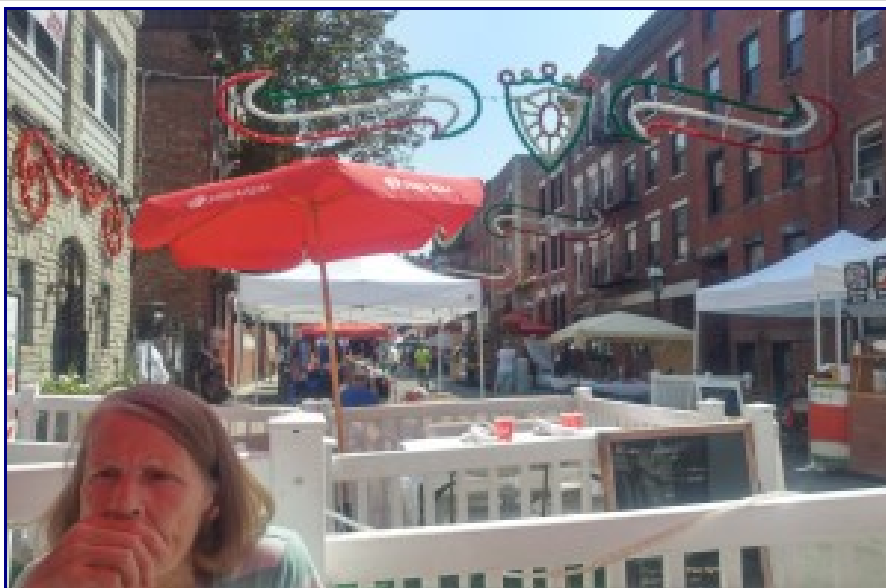
Jett still tires easily and we had to stop frequently to rest. That was just fine with me as my sciatica was making walking painful. Just a couple of old people dottering their way through the Feast.

I was happy to see, when we got back to our car, that no chunks of concrete had fallen on it. The Alewife Garage is now closed evenings and weekends for emergency repairs as the concrete is deteriorating badly and chunks have, in fact, fallen on cars. No one has been injured, though. Yet.

All-in-all it was a fine day trip - one of the too few that we have made this summer.



Downtown from the Greenway



From our table at Massamino's

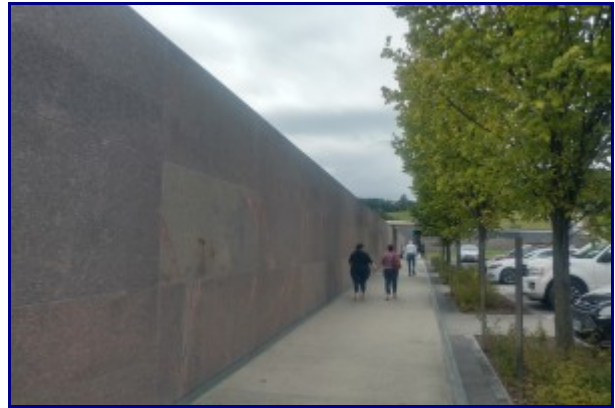
The Clark

2 Sep 2018

"The Clark" is how locals refer to the [Clark Art Institute](#) in Williamstown MA. I had heard good things about it so I decided to take a day trip to Williamstown. It is about 70 miles and an hour and 45 minutes away, straight out

MA 2. Route 2 is a 2-lane road almost the entire way (with the exception of a 3-mile stretch that it shares with I-91 and a few "slow lane" sections) which accounts for the slow trip. But it is scenic. You get a close-up view of the Berkshires along the way.

Parking is free and the lot is not too tight, so I had no problem fitting The Beast into a slot, ably assisted by a few high-school students doing their summer job. Admission was \$20 (no discount for my senior status). The grounds are expansive, with many miles of walking and biking trails (which I didn't sample). The entrance is via the Clark Center, a building which houses special exhibits, the gift shop and the cafeteria. It is connected by an enclosed walkway to the museum, which was my main destination. There is also a Lunder Center, a building which I did not visit that seems to house research and academic facilities. Near the gift shop is an outdoor plaza with a reflecting pool and a bucolic view of the rolling hills that surround the complex. I was there on a cloudy day, so the photos I took probably don't show the outdoor area in its best light.



The entrance to The Clark



Rolling hills



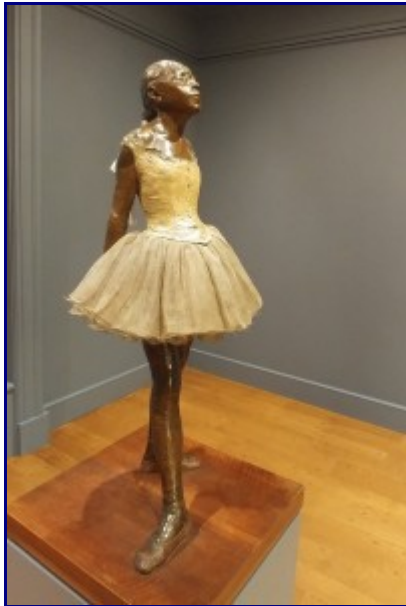
Reflecting pool

I am a fan of impressionist paintings and I had heard that The Clark had some good ones. That was an understatement. I love [Degas](#), [Monet](#), [Pissarro](#) and [Van Gogh](#). The Clark has only a few Van Gogh paintings, but has lots of the others. I am not so much of a fan of Renoir, Gauguin or Toulouse-Lautrec, but The Clark has many of those as well. I would estimate that at least half of the paintings in the museum are by impressionists.

It also has a smattering of sculptures, including some nice ones by Degas. Jett and I both love "The Dancer" by Degas and I was surprised to find one at The Clark (there are a couple of dozen in all, each of the bronze statues being cast from the wax original).

It also had one of Degas' ballerina paintings - one I have never seen before, so that was a treat. And four smaller ballerina sculptures. In all, a very nice assortment of Degas' ballerina works.

Other highlights? Some paintings and one sculpture by [Remington](#). Some very nice Monets and Pissarros. A "Thinker" sculpture by [Rodin](#). And a very intriguing painting of a wedding by an unfamiliar artist. I can't make out the name from the photo.



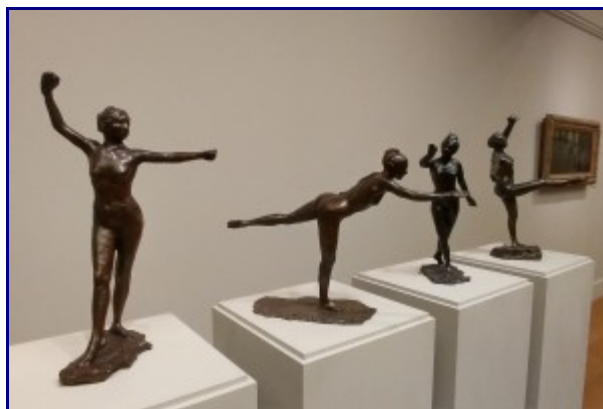
"The Dancer" by Degas



"The Thinker" by Rodin



Degas ballerina painting



Degas bronze ballerinas



Painting by Remington



Sculpture by Remington



Monet sunset



"The Wedding"

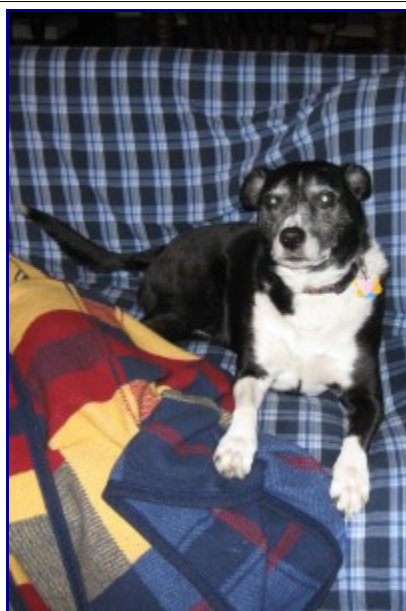
Planting the pups

3 Sep 2018

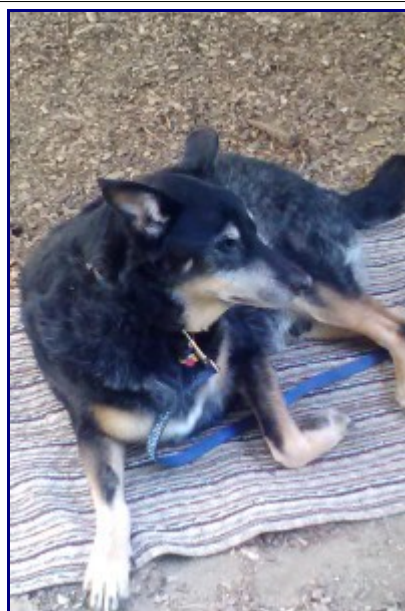
We have been carrying the ashes of our dearly departed first dogs - Cha-Cha and Grace - around with us on our travels for over a year. Jett says we had to keep them with us until we achieved our 48-state goal, but mostly it was because we never got around to finding a place to bury them. But last Saturday we put them in their final resting place in Uncle Ray's (that's what they called him) yard at the cottage in New Salem MA. This was the perfect place for them as they loved the cottage. It was one of the few places where they were allowed to run free.

It was sad, of course. Jett shed a few tears. But it is the perfect place for them. Their ashes won't be traveling with us any more but their memories will be with us forever.

R.I.P.



Grace



Cha-Cha



The gravesite

Lamb City Campground

11 Sep 2018

We have been staying at [Lamb City Campground](#) in Phillipston MA for over 3 months, so it is time for a review.

We like this campground and it has been a good location for us this summer - about an hour from Boston, an hour from Springfield, an hour from my softball field, an hour from Worcester and only 25 minutes from the wonderful cabin in the woods owned by Jett's brother Ray and his talented wife Kim. We have used the proximity to the cabin to visit often.

But this is not a review of the cabin; it is a review of the campground.

This is the most "weekend" place that we have stayed at for an entire season. Seasonal campgrounds tend to attract long-term campers, but this campground seems to be about 90% families who are in residence only on weekends. During the week the place is a ghost town. I walk the dog on weekday mornings and see not a single living soul. At night it gets downright spooky. It is us and the mosquitos.

The campground has a pond and LOTS of trees. And the summer has been very wet. So, yes, there are mosquitos. But they mostly keep to the heavily wooded areas, though a few have found their way into the RV.



Our sandy site

We have a site very close to the pond. If you stand outside and peer carefully between the RVs across the way, you can see a bit of it. We are a short walk from the firepit where communal campfires burn each weekend night. On the 4th of July weekend a live band set up near the firepit and there was dancing in the street. We didn't join in and neither did many others - there were about 20 people there at 10pm.

Which is another aspect of Lamb City which is less than endearing: it is very kid-oriented and not very adult-oriented. There are planned activities each weekend, but they are mostly for kids: crafts, face-painting, races, fire engine rides. Each Saturday night there is an adult activity - usually a dance or karaoke - which is poorly attended. It is not a friendly place. Most families, when they visit on weekends, bring their own friends and do not look for friends in the campground. I have met a handful of neighbors, but have not been invited to share

so much as a beer. Jett has met no one. So... a lonely place.

Our campsite is large, with plenty of room for both the truck and the "summer rat" - the 2009 Ford Focus that we bought to use for the summer. It is a full hookup site, with water, electric and sewer. It also has cable TV which is pretty basic - about 30 channels, of which we use maybe 10. It also, for cable, has terrible reception. All of the local channels and some of the cable channels can usually not be watched on the living room television because the picture is so fuzzy. If I were to give the cable a grade it would be D.

The biggest problem with the site: the sand. Apparently a tree was removed before we arrived, which left a hole in the ground. The hole was filled and then the entire site was covered in sand. Not gravel, like many other sites, but sand. We had great difficulty getting the RV positioned because it sank into the sand. It was like parking the RV on the beach. Worse, the sand is tracked into the RV every time we enter. We have swept about a bushel of sand out of the RV this summer. Not pleasant at all.

We put down a second outdoor carpet and that helped, but it hasn't eliminated the problem. We have already told the office staff that if we return next year we will want gravel put over the sand.

The facilities? Well, the camp store is large and quite nice. We haven't used it a lot because a shopping center is nearby, but it has just about everything a camper would need. There is a large activity hall which is... functional. No effort was expended to make it attractive. There is also a small activity hall, public restrooms with showers, a very small but decent laundry room and a playground that the kids seem to like, as well as a beach volleyball court, shuffleboard courts, two swimming pools and several horseshoe pits. The pond is used for boating and fishing (catch-and-release) but no swimming. There is a path around the pond - about a mile in length - that Rusty enjoyed the one time we traversed it.

So, bottom line: adequate, lonely, sandy. And, perhaps most importantly, affordable. The entire season here cost us just \$2750. Any other option in the Boston area would run at least twice that amount. So while it isn't perfect, it is a very good option.



The bear at the pond



On the path in the woods



The pond from the woods



Rusty in his sandbox



Volleyball court



Playground



Main activity hall



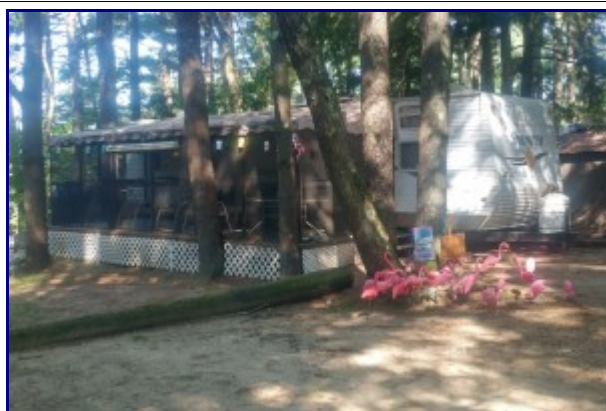
The pond



Main pool



Laundry



One of the many park models

Our incendiary neighbors

15 Sep 2018

I think I mentioned earlier that the Lamb City Campground is not the friendliest place we have ever been. We have not met many of our neighbors, in part because most are in residence only on weekends. Our back-door neighbors - the ones in the site behind and slightly above us - are here more often than not, but we have specifically avoided meeting them. They are known, affectionately, between Jett and me, as "The Bickersons" because they are always fighting. The loud voices, punctuated with verbal abuse, is an almost-daily occurrence. Sometimes objects are thrown. Usually soft, non-life-threatening objects, like bags of potato chips.

We think of them as "incendiary."

That term became even more appropriate last week when the "gentleman" - who spends about half of his outdoor time splitting wood using a mallet and chisel - decided to start his campfire with the assistance of an accelerant. I have to guess that it was something more flammable than charcoal starter. Probably gasoline and, from the result, was probably at least a pint. Maybe a quart. The result was an explosion that shook our RV and blew some of the wood out of the fire-ring, setting the grass on fire. I was grateful that the grass was wet or we would have been in danger of going up in flames.

Idiot. I think he scared even himself, though, as he has not done it again.

"The Wrong Side of Goodbye" by Michael Connelly

19 Sep 2018

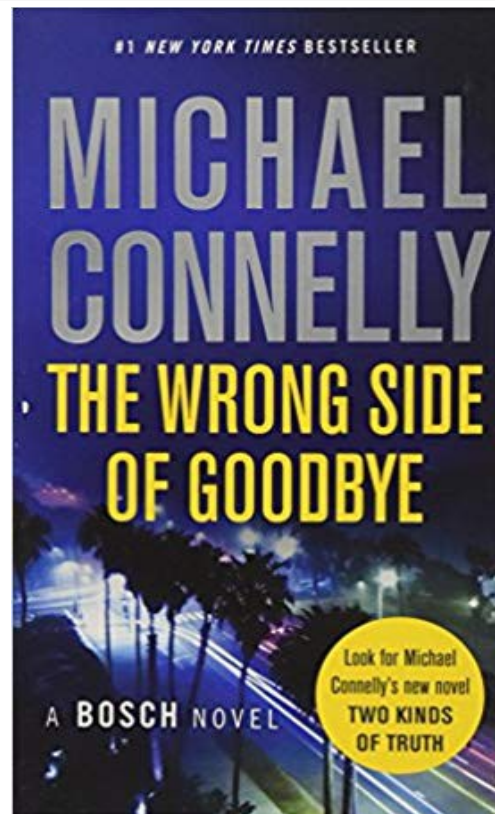
[Copyright 2016 by Hieronymus, Inc. Published by Grand Central Publishing.](#)

This is one of the series of mysteries featuring Hieronymus "Harry" Bosch, a retired LAPD detective working as a PI in southern California. He is a cerebral detective who can be tough when required. In this book he shoots a bad guy, so I guess he is pretty good with a gun, too.

There are two plots here: (1) a serial rapist, known as "The Screen Cutter," is on the loose in the San Fernando Valley and (2) a dying billionaire is looking for a possible heir. In the case of the rapist Bosch participates in the search as a part-time, unpaid cop for the San Fernando PD. The second case is taken as a private job. I expected these two cases to somehow cross paths and possibly even converge, but they didn't. It was like watching two TV shows on a split screen. It seems like Connelly had two ideas for stories but didn't have quite enough detail for a separate book for each, so he just threw them together. In my view both suffered from not being fleshed out enough. He should have written two separate books.

I like Connelly's style and was fully engaged until near the end. In both cases there was significant threat of violence and suspense, but in the end there was very little of either. It was a literary promise unfulfilled. Both stories disappointed me. So while I enjoyed about 90% of the book, I can't give it high marks. This book was a 99-yard drive that stalled on the 1-yard line. Great promise and fun getting there, but a huge disappointment at the end.

5 out of 10.



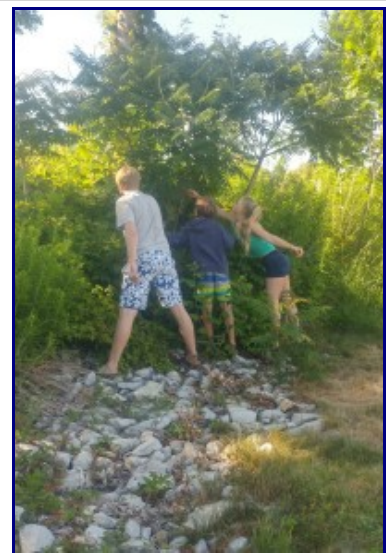
Red Apple Farm

22 Sep 2018

New England is littered with roadside farmstands. Most are quite good, with fresh vegetables, fruits and, in some cases, homemade jellies, jams and pies. A few offer self-picking of apples, blueberries, strawberries and other fruits. Some are so good with so many products and activities that they become destinations. [Red Apple Farm](#), in Phillipston MA, is just such a place.

Red Apple Farm has some kind of vague familial association with Lamb City Campground, our seasonal home. We were told, by an employee at Red Apple, who really wasn't too sure, that perhaps the owner of Red Apple was the son of the owner of Lamb City. What is absolutely indisputable, though, is that they are adjacent to each other and Lamb City prominently advertises Red Apple in its literature and runs hayrides through the connecting fields so that campers can shop at Red Apple. It is certainly a cozy relationship.

I visited Red Apple four times this summer. The first visit was a brief let's-see-what-they've-got visit with Jett. It was pre-July 4th so it wasn't very busy and the shelves were only partially stocked. Still, we were impressed



Picking wild berries

by the variety and quality of the merchandise.

The second was a mid-summer visit with Rusty and Ray and Kim's three neighbor kids, Connor, Riley and Levi. We walked the connecting road with Rusty leading the way. They went into the store and spent some money on fudge, to which they gave high marks. They also enjoyed the animals in the livestock pen - lots of goats plus a few ponies and steers. Finding and eating wild raspberries on the way home was a bonus.

The third visit was on Labor Day with Jett and her sister Sybil. Our intent was to get a meal (they have a BBQ shack) and a beer (from the beer barn). However, both closed at 4pm, which was the precise time that we arrived. So we were forced to switch to Plan B - dinner and drinks at the King Phillip Restaurant (to be reviewed soon) which we enjoyed very much. I got a beer at the beer barn before we departed. But I was disappointed to find that no beer is actually brewed there and the offerings, while interesting, were limited. The whole visit was a bit of a downer, but King Phillip saved the day.

The fourth visit was just a couple of weeks ago, with my wonderful granddaughter Lili. She was not impressed by the merchandise in the store but enjoyed picking a bag of apples which were ripe.

Four visits, four pleasant days. If you get to Phillipston, check out the Red Apple Farm. Recommended.



Jellies and jams



Red Apple General Store



Tree with – what else? - red apples

Jett's immigrant ancestors, 2018 update

26 Sep 2018

I have continued to research Jett's rich ancestry, with a focus on her immigrant ancestors. I have identified **314** such ancestors. Not all are rock-solid, but I am pretty comfortable with the vast majority of them. I will summarize a couple of relevant demographics here.

By country of birth:

England	288
Ireland	8
Wales	6
Netherlands	6
Scotland	5
unknown	1

By place of death:

MA	267
ME	13
NH	10
NY	3
CT	3
NJ	2
VA	2
Canada	2
SC	1
England	1
Barbados	1
unknown	9

Obviously, most of her immigrant ancestors were born in England and died in New England. However, the immigrants from Ireland (on her mother's side) are much more recent, giving her at least 50% Irish ancestry.

She has quite a few famous ancestors, most notably some *Mayflower* ancestors. She is directly descended from no fewer than **11** of the 102 *Mayflower* passengers:

- [Stephen Hopkins](#)
- [Constance Hopkins Snow](#)
- [John Alden Sr](#)
- [William Mullins](#)
- Alice Atwood Mullins
- [Priscilla Mullins Alden](#)
- [Richard Warren](#)
- [Thomas Rogers Jr](#)

- [William White Sr](#)
- [Susanna Fuller White](#)
- [Resolved White](#)

Six of these 11 (all the males except Resolved White, who was a juvenile) were among the 41 men who signed the [Mayflower Compact](#), the first constitutional document written in America.

I doubt if many Americans have a stronger link to the *Mayflower* than Jett.

Sparky's immigrant ancestors, 2018 update

28 Sep 2018

Since I have summarized my research into Jett's immigrant ancestors, I will also summarize mine, for comparison purposes.

I have identified **193** immigrant ancestors - many fewer than Jett's count due to many of the immigrants being more recent than hers. The VA/MD branch is a little shaky, but solid enough to be included. I summarize a couple of relevant demographics here.

