



Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Lazy Days, British Weather

Saturday, 11 June 2011



Saturday- weathers gone very changeable just like home except it's warmer. Sun and cloud today. Lazy day around the caravan.

Sunday - another mixed sun and cloud day. Lazy day around the caravan.

Had a drive into Airvault to get some bread. Quite expecting the place to be closed and deserted like most French towns on a Sunday. All the shops are open, including antique shop; parking is a nightmare; theres a queue at the bakery; and the church forecourt is just heaving with everyone in their Sunday bests. Something to do with Ascension day. Are we really in France?

In the afternoon I start redesigning our web site to run under MobileMe and save us some money - always a subject close to my nerdy heart. How us nerds enjoy ourselves. Mind you not that Wendy approves. She wants to see physical activity, blood sweat and tears, anything less is just lazing around doing nothing.

Wendy amuses herself by cleaning and breaking cupboard handles to jolt me into activity. Joy.

Some newbies to caravanning come to pick our brains - can you believe we're the experts! She's a retired teacher. Oh the stress of the job! He's an ex-teacher who taught category A prisoners Maths and Cisco operating system - very esoteric, god only knows what they do with that in the real world other than become hackers. You do start to wonder, why are we spending such money when services are being cut and pensioners are struggling to make ends meet. What the hell are all these do gooders and politicians up to?

Then we get some new next door neighbours - she's a walking ashtray as she spends most of her time outside her caravan smoking herself to death.

Monday - another mixed but warm day. A few sprinkles in the afternoon.

It's all go here. Bike ride down to shower block past the geriatrics asleep with their mouths agape collecting flies. Our time will come! At least there's some young blood on this site so it's not entirely Saga or Wallace Arnold. The great thing about this site is everybody says hello, nods or smiles - obviously no French.

Has anyone noticed the new vitriolic attacks on TV these days, "them lot off on their cruises" or similar. What is it with the do gooders and loony left. People work and save all their life to provide a decent retirement and are then pilloried as if they are some sort of carbuncle on the arsehole of society. Next one I hear will be proposed for the Saturday afternoon coliseum lion feeding spectacular.

Meanwhile early evening entertainment is provided by a numpty who reverses his caravan with the stabilisers down - a sure way to wreck your stabilisers and gouge a deep groove in your pitch. Actually we've come to the conclusion they're both French deaf mutes, despite the GB car and caravan, as they must be the only couple on the site who never speak to anyone.

Later we go to the race / curry evening social - yes I went to a social. Managed to back 8 horses and not one of them won. Now you know why I don't gamble. This is only the second time I've ever been anywhere near a horse race - last time was Ladies Day at Royal Ascot. I don't think there'll be a next time. How can people get so excited? Some of them were having orgasms on the table or convulsions. Anyway good news is about £460 was raised for charity and the Thai Red Curry was excellent.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Niort

Tuesday, 14 June 2011



Tuesday - mix of cloud and a bit of sun, but at least it's nice and warm.

Drive down to Niort. A bit of a disappointment nothing much there. Mind you we did get some nice filleted sardines off the inside market so all was not wasted. So that's really the best we can say about Niort.

Civil 0; Uncivil 1.

Mind you we've now discovered that Mutt and Jesse, on the site do at least understand sign language and have gravitated to an occasional, but somewhat begrudged nod. Never mind give it a month and we might even get an hello.

Wednesday - another cloud and sunny day.

Meanwhile the human ashtray on the next pitch continues to billow out smoke at every opportunity. At this rate they have to move pitches within a couple of days as the pitch will be full of fag ash.

Spend the morning transferring some money, it's always a major ordeal dealing with the banks and their weird and wonderful passwords. Manage to save £650 for an hours work thanks to Martins Money site, so at least it eases the pain

Ideal for a bike ride so we ride down the side of the river into Airvault. Coffee at the local newsagents. Don't ask, suffice it to say that she nips into her kitchen and gets out the Nescafe, the best that can be said is that at least it was a mug full and not served in an egg cup - now thats a first. Then we pop along to the bakers for some bread and, despite being English, we're given a gift of half a loaf of bread. Actually we did think of saying well lets forget our two baguettes we'll just take the free gift, but resisted.

Civil 2; Uncivil 0

Thursday - nice sun, cloud and warm. Lazy morning, then off for a pleasant bike ride to St Generoux, ideal cycling weather.

No chance of a coffee in the village though - not even an hairdressers there. They do have a fantastic old stone bridge. Cobbled with stones, it makes you wonder how old fashioned wooden wheels survived. Probably built and designed by the marketing department of the village wheelwright - don't worry it's just one of my rants I'm so sick of marketing departments screwing with web sites.

On the way back Wendy gets chatted up by a French geriatric who feels sorry for her pushing her bike up the hill.

Amazing down these lovely rural country lanes with hardly any traffic on them yet they must have the same scum bags here in France as we do in England, the only difference is they chuck out French fag packets - bring back the coliseum!

