

Days 45-51

The drive west out of Casper leads into a dry, desert scrub bush environment. It is fairly featureless land that was very hard to turn into functioning farms in the pioneer days, according to some signage. Another sign at one of the rest stops explained the importance of sagebrush country, and I've attached it here for your continuing edification. The fairly high temperatures moderated as the Grand Tetons came closer and the elevation and beauty of the countryside rose hand in hand. Then, in a manner of minutes: high drama. While passing through a canyon; the sky darkened, the wind started howling and gusting, the rain came down in sheets, and hail started dropping into my cockpit! When this all settled down in a bit, I noticed a dreaded 4" windshield crack starting from the upper left corner under the frame. Bummer! It started drizzling again as I entered the Grand Teton/Yellowstone Park complex, but the sky cleared up and the rain suit came off as I set up camp.

Took a drive to check out Jackson Lake to take in some nice views, and met Val and Arlene, from Virginia. Val had built an FFR coupe, but sold it to someone in France just before the government there outlawed such kit importation (Val says his was the last in). *Stopped in at a park visitor center with Wi-Fi and sent an email off to Jason at FFR asking for help with replacing my windshield. Ultimately, when I came off the mountains and back into cellphone range several days later, a bodyshop was able to do the drill and fill to stop the crack propagation (it had doubled to about 8" by then), and Jason was working on arranging to ship a replacement windshield (when a backorder condition is resolved) out to a future stop of mine. No worries, at this point.* We now return to the Grand Teton visit: as is my habit, wandered around the campsite visiting folks. Met a French family visiting their daughter in the US, and exercised a little of the French that I took in school for several years in the late 60's. They seemed pleased that some unshaven derelict (me) in the middle of nowhere would speak their language, and were very intrigued by the car. I moved on to the more desirable campsites, those with a roaring fire going. Spent time at two sites, one with a family of three, and the other with a young man traveling on his own, fishing his way across the country, to meet up with his teacher girlfriend who will be starting grad school in Connecticut. By then it was pitch black and time to turn in.

The next day dawned bright, sunny, and with clear blue skies. Drove through both Grand Teton and Yellowstone Parks over a period of about 8 hours, stopping numerous times for one beautiful view after another. The speed limits in the parks are very low, and as always there were a number of motor homes, 5th wheel trailers, and sedans who were unable or unwilling to achieve even those speeds, notwithstanding 100s of signs throughout the park asking slower traffic to use the pullouts. There's no way to resolve the problem, and you just have to give up any dreams of 'enjoying' the twisties, and just chill out. Big crowd at "Old Faithful", but it was an hour before the next blow was due, so moved on. At one point, saw a number of cars pulled over to the side of the road, with binoculars pointed at a single buffalo off in a field at a distance. It seemed not worth the effort to me, so continued on until I spotted a partially hidden but much closer Grizzly a little while later. "Boy, I would have made a great Indian scout", I thought. Then the "bear" straightened up and turned around to reveal itself as a buffalo. Then around the next corner found a huge plain with hundreds of buffalo. So much for my spotting skills. At the Northeast exit of Yellowstone, took the much anticipated rt. 212 "Bear Tooth Pass Highway". I did enjoy some real canyon twisties on the sunny way up towards the summit for a bit, but then three things happened: road construction caused traffic to bunch up, a gaggle of Harleys (many riding two up with the guy in front not wearing a helmet), and winter conditions (near freezing sleet/rain) near the summit in both directions. Result: semi-tortuous 15-25 mph crawl for at least

an hour, until near the bottom of the mountains. At Red Lodge, Montana, made the decision to spend the night in Columbus in order to have the body shop there work on the windshield to stop the crack propagation, and the iPhone directed me to continue up on the now high speed (75 mph posted, higher in real life) rt. 212 before cutting over on rt. 421. The latter was an absolutely empty (0 traffic), beautifully paved, sinuous and undulating ribbon passing through almost uninhabited farm land. Beautiful countryside. At this point the weather was perfect evening conditions; comfortably cool and a light layer of intermittent clouds. Ahhhhhhhhhh. By time I got to Columbus, the day of slow speed driving had been cleansed from both my forebrain and PCU's memory. Finding the recommended cheap hotel and neighboring restaurant brought an end to a very fun day.