By country of birth:

England	129
Netherlands	26
Scotland	9
Germany	9
Norway	5
France	5
Prussia	4
Wales	3
Ireland	1
Poland	1
unknown	1

By place of death:

MA	58
VA	39
NY	30
CT	20
WI	14
NJ	9
NH	5
MD	5
IL	2
ND	2

PA	1
At sea	3
England	2
Barbados	1
unknown	2

Most of my immigrant ancestors were born in northern Europe and what is now the United Kingdom. Most died on the east coast of the US, but a few made it to WI and IL. The geographical dispersion is greater for my ancestors than for Jett's. As with Jett's Irish ancestors, relatively few of my ancestors come from Norway but they are recent, giving them an outsized influence in my genetic composition.

I do not have any *Mayflower* ancestors, but I do have some early American ancestors - both in Jamestown VA and in the New York City (New Amsterdam) areas. Some were in America as early as 1613 - 7 years before the Pilgrims landed in Massachusetts. I also have something in my ancestry that makes Jett envious: I have one ancestor who is not only full-blooded Native American, but an Indian princess, the daughter of the tribal chief. Eat your heart out, Jett.

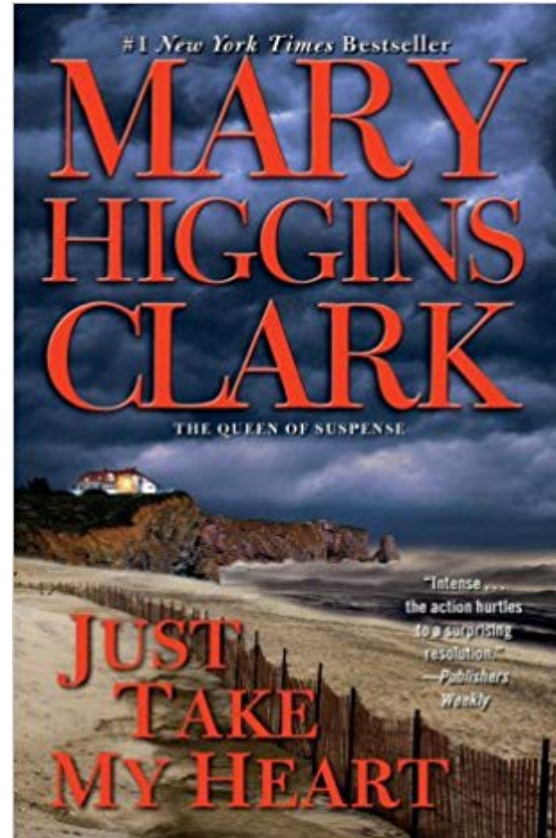
"Just Take My Heart" by Mary Higgins Clark

29 Sep 2018

[Simon & Schuster, 2009](#)

I am not a huge fan of Mary Higgins Clark. I find her plots to be contrived and the characters thin. But I have to admit that she is easy to read. Short chapters and no long dialogs. I read this book in less than a week, which is fast for me given all of my other interests and activities.

The protagonist in this mystery is Emily Wallace, an assistant DA who is both a war widow (her husband was killed in Iraq) and a heart transplant survivor (hence the title). She is given a plum assignment: prosecuting the husband of a prominent stage actress who was accused of murdering her in a fit of rage because she was leaving him. The key witness was a scumbag jailhouse snitch who had a meeting in a bar - witnessed by the defendant's friends - and, he claimed, a subsequent meeting in the defendant's home where he remembered many details of the living room, including, most significantly, a side table drawer that squeaked when pulled open. The defendant had a plausible explanation for the first meeting but could not explain how the snitch knew about the squeaky drawer. He was convicted, over the



protests of the victim's mother, who believed him to be innocent. And Emily, rather than being jubilant over her big victory, found herself wondering whether she had sent an innocent man to jail for life.

But there were no other suspects... or were there? The victim had a roommate many years earlier who was dating a married man. The victim never met this man but did, just once, see a photo that the roommate had secreted in her purse. When the roommate was brutally murdered she had the police draw a composite sketch based on her memory of the photo, but the culprit was never identified. When Emily's doubts about the guilt of the husband grew, she decided to reopen the investigation into the earlier murder and found that the sketch in the original homicide file did not match the one they had obtained when investigating the later murder of the actress. Why were the sketches different? The answer to that question, of course, led to catching the guy who murdered both women.

Meanwhile... and this is where the implausible Mary Higgins Clark plot emerges - Emily's neighbor, who is a serial killer, is stalking her for no good reason, it appears, other than the book needed another villain. He almost gets her, but doesn't, due to another killer showing up at the same time. Uh... yeah. Well, it is implausible but an easy read.

The heart transplant is another plot device that has no real use other than to give the book its title. It comes into play in a twist at the very end, also in a most implausible way.

Silly plot twists, but very readable.

7 out of 10.

Fourth Trip South (TS4) preview

30 Sep 2018

We start our fourth trek south on Wednesday. We will be heading to our new home at [Cypress Trail RV Resort](#) in Fort Myers. We are excited about this new location and our new status as "permanent residents" but that doesn't mean that we are going to rush down there. We are, as always, going to enjoy the travel and visit some new places and re-visit some places that we like. And, of course, we will visit Jett's family in Virginia.

The first segment of the trip, from Phillipston MA to Walland TN, will take 17 nights over 8 hops and 1292 miles. The stops:

1. Schenectady NY. We will spend 3 nights at the Arrowhead Marina and RV Park where we stayed last year and enjoyed very much. Our two days will be spent touring Jett's old haunts in and near Albany and a day seeking some of my ancestors' graves near West Camp NY.
2. Watkins Glen NY. We have never been to the Finger Lakes region of NY and will have a weekend to see what is there.
3. Bedford PA. We will have one free day here and will probably spend it visiting the [Flight 93 National Memorial](#) near Shanksville PA.
4. Lorton VA. This will be a week visiting family but will be unique in that we will need to move the RV twice during the 5 days in Lorton due to booking difficulties. That should be... fun.
5. Dumfries VA. This is just a few miles from Lorton and we are doing the 2 nights in Dumfries to see if this location has anything to offer. We have had so many problems scheduling visits to Pohick Bay Regional Park that we need to investigate alternatives. Between Lorton and Dumfries we will spend an entire week in the Alexandria area.
6. Keeling VA. This will be just an overnight stop.

7. Swannanoa NC. We will spend 2 nights here but have no particular activities planned. Maybe see if the area survived Hurricane Florence.
8. Walland TN. This location was chosen for being midway between Pigeon Forge (and Dollywood) and Tellico Village (where our Gulf Waters TN friends live). We will visit friends one day and Dollywood the other day.

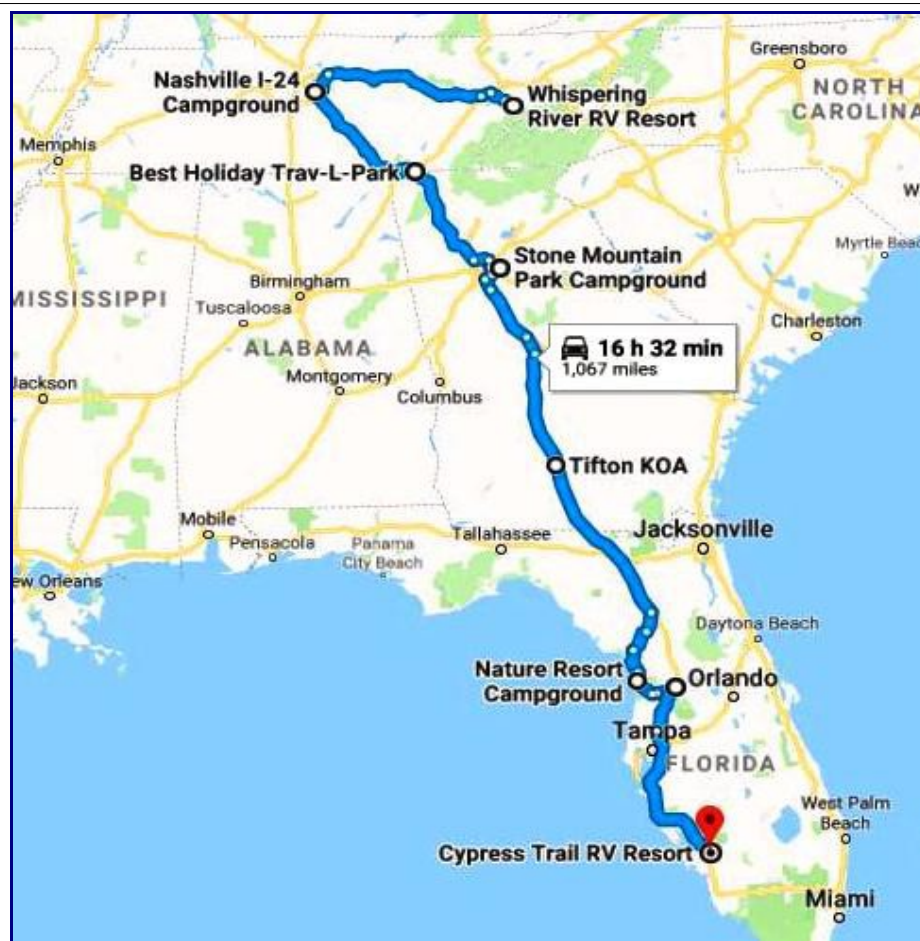


TS4 Segment 1 plan

We will spend 3 nights in Walland, then start the second segment of the TS4. It will also take 17 nights over 7 hops with a total of 1076 miles. The stops in this segment:

1. Smyrna TN. This will be a 3-night stop near Nashville. We visited Nashville before, on the GTW, but felt that we didn't get the real Nashville experience because the place was overrun with Steelers fans in town for a Thursday night football game. Hopefully we will get a more authentic Nashville experience this time.
2. Chattanooga TN. This will be an opportunity to visit Lookout Mountain and other nearby Civil War sites.
3. Stone Mountain GA. We will visit Stone Mountain, a popular tourist destination. We hope to spend a day visiting Atlanta as well.
4. Tifton GA. This is planned as a 2-night stop but we really have no plans for the area so it could be cut to 1.
5. Homosassa FL. We were here before and really liked the area. We hope to re-visit the [Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park](#) and view the manatees again.
6. Bushnell FL. This is our *de facto* home, though we have never lived here. We hope to attend the Escapees Chapter 57 Rally and, possibly, vote as we will be here for the 2018 election.
7. Fort Myers FL. Home at last.

By this plan - which, as always, is subject to change - we will arrive in Fort Myers on Friday November 9. The totals for the TS4 as planned are 15 hops, 37 nights and 2368 miles. I have booked the stops for the first segment but have not yet booked the second segment, so those stops are more likely to change.



TS4 Segment 2 plan

Tully Lake disc golf

6 Oct 2018

One of the positives in this summer of mild disappointments was the [Tully Lake disc golf course](#), located at the Lake Tully Recreation area in Royalston MA. I lost track of the number of times that I played this course. It is a very difficult course, but also a very beautiful one. And completely, totally free to play. My best score was 70, I think, which is way more than par, but anyone who gets par on this course must be a disc golf pro. Some of the holes are unbelievably difficult. But about four are relatively easy. I even got a birdie on one of them.

If you are into disc golf and are anywhere near Royalston (not likely, I know), give Tully Lake a try.



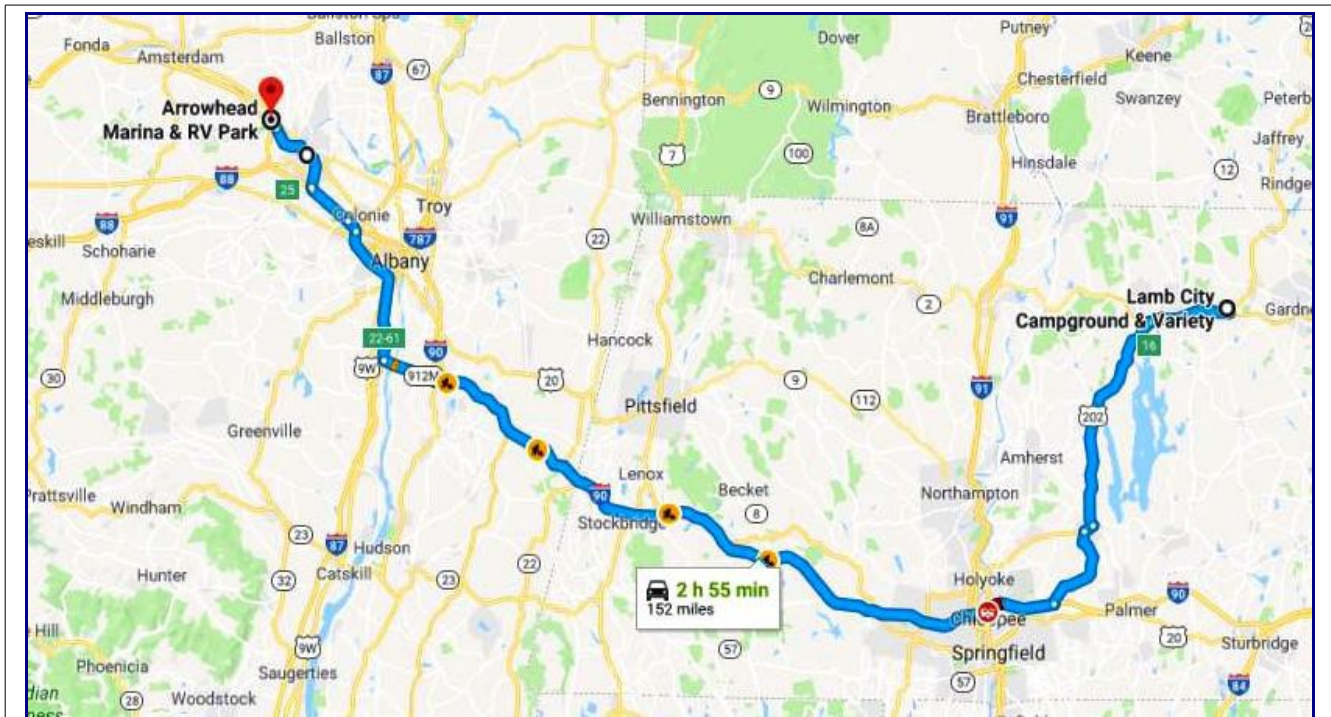
A difficult shot



The basket on #1 at Tully Lake

TS4-1 Hop 1: Phillipston MA to Schenectady NY

7 Oct 2018



TS4-1 Hop 1

152 miles via US 202, MA 21, I-90, I-87, I-890 (near Schenectady) and NY 5. Cumulative tow miles: 152. Truck miles: 170. Cumulative truck miles: 170.

This hop was over roads that we have traveled before, so no surprises. There is a lot of up-and-down both on US 202 and I-90, so the engine got a good workout. No check engine lights. Whew!

The only deviation from the planned route was taking I-890 at exit 25 off of I-90 instead of exit 26. We were following the GPS at this point and its infinite wisdom declared that I-890 was the better option. Who are we to argue with the Great God GPS?

The road was fairly smooth until we hit a rough patch in I-890. That jumbled things in the RV a bit. Most alarming, though, was the discovery that I had failed to secure the living room television and it was hanging out on its mount. How quickly we forget basic steps in the teardown. No damage done, though.

Our home for 3 nights was the [Arrowhead Marina and RV Park](#). This is the same park we stayed at last year. We even got the same site as last year, with an unobstructed river view. The campground is convenient to Schenectady, Albany and Watervliet and is right on the banks of the Mohawk River. Last year the weather and the river were both serene. This year, not so much. Schenectady, like most of New England, has had a very wet summer. The Mohawk River this year was about 6 feet higher than last year and was muddy, with a swift flow. Last year it seemed like a nice river to canoe on if you stayed near shore. This year it looked angry and uninviting when we arrived, though its looks improved with the morning sun.

The great view makes up for the railroad noise and the poor TV reception.



The Mohawk in the morning

Last year we were tempted to visit the new [Rivers Casino](#) in downtown Schenectady but never made it. We got there this year. I did okay at the slots, losing only \$10. But Jett took a beating, to the tune of \$80. Not a bad casino, but the slots seemed a tad stingy.

After losing money at the casino we spent some of what was left on dinner at the [River Road House Bar & Grill](#). This is a very small place in an historic building (first operating as a tavern in 1830) on the south bank of the Mohawk. It got good reviews and we weren't disappointed. The fried pickles, though not the best ever, were very good and my blackened haddock was superb. Jett raved about her turkey club. Recommended.

Last year we spent a lot of time visiting Jett's childhood homes in Watervliet. This year I visited cemeteries. The main destination was the [Stone Church](#) in Rhinebeck NY where 2 of my ancestors were reportedly buried. I also swung by Pittstown NY to search the Old Cooksborough



River Road House bar

Cemetery for two more of my Dutch ancestors. I didn't find any of them - no surprise as they were all 18th century graves which tend to not survive to the 21st century. But I was able satisfy 4 photo requests in findagrave.com, so it wasn't a wasted trip. I was actually quite pleased that I found the Old Cooksborough cemetery at all as it was tucked behind some houses and was not visible from the road. Both cemeteries were overgrown and in poor shape and over half of the headstones were unreadable, which is sad. But I am glad I

found them. It puts me a little closer to my Dutch ancestors.



Blackened haddock



Turkey club



NY cemetery tour



Stone Church cemetery



Old Cooksborough cemetery



Stone Church

Disaster!

7 Oct 2018

Yesterday, October 6, 2018, was, without question, the worst day we have had in over 6 years of travel. It was a cascading series of events that has left us with both a truck and an RV in need of repair before we can continue to Florida.

It all began on NY 206, about 4 miles west of Greene as we were heading to Watkins Glen. NY 206 is a nasty road with steep ups and downs. The truck labored to make the hills, though no more so than on similar roads that it has experienced before. But as we crested a hill I noticed, in my rear view mirror, what I first thought was smoke spewing from under the truck. I pulled over on the shoulder to investigate and, as I brought the RV to a halt, clouds of smoke or steam rose from the hood and the "low coolant level" warning appeared on the dash. I shut off the engine, opened the hood and saw a hose that was spitting hot water all over the engine. I assumed that a coolant hose had sprung a leak.

I decided to let the engine cool and refill the coolant reservoir in the hope that I could get the RV to a campground. Jett got on the phone and found just one open campground (most closed Oct 1). Yes, they could accommodate us. So the question was: could the truck haul the RV the 10 miles to the campground? Had to try.

The GPS directed us to proceed down the hill - a temporary relief soon to be dashed - but as we neared the bottom it told us to take a left. I was surprised - and not in a good way - to discover that my braking was very limited. I couldn't stop in time to take the left, so pulled over to let the GPS reroute.

Problem #2: either the RV brakes or the braking controller electronics seemed to not be working. Another concern, but nothing that would prevent me from getting to the campground.

The GPS told us to take the next left, a VERY narrow road. Still, the GPS would not route us down a road that we couldn't traverse, so I waited for a break in the light traffic and made the left turn. And didn't watch carefully enough where the RV tires would track. I looked in the rearview mirror just in time to see the left tires of the RV drop into a deep ditch. The RV heaved violently to the left and for a moment I feared that it would capsize. It didn't. It also didn't get stuck in the ditch. But it did bottom out, hitting, most obviously, the sewer drain pipes. I got to the next stop sign and got out to inspect for damage. Much to my relief, I saw none on initial inspection, which was a huge surprise given the violence of the impact.



The disastrous ditch. Notice the tire track.

But my relief as short-lived. The GPS directed us to go back up the steep hill that we had just descended. We made it to the top and down the other side, to CR 2, where we were directed to take a right. At that point the engine was, once again, steaming. Fortunately there was an empty pull-out area at that intersection. We stopped and I once again let the engine cool.

I used the engine cooling period to conduct a more thorough inspection for damage and was disappointed to find some. First, it was clear that not only had the RV bottomed in front of the tires, in the vicinity of the sewer pipes, but had also bottomed out behind the tires. The foot of the hydraulic jack was tilted (probably not a huge problem) and the flange holding the spare tire was bent. The severity of the flange damage was unclear. The tire was in place, but I couldn't be certain that it would remain there. This was damage that would need to be repaired before we got to Florida.

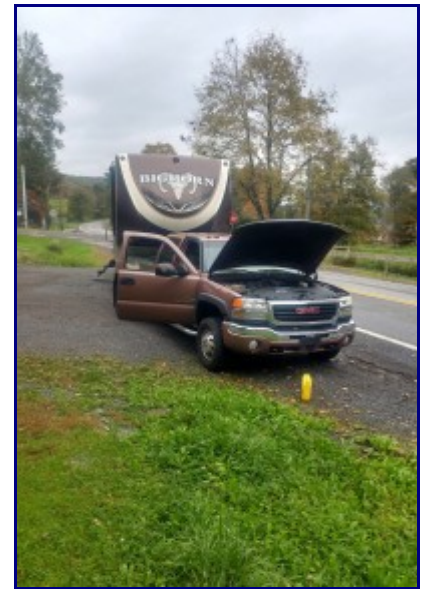
Worst of all, water was dripping from the area of the gray water tank for the kitchen and half bath. Again, the severity was uncertain but was something that would have to be repaired before Florida if we were to use the kitchen sink.

If there was any good news in all of this it was that there appeared to be no damage to the half bath black water tank or either the gray or black water tanks for the full bath. We still had working plumbing.

So, to enumerate the problems:

1. Truck engine problems of undetermined severity.
2. A severe braking problem.
3. Serious sewer problems (on top of the problems we already had).
4. A serious problem with the flange holding the spare tire.

I can't be certain that no additional problems will yet surface. The bottom line is that both the truck and the RV require repairs that must be done before we go much further.



Waiting for the tow truck

Back to our situation. We were at the side of some relatively minor roads, in the middle of nowhere, with no cell phone service. As a matter of desperation, we decided that we needed to unhitch the RV and limp the truck to a location where we could phone for aid. We unhitched but as we were waiting for the engine to cool, a gentleman pulled up alongside and offered to help in any way he could. He invited us to his house, just a few hundred yards away, to use his land line. We gratefully accepted his offer, used his phone to call a tow truck (thanks, Good Sam!) and had a lovely chat with this lovely couple while we waited. We were eventually informed that the truck would be an hour to arrive, so we took our leave, went back to the RV. Jett and Rusty napped on the bed while I napped in the truck. The tow truck did appear, as promised, about an hour later.

