

20090126 – Letter to Obama

Easy and pleasant check in at Manchester, no queues. Wendy was a bit concerned about a middle eastern looking geezer in track suit, trainers and no luggage – definite terrorist material. If she'd had her way he wouldn't have been allowed on the flight, mind you he did look suspicious. Of course I drew the short straw and was sat next to him on the flight. Any trouble from him and he have had a tomato juice with Worcester sauce in his face. Great flight, good leg room and seat back TV's complete with Films on demand, all courtesy of Linux operating system.

Welcome to JFK the sauna - the airport that is – no sign of Bruce Willis though. But beware of the low flying pigeons, the ceilings only 8ft high so when they come batting down the corridor you have to duck and dive.

First US encounter is stimulating to say the least. Yes we're in the land of the blobbies and there to welcome us is a blobby with the job of directing "US citizens to the right, non US to the left" – in these economic fraught times it's good to see that the US is still creating jobs rather than employing an automated announcement. Mind you what a boring job and I'm sure she was writing down what she had to say!

Forget the ESTA (web sign up for your Visa) they still dish out the Green cards that you have to fill in along with the white customs declaration. Now they want all your fingerprints and thumbs as well as a photo – but I'm dammed if I'll smile for it. Surprised I didn't have to give them a DNA sample – whatever happened to civil rights. Can you believe it! Not only that our cheerful, armed, customs geezer says that there probably going to have to keep the green forms as well the ESTA because they need some means of identifying if you've left the country – it's surreal, you really couldn't make it up. He was amazed that you could go skiing in Salt Lake, Utah – he must have slept through the winter Olympics in Utah – just another example of the low standard of education and general awareness.

Want to buy an Ipod? No problem you can get them out of drink vending machines here. Mind you when they drop down the chute it can't do them much good.

So Mr Obama some tips for you:

- 1 Turn down the heating at JFK and you'll cut US greenhouse emissions by 10%.
- 2 Improve the education of the nation.
- 3 Put the country on a diet – latest scientific findings show that starving older people improves their memory.
- 4 Get someone with half a brain (I'll lend you a spaniel if you're struggling) to look at the ESTA and that disastrous form that asks so many daft questions.

Anyway better be careful with words like terrorist, civil rights, Obama and ESTA in an email, the NSA / FBI / CIA will be swooping down on me.

And to top it all there's a laughing geezer on TV here rattling on about economic collapse in Iceland / Europe as if it never originated here.

Good news the flight to Salt Lake has a negative delay of -5 minutes - how can you go 5 minutes early?

20090127 – Is This Heaven

No time wasted today we're out on the slopes for breakfast by 08:00. The big breakfast, usual hearty US fare, pancakes with fruit, apples, maple syrup and hash browns – don't you just love the mixture of sweet and savoury! There's that much apple in Wendy's pancake that I help her out and then we take the rest home in a doggy bag to make an apple crumble – unbelievable.

Well it's a gorgeous day bright blue sky, but it's 2 degrees (that's degrees Fahrenheit for those that can remember) that's cold, but we had snow overnight so all the trees are covered in snow, it looks just fantastic and the skiing is great. Is this heaven? If it is then you need to wear long Johns and goggles. I just wore sunglasses but my eyeballs were freezing up. Wendy stayed in, unpacked, sorted out the condo and had an easy day.

Great days skiing, just perfect. I've lashed out on a season pass, it works out a lot cheaper as long as I ski more than 10 days, so I guess I'll just have to ski every day to get the most out of it - it's a tough life.

Pity I didn't have a bowie knife with me there's a bloody great deer on the road side, could just slice off a haunch of venison. It's just goes to show how far we've come from living off the land - no ones snapped it up. Mind you I bet it made a mess of the car that hit it. It's not called Deer Valley for nothing.

I wonder whether they have supermarkets in heaven – that would spoil it. Anyway they have them here and just so that I don't get to enjoy myself too much I'm treated to a trip around the supermarket with Wendy – her eyes light up at the size and choice.

20090128 – Powder and a Heat Wave

Bad news it's snowing, but then every cloud has a silver lining; the skiing is just great with 3" of new powder (well worth putting up with the snow); temperatures 30 F (a heat wave compared to yesterdays 2 F); slopes are very quiet, most of the blobbies are tucked up in front of the fire, the snow and winds put them off – don't know what they're missing.

Wendy spends the afternoon in the cafe reading. She's just waiting for the temperature to top 71F with clear blue sky and then she'll ski. Lots of moans from her this year about the cold it, must be that bus pass that's made her nesh (good old word).

Letter to Obama

- 1 Why don't you make it illegal to quote prices without the tax included. It's just ridiculous. But then perhaps it's a cunning plan to increase the numeracy of US citizens.

Update on the gas guzzler it seats 8 not 7, but every time you clamber into it you end up decapitating yourself as the roof is so low. Unbelievable, you just have to crawl sideways into it!

Wifi here is stunning, 8 megs, how will I cope with 1 meg at home!

Rumour has it we're – that means me as well – going into Salt Lake for the day on Saturday. I've pointed out to Wendy that "computer says" - Outlook calendar - skiing for the day, and we should stick to the plan.

Somebody's finally snaffled up the deer, or perhaps unlike Belthorn, they have diligent dustbin men (is it politically correct to call them that?) over here.

20090129 – Protective Antioxidants

Glorious blue sky day not quite 71F, currently nearer 4F on the mountain (forgot to mention this to Wendy), but the promise of blue skies and maybe the fresh powder has persuaded Wendy to forsake the supermarkets for the slopes.