Civil 2; Uncivil 0

Friday - mixed sun and cloud again with some rain later on. A bit like Belthorn as we even have some wind, but at least it's warm. Weekly shop day so Wendy toddles off for her weekly fix, while I try and learn some more French. Bunny rabbit for tea one night.



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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

French Course

Saturday, 18 June 2011

Saturday - sun and showers.

It's the start of the French course tonight. Apparently it will be conducted in French. Wait till they hear me crucify their language within my first sentence, they'll soon change their minds.

Well a pleasant welcome to the French course reception complete with champagne and nibbles.

Fortunately it was all in English tonight, the real work starts on Monday at 09:30 - what an ungodly hour.

Nip to bread shop and dry cleaners. Two very pleasant encounters, we even have a laugh and joke. The French around here do seem a lot friendlier. No sign of Monsieur Hitler!



Civil 2; uncivil 2

Sunday - bright blue sunshine start to the day soon replaced by warm sun and cloud - more cloud than sun.

Lazy day. Wendy does the washing.

No French encountered today although I notice we do have a token French couple on the site. Is this the start of multiculturalism and the end to sanity.

As there are no photos for the past two days I thought I'd share this one of a school outing of 7 year olds on push bikes. I don't know whether they're just very brave or very stupid. It's certainly not a H&S assessment most governing bodies would be happy to sign off on.

Monday - course begins, let battle commence. Even get some homework. Disappointing can't say as I learned a lot but a good laugh.

In the evening we go to the quiz, fortunately not in French. Miraculously manage to come a respectable 3rd.

Tuesday - mixed weather, sun and cloud. Day 2 of the course.

Can't quite make up my mind whether this is French 2 or Cordon Bleu 1. We get to prepare a recipe with real ingredients. As some of you may guess this is totally lost on me - pas pour moi. Fancy allowing grown men loose on ecoli ridden cucumbers, can openers and sharp knives - did anyone do an health and safety assessment? Did anyone wash their hands?

Then at lunch time we're meant to eat our concoctions. Each dish was scored on presentation, not that anyone was told that was the criteria rather than strict adherence to the recipe. Fortunately we had some home made walnut wine and liquor to kill off the ecoli.

In the afternoon three brave French people came to have some conversational French with us. Now that was hard work but exposed us to real.

Wednesday - rain in the morning but sunny by tea time yet again. A lazy day, no French lessons although in the evening the French course and Wendy all go on a wine tasting - mainly in French. End up buying some pleasant and reasonably priced wines, so we all survived.

Meanwhile Fag Ash Lille on the next pitch has nearly got to the point where they'll have to move pitch as there's so much fag ash on her pitch. It's not surprising she never speaks as she's always got a fag in her mouth and it would lessen the nicotine intake.

Whilst our other neighbours - Mr and Mrs Door mouse - have finally been seen to rise out of their week long slumber on recliners and exert themselves to read a book.

After the wine tasting my two team members and their wives come round for late evening drinks and we down a few more bottles of French wine sat



out in the awning until 23:00 - just like you would in Belthorn!



Thursday - cloud and sun again. In the morning we have a quiz in French on French subjects. Apparently they do have a few famous people. After another lengthy lunch break we go down to the local college for a tour around in French and then sit in on a French class. Quite an interesting experience. And it provided quite a lot of amusement to the French kids.

In the evening there's a French class meal down at the local hotel.

Now I've commented a few times before about the Welsh being a load of rabid chauvinists nearly as bad as the French and yet they seem to pop up everywhere, even on French classes. Fortunately they're very easy to spot as they're usually adorned in their national flag, without the need to listen to their lilting tones. By way of a change one of them was ranting on about their precious Welsh language and how the government was spending millions to promote Welsh language learning in schools. As you may imagine I was somewhat incensed at this, but at least now I know where my taxes are being frittered away on a loony minority language that will do no child any good in the real World beyond Offers Dyke. Where they'll be able to run a post office in

Wales and switch to Welsh as soon as anyone from England is stupid enough to cross the threshold. So Mr Cameron there's a saving of millions to be made. Do parents not realise what a waste this is, why would you want to have your child's second language be Welsh?

Friday - sunny. We're off to St Loupe where we get to maraud around this quaint village whilst demonstrating how quickly we can crucify the French language in the search for clues to our treasure hunt. Followed by a lavish picnic, banana and bottle of water.

After lunch we finish, that's Wendy and I finish packing up the caravan ready for departure.

In the evening there's a prize giving and barbecue. Now, it's not that I'm a bad loser, or that I'm obsessive about winning but to lose to the team with Gobena in it - yes every class has to have at least one smarty pants, but this one just had to engage gob at every opportunity and regale us with the boring details - was a real downer. We came 2nd but I'd rather have come 2nd to last as long as Gobena's team came last.

Then there's the obligatory barbecue, fortunately Wendy's learnt and is prepared with some trays to prevent charbonising everything.

Yet again the Welsh are present with yet another shirt with the Welsh emblem on. If I'd have known I'd have gone draped in a union jack.

All this is then followed by a sing song, fortunately there was no bingo. All good training for Wallace Arnold coach holidays - beam me up I'm not ready for this. Sadly we have to depart early!