I was able to drive the truck, with only minor steaming, the 9 miles to the campground, the tow truck following my lead. The owner of the campground met us at the entrance. I took one look - a narrow road over railroad tracks with a sharp drop, then a sharp right over a rutted and very narrow lane - and knew that the tow truck, which was a huge semi-trailer cab, would never make it. I told the truck driver to drop the RV at the side of the road (NY 12) and I would take it from there. He was more than happy to do that.

I hitched up and was able to navigate the entrance without doing additional damage to the RV. But the RV site required pulling up onto very soft grass and backing in. I was unable to do it on three attempt and was chewing up the grass badly each time. I finally told the owner that I should just pull in and run the electric and water lines under the RV. He agreed and we got the RV settled for the night. I will have to back up to exit, but that is a problem for another day.

The campground is a mess and I initially thought that we were totally "off the grid" - no TV, no internet and no phone service. That turned out to be untrue as I found that my main router was able to provide an internet connection, which I am using to post this.

So we were able to have a relatively normal evening in the RV, watching DVDs and playing cards. We agreed that we would not talk about the disastrous day.



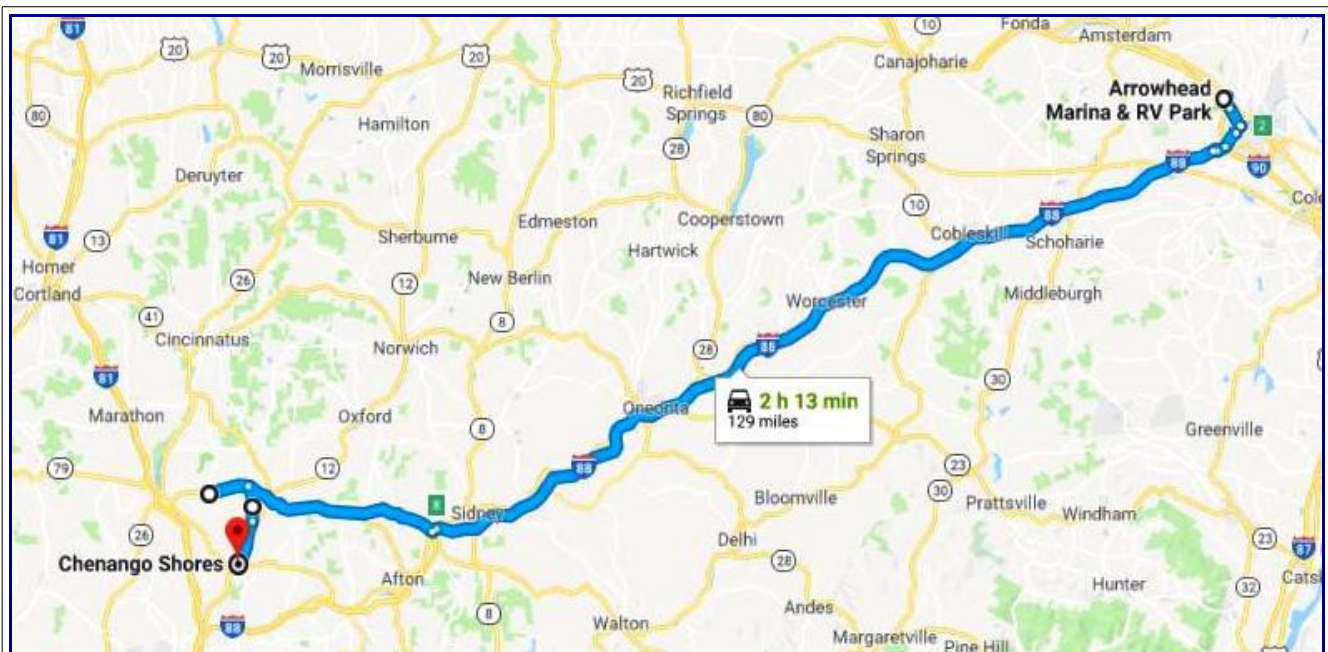
Safe at Chenango Shores after a VERY tough day

But I was up early Sunday morning, thinking about how to proceed and estimating how much this is all going to cost me. It won't be cheap, that much is certain.

It also means that our TS4 plans are out the window. One of the first things to do is to cancel all of our reservations. When - and if - we get a working rig again we will plan a new route to Fort Myers.

TS4-1 Hop 2: Schenectady NY to Chenango Forks NY

15 Oct 2018



TS4-1 Hop 2

130 miles via I-90, I-88, NY 206 and NY 12, Cumulative tow miles: 282. Truck miles: 302. Cumulative truck miles: 472.

The extra 172 truck miles were incurred in Schenectady and along the Hudson River on the several excursions we took while there, as documented in the TS4-1 Hop 1 post.

This was not the hop we planned due to the disaster we encountered on NY 206 (see my previous post). The trip to that point was uneventful, except for a heavy shower that we encountered on I-88. NY 206 is now on our list of least favorite roads due to its sharp undulations. If we weren't taxing the engine on a steep uphill section we were wearing out the brakes on a sharp downhill section. Then, about midway between Greene and Whitney Falls, we popped a coolant hose and had to limp to the only open RV park in the area, after arranging a tow for the RV.

We knew that we would be stuck in Chenango Forks, a tiny "hamlet" on the shores of the Chenango River, until the truck was fixed. As it turns out, we were there a few days longer than that, for a total of 8 nights. Our planned visits to Watkins Glen and the Finger Lakes region, plus the stop at the Flight 93 memorial, were scrapped. Instead we subsisted at a place with no television (cable or over-the-air), no sewer hookup, no cell

phone service and almost no internet service. The site was muddy and became muddier as it rained nearly every day. The public restroom – which I tried to use whenever I could to stretch the capacity of the RV's black and gray water tanks – was filthy and the shower had only cold water. Our few neighbors clearly qualified as "trailer park trash." In short, it was a miserable place to spend 8 nights.

Was there anything good about the park? Yes, the owner bent over backward to help us in any way he could, starting with meeting us and the tow truck at the gate to guide us to the spot, helping get the rig situated and, on Monday, driving me to Enterprise to rent a car. He also dropped his rate, from \$35 to \$25 per night with the seventh day free. So we paid for just 7 nights out of the 8, for a total of \$175. Which would have been economical had it not been for the fact that we lost our deposits entirely for our Watkins Glen and Pohick Bay reservations and received only a partial refund for our planned Pennsylvania stay. So the actual total campground expense for the 8 nights was \$470.90.



Muddy Chenango Shores

The other saving grace was that the park, despite having absolutely no cell phone service, did have some internet connectivity via our old JetPack router. That surprised the hell out of me as I thought that cell phone service was a requirement for data connectivity. Apparently that is not the case. I discovered this new truth when, early Sunday morning, I tried to connect to the internet and just about fell out of my chair when I succeeded. The connection that morning was not great, but wasn't bad. I was able to do searches for GMC dealers, book a service appointment online and book a rental car. I was also able to read email and send out an update to family assuring them that we were safe and warm despite being "off the grid" for telephone contact. Having this connectivity – which, I learned, was not always as good as it was that morning, was a real boon.

Chenango Forks is about 15 miles from downtown Binghamton NY and most of our miles during those 8 days were spent on the roads to and from Binghamton, with two trips back to the scene of the breakdown: one to take photos of the ditch that we fell into when we damaged the gray water tank and bent the flange holding the spare and another to deliver a small token of appreciation to Butch and Jackie, the lovely couple who showed some true kindness and compassion when we really needed it.



Nestled between trashy neighbors



The view from our front door

Disaster recovery, phase 1: the truck

15 Oct 2018

Of the four known problems with our rig, two were truck-related and two were RV-related. Clearly, nothing could be done with the RV problems until the truck problems were solved. Unfortunately, one of the two GMC dealers in Binghamton NY would not book an appointment until Thursday and the other would only offer a Friday appointment. I booked the Thursday appointment, with the intention of making a personal, pathetic appeal to move it up once I got a rental car and could go see them in person.

To that end I arranged with the campground owner for a ride to Enterprise Monday morning (Sunday was spent in the RV, carless, dining on whatever we had on board and watching DVDs). He drove me there in his 2002 pickup with faulty spark plugs which caused engine hesitation for the entire 18-mile ride. I was grateful that I got to Enterprise without suffering through yet another truck failure. I gave him \$20 for the ride.

Enterprise, efficient as always, got me behind the wheel of a Kia in about 10 minutes and I immediately drove to Botnick Chevrolet in downtown Binghamton. Or tried to. This particular Monday was Columbus Day and there was a parade in downtown Binghamton. Many streets were closed off. I drove down a small street which seemed to be open but wasn't. I got stuck in a long line of cars that had made the same mistake. We all had to back up to find an alternate route.

I did finally get there and made my most sincere, whiny appeal for a more timely appointment. The service advisor, while sympathetic, could only say "bring it in and I will see if I can slip it into the schedule." I promised him that I would have it in his lot no later than Tuesday morning.

Jett opted to use Monday afternoon to do a trip to the laundromat and food store, to make our RV exile a bit more pleasant. Then, Tuesday morning, I filled the coolant reservoir on the truck and a gallon of water, in case I needed to refill it during the 12-mile trip to Botnick. We had originally planned to get a tow from AAA, but the logistics of that were difficult. Specifically we would have to travel about 6 miles just to get to a place where we had cell phone service and there was a wide shoulder where we could wait. We reasoned that if we could drive the truck 6 miles we could probably do another 6 and avoid the hassle of waiting for a tow.

We made it without requiring a refill and without emitting any steam clouds that would have alarmed our fellow motorists. I left the truck at Botnick with a renewed plea for mercy.

The plea went largely unanswered. We basically cooled our heels the rest of Tuesday and Wednesday, with me making occasional forays into the realm of cell phone service to check the status. Finally, at 3:30 pm on Wednesday, Botnick got it into the shop.

I should mention that one other thing I did on Monday was try to clean the contacts on the trailer hitch connector – the socket that the RV umbilical plugs into that both provides electrical power to the RV while traveling and sends the braking signal from the truck's brake controller to the RV's electrical brakes. My view of the braking problem was that it was about 80% likely that the problem was just a bad connection and about 20% likely that it was something else. This was based on the observation that the display on the braking controller seemed pretty normal in all respects except for the color. My recollection is that the screen was supposed to be green when the trailer was hitched and resting and should be red only when braking. My controller's screen was always red.

So I got a screwdriver and tried to scrape the contacts on both the truck socket and the RV plug. But while scraping the truck socket I encountered a small spark, apparently from the head of the screwdriver bridging the gap between two pins. It was a very small spark and I thought nothing of it... until, on the trip into Botnick, I discovered that the cruise control was inoperative. So that was added to the service list:

- diagnose and fix the coolant leak

- flush the radiator and refill with coolant
- diagnose and fix the brake controller problem
- oil change (it was due)
- fix the cruise control

I thought the cruise control problem was probably a blown fuse due to that tiny little spark, but, like so much else during the week, I was totally wrong. It was a brake pedal sensor switch that needed to be replaced at a cost of about \$140.

Botnick completed their work late Thursday afternoon. Total cost: \$686.26. But they did nothing about the brake controller, saying that it was an after-market (i.e., non-GM) product that they knew nothing about.

Friday morning I drove the rental car back to Enterprise (total cost: \$307.57), got a ride from them to Botnick (\$5 tip), retrieved the truck and started thinking about how to fix the brake controller problem.

Total cost of the truck fix: \$1018.83. We had our tow vehicle back but needed to figure out the brake controller problem before we could continue our journey.

Disaster recovery, phase 2: the brake controller

15 Oct 2018

For those of you who never tow anything, I will enlighten you on what a brake controller is: it is a device that controls the brakes on whatever you are towing. When you press the brakes on the truck it sends a signal to the trailer to activate its brakes too. The truck and the trailer then brake together. It is mounted under the dash in the truck.

There were two reasons why I believed that I had a brake controller problem: (1) the poor performance of the brakes when coming down the hill after getting hit with the coolant hose leak and (2) the fact that the controller display was always red. I had this vague memory that the display should be green when the trailer was attached. But I wasn't 100% certain about either. It was a steep hill and I was already rattled from the engine problem



A brake controller similar to my old one

Perhaps I was going too fast or my new rear brakes on the truck weren't set quite right. And the green display? I am old and forget things. Maybe I forgot that the screen was always red. I never had documentation for the device, so I couldn't easily check what the correct color should be.

But I couldn't take the chance. At the very least I had to convince myself, beyond a reasonable doubt, that there was no real problem. Besides, Jett said that there was NO WAY that she would be riding in the truck if there was any possibility that the 8-ton trailer behind us had no brakes. She said that she would fly to Virginia if I insisted on driving the rig down there without firmly fixing the problem. I went so far as to actually book a ticket from Binghamton to DC.

So my first step, after retrieving the truck on Friday morning, was to find a local dealer of hitches and brake controllers. I found one, drove to his small shop and discussed the problem. He said it was most likely a

corroded contact problem and sold me a spray can of brake cleaner (best for cleaning electrical contacts, he said) for about \$7. I also booked an appointment with him for a more thorough inspection and diagnosis first thing Monday, which was the earliest he could fit me in. I dearly hoped it wouldn't come to that as I thought I would end up slitting my wrists if I had to spend another weekend at Chenango Shores.

I did one more thing: I got his permission to hitch my truck to one of the trailers on his lot that had electrical brakes like my RV. Hitched up. Same behavior. That experiment convinced me that the problem - if there was one - was on the truck side of the connector; the RV was not implicated. That was good to know as it narrowed the problem and meant that I could deal with it by looking only at the truck.

My next stop was at a Love's travel stop where I asked if anyone was available to look at the problem. No, but they suggested that I talk to the various muffler and brake places nearby.

Third stop: Midas Muffler. The manager there seemed fairly knowledgeable about brake controllers and showed me the connector panel mounted near the rear axle. He said that the panel had a tiny microprocessor and suggested that replacing the panel and the socket on the bumper would almost certainly fix the problem. I scheduled a Saturday "first thing" appointment.

Fourth stop: Munro Brakes. They offered to do an electrical check of the controller and wiring for about \$60. I took the offer and had lunch while they worked. Conclusion: no breaks in the wiring and no abnormal voltages.

That was all done Friday afternoon. I went back to the RV with the depressing knowledge that we would not be leaving that day. I paid for another day.

Saturday morning I took the truck back to Midas for its 8:15 am appointment. They finished the work in about 90 minutes. Cost: \$370. I drove back to the RV, hooked up the umbilical. Red display. Crushed, I went in to discuss the problem with Jett. We agreed that the next step (and, indeed, the only thing left to try) was to replace the controller itself.

But first, I said to Jett, there is one more thing I needed to check. I wanted to verify that the setup was correct. There were really only two things to set: the brake type (it was correctly set to "electric" and not "hydraulic") and the display settings. There was a choice of display color. It was set to "red" and the other choices were "white" and... wait for it... "green." Was it possible that I just had the wrong display setting? I tried to set it to "green" and... poof!... the display went blank.

That put a lot of weight down on the side of "faulty."

I got the number for Jim's RV Center, drove the 6 miles to where I could get cell service, called them and confirmed that they had, in stock, a brake controller from the same manufacturer as mine. Praying that the controllers would be plug-compatible, I drove the 30 miles to their location, extracted my controller, took it in and confirmed that the plugs were identical. I then asked if there was any way to test my controller and they said that they had a tester in back. They took my controller into the back room and returned about 10 minutes later with the declaration "Yup, it's bad." Grateful to finally have a firm handle on the problem, I bought the new one (\$120), drove 30 miles back to Chenango Shores, plugged the RV and pressed the test lever on the controller... it went from green to red! That was enough to convince me with 99.9% certainty that the problem was finally solved.

Lesson: check the least likely component first. I really went into this believing that the controller was ok. Only by eliminating all other possible problems did I settle on the controller as the culprit.

I informed the campground owner that we would be leaving on Sunday morning. Perfect timing because Sunday was the last day of his season.

I also cancelled Jett's airplane ticket.

Sunday had its own stresses, which I will leave for the next post, but the bottom line was that the new brake controller did, in fact, control the brakes. Confirmation that the problem was finally solved. Total cost: \$557.

TS4-1 Hop 3: Chenango Forks NY to Tremont PA

16 Oct 2018

154 miles via NY 12, I-81 and local roads. Cumulative tow miles: 436. Truck miles: 310. Cumulative truck miles: 782.

This was the hop that extracted us from our 8-day nightmare. As expected, the most difficult part of the trip was the 200 yards to exit the Chenango Shores Campground. There were three distinct challenges:

1. Push the RV back onto the grassy common area, to make a Y-turn to the dump station. With all the mud - from the heavy rains on Friday and the lighter rains on Saturday - I thought that there was a very real possibility that either the truck or the RV - or both - would get mired, axle-deep, in the muck. We didn't get stuck, but we left deep tire tracks that will not disappear until next summer.
2. Dump the tanks. We were using only one black water tank and one gray water tank, each 45 gal capacity. But, after 8 days, they were probably pretty full. We probably had over 70 gallons of sewerage to dump. The dump station was nearly full. I could not completely empty the tanks, but got rid of enough weight to make traveling 150 miles feasible. Probably dumped 40 to 50 gallons.
3. Get to the road. This involved traversing the very narrow, very muddy road and making the fairly sharp left turn, avoiding the post on the left and the junk metal gate on the right. The bushes, too, to the extent possible. All through very deep puddles and mud. This turned out to be relatively easy. We hit nothing and didn't get stuck.



The campground owner was waiting for us at the road. We thanked him once again for his kindness and assistance. He invited us to stop in again next year.

Not bloody likely.

Our new brake controller - which I had felt engage the RV brakes just getting to the exit - still needed fine tuning. Our plan was to take a slight detour to a large parking lot where we could get it set just right. But in traversing the 6 miles of NY 12 to the entrance to I-81, I made adjustments along the way. By the time we got to I-81 I was pretty confident that the settings were good enough to be safe, so we skipped the parking lot and started heading south on I-81.

The ride on I-81 was uneventful. I was a bit apprehensive about the undulations near Scranton and knew that they would provide a test of the engine's health. It passed easily. The engine ran smoothly and never seemed to struggle much.

Our home for the evening was the [Echo Valley Campground](#) in Tremont PA. I picked it almost exclusively for its location - about 150 miles from Binghamton (a good road test for the truck, but not too taxing on its weary passengers) - and just a mile off of I-81. But it also offered pull-through sites and full hookups. The very first thing I did after we got set up was open the valve and complete the dumping of our gray and black water tanks. Then I took a long, hot shower.



Narrow, muddy exit path



Post to the left

The campground was no better than average, but did have recycling and one of the largest pools we have seen anywhere.

Ironically, this campground had almost no Verizon service. So, for the 9th consecutive night, we could not make or take phone calls. The TV service was also spotty. We got 4 channels on one TV and zero on the other.

Jett wanted to go out for a good meal and I didn't argue. So we drove about 5 miles to [Buddy's Log Cabin Restaurant](#) in Pine Grove PA. It had very good reviews - 4.3 out of 5 on Google - so we had high hopes. Jett ordered their specialty - broasted chicken - and I opted for some meatloaf. The salad bar was mediocre, as was the birch beer. The entrees... well, Jett couldn't eat the chicken. Too overdone. The meatloaf was cold and bland. The mashed potatoes were instant. What did we like about the meal? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Disgusting meal. One of our worst dine-out experiences ever. I would be generous if I gave it a 1-star rating.



Echo Valley pool



Buddy's Log Cabin

TS4-1 Hop 4: Tremont PA to Herndon VA

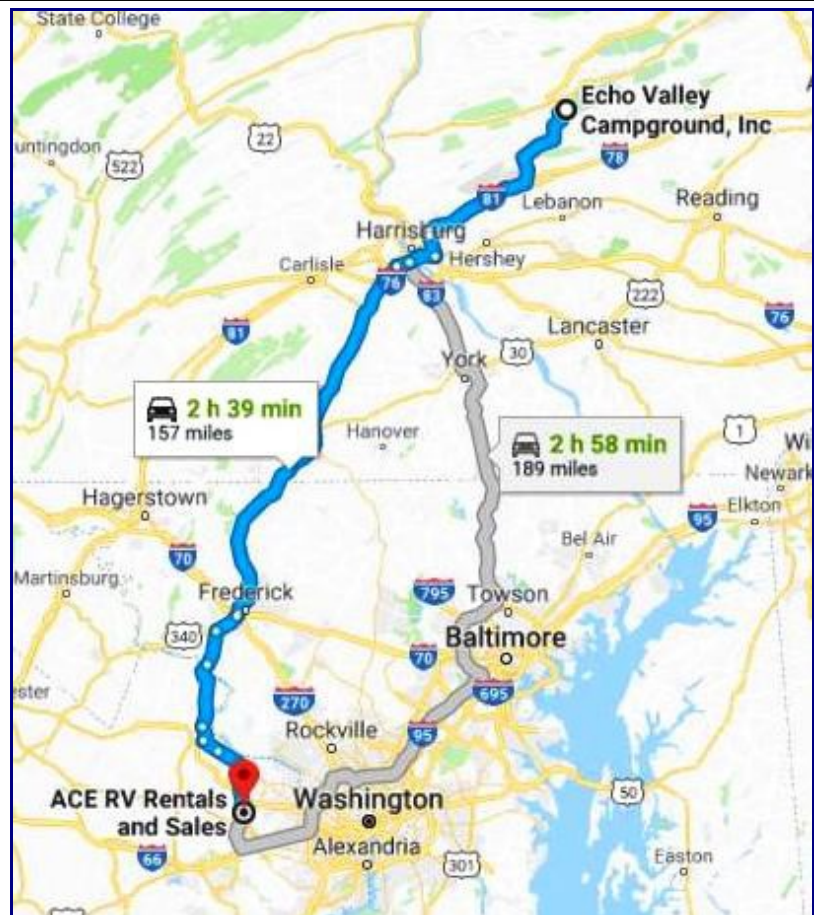
16 Oct 2018

158 mi via I-81, I-83, US 15, VA 267, VA 28 and local roads. Cumulative tow miles: 594. Truck miles: 410. Cumulative truck miles: 1192.

