

## Days 52-59

As I had mentioned in an earlier reply, I fortunately learned before traveling south several hundred miles that Dave and Susan lived very near where I was staying. I ended up only driving about 10 miles to meet Dave at a gun show in which he had a selling table. Dave specializes in high end collectable Colt single action army pistols, but at this show had only M1 carbines and real military artifacts. After several hours, we packed up and headed to his home in Gig Harbor. This entailed crossing the bridge at the Tacoma Narrows, which if you'll remember was the place where an earlier version was destroyed by an oscillating condition brought about by winds. Check out a vid on YouTube if you've never seen it. Dave and Susan live in a lovely home with a great view overlooking Gig Harbor. Their guest quarters were the most complete I've ever experienced or seen - bed, bathroom, exercise equipment, French doors with a view, electric blanket....I could live there! We went out for a nice dinner at a local wine bar and had a McDonald's ice cream cone (my favorite) for dessert. The next day, Dave and I took the Cobra up to the Boeing flight museum, which is superlative. Multiple display areas chock full of planes, many in historical settings (which really adds to the presentation). Also took in a movie on the Gemini space program. All in all, a very enjoyable several hours. We then drove back south to the LeMay car museum. Tons of vehicles, but laid out in rows up and down ramps, in a seemingly haphazard manner. Frankly, somewhat disappointing. Perhaps part of that impression is a result of us just having seen the Boeing museum, with its great collection and layout. Back to Gig Harbor, we all had a great dinner at a Mexican restaurant, talked about old times a bunch, and then hit the hay.

Took off the next morning, heading for the Portland area to meet up with forum member Don H. and friends for a drive up to Mount Hood. Don was finishing up a dusting off of his pristine early FFR (Mk I or II, I forget), and then we took off to the meet up spot. There we met Butch, Don C., Dave, Mike, and Nick and his daughter in a number of Cobras plus a beautiful Superformance GT40, which I followed all the way up the mountain. The guys had a beautiful route picked out, including what turned out to be our own private twisty turny country road under the trees, and we did not just do a slow cruise. Just above the tree line at Mount Hood was the Timberline Lodge. As we pulled into the lot under total sunshine, it was interesting to see all the skiers and snowboarders coming back to their cars after a morning on the slopes. They had been hiking up to and skiing/boarding down the remnants of the lower snowfield in glorious sunshine before it turned to afternoon mush. Had a not inexpensive lunch in the lodge, which is constructed of huge beams and logs (it sure seems that they don't grow them like that anymore). The drive down the mountain was equally fun and fast, and the group peeled off one by one. At this point it was sweltering, so headed off to a gas station mart to refresh my cooler. While there, a truck towing a boat pulled up, and after a bit my sun/heat addled brain figured out that there must be a lake around. Asked for info, and then took back country roads out to the Henry Hagg day park, and had several deliciously cool swims in the damned lake. Total bliss! Feeling totally refreshed, headed on back roads to nearby McMinnville in anticipation of the next day's visit to the Evergreen Air and Space Museum. While driving through the small town of Carlton, saw they were having an annual street fair and decided to stay the night. Pulled out my iPhone (an absolutely invaluable tool for modern travel) and located a bed & breakfast two blocks from where I had pulled to the side of the road. Called them up and it took only seconds to secure a room with a deep deep discount (they had only one other couple staying there). Unloaded my stuff and walked up to the fair. Loaded my plate with food like a pig, only to find that it was all free! After gorging myself on a delish all American dinner, felt compelled to make a contribution. Was pointed in the direction of the mayor and after only a nanosecond of discussion she gratefully

accepted my 10\$ donation. In turn, I asked that she apply one of the stick on deputy badges to my shirt and appoint me as an honorary officer. After that I asked if this gave me the privilege of being able to speed on my way out of town the next morning and was sad to hear a resounding "no" in reply. I finished up my visit to the fair by reading the large placard giving the town's history, and as is my habit found a grammatical error. I pointed this out to the young man sitting next to the mayor, who turned out to have the last name of Carl, one of the founder's descendants. He assured me that they would fix it during a forthcoming update. Yet another small fix for mankind in my quiver.

Headed off to the Evergreen Museum the next morning. What a beautiful collection of structures- three for the museum and one for an indoor waterpark. The latter has a Boeing 747 mounted on the roof through which tubular waterslides course. Amazing! The museum has an excellent collection of air and space stuff, contained in large pristine indoor display areas and around the outside on the grass. The centerpiece of the airplane exhibit is Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose", which several years ago had been moved up from its prior location near the Queen Mary in Long Beach. Man, this thing is HUGE, dwarfing a 747. Read the history of Evergreen Air, which is impressive and worth of further internet study. Also saw a 3D movie on the universe, which portrayed the mind boggling scale of the known universe, containing billions of observable galaxies (with certainly more just too far away to see given current technology), each containing billions of stars. It's sure hard to reconcile this reality with any mainstream religion, but I'll leave my atheistic pulpit with just that observation.