The next morning, after a quick and friendly half hour getting the windshield drill and fill repair, took off in perfect driving weather towards Glacier National Park. The body shop guys specified which of my Apple map's 3 choices was the best (basically, route 89 North), and off I went. Stopped at the "Prairie Dog Town Museum" on the side of the interstate, which turned out to be just a field full of holes. Didn't see any prairie dogs, but did hear them chattering. The only other car in the area was a Toyota Camry, occupied by a couple who were amazed to see a Cobra appear. Turns out that he used to own a B & B Cobra on which he had put 28,000 miles, but had moved on to the 'civilized' realm of a Z06 Corvette and never looked back. We had a nice chat and then each got back on the highway. Turned off the interstate on to some really nice empty back roads through desert ranch country: mountains/cattle/alfalfa/emptiness for miles and miles. Eventually got to a wonderfully twisty tree bordered road in Lewis and Clark National Forest, which I videoed and will post when I get a chance. At its end, ran across a little country restaurant in which I was the only non-local, and had a great burger. After more country roads, a little interstate, and another length of country road bereft of traffic (I've concluded that Northern America is actually one big farm, periodically interrupted only briefly by isolated towns and cities), I approached the area of the Glacier National Park East entrance (the town of Saint Mary, Montana). As I headed up the twisty hills bordering the mountains, the sky got blacker and blacker. Then the heavens opened up with a real gusher. For the Nth time, even though I had just traveled miles of emptiness, after just a few minutes the destination town appeared along with a set of covered fuel pumps. Pulled in only slightly wet amidst pouring rain and wind and darkness. Sat on the porch of the convenience store/coffee shop for about 20 minutes and the edge of the front moved on, leaving perfectly clear blue skies, beaming sunshine, and steam coming off the roads from the heat and sun. Simply a marvelous transformation! Drove up to the park entrance, only to find that the nearest campground with a vacancy was 2.5 hours up on the mountainous park. Ended up taking the ranger's suggestion to camp out just a quarter mile back in a local campground (Johnson's). Within a half hour, was fully set up in a field with only a few other tent campers-no RVs or generators in our vicinity. Took off to explore a recommended local road near a dammed lake, and got back to my campsite as darkness neared. My neighbors asked if I wanted some dinner, but thinking they were just being polite, declined on the basis that I was heading to the camp restaurant. Turns out it had closed at 9PM, so headed back and took my neighbors up on their offer. Spent a wonderful 2 hours with Dirk, Jennifer, and their charming pre-teen children. They're originally from Michigan but had moved to Southern Missouri and were loving the open, friendly, and neighborly lifestyle that they had found there. Their two children were very outdoors types (both heavily into scouting). The cute young girl jumped to assist me in my cooking of several brats over the fire pit, fetching me (unasked) a plate, buns, and condiments of my choice, and regaled me with thoughts on her favorite TV shows (outdoor reality stuff). We all talked about all kinds of things, same some songs, and then they had to hit the sack. Great evening!