The extra truck miles - nearly 250 - were incurred in making the innumerable trips into Binghamton and surrounding communities trying to get the brake controller fixed.

This hop was just a bit longer than the previous one and the truck continued to perform well. The roads were good and the traffic was surprisingly light for a Monday. The destination was unusual - not an RV campground but an RV repair facility, [ACE RV Sales and Rentals](#). It was time to repair the damage done in the near catastrophe. And we might as well fix the other problem - the broken #2 black water valve - too. That one had been annoying us for over 3 months.

We arrived at the shop at 2:40 pm. I was distressed to see that not only was the shop's yard full, but the street near the shop was lined with RVs as well. We had to park in a "no parking" zone while, with some trepidation, I went into the office, to find Ali Khan, the head of the repair operations. I expected to be told that there was no place to put the RV and please come back tomorrow. But, no, he greeted me



TS4-1 Hop 4

with a smile, assured me they had a place and took command of the truck to haul it to its repair location, just outside the shop. A worker immediately started unscrewing the undercarriage so that they could inspect the damaged gray water tank. We chatted a bit about other recommended work, got our suitcases out of the RV and were on our way to Jett's sons' house in Alexandria by 3:30 pm after promising Ali that we would be back in the morning to go over the list of repairs. We were amazed. We had never experienced - over even heard of - such prompt service. We left believing that the third phase of our disaster recovery would be quick and easy.

But not inexpensive. I was guessing that the repairs would run between \$3000 and \$5000.

We were very impressed with ACE after this initial meeting. They even plugged the RV into an electrical supply, which obviated the need to empty the refrigerator. Jett really liked that unexpected courtesy.

One of the reasons that we chose to get the RV repairs done in VA was that we had cheap (i.e. free) accommodations with Jett's son for as long as we needed. Of course we wanted to resume the TS4 as quickly as possible so we hoped that the repairs could be completed quickly and we could be back in the RV within 5 days. But that depended on whether a new gray water tank was needed. I waited for news on that with great anxiety.

Col William Burgess Sr, 1622-1686

19 Oct 2018



All Hallows Cemetery

I had an afternoon free this week, so I decided to travel an hour to visit the All Hallows Cemetery in Harwood MD (formerly Birdsville). I was looking for the grave of an 8th great-grandfather, Col. William Burgess Sr. I thought he was my only direct ancestor buried there, but was surprised to discover, buried adjacent to him, his son, William Burgess Jr, a 7th great-grandfather. So I got more than I bargained for. And, for the first time ever, their graves were the first ones I looked at. That was a pleasant change from the usual search-for-an-hour-and-be-lucky-to-find-it experience. His grave appeared to be undergoing restoration, but a commemorative plaque was intact.

The cemetery, which is on the grounds of the All Hallows Episcopal Church, is perhaps the best-kept cemetery that I have ever seen. All of the headstones are free of dirt and lichens and the base of each is surrounded by mulch. Someone - presumably members of the church or someone they hired - spends a lot of time keeping this cemetery pristine.



William Jr's grave

William Burgess Sr was quite a guy.
From findagrave.com:

The Honorable William Burgess is one of the notable South River colonists. He came into Maryland from Virginia in 1649. By 1659 he was a member of the House of Burgesses, and shortly thereafter he appeared in the capacity of High Sheriff of Anne Arundel County. In 1660 William Burgess founded London Town on land he gave for settlement. For a time, London Towne rivaled Annapolis as a commercial center, a port of entry, and the residence of the leading merchants of the colony. When Lord Baltimore sailed for England in 1684, he appointed William Burgess to serve as Deputy Governor and Lieutenant-General of the Province during his Lordship's absence.

His third wife (and William Jr's mother), Ursula, is also reportedly buried in this cemetery, but her headstone is gone.



William Sr's grave

TS4-1 Hop 5: Herndon VA to Dumfries VA

19 Oct 2018

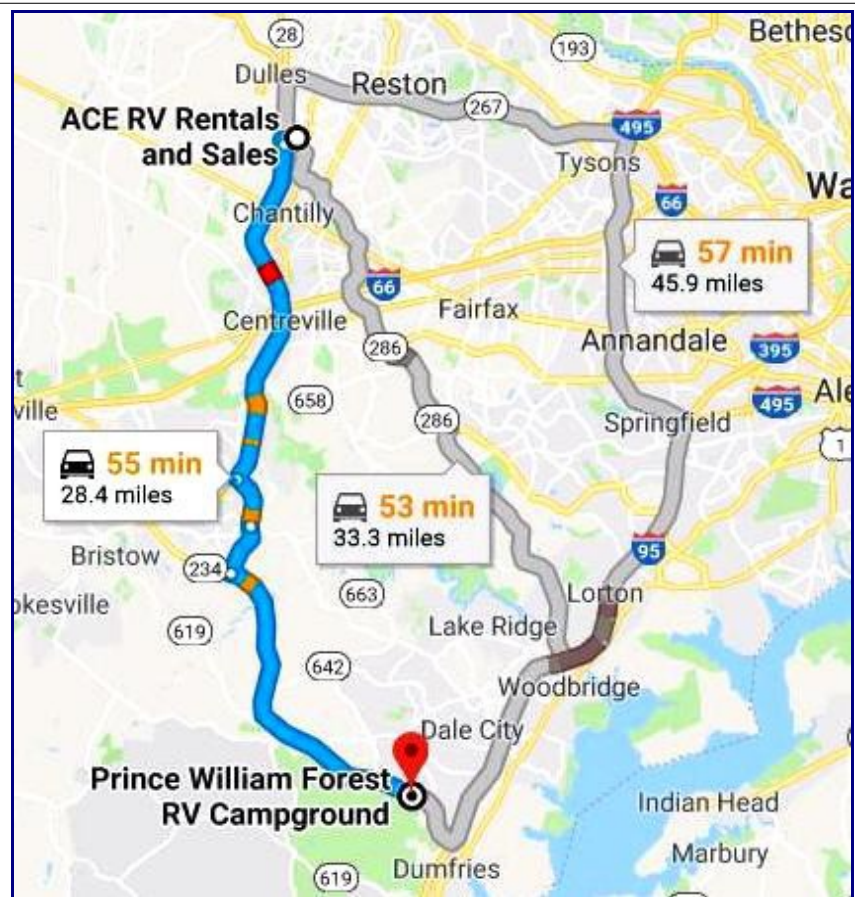
28 miles via VA 28, VA 294 and VA 234. Cumulative tow miles: 622. Truck miles: 149. Cumulative truck miles:

1341.

This was a short hop from ACE RV to the [Prince William Forest Campground](#). It marked the end of our disaster recovery. Or the start of the next disaster recovery. Or both.

I will describe the RV repairs in detail in my next post, but the bottom line is this: just over \$5000 of work to repair a variety of issues and perform some too-long-deferred maintenance. It was in the shop for just 4 days, which I find pretty miraculous. It leaves us about 5 days behind on our original TS4 schedule. As we do not want to move the Ft Myers arrival date, we need to cut out 5 days from our original itinerary. Most likely to be cut: Nashville TN and Homosassa FL.

The comment about "the start of the next disaster recovery?" Well, the main problem is that, in the final stages of repairing the known problems, the good workmen at ACE discovered that the back corner of the starboard slide had some badly rotted plywood. This was almost certainly due to the propensity of the



TS4-1 Hop 5

window on the side of that slide to let water in during a rainstorm. Several times we have discovered, too late, water running down the wall before we completely closed the window. This rot will have to be fixed soon, but probably not until we get to Florida. Other problems: the TV antenna was caulked to the roof (I had to climb onto the roof and manually pull it free of the muck) and the new toilet was unconnected to the water supply. This resulted in about a gallon of water spraying all over the half bath before I got the water supply shut off. More rot waiting to happen?

It seems unfair that we weren't permitted to enjoy our \$5000 worth of repairs before we had to start thinking of more.

Disaster recovery, phase 3: the RV

21 Oct 2018

The truck and brake controller have both been functioning well since our Binghamton disaster. The last phase of the recovery was to repair the damage to the RV: the leaking gray water tank and the bent spare tire flange. And, since we were planning on doing some long-deferred repairs to the #2 black water valve (it was stuck in the shut position), we decided we might as well throw that in as well.

The worst problem was the gray water tank. That tank held water from the sinks in both the kitchen and the



Washing dishes in the bathroom

half-bath, which meant that dishes had to be washed in the bathroom. This was a major hit on the quality of life in the RV. It was so onerous that we took to using disposable cups to drink coffee and plastic utensils and paper plates for meals. This absolutely had to be repaired before we got to Florida.

The damaged spare tire flange was not a quality-of-life issue, unless you factor safety into quality of life. It probably could have waited until Florida, but it was that "probably" that made fixing it immediately mandatory. First, it was not guaranteed that the spare tire rack wouldn't fall apart while on the road, doing who knows how much damage to our rig and anyone behind us. Second, it was not guaranteed that the spare was still usable. So it had to be fixed and the spare had to be inspected for damage.

The intended list of repairs, then, when we dropped the RV off at ACE RV Sales & Rentals in Herndon VA, was:

1. Fix the gray water tank.
2. Fix the spare tire flange.
3. Fix the #2 black water tank valve.
4. After an initial inspection of the damage with Ali Khan, the head of the repair branch of the business, we added another: repacking the axle bearings. This was a relatively cheap maintenance task that he said should be done every 2 years or so.

When we first arrived at ACE I was somewhat dismayed to see RVs lining the street as well as occupying every spot in the not-very-large repair yard. I had visions of being told either to bring it back tomorrow or needing to wait several days until work could begin. But, no, they took the RV immediately into a prime spot just outside the garage and had a workman under the RV, dropping the undercarriage cover, within minutes of our arrival. We got there at 2:40 pm and by 3:30 had taken our suitcases out of the RV and were on our way to Alexandria,

to stay for who knows how long with Jett's son.

The first big surprise came at 5:30 pm when Ali called. The inspection of the gray water tank revealed no damage at all. That was the good news. The bad news was that the water that I had observed dripping from the area of the gray water tank was coming from the roof damage that I had tried - unsuccessfully, obviously - to repair in Massachusetts. He said that they had confirmed that water was leaking through the roof, running down a channel between the inner and outer walls, then running through the undercarriage until it found its way out near the gray water drain pipe. This would need a roof patch. He said he would show me if I stopped by Tuesday morning.

Which we did. After showing me the roof damage he also pointed out another section of the roof that had apparently been damaged by branches and was a potential source of leaks. He suggested that after patching those areas we re-caulk the entire roof as there were other areas where the caulk was cracked. I agreed. He said, somewhat ominously, that they could not tell whether there was rot in the roof plywood or dampness in the walls (with mold potentially an issue) until the roof was opened.

While we were talking I remembered the various issues we had had with the slide gaskets - the rubber strips that kept water out. The top strips were frayed. I thought it would be a good idea to replace those, too. This eventually turned into completely replacing the gaskets around all three slides. Not critical, but also not terribly expensive. A wise thing to do.

Oh, yeah... let's get that basement key replaced. Our one-and-only key that locked the large basement doors had broken nearly a year ago and we had, since then, been unable to lock them. He said he could get a replacement. We ordered two.

So the revised list of repair tasks was:

1. Patch the roof in two places.
2. Re-caulk the entire roof.
3. Fix the #2 black water tank valve.
4. Fix the spare tire flange and check the spare.
5. Replace slide gaskets as necessary.
6. Repack the axle bearings.
7. Get basement keys.

Total estimated cost: about \$5000. The figure Ali quoted was \$4199, but that did not include the flange, the gaskets or the keys. As it turned out, it also did not include the \$500 cost of replacing the toilet in the half bath which, it was discovered when the fixed black water tank valve was fixed and being tested, was cracked and leaked when the water was turned on. This was a huge surprise as when it had last been used, about 4 months ago, was fine. It might have been due to our near catastrophe in Binghamton, but is impossible to know. But it absolutely had to be replaced.

Final cost of all the repairs: \$5209. Money that was not in our budget and, when added to the cost of repairs to the truck and the brake controller, makes this one of the most expensive trips we had ever taken.

But we now have a much improved RV to take to Florida. And no roof plywood rot had been found and no dampness in the walls had been detected. All VERY good news.

I should point out that, of all the repairs, the only one that is directly attributable to the near-disaster was the flange repair (the spare was fine). The cracked toilet... maybe. But the bottom line was that, despite the direct hit on the sewer pipes when we bottomed out, no damage was done. I am totally amazed at that bit of good fortune. I really thought, when I saw the pipes hit the ground, that I had destroyed the entire plumbing system. I am VERY grateful that I was wrong.

On the other hand... we have almost nothing to claim from insurance. It isn't worth the bother of filing a claim.

A few words about ACE and Ali. These guys were incredible! This was our first foray into major RV repairs and I was well aware of the horror stories: waiting for weeks for repairs to start, shoddy workmanship, hidden costs. I had never heard of ACE, but after our horrible experience with Camping World this summer was not about to take the RV there. It seemed like the best option near Alexandria where we would be staying.

So ACE was a bit of a pig-in-a-poke. But I had been impressed with Ali's thoughtful and prompt responses to my initial email queries, so I was cautiously optimistic. And when they started work within minutes of our arrival I was blown away. The work - which was extensive - was completed in less than 4 days. My most optimistic hope was to get the RV back on Saturday, but it was ready by 1 pm Friday. Outstanding service!

The final surprise - and not a good one - was the discovery of some badly rotted plywood on the underside of the large starboard slide. This was directly below the window that had a tendency to leak in rainstorms if it was not shut tightly. I suspect that the rot was due to rainwater that got inside and soaked into the floor. This could have happened multiple times without us noticing as the area below the window is carpeted and is next to a recliner. We might never have noticed dampness in that area.

Anyway, the damage was discovered too late to do anything about it. I will try to put a metal patch over the damage today to reduce the chance for additional deterioration. Eventually it will have to be repaired.

As Jett says, "it takes a lot of money to live like a homeless person."

TS4-1 Hop 6: Dumfries VA to Keeling VA

22 Oct 2018

215 miles via VA 234, I-95, I-195 (west of Richmond), VA 76, VA 288, US 360, VA 360 and CR 726. Cumulative tow miles: 837. Truck miles: 334. Cumulative truck miles: 1675. The extra truck miles reflected the trips we made up to Alexandria and various errands.

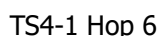
This was one of those hops where the GPS did not agree with the Google map. My intention was to follow the map, but I couldn't think of a good reason why the GPS disagreed so strongly. Eventually, as we approached Richmond, I gave in to my gnawing doubts and decided to trust the GPS. Shortly thereafter we discovered the reason for the discrepancy: VA 76 was a toll road. The Google map was set to avoid tolls. No going back at that point, so we had to roll through the toll booths/detectors using our EZ-Pass. It probably wasn't set correctly for the rig, so maybe someday I will get a letter in the mail asking for the additional 75 cents. I will be on pins and needles for months.

We were a bit nervous about this hop as it was the longest, toughest test yet of the repaired rig. But it went smoothly. The brake controller needed a tweak once again, but no big deal. Overall, it was a pretty uneventful 4-hour ride.

Our home for 3 nights was the [Prince William Forest Campground](#). We originally booked this site in desperation, because we just couldn't get an adequate booking at our usual haunt, the [Pohick Bay Regional Park Campground](#). Then we had to reschedule the booking twice: first when we thought that we would get the RV back on Saturday and then again when we got it back on Friday. As it turned out, booking on Friday working in our favor because we were given a short site when we were arriving on Saturday, but got moved to a larger site when we extended it to 3 days.

We liked this campground more than we expected to. The sites are large and shady. The staff was wonderful. We will come back to Prince William again.

Time will tell.



24 Oct 2018

This was an uneventful trip. Almost. The first 200 miles were level, smooth and relaxing. The last 18 miles, though, included a long uphill climb that taxed the engine and a stretch on US 70 through downtown Black Mountain that was a little too tight for comfort. We made it, but not without some new concerns about the health of the truck.

The problem was the sudden "whooshing" sound that the engine started emitting about a mile before the crest on the long uphill. It was loud. It sounded serious. I considered pulling to the side but the gauges were



reading normal and there was no discernable change in the truck's performance. The moment I let up on the accelerator the whooshing stopped. Then it returned when I accelerated again.

Last night I researched the behavior and learned that it was almost certainly due to the engine's turbo boost capability. I also found that some regarded the whooshing as a normal sound for the Duramax 6.6 engine. Well, I have had the truck for over 6 years and have driven it over 80,000 miles and I have never heard that sound before, so I have a hard time accepting it as "normal."

I took the truck to a local auto repair place today. A mechanic took the turbo hoses off, inspected them and other turbo components and found no problem. Another mechanic took the truck for a test ride and declared it to be running just fine. A third mechanic took a look as well. They all agreed that there was nothing to be done and assured me that I could haul the RV over the Blue Ridge Mountains tomorrow.

I will hold you to that, guys.

Total repair cost: \$43.

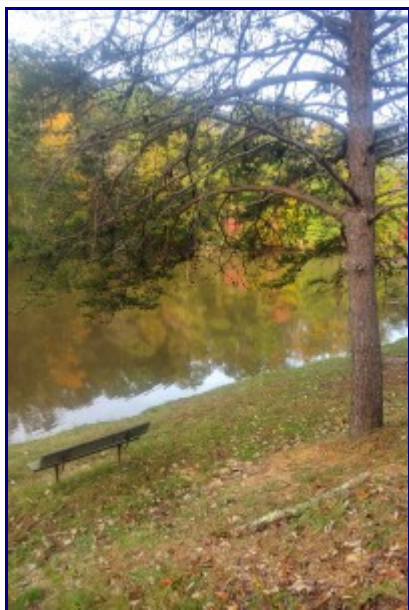
Our overnight stay was at the [Paradise Lake and Campground](#) in Keeling VA. Our site was spacious and,

while far from level, wasn't so uneven that the RV couldn't level itself. The campground had no cable service but was close enough to Lynchburg that we could pull in a handful of channels with a signal sufficiently strong that the stations were watchable. It wasn't much but after all the nights with no television at all it was a joy.



Our site at Paradise Lake

In the morning I took Rusty for a walk down by the lake and discovered just enough fall color to make for some good photos.



Paradise Lake



Paradise Lake

Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville

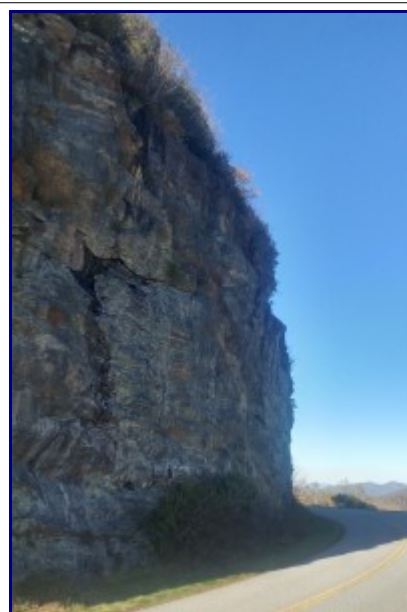
25 Oct 2018

Yesterday was a beautiful, cloudless, warm day in Asheville NC. I took a few hours to drive a section of the Blue Ridge Parkway and take a few photos. There was some fall color, though very muted by Vermont standards. But it was a nice day for a drive and an opportunity to regain some confidence in the truck. It is going to be tested today on the trek to TN.

I drove up from Bent Creek, to Mount Pigsah, with a brief stop at the [Pigsah Inn](#) to marvel at the view, then down via NC 215. A nice drive - and the truck performed well - with some beautiful vistas. The big surprises, for me, were the number of tunnels (about 10), the presence of a hotel at the top of the mountain



View from the Pigsah Inn



Rock cut

and, directly across the road from the hotel, a campground with RV sites. A motorhome was checking in. I have to admire the courage (foolishness?) of someone who would drive an RV up those steep, winding roads.



Fall colors



Valley vista



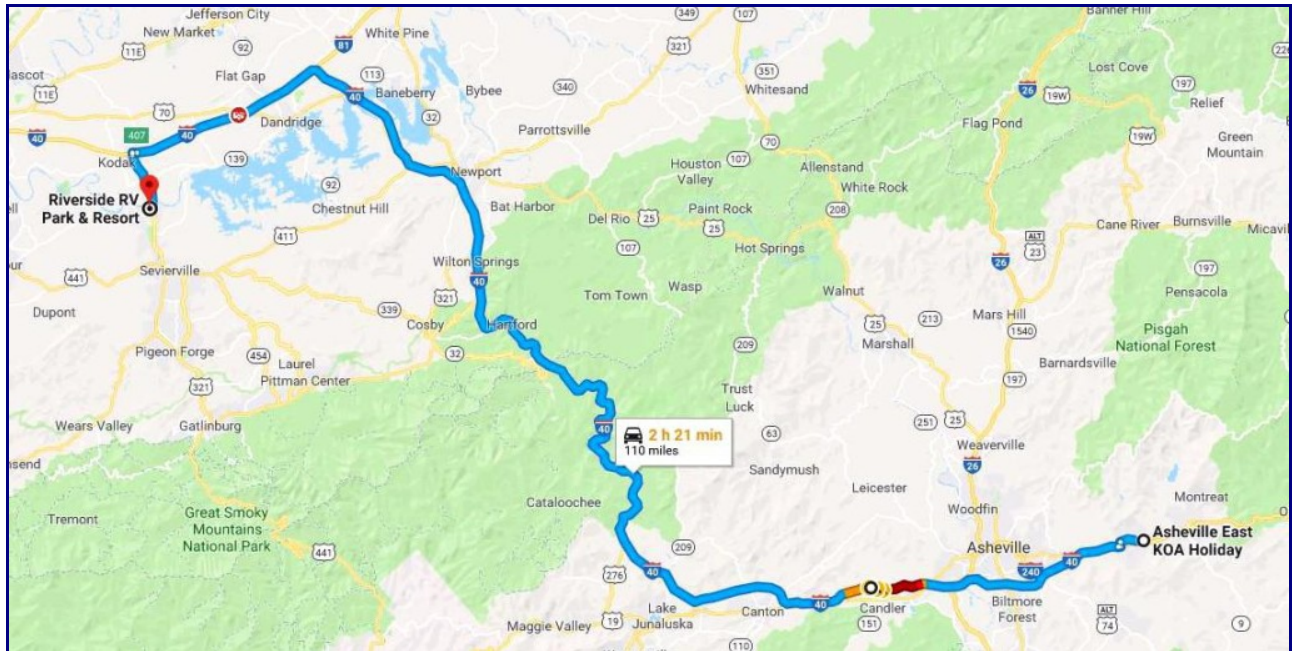
Pigsah Inn



A tiny bit of color

TS4-2 Hop 1: Swannanoa NC to Sevierville TN

26 Oct 2018



TS4-2 Hop 1

110 miles via US 70, I-40 and TN 338. Cumulative tow miles: 110. Truck miles: 228. Cumulative truck miles: 228. The extra truck miles were largely due to the trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway as described in the preceding post.