Onward towards the Cascades, which proved to have yet more awesome views and perfectly smooth and sweeping roads through the innumerable canyons. Stopped in Salem for a much needed haircut at a Sport Clips, and got into an interesting conversation with my hair cutter. She lives on 40 acres with her husband and daughter, is kind of a 'pioneer' woman, and has hunted and camped all her life. She's shot plenty of deer, elk, and bear (one of which she surprised on a trail and didn't have time to bring her rifle to bear-she drew her pistol when it was within 5 yards and it took 5 shots of her .40 Sig Sauer to bring it down). They harvest and eat all their kills. Heading into the mountains, stopped for a cooler refresh and got into several conversations with the usual gaggle interested in the car. One fellow extolled the virtues of the local hot springs and pointed me in the direction of a clothing optional one located near Cougar Reservoir. About 60 miles later in the middle of nowhere, after having stopped to check out a fish hatchery, thought I had missed a turnoff after driving a number of miles of twisty two lane next to the reservoir. Then, up came a dirt lot on the side just after a small structure next to a bridge. A fee of 6\$ and an eighth mile walk got me to the hidden hot springs. Four pools of descending temperature contained about a dozen people (naked women and a few guys) in a paradisiacal surrounding. Heaven on earth! Played it cool and continental while staring everywhere but at the naked beauties around me, a few of which smiled at me, probably recognizing my internal delight. Note to self: young naked bodies still look great!

Found a primitive campground across the reservoir after driving about a quarter mile on a 1.5 lane wide gravel road full of potholes, set up camp and enjoyed a fire in a solitary setting before hitting the sack. The next morning, spent awhile cruising up and down route 126, checking out Clear Lake (Formed by a volcanic eruption 3000 years ago which created a natural damn). The lake is crystal clear and one of my pictures shows a petrified(?) tree rooted in the lake bottom that itself is 3000 years old) and its associated feeder river (McKenzie) and waterfall, then headed up the scenic route 242 McKenzie pass. The first part of this mimics but beats the Tail of the Dragon in every way. Just as twisty but recently repaved, in the midst of a dense forest, and far less crowded. It peaks in a lava field with a view stop of

'The Three Sisters' and another mountain (I think Mt. Washington). Thereafter, the road straightens out as it heads into the town of Sister. From there, headed through Bend, Oregon to pick up the 'Cascade Scenic Highway' over to Crater Lake National Park. Another gorgeous road with beautiful vistas! Caught a short rainstorm which cooled things down and washed off a little bit of the road grime. Got to the park in late afternoon to find that all campsites were full, so was directed down to the Diamond lake campground and got a nice spot right off the lake. Set up camp, went down the road for some pizza, then had a nice conversation with two neighboring bikers camping out around their fire. Went back to my own place, then stared at my fire for a bit before turning in. I think I'm going to talk to my wife about retiring to Oregon when she's done working. Looks like a great place to live.

Crater Lake proved to be stunning, with numerous view spots all along the rim road-just amazing. Still, I think I'm now a little jaded given all the terrific sights I've been exposed to after two months on the road. At the visitor's station, talked to a ranger who gave me directions along a scenic route to Yosemite. This is where I had my first trip total brain fart, because I had intended to travel up to Coos Bay for a long ride down the coast highway. Didn't realize this until I had committed to the inland path directly to Yosemite. Oh well, something to do with my wife when she retires in a few years and we do a similar cross country trip, albeit in the comfort of a rented motorhome or a luxury sedan. As well, next week I'll be taking a familiar drive down the Pacific Coast Highway from Monterey to Los Angeles. The inland drive proved to be quite interesting, but somewhat warm and very arid. After several years of less than normal rain and snowpack, all the lakes are well below their high water line. Their companion vacation home areas are now some distance from their lakes, and a number of businesses are closed. They have that haunting desolation look that I've only seen in dessert communities. Ended up in Virginia City, just south of Reno. Discovered that the latter was in the midst of a weeklong "Hot Summer Nights" car show, but just didn't see the need to make another 30 mile round trip to see more cars (I'll be at Laguna Seca for the vintage races and Pebble Beach for the concourse in a week), so checked into a hotel to clean up after several days of camping. Most rooms were booked for the Reno show, so ended up in yet another cheap dive. Walked down to the weekly street fair, had dinner, then milked \$20 for several hours playing blackjack before getting sleepy and bored-whereupon I made some big (5\$ !) bets and lost it all.

Completed the desert drive down to Yosemite the next morning, climbed the Tioga pass into the park, and spent a number of hours slowly cruising the overcrowded park, which was quite dry. It was jammed to capacity and as always, slow moving motorhomes and trailer towing pickups refused to maintain the already painfully slow speed limits, yet declined to use the turnouts notwithstanding the many signs directing them to do so. This effect was exacerbated on the very scenic route 41 south that I took, heading to a former coworker's house in Awahnee. When I saw the sign saying "no passing next 31 miles" with a slow moving motorhome in the lead of our train, I groaned internally and yet out a very loud expletive (deleted here to keep a 'G' rating, but similar to "firetruck", but without all the letters). I was a good boy for about a half hour of torture, but then slipped into motorcycle rules (double solids are mandatory for everyone else but only a suggestion for me). Within seconds I was a speck on the windshield of those slow moving pokers and had a fine time on the last 10 miles into Mariposa. Made the turn towards Awahnee, and within minutes was enjoying a Gin and Tonic while sitting in Roger and Trish's swimming pool in the back of their mountain retreat. This was followed by a fantastic steak dinner, then we sat on the patio and watched a glorious star field appear (the Milky Way was almost opaque with stars) and caught the one minute space station transit and a bit of the Perseus meteor shower (tonight it will be nearly peaking) before calling it a day.

Tomorrow (Monday) I'll head back to the park for some hopefully less crowded Monday viewing, and spend another night here in Awahnee before heading south towards Santa Cruz and some ocean climate. Until the next report.....