Fantastic skiing, whilst it's still only 30F, with the sun out and no wind it's almost tropical and no mosquitoes. Wendy gets her ski legs and we have a very leisurely cruising (nothing to do with P&O) days skiing. Over lunch I nip out for a few extra runs while Wendy relaxes in the ambiance of the ski lodge. I can't believe it but after 4 years coming here to ski I have come across 4 runs I've never tried – the excitement just keeps coming on.

Meanwhile the gas guzzler continues to consume petrol at a rate of knots – you can watch the gauge go down.

I think I truly qualify for US Citizenship, I've passed the ultimate in Americanness, I'm eating Granola and smothering my food with A1 sauce (breakfast excepted). The supermarkets are just packed out with Granola, a whole isle devoted to just Granola – breakfast cereals are elsewhere! Yes, I'm becoming quite a supermarket aficionado. Amazingly you can even buy a mortgage or insurance, don't they remember mortgages are the thing that got the world into it's current financial state. Perhaps we should have an International Financial Crimes Tribunal and then we could take the US bankers to Nuremburg. I notice that China and Russia at the Davos conference are almost of a similar mind as they castigate the US government for the worldwide financial crisis.

We're also into drinking "protective antioxidants", no that's not red wine but teabags to us Brits. Why can't they keep it simple in line with their IQ's.

Well our 100+ TV channels reveal nothing worth watching, even if you do find something the adverts turn a 90 minute film into 180 minutes, so we've signed up to Blockbuster for a months as many videos as you want deal. The only problem is we have to start watching a film before 18:00 to stand any chance of watching it without falling to sleep.

I've finally managed to use BBC iPlayer so Wendy can get her East Enders – there's no escaping it.

For more travel blogs or "Soup of the Day" rants and raves see our Blogs at www.4uand.me.uk.

20090130 – Blue Sky Blobbies

Yet another glorious blue sky day, still not quite 71F, but we're both out on the slopes. It's even warmer than yesterday. All the blobbies are out. Originally I thought that the average ski population were more svelte than the average US population, but I had been conned by the padded anoraks hiding the true state of affairs. When you're in the restaurants then you get a truer picture and the situation is just as dire as the rest of the US, mind you given the size of the food portions it's not surprising.

Any avid readers of our travel blog (rumour has it there is 1) will notice the absence of any comments about the state of toilets since we've left France. Well that's because in general US toilets are excellent, even at the top of the mountain they are generally better than most in the UK. However I do notice a disturbing trend with a fetish for the hands free everything. For hands free read electric with automatic sensors, this now extends to toilet flushers, taps, paper towel dispensers and even soap dispensers – all very good but too much complexity and potential for faults. They now have water free urinals that save 40,000 gallons of water a year. Where will it all end? Thankfully no one has tackled hands free toilet paper dispenser and heaven forbid hands free wipes.

The economic news over here is full of job losses. However, given the excess labour used to tackle even the simplest of task it is not surprising. Perhaps US companies are starting to turn their backs on job creation schemes. An example of the job creation schemes over here is the ski parking lot this morning. The car park must hold about 500 cars and there are three parking attendants directing you where to park. One could have done the job quite easily and for the previous 3 days there has been no one doing the job and with no apparent detrimental effect.

Well another great days skiing. Starting to push onto the harder runs and Wendy's now moving from the greens onto the blues. Also the mystery of the runs I'd never done has been solved, they're just new runs they carved out this year.

Letter to Obama:

1 Whilst it's a good idea having laws that expect people to behave safely on ski slopes why not at least insist on one ski run at each resort being called "Idiots Plunge" or "Lunatics Revenge" and then all the idiots can go on their and do their thing (skiing backwards at break neck speed; leaping out of the tree line into the path of downhill skiers; not to mention anything done on a scumboard) without endangering the rest of the population.

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20090131 – The Supreme Sacrifice

Glorious blue sky, sun, forecast in the 30's, good snow and what did we do today? We went to Salt Lake for a mooch around the Gateway centre. Computer said ski but I made the supreme sacrifice and gave up a days skiing.

Good news is I've got rid of the gas guzzler and picked up a smaller car – Ford Ease. It was quite a battle at Hertz as their definition of a smaller car was a Ford Explorer or a Toyota Highlander. Anyway the Ease is less of an SUV and has permanent 4 wheel drive – trusting my life to a computer yet again! And of course being much smaller it will have better MPG – all of 18.3 MPG - much nicer to drive.

The Gateway centre in Salt Lake is very similar to Blackburn shopping precinct at least in one respect, it has shops in it, and that's where the similarity ends. Being the lavish travellers that we are we'd taken a fruit lunch with us, so there we are sat by a roaring outdoor fire – it's only in the 30's – eating our lunch, listening to some excellent music all co-ordinated to a fantastic water fountain. It's clean, it's virtually traffic free, there are no mounds of chewing gum to climb over, there's piped music everywhere, it's not crowded, there's no graffiti, there's no litter, there's no marauding gangs of youths. It's just very pleasant and relaxing and to put yet some more nails in Blackburn's coffin, not that they need any more, it's all free and you can park on the streets for free.

One of the shops has a massive indoor climbing wall. Must be about 200ft high and it's \$5 a go. To top it all there is a women doing a climb. Nothing unusual about that you might think as they have equality and the vote. However she was 7.5 months pregnant and looked ready to pop – somewhat irresponsible in our opinion, but you give all this equality and it comes with the territory. Mind she did make it 90% of the way up without a fall. Only in the US.

Most of the shops were very quiet, however the Apple store was heaving. Full of nerds – so I blended in quite well – all playing on the computers, Ipod and having hands on live tutorials. Their new ultra thin laptop is very impressive and light, but who'd pay these prices. Well judging by the crowds in there quite a lot.

Well having made the supreme sacrifice, and won some brownie points, hopefully it's back to the grind of skiing tomorrow. And to make just a perfect end to the day we've 4 East Enders to watch tonight – oh joy.