More truck problems. The "whooshing" sound that appeared on the long uphill slog into Asheville was still with us as we left the campground yesterday morning. I was only about 90% convinced that there was no serious problem after three mechanics looked at it the day before and declared it "good to go." But the truck ran fine on the trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway and seemed to be fine for about the first 50 miles of this hop. But as we were climbing a hill on I-40 I noticed some black exhaust when the engine was running at about 2,000 rpms. Strangely, I did not see any black exhaust when running on the flat or on steeper hills when the engine revved near 3,000 rpms. The black exhaust worried me, but the engine still seemed to be running well, if noisily. I was a bit concerned that we were burning oil, so I stopped in a rest area to check. Nope - oil level was fine.

Then the dreaded "check engine" light appeared. But no dashboard message and no discernable loss of power. At that point we were on a long downhill stretch, coming out of the mountains, so the engine was not being taxed. We got to our turnoff on TN 338 and my intention was to drive the final 30 miles to our destination, then find a mechanic to look at the problem on Friday. But going uphill on 338 I realized that the engine was no longer running fine. I could barely maintain a 30 mph speed going up a not-very-steep hill. It was apparent that if we encountered any uphill stretch in those 30 miles - which was pretty likely - we might very well be stranded on the side of the road.

The section of TN 338 just south of I-40 is bounded by small shopping centers and other commercial properties. I started scanning for a large parking lot where I could stop and start making calls as it was apparent that we were not going to get to Walland TN that night. Then I spotted a sign for Riverside RV Resort, made the turn at the sign, pulled over into a small truck stop area, called the campground and booked a night, drove the final quarter-mile to the campground, got set up and started dialing for a mechanic. I was somewhat

desperate to find one quickly because the campground had no site for us beyond Thursday night.

The first three calls - to two GMC dealerships and one diesel repair specialist - elicited nothing better than a promise to look at the truck on Monday. I needed IMMEDIATE service, so I kept dialing, with not a lot of hope. But I was desperate so I tried [Tennessee Fleet Service](#) in Knoxville, an establishment which clearly catered to big rigs, not puny little trucks like my GMC 3500. But they told me if I could get to their shop - 20 miles away - they would look at it. I hung up, grabbed my keys, kissed Jett and took off to Knoxville.

The truck ran a lot better when not towing 15,000 pounds.

When I got to Tennessee Fleet Service I was underwhelmed by the building. And I had trouble finding anyone to talk to. One guy was under a truck with only his legs showing and the other was bent over a box truck engine, operating a sander while wearing earphones. The "office" - a tiny cubicle in the corner - was unoccupied. I finally got the attention of the guy with the sander. He asked me what I wanted - with a tone that really meant "what the hell do YOU want" - which I initially misunderstood due to his Tennessee accent. When I finally communicated my problem, he stopped sanding and walked out to take a look. He started the engine, revved it, heard the "whoosh" and opened the hood. He spent about 10 minutes over and under the engine, feeling hoses. Soon the guy who was



Tennessee Fleet Service

under the truck appeared and started kibitzing. At first the talk was rather ominous, heading it the direction of "the turbo needs to be replaced." When I asked how difficult that would be the second mechanic laughed and said the last one he did took him 9 hours.

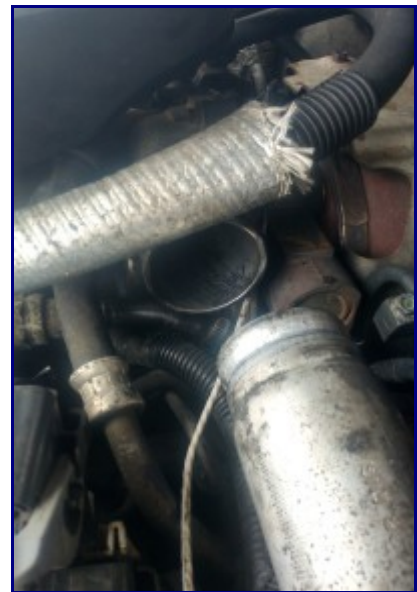
I wasn't laughing. I had visions of being stuck in Sevierville for a week and started considering options for where I could put the RV while we were stuck.

Then the conversation turned 180 degrees and went down the path of "the air filter is clogged." But that turned out to be untrue, just that the guy who replaced the filter neglected to reset the "dirtiness" gauge.

After a few more moments the first mechanic - his name tag said "Moose" - felt a hole in a flexible hose in the turbo air pipes. He removed the hose and showed me a large fissure - about 2 inches - in the hose. He was pretty certain that the hose was the source of the "whoosh." He took off in his truck to find a replacement. I was left to consider how long this problem had existed.

I think it existed at the time of the Binghamton disaster. When we first had the coolant leak I incorrectly thought that it was this section of hose that was leaking, because I saw it "spitting" coolant. Of course there was no coolant in the hose, so I now believe what I observed was coolant being sprayed onto the hose and the hose,

though its split, was expelling air through the coolant, making it "spit." So add yet another problem to the list of issues that the truck had at the time of the disaster.



The problem - hose removed

We have certainly had more than our share of problems on this trip south. And it is wearing on us. Jett: "I'm not sure how much more of this I can take." I can't disagree. It has been brutal, reminiscent of our first month

on the road back in 2012 - our "ding-a-day" trip.

Ironically, that trip resulted in us being stuck in Knoxville. History repeats, I guess.

But that trip turned around after Knoxville and I have to hope that this one does, too.

Anyway, when Moose returned with the replacement hose - a used part that cost \$13 instead of \$68 for a new one - he immediately started installing it. After the hose was securely clamped in place he started the engine and revved it. No "whoosh!"

The engine was fixed, the "check engine" light reset and I was back at the campground within 3 hours of arrival. Total cost: \$140, including a \$25 tip. Just amazing. Better than any "best case" scenario I could have envisioned when we limped into the campground.

Tennessee Fleet Service saved the day. Moose is my hero. I have to view this whole experience positively because (1) we didn't have to call for emergency assistance, (2) we were able to get to a good campground to deal with the problem and (3) the problem was fixed quickly and inexpensively.

Now I have to wonder why three mechanics on Wednesday were unable to find a gash in a turbo hose, Maybe it took a dedicated diesel guy like Moose to figure it out.

Today's new Hop 2 will be 27 miles to Walland TN, our original Hop 1 destination. This will be one of our shortest hops ever. But, to make it interesting, it will be done in a driving rain.

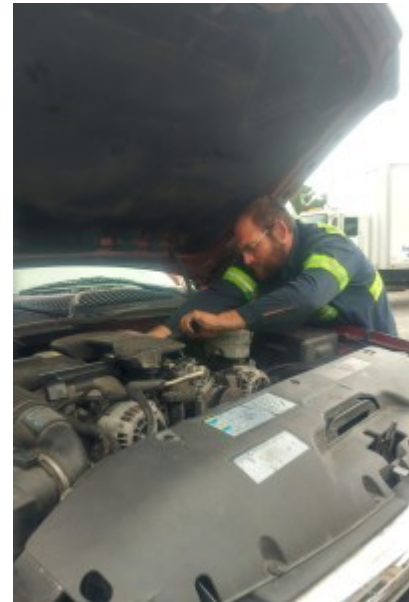
Our 2 nights in the Asheville area (actually in Swannanoa, about 10 miles east of Asheville) were at the [Asheville East KOA Holiday](#). This is a nice park which, like so many KOAs, has very tight sites. I had to tuck the nose of the truck under the RV's front overhang to get it off the road. But we were close to the dog park and within an easy drive of restaurants, food stores and auto services. It had train noise, but none in the middle of the night. It suited our needs but was not luxurious. Looking now at the website I see that it claims to have TWO lakes. I didn't explore, admittedly, but I saw no lake. Maybe the campground is nicer than I perceived.

While in Swannanoa I bought some groceries at an

Ingles supermarket. I bought a couple of items on sale and asked to use a "courtesy card" as, being a short-term visitor, there was no point in getting a customer loyalty card. The checker said she couldn't let me use one but I was free to ask another customer to use theirs. I wasn't about to do that and was pretty shocked, really, that no courtesy card was available. That was a first in our six years of travel. So I complained to the manager. She was sympathetic but said she would be fired if she let me use one - it was a very strict corporate rule.

My advice to full-timers: avoid Ingles. They are not full-timer friendly.

After our tough day on the road, followed by our miraculous timely truck repair, we felt we deserved a dinner out. Jett picked the [El Paso](#) Mexican restaurant just a few miles away. It turned out to be quite good. And the



Moose installing the hose



Asheville East KOA

margarita was much needed. High marks to El Paso. And it was a relief to have a good meal after the disappointing/awful one at [The Coach House](#) in Black Mountain NC. This place gets high marks from many diners, but both my swordfish and pecan pie were about the worst I have ever had and Jett's steak, while tasty, was overdone. Low marks to The Coach House.



El Paso Restaurant

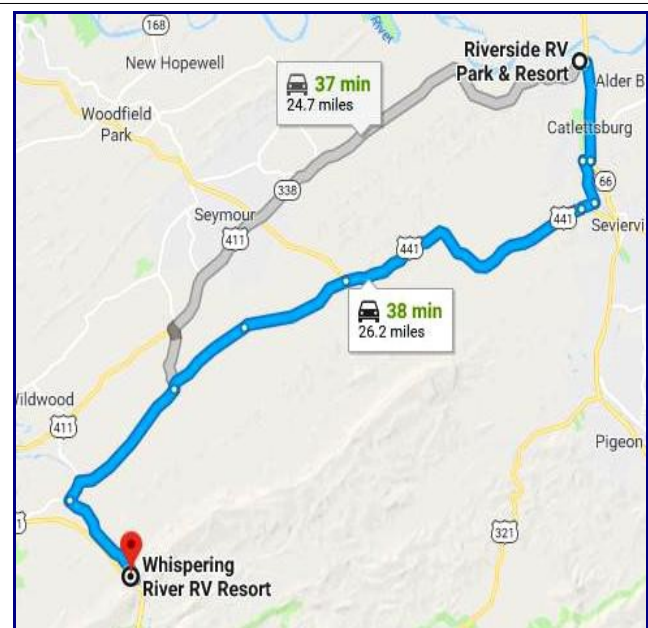
TS4-2 Hop 2: Sevierville TN to Walland TN

27 Oct 2018

27 miles via TN 338, US 411/441 and local streets. Cumulative tow miles: 137. Truck miles: 85. Cumulative truck miles: 313. The additional truck miles were due to the 50-mile round trip to Tennessee Fleet Service to fix the engine "whoosh" and the trip out for dinner and fuel.

This was the most stressful 27-mile hop ever, due to the narrowness of the local roads we traveled and the GPS's strident insistence that we should NOT BE ON THESE ROADS. It's preferred route was 14 miles longer. That baffled me. True, the 10 miles on those local roads were stressful, but there were no low bridges, no weight restrictions and no truck prohibitions. In fact we had to share the road with some 18-wheelers and big RV rigs traveling the opposite direction. Two of the RVs actually stopped to let us by (but not the 18-wheelers) which was unnecessary, but I understand their caution. Not only were the roads narrow with no shoulder, but in many places the road dropped precipitously into deep ditches. With visions of our Binghamton disaster fresh in my mind, my grip on the wheel was pretty white-knuckle.

But it was just 27 miles, so it was over quickly.



TS4-2 Hop 2

Our emergency overnight stay was at the [Riverside RV Park and Resort](#) which I selected entirely because it was right there where we broke down. I think it actually selected us. But however the decision was made, it was a good one. The staff was very accommodating and it is a beautiful park with mostly pull-through sites but also some very attractive cabins. It was a snap getting in and out. It is situated along a very scenic river with the cabins in many cases overhanging the water. I can understand why someone would make this a destination for a vacation.

It rained all night which made the morning teardown messy, but I still liked the place.



Our site at Riverside

Another day, another truck failure

28 Oct 2018

This is getting ridiculous, in a sad, annoying way. It seems like every day there is a new problem with the truck. Because there is. Yesterday, as we were delivering donated food and towels to the local pet shelter on a cold, drizzly day, I shut off the truck... and the blower continued to run. It just wouldn't shut off. Started the truck again, turned it off, blower still on. Started the truck, manipulated the controls for the heat, shut off the heat, blower continued to run. Tried pulling fuses, blower continued to run.

We finally had to find a tire/auto service place where a guy was available to look at the problem. He showed me the OTHER fuse box, under the hood. He found the fuse that controlled the blower and pulled it. That stopped the blower.

So we have to limp our way to Florida with the blower either on (fuse in) or off (fuse out), with no control over the heat level.

Sheesh. What a weird problem!

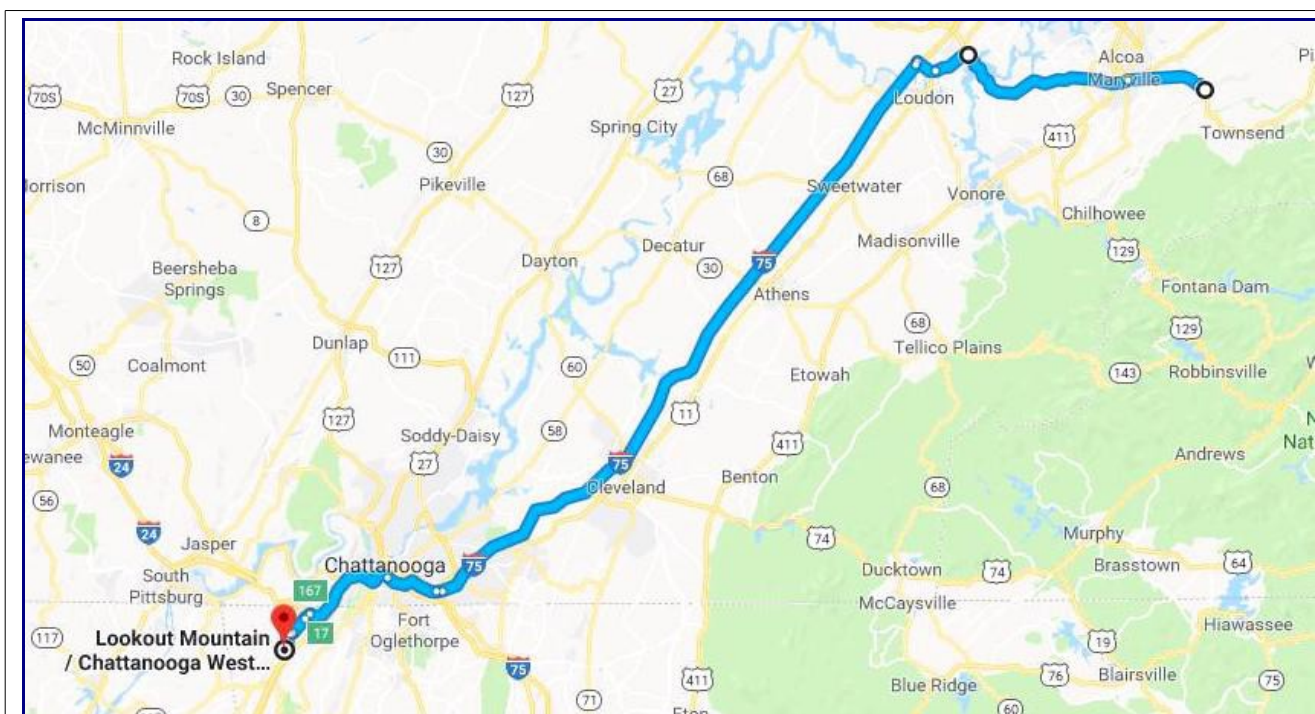
I should mention that the heat system was already a little screwy. Starting sometime this summer - probably around the time the main computer was replaced - the heat controls worked on one side only (we have left/right heat level controls); the left side always blew cold air.

Something else to be looked at when we get to Florida.

If we get to Florida. With a problem on every hop we have 5 more problems to look forward to.

TS4-2 Hop 3: Walland TN to Trenton GA

30 Oct 2018



TS4-2 Hop 3

134 miles via US 321, US 11, I-75, I-24, I-59 and local roads with a rest stop at the halfway point. Cumulative tow miles: 271. Truck miles: 189. Cumulative truck miles: 542. The extra truck miles were incurred primarily in our trip out to Tellico Village to visit with friends Roy and Patricia.

This hop had a little glitch at the start - I discovered, when trying to pull the awning in after disconnecting the power (and therefore running off of battery) that the RV's entire 12V system was inoperative. Fortunately I knew exactly where to look - the breaker reset in the front basement - so that was easily solved.

The rest of the trip was relatively smooth and pleasant. I-75 through Tennessee is a beautiful road, a joy to travel. But I-24 and I-59 were pretty rough, so things got jumbled a bit.

We stopped for a break at the halfway point, primarily so we could shut off the blower. Remember, I now have to open the hood and remove a breaker to shut it down. It was pretty warm by that point - about 72 - so no heat was needed.

Our two nights - reduced from the original planned 3 nights due to the truck's turbo problem - in Walland were at the [Whispering River RV Resort](#). This is a park with very nice facilities - one of the most attractive offices that I have ever seen and a very nice bathhouse/laundry room. It also had a very good cable TV system. What it didn't have was Verizon connectivity - it was as bad as Chenango Shores. We couldn't reliably make phone calls and had very spotty internet service. The campground has WiFi, but it was heavily used and very slow.

It was also very cold - in the low 50's for highs - both days, but I can't fault the campground for the lousy weather.



Whispering River

Walland itself is a hole in the wall. It is very rural. We had to go over 7 miles into Maryville to get fuel. But Walland does have the [Snoring Bear Diner](#), a cute little place serving very tasty pancakes and eggs. The service was outstanding and we both enjoyed our meals very much. It was definitely the best of Walland. If you are ever in Walland TN (and why would you be?), stop by the Snoring Bear.



The cozy sitting area in the office



Snoring Bear Diner

Chickamauga Battlefield and Lookout Mountain

31 Oct 2018

Monday was beautiful, though a bit coolish, in Chattanooga. I was feeling a bit sniffly, but decided to ignore my stuffy nose and take advantage of the clear skies to get some photos at [Chickamauga National Military Park](#) and [Lookout Mountain](#), sites of two very significant Civil War battles. Significant for the outcome of the war and very significant to the 10,000 men who died there.

The Chickamauga battlefield is huge - larger than Gettysburg - and the [battle of Chickamauga](#) is second only to Gettysburg in the number of casualties (about 35,000). But the battlefield is not nearly as dramatic as Gettysburg, consisting mostly of woods and fields on relatively flat terrain. No Little Round Top, no Devil's Den,



Chickamauga fields

no Missionary Ridge. But it is scenic in its own way and was definitely worth a visit.

I started at the Visitor's Center and viewed a 26-minute film that put the battle into context for me. It came just a few months after Gettysburg and was the Confederacy's last best chance to regain control of the war. The Battle of Chickamauga was, technically, a Confederate victory, but not a conclusive one. Both sides were battered and the Union forces were able to withdraw to Chattanooga. The Confederates laid siege to Chattanooga but were unable to roust the Union army who retained control of this vital railroad crossroads. Ultimately, Ulysses S. Grant took control of the Union army there and was able to break the siege with battles on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. That opened the way for Sherman's march to the sea which broke the back of the Confederacy.



Visitor's Center

As at Gettysburg, the battlefield is sprinkled with monuments to individual brigades that were significant in the battle. There are also many permanent markers that describe the action that took place at that point. It is hard now - particularly on a bright, calm, sunny day - to imagine the carnage that took place on that battlefield over 150 years ago.

The [Battle on Lookout Mountain](#) became known as "The Battle Above the Clouds" because it occurred high up on Lookout Mountain, perhaps some 400 to 500 feet above Chattanooga. The promontory overlooking



Marker at The Gap



View from Point Park

Chattanooga is now [Point Park](#) and is popular more for the vistas than the history. It is easy to see how an army that controlled this mountain could control Chattanooga.