The next morning, I packed up early to get to the park before the crowds (my lesson learned for all National Parks during vacation season). Started up the Drive-to-the-sun Road into the park under perfect conditions. Pulled into a pull out to set up my GoPro camera, only to find it was out of juice. Just then, an apparition appeared over a rise in the road up ahead. This low wide spaceship pulled up in front of me. It was a slightly muddy Lamborghini Aventador Roadster, which turned out to be driven by Arthur St. Antoine, one of the Motor Trend editors, in the midst of a video test drive. We chatted for a bit, then I ended up following him up the road past the camera crew, so maybe you can see me on the Motor Trend YouTube channel. Up ahead, they were doing major construction on the road due to rock falls (hence the mud on the Lambo), so had to traverse several hundred yards of bumpy and rocky dirt roads, hitting my frame a couple of times. I pulled over at the next pull out in order to verify that the bottom of my car was still there, and a construction foreman pulled over to see if I was OK. He apologized for the bad road, promising to yell at the crew to immediately flatten out the rough section for us sports car drivers. It was nice of him to be so conscientious. Onward to the summit: the views in Glacier National Park are simply stunning. It is the most amazing piece of real estate I have ever laid eyes on, and I've seen a lot-including the Grand Canyon, the Alps, and the Egyptian antiquities. If you ever have a chance to visit it, 'just do it'! I did a small hike up at the summit to Hidden Lake, then drove down the other side of the park to the Western Gate, most of the way with a vertical cliff with rocky projections rising hundreds (thousands?) of feet over the right side of my car. Yikes!

At the bottom of the park, started to endure hot summer conditions for the first time in days (weeks?). Endured a stop-and-go 90+ degree traverse through Kalispell before passing very pretty Flathead Lake. However, having spent hours in my now favorite Park, my ocular pleasure center was overloaded and I could only think "ho hum". Continued to bake as I turned westward on routes 28 and 135 through very arid landscape, before intersecting Interstate 90 for the Westward run towards Seattle. Conditions cooled off nicely with some cloud cover, and I was able to continue on for almost 200 miles, ending up in Ritzville WA. This stop was suggested by a guy named Mike I met at a rest stop, who was towing a quad back home from his vacation property. We talked cars and bikes for about 15 minutes before going our separate way. I downshifted and goosed the throttle as I caught and passed him, much to his and his wife's thumbs up reaction. In Ritzville, I found a fully booked Best Western, an overpriced local hotel, and then found "The Tophat" hotel 'downtown', across from the grainery and train tracks. After doing my act with the owner, talked her down from 44\$ to 40\$ for the night, helped her reboot her router and wi-fi system to get it working again, and then headed off to the recommended preferred bowling alley/café for dinner. Was one of two customers in the entire building, and had a truly enjoyable taco salad. Afterwards, I queried the other customer and bartender/cook/waiter about local farming, to find out the local crop is "dry wheat" and that the massive corrugated holding tank silos supplementing the cement grainery silos had been there for years. Amazingly, the 40\$ TopHat Hotel proved to be the best value of any hotel or campground yet experienced. Clean and fully inclusive of amenities. In the morning, I spent about a half hour chatting with my neighbor and his fiancé. They're from Pennsylvania near Pittsburg, and were heading to Portland where he will spend about 5 months sandblasting and painting the big bridge there. It was really interesting to hear how that process works. He's been doing it for 30+ years and goes from place to place wherever the projects are, and stays on per diem for months at a time. They use steel shot for the sandblasting, and have a system set up to recapture the shot magnetically. Very cool.

The next morning, continued West on this relatively boring part of Washington State, having briefly passed through Idaho the previous evening. The boredom was interrupted by coming up on the Columbia River Gorge. Great overlook, where I was asked by an elderly couple to take