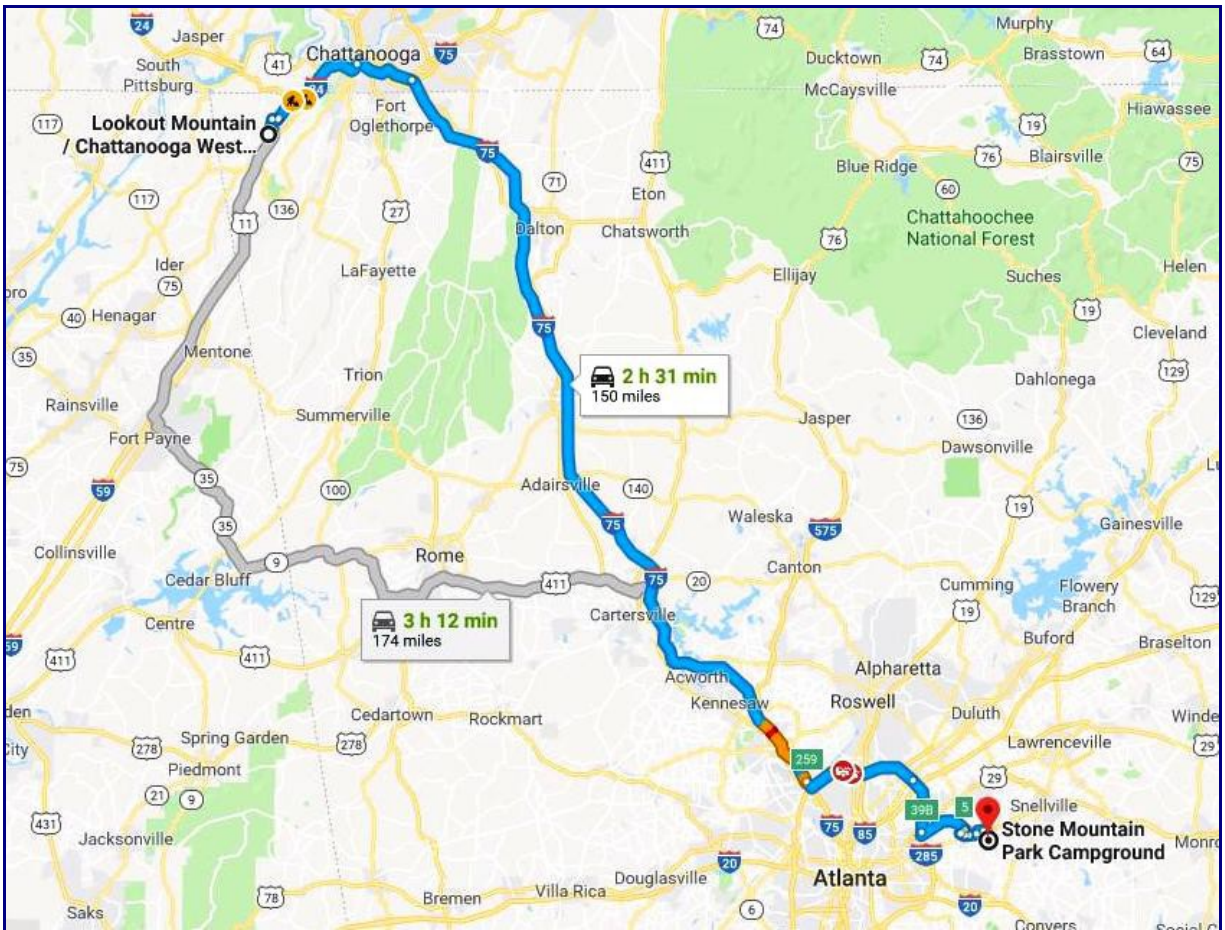
It was a good day of tourism, but I didn't see Chattanooga itself. I will have to leave that for another trip.



Artillery in Point Park

TS4-2 Hop 4: Trenton GA to Stone Mountain GA

1 Nov 2018



TS4-2 Hop 4

150 miles via I-59, I-24, I-75, I-285 (around Atlanta), US 78, GA 10 and local roads. Cumulative tow miles: 421. Truck miles: 242. Cumulative truck miles: 784. The extra truck miles were primarily due to my visit to the Chickamauga battlefield and Lookout Mountain (see my previous post).

This was a fairly easy hop, mostly on interstate roads, in clear weather. However, the GPS made it more interesting by failing to function, putting the navigation burden on Jett who guided me using the printed map and, as we neared the destination, the GPS on her phone. I guess the GPS failure was our "ding" on this hop, but a minor one. Jett actually relished her role as navigator. I doubt if she would have had as much fun if the route had been more difficult.

Traffic was heavy and there were several points at which I had to brake hard. I am happy to report that the brake controller is working fine and the RV brakes assisted very well.

I knew that our destination - the campground at Stone Mountain - was within the park boundaries. However, I was surprised to discover that it costs \$20 to even get into the park. Hope it is worth it. The toll booth was interesting in that it was very tight - I squeezed through with maybe 6 inches to spare.

Our home in the Chattanooga area was the [Lookout Mountain / Chattanooga West KOA Holiday](#), a very nice park on the side of a mountain southwest of Chattanooga. I really liked this campground. It was very scenic, with large shaded sites, beautifully maintained facilities (including a very nice dog park) and friendly, efficient staff. I think it may be the nicest KOA we have ever visited. And they were all decked out for Halloween, although I did not see any children in the campground while we were there. Still, it added to the festive, fun atmosphere. Recommended.



Our site



Dog park



Black cat at the office



Bounce pad (flat)

Stone Mountain: Native American Pow-Wow

3 Nov 2018

Quite by accident we arrived at the Stone Mountain Park just in time for the start of the annual 4-day Native American Festival and Pow-Wow. It was an unexpected opportunity to meet some real Native Americans and to buy some authentic Indian gifts for the grandchildren. We also had, for lunch, Indian tacos (made with frybread) and watched some tribal dancing. A good time, even though the weather was less than ideal - we got home just before the skies opened up.

The Pow-Wow was held in Stone Mountain's "Historic Square" area, which is a small collection of authentic historic buildings from the south, including slave quarters. It is a very small version of Sturbridge Village or Greenfield Village, but interesting. I found the ancient barn and the slave quarters the most interesting.

We were warned that there would be a LOT of schoolchildren there on Thursday and that was accurate. But they were well-behaved and didn't ruin the day.



Vendor area



Native dance



Jett at the slave quarters



Ancient barn

Stone Mountain Park

3 Nov 2018

[Stone Mountain Park](#) claims to be "Georgia's most popular attraction." I can understand the appeal. There is

something for everybody, though it seems to be more adult-oriented than, say, Disney World. The things that would appeal to kids are:

- the adventure course
- the 3-D theater
- the train ride
- a petting zoo

It has, for adults, two golf courses, hiking trails and a museum. The cable ride to the top of the mountain and the historic square appeal to all ages.



The carved face of Stone Mountain

In the center of the park, carved into the rock face, is the largest bas-relief in the world - a depiction of the three great heroes of the Confederacy, Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. It is not a great piece of art, nor is it as epic as Mount Rushmore. But it is worth seeing. Viewing it is one of the things you can do for free once you pay your \$20 to get your car into the park.

When I viewed the mountain the park was preparing for "[Snow Mountain](#)", a snow festival that runs from mid-November to mid-February. The festival centers around a huge snowtube slide that runs from the museum to the base of the rock. My first thought was that using this key space for that kind of entertainment was nearly sacrilegious, like setting up a bowling alley in The Louvre. But after mulling it a bit, I think I understand. The rock art, while interesting, really only grabs one's interest for about a minute. A 400-foot snowtube course, on the other hand, can amuse a family for hours. Definitely something that would add to the appeal of the park as a destination.



Train station



Adventure course

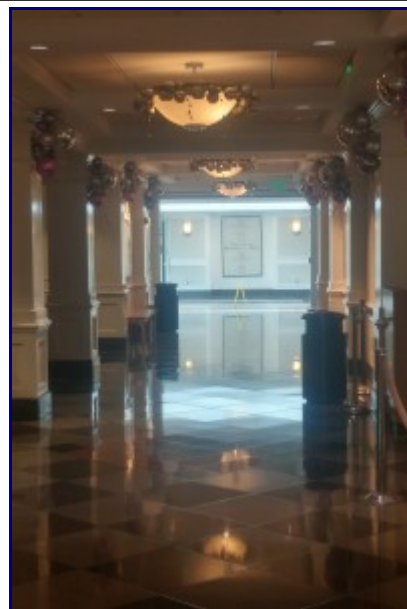
The park is open year-round, but I got the impression that this time of year is its off season. When we arrived at the campground it was probably no more than 25% full. The Native American Pow-Wow was attracting some visitors (see my previous post), but the rest of the attractions were desolate. How many people do you see at the train station or the theater in my photos here? None. And the adventure course was closed, as were all of the refreshment stations. I walked through the museum hallway to the gift shop (also empty) and saw no one except for a very bored guard who was struggling to stay awake. Almost spooky.

So Disney World it's not.

Maybe that is a good thing.



3-D theater



Desolate museum hallway

TS4-2 Hop 5: Stone Mountain GA to Tifton GA

4 Nov 2018

197 miles via US 78, I-285 (around Atlanta), I-675 (south of Atlanta), I-75 and I-475 (around Macon). Cumulative tow miles: 618. Truck miles: 233. Cumulative truck miles: 1017. The extra truck miles were due to a couple of trips to WalMart to buy food and fuel and our sightseeing around Stone Mountain Park.

This was one of the more pleasant hops on the TS4 trip. Basically it was all on expressway, the roads were relatively flat and in good repair, the traffic, once we got about 20 miles south of Atlanta, was not heavy and the weather was bright and sunny. The temperature climbed into the low 70s, so it was a good day to travel in a truck with no heat or A/C. Most importantly, the truck ran fine.

We took a short break at a rest area near the halfway point, more to stretch the legs and relieve the bladders than to eat lunch. We parked next to a very similar rig and had a nice chat with the driver about RVs and the lifestyle.

A good day on the road.

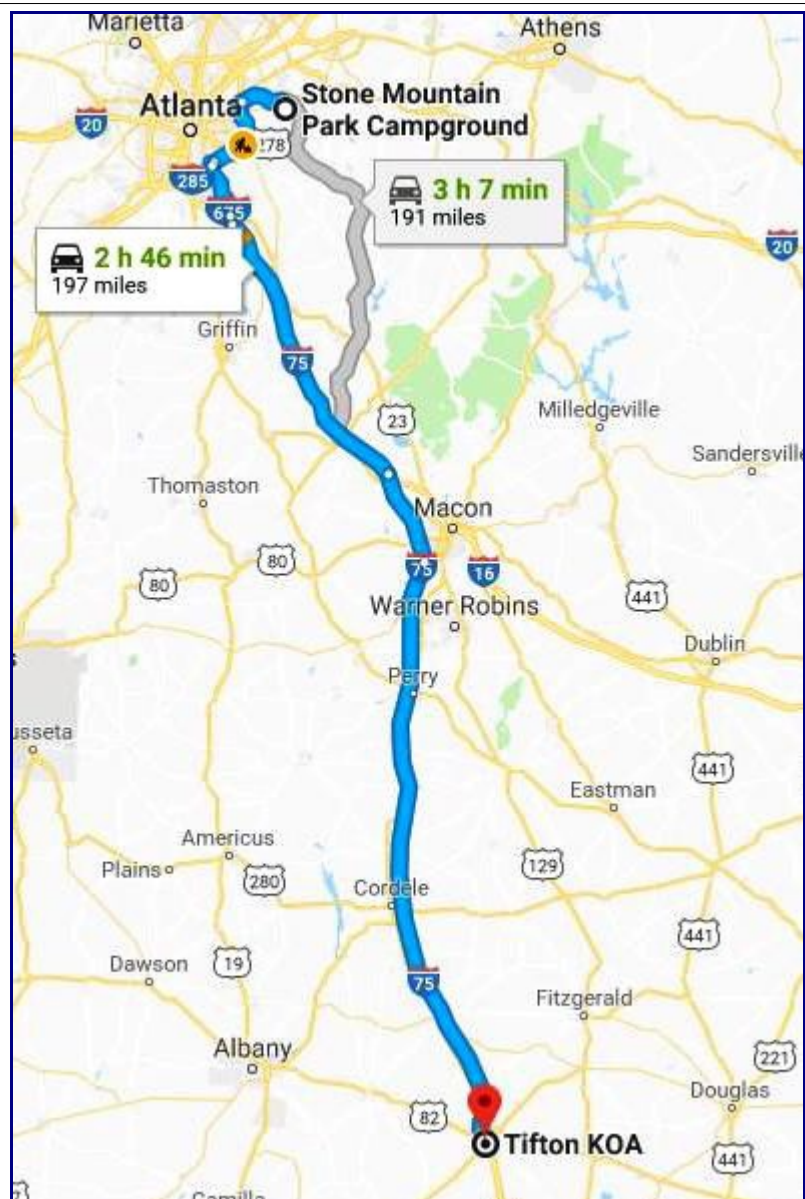
Our three nights in Stone Mountain GA were at the [Stone Mountain Park Campground](#), within the confines of Stone Mountain Park. It is a large campground nestled on the banks of Stone Mountain Lake. Many of the sites are directly on the water. Very scenic and wonderfully appointed: every site had a wooden patio with a propane grill. The recreational facilities, while not extensive, were very nice. I liked the side-by-side playground for ages 2 to 5 and 5 to 12. Presumably 5-year-olds can take their pick. The pool was full but the gates were locked (I suspect they open the pool if the weather is warm).

The weather during our tenure was far from ideal. The sun basically did not appear until the morning of our departure. But when it came out it revealed some lovely fall colors.

We dined out on our final night at Stone Mountain. Jett decided that I needed a treat and selected the local German restaurant, the [Village Corner German Restaurant & Bakery](#). I like a good German meal, with a preference for great German sausage. Well, I didn't see any sausage on the entrée list, so I

chose the sauerbraten, a dish that I probably haven't had for 50 years. I think it was a mistake as it is marinated pork that is, indeed, sour. Not my favorite. But the spaetzle and red cabbage that came with it were very good. If you like German food and are near Stone Mountain GA, this would be a good choice. Yes, it is your only choice, but it is still a good one.

They also brew their own beer and have an interesting selection. I chose a 4-flight combo of grapefruit heffewiesen, a nut brown ale, a pale lager and an Octoberfest. Delicious!



TS4-2 Hop 5



Wooden patio with grill



My flights Yum!



Age-specific playgrounds



A colorful morning

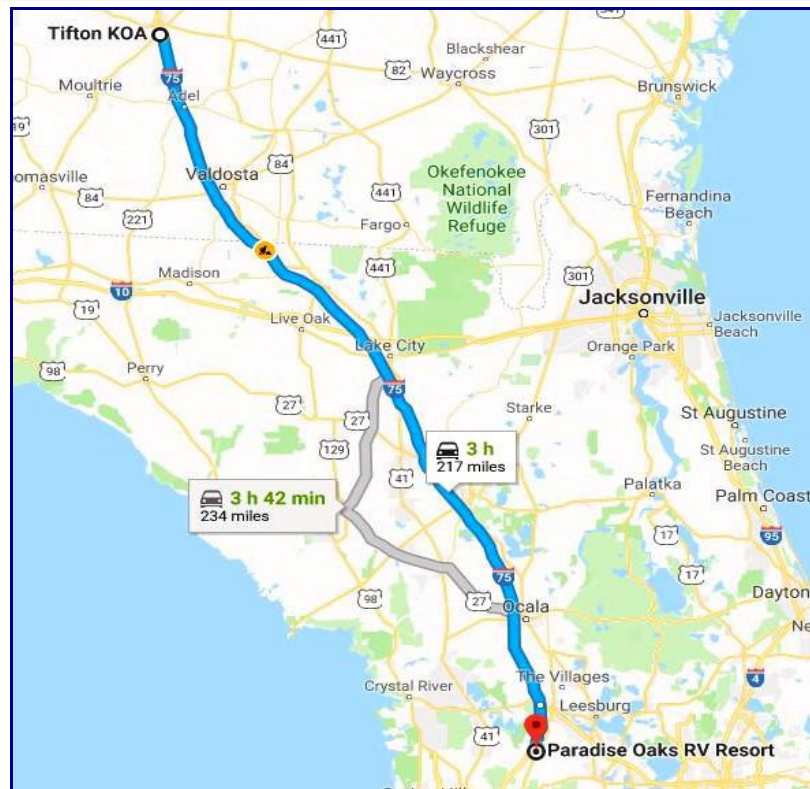
TS4-2 Hop 6: Tifton GA to Bushnell FL

5 Nov 2018

217 miles via I-75 and CR 475, with a detour at the end. Cumulative tow miles: 835. Truck miles: 228. Cumulative truck miles: 1245. The few extra truck miles were from a refueling/shopping trip.

The GPS is still obstinately refusing to function, but for this hop it wasn't needed. We traveled about a mile to get to I-75, then 203 miles straight down I-75. Flat roads, but heavy Sunday traffic and intermittent showers most of the way. Not the most pleasant of hops, but no real problem. The only difficulty was a detour (bridge out) on CR 475 as we approached the destination. That added about 2 miles to the trip.

When we arrived at Paradise Oaks RV Resort, the office was closed. This was not a surprise as they had called us on Saturday to tell us that they would leave the site information for us at the door and indeed an envelope with our name on it was there. We got parked and set up, then I took a walk around the park with Rusty.



TS4-2 Hop 6

I will give a full review when we leave, but there are two obvious problems: no cable TV (and only 2 crappy OTA channels) and nearby train tracks. I am praying that the VERY noisy trains do not run in the middle of the night.

Our overnight stop in Tifton was at the [Tifton KOA](#). This is a pretty basic campground, with a very small pool (closed) and a nice campground store, but not much else. But it had what we sought - a pull-through with full hookup - so we were very happy with the place.



At rest in Tifton

Hand, Knee and Foot scoresheet

8 Nov 2018

[Note] The blog post included a PDF file. I have included a JPG here. Size for printing as necessary.

Trying something I have never tried before - attaching a PDF. This is the scoresheet we use for playing Hand, Knee and Foot. Jett designed it and I think she did an outstanding job. We have played hundreds of games and have never once found a reason to update the scoresheet.

It is designed for 2-sided printing, so just set your printer (if you can) to duplex printing and you will get a 2-sided scoresheet. Saves paper. If you can't do duplex printing, then 1 copy will give you 2 scoresheets.

I hope it is self-explanatory. If not, let me know and I will give you a walk-through of how to use it.

Hand Knee & Foot Scoresheet		Play Date:	Players=2 Teams or 2 Individuals.**	WE	They
Opening Meld (s)	Hand #	WE	THEY	SCORING	
0 to 15K= 50	1			Basic Books	11,500 out 1st);11,300
15K to 30K= 90	2			7's	5,000
30K to 50K = 120	Sub			5's	3,000
50K plus = 150	3			Wilds	2,500
	Sub			Red 3's	1,000
	4			RED	500
TOTAL	POINTS=			BLACK	300
SCORING	Points=	We Hand 1	They Hand 1	We Hand 2	They Hand 2
Basic Book	Vary				
Red 3's	100 each				
Bonus Books	Vary				
R & B Canastas	500/300				
COUNT	Vary				
	Sub Total				
Penalty Pts & 3s	Red 5;Blk 1	()	()	()	()
TOTAL HAND	Points=				
SCORING	Points=	We Hand 3	They Hand 3	We Hand 4	They Hand 4
Basic Book	Vary				
Red 3's	100 each				
Bonus Books	Vary				
R & B Canastas	500/300				
COUNT	Vary				
	Sub Total				
Penalty Pts & 3s	Red 5;Blk 1	()	()	()	()
TOTAL HAND	Points=				
* If 3 independent	players	use 2 score	sheets with	names, vs. WE	and THEY. **

Escapees Chapter 57 rally

9 Nov 2018



Wash and was at Paradise Oaks

We spent 5 nights at the [Paradise Oaks RV Resort](#) in Bushnell FL. The reason for being there was the [Escapees Chapter 57](#) (the "Florida Sun Gators" chapter) rally. We were newly-minted members of this chapter, having just forked over our \$20 for a 5-year membership. Attending the rally cost another \$30. But for the total of \$34 (\$30 plus the \$4 for this year) we got to meet a bunch of great RV people, eat lots of food, bid on some charity auction items (more on this later) and make some paper airplanes.



Losing plane



Live auction

Yes, one of the big events was a paper airplane building/flying contest. I thought this would be right up my engineering alley but I failed miserably. I just couldn't get it to fly in a straight line or for a long distance. Since I didn't get any awards I had to settle for having fun.

It was a very good time and we are glad we went.

We also took the opportunity to give the RV a wash and wax (see the photo above). It had been a tough trip south and was pretty darn dirty. I think we carried mud all the way from Chenango Shores. It looks great now and won't be embarrassing when we take up residence in our new home in Ft Myers.



Becky and the chapter flag

Paradise Oaks is a very nice park. However, it is really two different parks: a park for long-term residents and a park for transients. Yes, they share the common facilities, which are very nice - a large meeting room and several smaller meeting rooms, a huge exchange library, an exercise room, a laundromat, a pool room and a dog park. It has a beautiful swimming pool with hot tub, 4 pickleball courts, shuffleboard courts and a 9-hole disc golf course. I tried the disc golf course and it wasn't very good. Two holes appeared to be missing and none of the tees were marked, so I will call it a disc golf course in name only.

However, the transient area has one thing that the residential area does not have: ear-splitting train noise. A heavily used rail line runs very close to the boundary of the transient area and those trains run 24/7. Several times during our stay I was awakened at 3 or 4 am with a loud blast of a train horn that seemed to be next door.

The transient area also lacks one thing that the residents have: cable TV. We had no cable TV and almost no OTA TV. Two useless English channels and one even more useless Spanish channel.

Both areas had some nice sunsets.



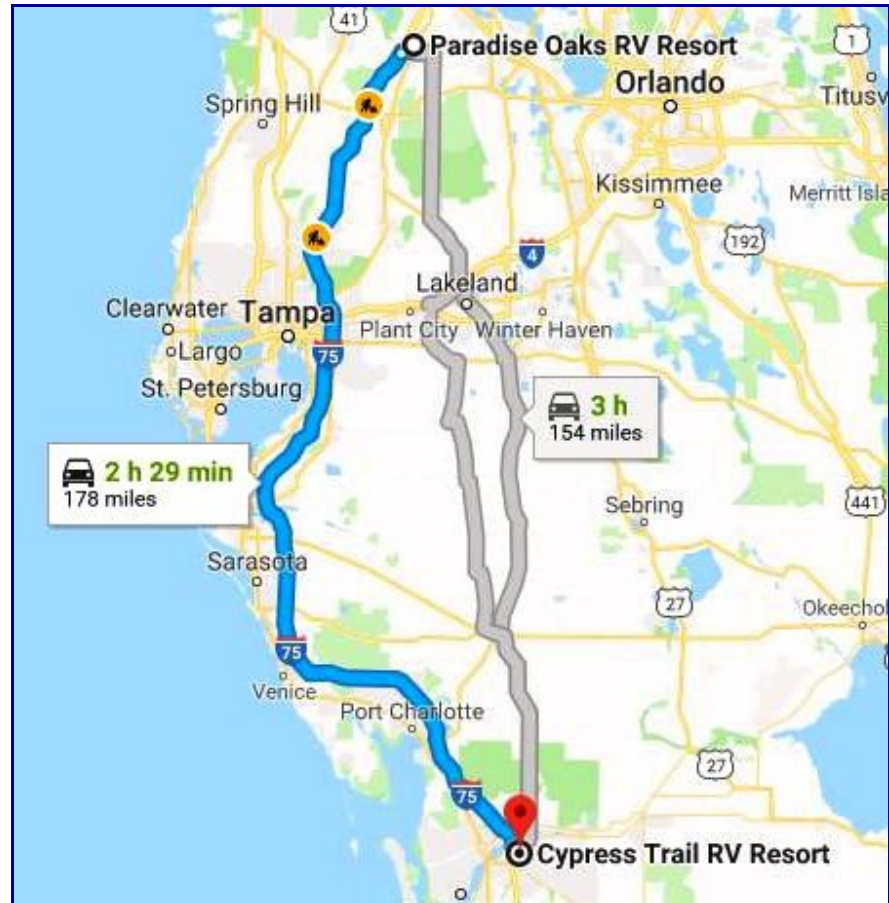
Nice sunset

TS4-2 Hop 7: Bushnell FL to Ft Myers FL

10 Nov 2018

178 miles via CR 475, FL 48, I-75 and local roads.
Cumulative tow miles: 1013.
Truck miles: 193. Cumulative truck miles: 1438. Two trips to run errands in Bushnell accounted for the extra truck miles.

Notice that Google gave me an alternate route down US 301, US 98, US 17 and FL 31. I almost took it because it was the best route, 20 miles shorter and 10 minutes faster, when I looked before breakfast. But after breakfast I-75 was, once again, the fastest route, by over 30 minutes. I am always amazed at how quickly the route can change due to traffic conditions. Google maps is smart enough to not only update the route when an accident is detected but is very good at estimating the length of the delay. Someday I will have to figure out how they do it.



TS4-2 Hop 7

This was an easy hop over roads that we have traveled many times. The weather was bright and sunny (hey, it's Florida, what else would you expect), but very warm - 90ish. And no A/C. So we kept the windows open. Rusty seemed to enjoy the breeze.

We did the first 175 miles non-stop, then pulled into a Love's truck stop to change. My shirt was soaked. We then drove the final 3 miles to our new home park, the Cypress Trail RV Resort. They were expecting us and gave us gate badges and a modem at the gate. The modem surprised me. Apparently one of the perks of ownership is free internet service. Loved the place when we bought it, love it even more now.

We got set up quickly and in the first 30 minutes on site met our neighbors to the west and were invited to a huge party thrown by a guy across the lake. Rusty also met a beagle at his new dog park

A good start.



Our new home



The view from our patio

TS4 wrapup

10 Nov 2018

TS4 was a trip to forget. Yes, there were some good things about it but they were overwhelmed by the bad things: two complete breakdowns of the truck and extensive repairs to the RV costing over \$5,000. A very expensive, very stressful trip.

The trip was done in two segments. The segments themselves were meaningless and existed only to enable Google maps to handle the points in the route (it has a limit of 10 points). But it gives me a good way to do a side-by-side comparison of the plan versus the actual.

Segment 1

The main event in this segment? No question: the breakdown near Greene NY on NY 206 and the unplanned 8-night stay at Chenango Shores Campground. We should be grateful that we were able to get to a campground at all as it was the only one still open in the region. But we had no cell phone service, no sewer hookup, almost no internet service and were surrounded by very old trailers in various stages of decomposition. And we sank deeper into the mud every day we were there. The few people we met were nice, but that doesn't fully counterbalance the pure misery of our existence. We rented a car and so were not immobile, but the general miserableness of the situation made it one of the worst weeks in our 6 years of travel.

Due to the unplanned stop in Chenango Shores we had to cancel our planned stays in the Finger Lakes region and the trip to the Flight 93 memorial in Shanksburg PA. Deposits were lost in both places.

And we almost capsized the rig - the closest we have ever come to a true disaster on the road - due to a brake controller problem that cost more to diagnose than to fix. But coming on top of the engine problems, it had a "straw that broke the camel's back" feel. I was grateful that the obvious RV damage was relatively light, but I believed that we had ruptured a gray water tank. This compounded our misery as it meant that we could not use the kitchen or half-bath sinks while at Chenango Shores. It also meant that we had to find a way to repair the damage before we continued on to Florida. We were fortunate to find ACE RV Repair in Herndon VA and they did an outstanding job of both repairing the damage (which turned out to have less to do with our near-capsizing event and more to do with old roof damage that I had not noticed). We were able to stay at Jett's sons' place in Alexandria which saved us the cost of a hotel, and did not lose any additional days on the schedule due to the alacrity with which ACE worked.

We had to cancel all of the Segment 1 reservations when we got stuck in Chenango Shores and when we tried to rebook Mama Gertie's near Asheville, they had no room. We found a spot at the Asheville East KOA.

The highlights of Segment 1? The kindness and assistance of Butch and Jackie when we broke down near Greene. The Prince William Forest Campground turned out to be much better than expected. The time in Albany was nice - particularly the day I spent in the graveyards. Finding ACE RV Repair turned out to be a very positive thing. Other than that... mostly bad things. Bad breakdowns, bad restaurants, bad weather.

Segment 2

The second truck breakdown started on the long haul uphill into Asheville at the conclusion of Segment 1 - the engine suddenly started "whooshing," emitting a loud roar of air being taken in or expelled. I tried to fix it in Asheville but 3 mechanics who looked at it could find nothing wrong and, truth be told, the truck seemed to be operating just fine. But on the first hop of Segment 2 I noticed black exhaust when the engine was stressed and later, near Knoxville, noticed a significant loss of power. We had to quickly, once again, find emergency accommodations for the night and I again had to scramble to find someone to repair my truck at 3pm on a Friday afternoon.

I feel extremely fortunate that I found Tennessee Fleet Service, a little diesel repair shop some 20 miles away.



TS4-1 plan



TS4-1 actual

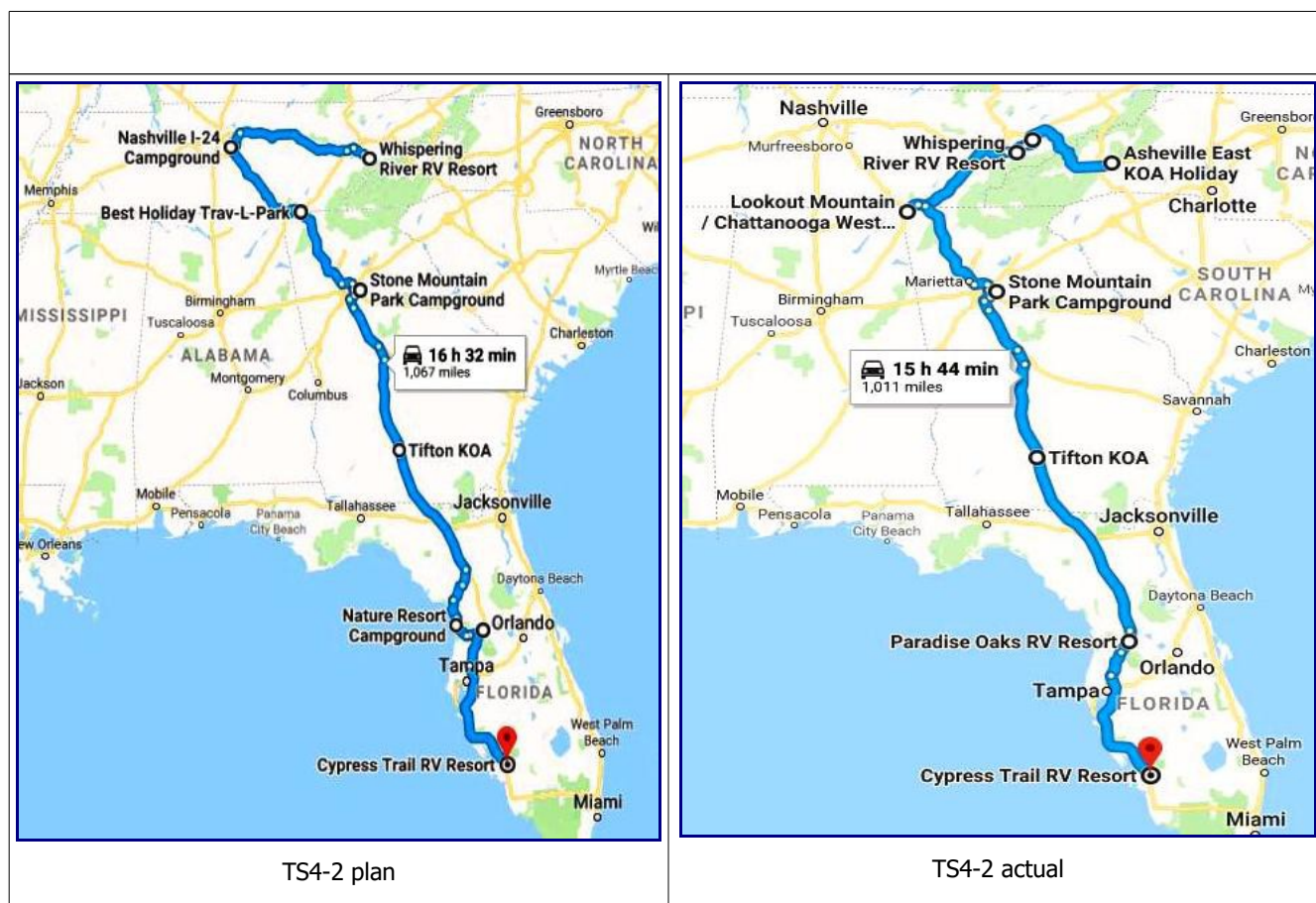
They were able to diagnose and fix the problem in under 2 hours. They really saved the day. The only consequence of that breakdown was the loss of a day near Pigeon Forge. We had tentatively planned to visit Dollywood, but the stresses of the trip and the very cool weather dissuaded us.

The delay in Chenango Shores left us 3 days behind on our itinerary. We needed to eliminate one stop if we were to get to the Escapees rally on Nov 4. So our Nashville stop, planned for early in Segment 2, was also scrapped.

The Escapees rally was a change to our plan we had originally expected to stop in Homosassa Springs to see the manatees again, but when we saw that Escapees Chapter 57 was having a rally that week in Bushnell we joined the chapter and jumped at the chance to participate in the rally. That, along with the very nice visit with friends Roy and Patricia in Tellico Village TN, the Civil War sites in Chattanooga and the pleasant stay at Stone Mountain Campground, turned out to be the highlights of Segment 2.

And there were no further truck breakdowns. I guess I have to count that as a highlight as well.

Unless you want to count the failure of our heat and A/C a breakdown. It will have to be fixed, but seemed minor in comparison to the other ordeals that we survived on this trip.



Netflix

11 Nov 2018

An unexpected boon of our new status as owners at Cypress Trail RV Resort is free internet. I had planned on



Netflix on our TV!

finding out how to get hard-wired internet access while in residence, but was surprised to be handed a modem when we arrived at the gate. Free hard-wired internet! Woo hoo!

The main reason for wanting a hard-wired internet connection was to gain access to Netflix. Of course we could have signed up at any time, but we were always bumping up against our Verizon data plan limit (yeah, yeah, we have an "unlimited" plan but the fact is that the speed goes to crap after 15GB or about 4 movies). With a hard-wired internet we can, for \$11 per month, have access to all that Netflix offers.

So much of yesterday was spent trying to get the internet connection operational, creating a Netflix account and trying to get the TVs configured to access Netflix. All of these were harder than they should have been, but easier than they would have been a few years back.

The most surprising part of configuring the NetGear modem was that I couldn't do it using my laptop; I had to use my phone. Yes, the world has come to the point where a smart phone is more useful than a laptop computer. The most frustrating part was that, once configured, the modem was able to upload but was unable to download. A modem that can't download is pretty darn useless. So I did what any intelligent person would do: I rebooted the modem a few times and jiggled some wires. And suddenly, for no good reason, it started downloading.

Signing up for Netflix was easy, but I was surprised that I could create a "profile" for both me and Jett. I was able to tell Netflix what kind of viewing I like (but, darn, "porn" wasn't an option). I guess they offer stuff based on what I tell them I like and, presumably, on what I actually watch.

But I couldn't do the same for Jett, even though she had a separate profile. Puzzling.

The hardest part was figuring out how to actually watch Netflix on our televisions. When we replaced our main

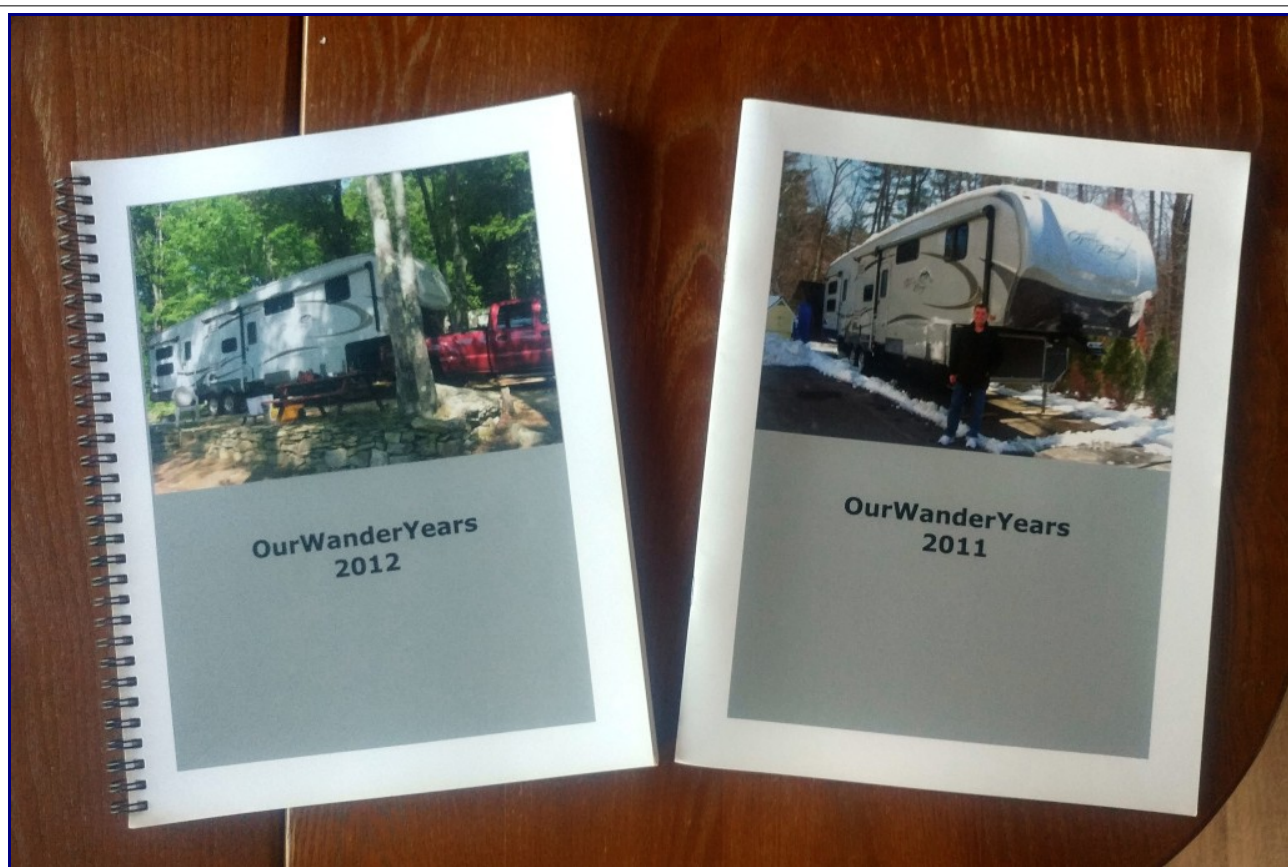
TV a year ago I recall that I specifically looked for one with WiFi connectivity. I needn't have bothered because it is much better to connect to Netflix using our Blu-Ray DVD players. The advantage of that is that the remote DVD controls all work for Netflix. Watching a movie on Netflix is exactly like watching a Blu-Ray DVD.

Jett hasn't used Netflix yet, but she is going to love it.

Who knows, maybe she will love it so much that we will stay in Florida an extra month or two.

The printed blog, 2011 and 2012

12 Nov 2018



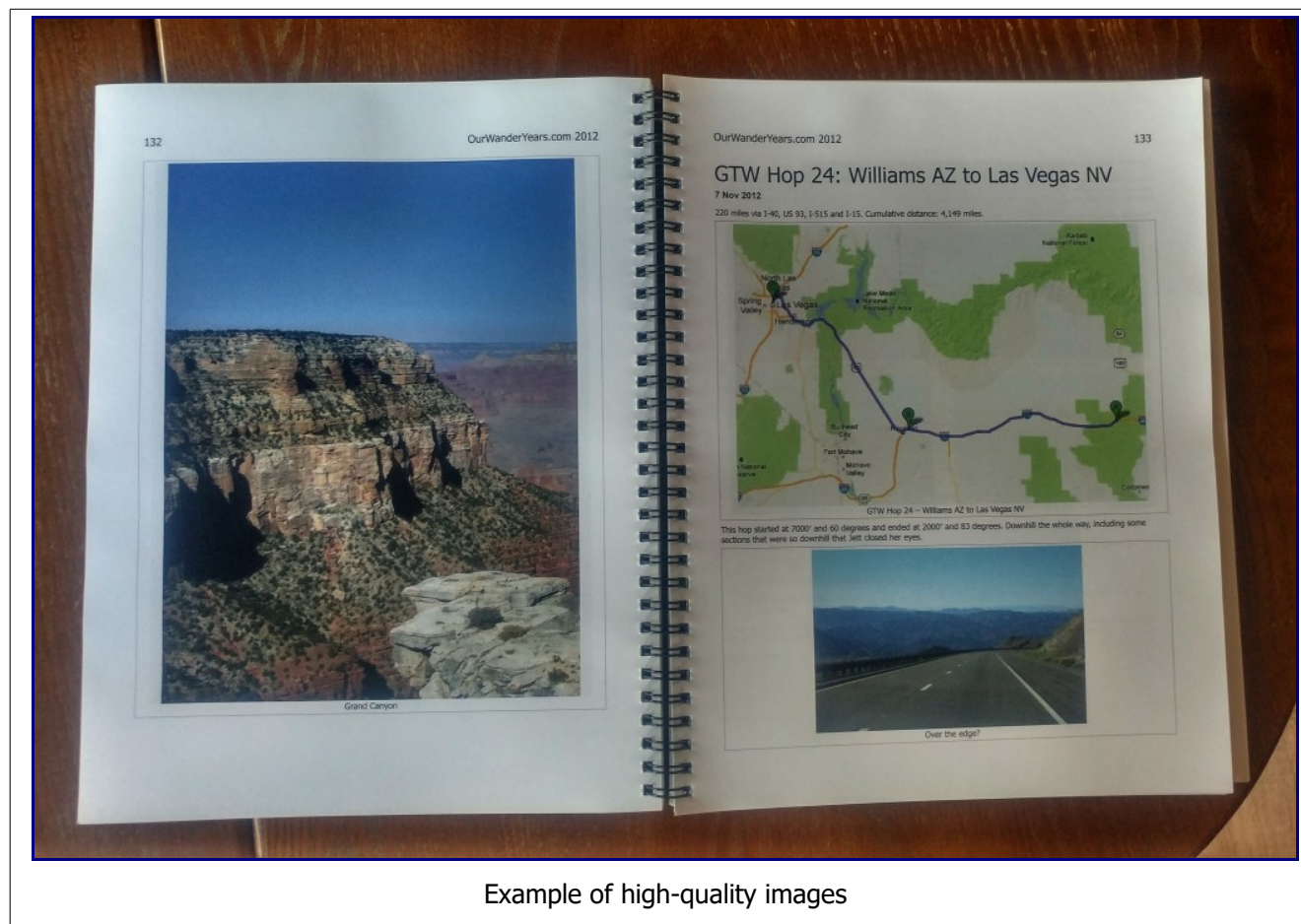
The first 2 volumes

I have taken delivery of the first two volumes of the printed blog (2011 and 2012) and I have to say that I am thrilled with the result. It has been a lot of work - particularly 2012 which was 184 pages - but worth every minute. It will be a keepsake for us and anyone who cares about our travels (siblings and children, mostly). The books were not cheap. In quantities of 10 they worked out to nearly \$6 and \$24 per copy, respectively.

I used staples for the 2011 volume because it was just 28 pages, but chose the spiral binding for the larger 2012 volume. I think that was an excellent decision as it reduces wear-and-tear on the binding when being read. That should improve the longevity of the booklet. I will use spiral binding for any additional volumes of more than 50 pages.

I was also thrilled both with the quality of the paper (70# silk finish) and the cover (100# silk finish). The vivid

colors in the photographs and the overall clarity of the images were also more than satisfactory.



Example of high-quality images

"The Closers" by Michael Connelly

18 Nov 2018

Copyright 2005 by Hieronymus Inc, published by Little, Brown and Company

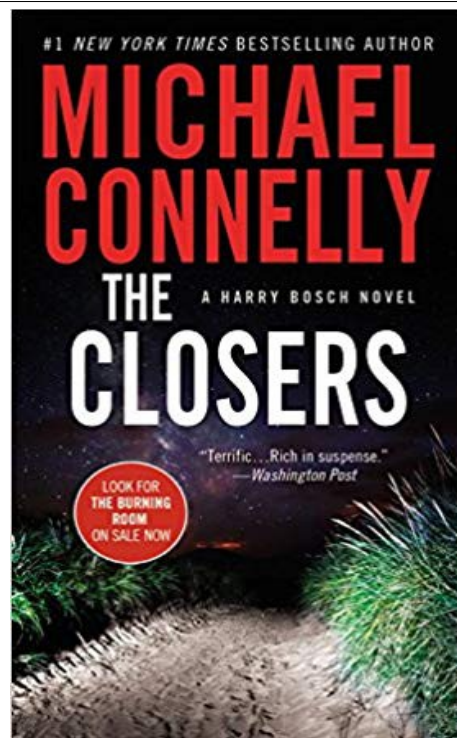
I had already decided to give this book high marks before learning that it had reached #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list when it was first published in 2005. It has an intricate plot that kept me guessing until the very end and resolved in a very satisfactory - and very plausible - way. Too often a book I enjoy has ridiculous coincidences or loose ends that are left hanging. None of that here.

This is one of Connelly's Harry Bosch mysteries. In this one he has returned to the LAPD after several years of retirement. He is assigned to the Open-Unsolved unit and, as his first assignment, is handed a 17-year-old murder of a teen girl. It is a classic "cold case." So much so that at one point in the book he is approached by writers from the *Cold Case* TV series for an interview. The reason the case popped to the top of the cold case stack was a new DNA match of blood found on the murder weapon to a man previously unassociated with the case. It isn't giving much away to tell you that the man whose blood is on the gun is not the killer (how boring would that be?) but his identity is a thread that, when unraveled, reveals the killer and the complex circumstances that surrounded the murder.