their picture. They told me that they were there watching in 1962 (50 years ago!) when the dam was put in place, and that lots of folks were there in boats to catch the snakes as the water level rose. Interesting anecdote. After another couple of hours of unremarkable travel, arrived at the ferry to take me over to Whidbey Island. I was welcomed by Mark (my former boss's boss) and Joan at their lovely coastal 'estate', and spent an extremely enjoyable two days with them. The weather was cloudy and rainy for the evening of my arrival and the next day, but cleared up for the final morning of my stay into beautiful sunshine. We did a tour of the island on the rainy day (during which we tried to get on the Naval Air Station to see the planes our company had built, and ended up going through 10 minutes of ID checks and cavity searches before we were given the boot-I read later about an ongoing worldwide terrorist threat so perhaps there was some kind of DEFCON sitch going on), enjoying a breakfast in an artsy café (many enclaves on the island are kind of artsy), a fantastic roasted chicken dinner back at 'the estate', relaxed sitting out by the fire pit toasting marshmallows and in the Jacuzzi, and did a surprise drop-in on a former co-worker. We worked with Ed on the B-2 Bomber program in Los Angeles a long time ago, and I hadn't seen him in about 20 years. We had looked up his address in the white pages, and simply drove up and knocked on his door. When he answered I asked him "where have you been?" He hadn't a clue who I was, and had the deer-in-the-headlight look like he was trying to remember where he had forgotten to be. When I chuckled and told him who I was, his eyes crinkled up in a smile and we all shared a hearty laugh. We talked for a bit, but all were in the midst of things, and we promised to return on the morrow and spend more time together. After a great Belgian waffle breakfast, I gave Mark and Joan rides in the Cobra in the sunny morning conditions. Joan was thrilled with the whole roadster open air thing, and Mark and I spent about an hour catching up with Ed. He's going non-stop in his retirement, having restored dozens of Model A's in his life, along with a late 60's Shelby Mustang King of the Road (which he still owns). He is big into sailing and gives back to the community in a number of ways, including teaching young and old folks to sail. He's a past president and still active in the local Society of Manufacturing Engineers chapter. He has constructed three buildings on his 5 acre property, including a main house, a guest house, and a fantastic 6 bay steel garage, with office, fully furnished bathroom, machine shop, and a full paint booth under construction. The whole property is a little slice of heaven for a high achiever. Once again, "Retirement doesn't suck!"

Left my gracious hosts Mark and Joan, and took the ferry back to the mainland. Headed to Paul Allen's Museum of Flight in nearby Everett, which was awesome. A relatively small but superlative collection of warbirds and armor. Highlights were a fully restored Bf-109, FW-190A, FW-190 Dora 9 (holy cow!!!), a Nakajima Oscar (only flyable example in the world), Me-163 Komet rocket plane, Russian IL-2 Sturmovic, and the usual Spitfire, Hurricane, Mustang, and Thunderbolt. Also present were two V-1 buzz bombs (one of which was a prototype manned version) and a V-2 rocket. A really first rate collection. At that point it was getting late in the afternoon so would not be able to get to the LeMay automobile museum in Tacoma prior to closing. Since I had the time, decided to take forum member Gale K up on his suggestion to check out the XXX Root Beer drive-in located in Issaquah WA. Showed up there to see a small but nice Saturday evening car cruise in progress, and Gale showed up a short while later (in a 'civilian' vehicle; all his interesting cars were undergoing updates/mods). We talked cars and life over a delish pair of burgers on the outdoor patio, before I headed off to find a campsite near Tacoma. Turns out they were all booked up, so settled on a cheapo hotel. The internet booking service ended up booking me in a hotel that had no vacancies, so had to go down the street and check into a full service/fare hotel before they too ran out of rooms (I got the last one). Several phone calls to the internet booking company (I was really irate about the worthless booking and subsequent telephone holds and hang-ups), and ended up getting a voucher good for my next use of their services in the amount of the 50\$ extra I had to pay for the full service hotel. They

resolved my anger but I'm a little nonplussed by their level of service. All will be good if when I next need a hotel I can find one with them for 50\$ and thus pay Zero.

This morning I'll be heading over to the LeMay when it opens at 10, then head several hundred miles down to the Evergreen Air & Space Museum in McMinnville, OR, before finishing up another 50 miles down the road at my next mooch stop in Portland (my former boss Dave, who hired both this cute little hottie Constance [now wifey-poo] and me). Forum member Don H of the Cascade Cobra Club has invited me to join him on a side trip out of Portland to Mt. Hood in a couple of days, then I'll be heading to the Crystal Lake area before making the long trek to Northern California via mountain and forest roads. Have accumulated about 9,000 miles on the FFR plus another 1,000 miles in the Camry (Wisconsin), meaning I've now traversed the equivalent of 40% of the earth's circumference. So much for Christopher Columbus and Marco Polo; look out Magellan! Until the next time.....