There are only two deaths in the book (not counting the old murder), so those looking for a huge body count will have to look elsewhere. But they are both surprising, unexpected deaths and are, in their own way, very satisfying.

A very fine book.

9 out of 10.



"Never Go Back" by Lee Child

25 Nov 2018

Copyright 2013 by Lee Child. Published by Delacorte Press.

This is one of Lee Child's popular mystery/adventure books featuring Jack Reacher. Reacher, for those of you who aren't familiar with him, is a former MP standing 6' 5" and weighing 250 pounds. I mention his size only to remind those who think "Tom Cruise" when they hear "Jack Reacher." The casting director who decided that an actor who stands 5' 7" and weighs in at about 150 pounds was the right choice for playing Reacher is either an idiot or took a sizable bribe.

I mention this miscasting because one of the more vivid scenes in *Never Go Back* is Jack Reacher, sharing a tiny bathroom aboard a transcontinental flight with a US Army soldier and, in those close confines, breaking both of the soldier's elbows. I don't know how the director of the movie is going to make that scene plausible. Tom Cruise would have a hard time breaking a wishbone at Thanksgiving, much less a soldier's elbows.

Actually, the scene is pretty implausible in the book, too. Try to imagine a soldier having both elbows brutally snapped then meekly returning to his middle seat to sit quietly for 3 hours until the plane lands. This is after Reacher breaks four fingers on another soldier on the plane, who also endures the excruciating pain without a peep. Both incidents of mayhem occur without any passengers noticing. Not plausible.

But great fun. I finished this book in under a week, which is the fastest read that I have had in some time.

The thumbnail plot is that Reacher, a drifter by profession, hitchhikes to Virginia to meet the CO of the 110th MP corps, a unit he commanded when he was still employed by Uncle Sam. The reason he traveled for over a week to get there? He wanted to take her out to dinner because she had a nice voice.

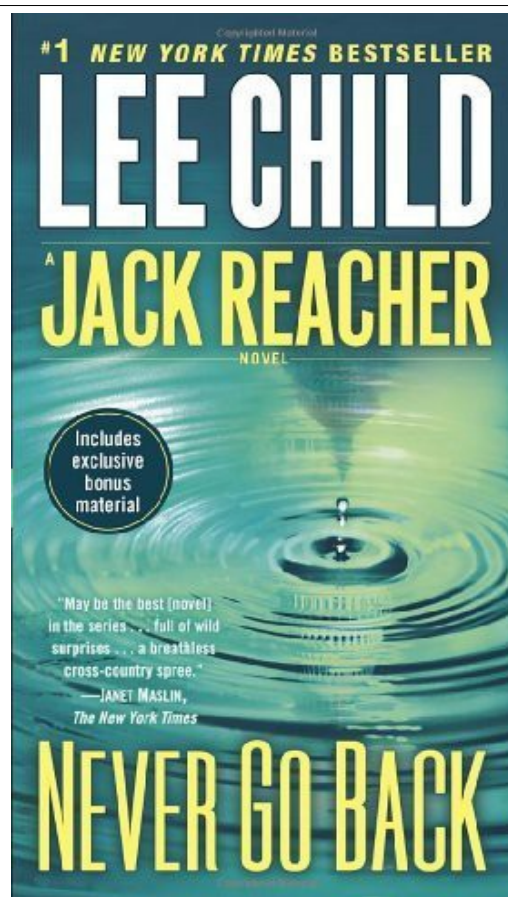
As a retired man I understand doing stupid stuff for no good reason, so I can't fault him for going to Virginia. But when he gets there he finds that she has been arrested for embezzlement and he himself is visited by a couple of Army thugs who warn him to leave town or face arrest on a 16-year-old manslaughter charge and a paternity suit. Reacher, never one to run, decides to stick around to see what the heck is going on. Soon a third charge is added: attempted murder on the jailed woman's attorney. Reacher is thrown into jail, too. The same jail where the cute CO, Susan, is cooling her heels.

He concocts a scheme to break both of them out of jail. It succeeds, of course, and the rest of the book has Jack and Susan traveling across the country, dodging people who want to arrest and/or harm them. They gather clues along the way. Eventually Jack meets his purported daughter and they solve the mystery, while screwing their brains out at every opportunity.

Fun on the run.

And fun to read.

8 out of 10.



Enter the Corolla

3 Dec 2018

We knew that we had to get a small car when we got to Fort Myers. Jett continues to refuse to drive the GMC dually and, truth be told, I wouldn't be comfortable with her behind the wheel of The Beast. So our choice was to either get a "winter rat" - a cheap (under \$5,000) car that we would sell at the end of the season - or a better car (under \$15,000) that we would keep for at least 3 years and would transport to and from New England. Actually, the transport decision is not cast in concrete as we could, conceivably, leave the car in storage in Florida and buy a "summer rat" for use in New England, as we did last year. But that would mean paying insurance on *3* cars and probably tying down the car we leave in Florida. But it would save the cost of transporting it. Another decision for another day.

I looked at some cheap cars and found some that would probably serve, but none as nice as the \$4,000 Ford Focus we had this summer. And Jett was strongly in favor of getting a car with more than a 90-day warranty. So we went back to the Toyota AutoNation lot where we bought the Yaris in 2012 to see what they had to offer for under \$15,000. The pickings were slim and the choice really came down to which 2017 Corolla was best. The

only features that were required were cruise control and a CD player and all 3 had those. We opted for the slate gray one because of the low miles (about 41,000) and the cleanliness of the interior.

With tax, registration and an optional extended warranty, the final price was nearly \$17,000. More than I was planning to spend, but acceptable. Within 2 hours we had our winter rat, which was nice enough that we can't call it that.

We couldn't actually take it home with us that night because it was dark by the time we finished the paperwork (Jett doesn't drive after dark), but we got it the next day.



Our "new" 2017 Corolla

The Red Sox spring training ticket fiasco

4 Dec 2018

Two of my oldest and best friends are coming to Fort Myers in March, to attend, for the first time, some Red Sox spring training games. Being a resident of Fort Myers and experienced at getting spring training tickets, I volunteered to get some for all three of us. Two games at JetBlue Park - the home field for the Red Sox in Florida - and one at CenturyLink Park, the Twins home field. Easy-peasy.

So, at 9:30 am on Saturday Dec 1 I was on my laptop, logged into the mlb.com site, ready to jump the moment the tickets went on sale at 10 am. I had my tickets selected - box seats for both games, one on the first base side and one on the third base side.



In line at JetBlue Park

When the clock struck 10 I pounced. And was immediately disappointed. No box seats were available! Where did they go? After several tries in different seating sections I opted for the "best seats available"... and was offered seats high in the grandstand. Where the heck were the good seats?

Increasingly desperate, I accepted the "best seats" and went to check out. Bad turned to worse as the website refused to accept my credit card payment. The message was "address must match credit card." I tried two different cards and triple-checked the address each time. Rejected each time. I was cursing a blue streak.

It was now 10:30 am and I had been completely thwarted in my attempts to secure spring training tickets. I texted my buddy Mike in MA and told him I was having trouble online. I asked him to try the website while I headed over to JetBlue to stand in line.

When I got to JetBlue I was initially relieved. Only one person at each ticket window and a small group milling around a bit further away. I picked a window... and was immediately confronted by a Red Sox staffer who asked me what the heck I was doing. Dumb question. "Buying tickets." "Well, then, get in line." He pointed into the distance. I turned the corner and saw that the "small group milling around" was actually the head of a very long line snaking under the stadium. Probably about 300 people in line.

I waited. Not very patiently. I struck up conversations with the people near me and they, too, had stories of difficulties buying tickets online.

I got to the ticket window at 12:50 pm. Just about 2 hours in line. While waiting Mike had been able to secure tickets for the 3/19 game but had struck out on 3/16. He tried several alternate sites - e.g., StubHub - but was appalled at the prices being charged. He had a line on some \$80 tickets by the time I reached the window but I told him to hold off until I saw what was available at the box office. I ended up getting some decent grandstand

tickets for 3/17 for \$35 each. Success.

Got the tickets, but felt like I had been run over by a steamroller. It really shouldn't be this difficult.

Painting the steps

12 Dec 2018

It is hard for me to believe, but our "new" RV is now nearly 4 years old. It has traveled across the country and between New England and Florida several times. It has reached the point where certain things - like the roof and the slides - need attention. The steps, too.

I noticed that the steps were looking a bit worn and were starting to show some rust. They needed a new coat of paint. Easier said than done as they are the only means of access to and egress from our living space. So the steps had to be painted in... steps. One step a day for four days. And because the paint required a minimum of 3 hours to dry, I had to plan to paint when no one - no even Rusty - needed to use them for at least 3 hours. So I painted a step after I took Rusty for his afternoon walk and it would be dry enough for him to step on it by the time his evening walk came around. I continued to step over the painted step, giving it all night to dry. The plan worked well. I now have a set of steps that look nearly new.

The photo shows two steps - the top one painted, the bottom one unpainted. Big difference.



Painted/unpainted steps

First footers, of a sort

17 Dec 2018



Empty sites to the north

It is not yet The Season in southwest Florida - that starts Jan 1 - so the park is still only about one-third occupied. The 3 sites to our north are all empty and the neighbor to our south has gone away for the holidays, leaving us feeling a little lonely and isolated. So it is a good time to make an effort to meet people who are in the same situation.

To that end we invited a couple of near neighbors - the couple across the street and the couple four sites to the north - to our place for drinks and appetizers. We could have just offered appetizers because they brought their own drinks. But their presence made them "first footers" of a sort. Technically a first footer is the first visitor to enter a new dwelling. Well, they didn't actually enter our RV and even if they had they wouldn't have been the first. But they were the first visitors to set foot on our site, so I think they qualify.

It was a good time. And it felt good to make some new friends. It has been a while since we have done that. We didn't make any real friends over the summer as Lamb City was a weekend/family kind of place. But as residents who are committed to staying at least 3 years, we hope to make some good long-term friends here.



Jett preparing for the guests

First footers are a start.

Jett's American ancestors, 2018 update

18 Dec 2018

I have gone through Jett's Ancestry tree, reviewing new hints, correcting some errors and adding a few newly-discovered ancestors - specifically the ancestors of Mehitabel Williams (a 6th great-grandmother). In the course of reviewing these new hints i discovered some new things:

- She has several new direct links to Plantagenet royalty (specifically Edward III).
- She is a distant cousin to both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher (they were siblings).
- One of Abraham Lincoln's 6th great-grandfathers is one of Jett's 10th great-grandfathers, making her a distant cousin to Old Abe.
- Another 10th great-grandfather, Thomas Macy, was one of the 10 original owners of Nantucket Island.

The total number of documented American ancestors in her family tree is now 549. Pretty deep roots.

Stats for Jett's American ancestors, 2018

20 Dec 2018

Number of American ancestors: 549

Location of graves, by state:

- MA - 443
- ME - 42
- NH - 16
- NY - 12
- CT - 7
- VT - 6
- NJ - 2
- RI - 2
- VA - 2
- FL - 1
- SC - 1
- Canada - 1
- England - 1
- Barbados - 1
- unknown - 12

Number of immigrant ancestors: 326

Country of immigrant birth:

- England - 300
- Ireland - 8
- Netherlands - 6
- Scotland - 5
- Wales - 5
- unknown - 2

“Night School” by Lee Child

22 Dec 2018

[Copyright 2016 by Lee Child, published by Delacorte Press.](#)

This is the 21st book in the Jack Reacher series. I like all of the Jack Reacher books. He is larger than life, sometimes tender, sometimes brutal, always analytical and never predictable. All of which makes for a good read.

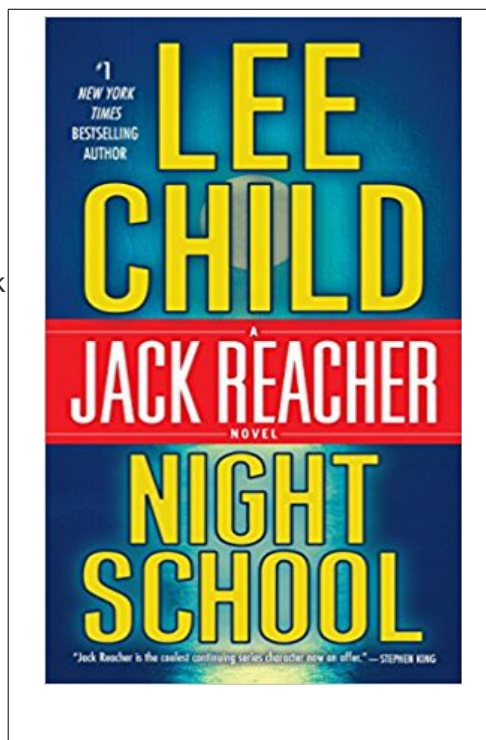
In *Night School* he is in the army - which is somewhat confusing as he had mustered out in some of the earlier books. Apparently these stories are not chronological. But they almost always stand on their own, so it is not a fatal flaw. At some point maybe I will try to go back and put them in sequence. But not today.

The premise of this one is that Reacher has been ordered back to the classroom, ostensibly to learn about the latest developments in interagency cooperation. But it is a cover, of course, for a clandestine operation. A small group, consisting initially of a CIA agent, an FBI agent and an MP (Reacher) has been assembled to look into an alarming report of possible terrorist activity in Germany. It quickly develops that an AWOL soldier is selling something to a terrorist group for \$100 million. The question is what. What could a lowly soldier from a mundane unit in Germany have acquired that could command that price? What could interest a terrorist group for that kind of money? It has to be small (because a single man stole it) and simple (because it can't require a lot of training or support to be used). It

also has to be something that has slipped between the cracks in the military's inventory control because nothing of that value is missing.

It is a puzzler, all right, but Reacher loves puzzles. He also loves that the liaison with the NSC is an attractive woman who falls for Reacher's charms and is more than willing to share his bed between forays into the field in search of clues.

Once the culprit is identified to be the AWOL grunt and it becomes obvious that his theft is the culmination of a plan that formed years earlier, before he even joined the army, the investigation tries to figure out what the plan is by interviewing people from his past. The most salient clue is a cryptic comment he made to a fellow soldier



that he joined the army "because of Davy Crockett."

Of course the team figures it all out eventually and just in the nick of time, with about 95% of the credit due to Reacher and his insights. They all get a medal.

Not the most compelling Reacher story I have ever read, but damn good still.

8 out of 10.

Rusty the goofball

22 Dec 2018



The goofball at rest

We have been a one-dog family for nearly a year now. That means that all of our loving attention has been lavished on a single dog. It is a heavy burden for a dog to bear, but Rusty seems to be able to tolerate it. As you can see from this photo, he can thoroughly relax despite the pressure.

He is a funny dog. A goofball, for sure. He amuses himself by tossing dog toys into the air and catching them. He kicks a ball down the hallway, then chases it. While he enjoys meeting other dogs, his interest usually lasts less than 30 seconds. Maybe the best thing about him - when walking him, anyway - is that he completely ignores dogs who are being aggressive towards him.

He is a good dog. We will keep him.

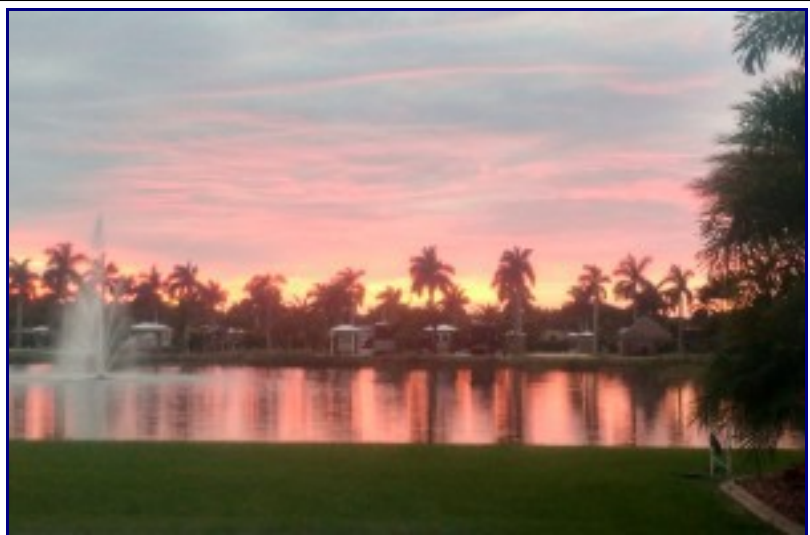
Sunsets in Fort Myers

23 Dec 2018



Sunset at the pool

One of the best things about southwest Florida, right behind the (usually) great weather, is the sunset. More often than not the sun sets in a blaze of color. Enough color to make you stop what you are doing and just watch. Free theater.



Red sky at night, sailor's delight



Translucent clouds



Dusk over the pool



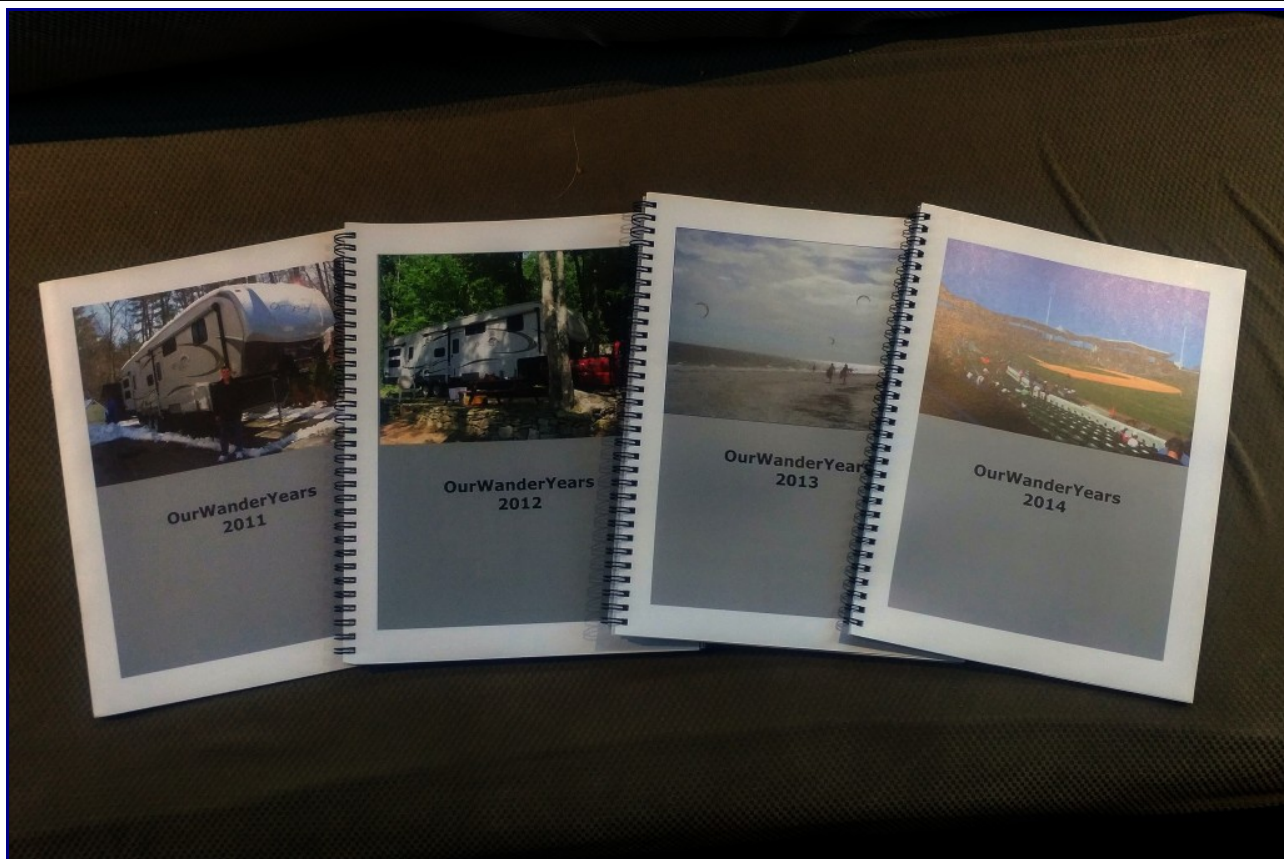
Nearing sunset



Dusk at the pond

Ghosted by my printer

24 Dec 2018



The first 4 volumes, from printi.com

I have published the first four volumes of the blog - 2011 through 2014 - and have the 2015 volume ready for print. But my chosen printer - printi.com - has disappeared. Apparently they have been gobbled up by VistaPrint. Their website now redirects me to the VistaPrint website. But I have been unable to find similar booklet publishing services available through VistaPrint. The only spiral-bound booklets they offer have plastic bindings, which I deem unacceptable. So I am looking for a new printer. Not how I wanted to spend my holiday time.

Letting my (freak?) flag fly

29 Dec 2018

Jett has, for years, wanted to get a large American flag that we could display at our site. On taking up residence for at least 5 months - perhaps longer - it seemed like a good time to make it a reality. So we ordered an American flag and a new "thin blue line" flag and, after the storms of last week subsided, got them both installed at the front of our site. I think they look pretty good. What do you think?



Flag pride

I also, by coincidence, got and installed on the same day a front license plate for the truck. Now everyone knows that I am a Red Sox fan. Not that it was a secret.

NYE fail

31 Dec 2018

Jett and I have been volunteering a lot at our new home. It is a good way to meet our neighbors and is fun, too. Mostly. Cleanup from the Thanksgiving dinner was a lot of work - over 2 hours. Prepping for the New Year's Eve dinner (mostly preparing the 240 baked potatoes) was only about an hour. Decorating for NYE - both taking down the Christmas decorations and putting up the New Year's Eve decorations - was in the middle at about 90 minutes. My primary contribution was putting up the shiny gold foil backdrop on the stage where the band would play. That was an hour spent on the ladder, pressing the self-stick backing to the wall. It looked great when I finished.

It didn't look so great yesterday when I poked my head into the ballroom. It had all fallen down.

Epic fail.

Somebody put it back up, with stickpins, so it looks good again. But it still feels like a fail to me.



Foil backdrop



Granddaughter Liliani