Has the French course improved my French. Well sadly I think there has been no significant improvement. Vocabulary improved very slightly; listening skill improved slightly; no improvement to spoken French. But I have to say it was very enjoyable. Question is do I continue in the vain hope of getting fluent or do I call it a day and accept that I've enough to scrape by on?

Saturday - clear blue sky with a fantastic forecast for the next 5 days and we're heading back home! Although when we get near Calais the weather is cloudy, misty and cold - preparing us for England.

Funny but the return journey somehow never as enjoyable as the coming. Perhaps it says something about where we're going to!

It's a traffic and hassle free 6 hour drive to the tunnel. Stay overnight at the Premier Inn in Folkstone. Great service, great food and very comfortable.

Sunday - day starts off misty.

Well what can I say about the drive up England. I've probably already said it before but here goes. 330 mile with 4 major (two of them about 30 mile long) road works; 20 minute queue at Dartford crossing; stop, start and stress all the way; sunny most of the way until we get to the Northwest and then it's grey clouds. Welcome back to England!

Never mind only 2 months before our next jaunt.

In the evening we go down to Kurt and Fiona's new home for Dinner and celebrate with some champagne. Some may think we're celebrating their new home and some may think we're celebrating them leaving home? Just to confirm my jaundiced view of Blackburn it manages to sprinkle a little



Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Silver Surfers 1 - Scroats 0

Thursday, 1 September 2011

At last the first warm nights sleep this "summer", thanks to Wendy installing the tog 13.5 duvet.

We finally manage to escape the joys of an English summer in Belthorn as we head off to Utah, Wyoming, Arrizona and just a smattering of Montana. Two months away from Belthorn, oh how we'll miss it.

Manchester airport wasn't too bad, having finally accepted that those silly boarding card scanners just don't work and replaced them with a human being.

Flight was reasonable, plenty of leg room but the food was just disgusting, courtesy of US Airways. Now I don't normally bother watching TV on planes, as it violates the laws of retirement, but two new episodes of "Curb Your Enthusiasm" was just too much temptation.

Land on time at Philadelphia. Now the Americans have really excelled themselves this time. Its a customs queue to end all queues. Took us 65 minutes to get through. It really does make you say "never again, stuff them". You really do wonder if they want tourists? Perhaps their economy is booming!

Of course you always get one smart arse, and his wife, who decides to jump the queue. Approximately 100 people let him push in front and not one of them says anything.

Well I'm having none of it. It's about time these scroats get there come uppence. I challenge him and very politely - somewhat unusual I know - ask why he thinks he's better than everyone else and should push to the front. This occurs several times as we pass in the queues, but few others, including those he's barged in from of aren't quite as vocal, some risk an occasional muttering. Anyway after politely asking him to return to his original position I summon one of the many queue wranglers (5 of them employed to organise and direct the queues - unbelievable) and point out that he has jumped the queue. I take her along and point him out. She eventually makes him and his poor wife - who looks like she just wants to crawl under the grubby carpet - go back to their original position. At which point those mice who'd kept quiet suddenly find their voices, a cheer goes up; "serves them right"; even clapping. Only pity is they didn't make him go to the very back of the queue or cart him off for an appearance in next Saturday's coliseum. Silver Surfers 1 Scroats 0 - Victor Meldrew would have been proud. What is it they say, "Evil triumphs when good men stand by and do nothing" - power to the people.

Finally get to Las Vegas where it's 105F. Shuttle bus is awaiting us and whisks us off to the Comfort Inn. Nice hotel with good rooms. Of course by now we're both knackered so it's straight to the usual ginormous bed that you get lost in. Then at 22:00 it starts. Can't really describe the sound but suffice it to say the attached video might give you some idea. Yes, they're digging up the road with a resurfacing machine. Of course very obligingly they've put us in a room closest to it, might as well have had the bed in the middle of it all. Fortunately we're so tired we manage to sleep through rather than bother moving. Then in the morning they start with a pneumatic drill. And of course what happens when they dig roads up? They manage to cut pipes, so no water.

Friday - blue skies, sunshine and a full refund help us put the nightmare behind us. We set off to pick the car up and drive up to Park City. 420 miles up the Inter-state and most of it's at 80 mph.

For lunch we treat ourselves to a our first US gourmet meal - a Burger King. Junk food rules.

Get to our Condo about 16:00 and it's clear blue skies and a balmy 78.

Then joy of joys it's off to the supermarket. I'm despatched to choose my own corn on the cob, granola and coffee. Helpful supermarket guy gives me a lesson in selecting the best fresh cobs and tips on how to cook - add a cup of milk and two teaspoons full of sugar. I even managed to get the granola in the plastic bags without mishap and eventually conquer the advanced technology of the coffee grinder. Now I know the cynics amongst you will find it hard to believe, but yes I was in a supermarket; yes I was well behaved and didn't sulk; mind you the cooking advice was wasted; yes I actually did something useful - it must be sunstroke! Meanwhile I can't believe I finally met somebody who actually likes the rain. I was chatting to the supermarket manager and he actually said how much he misses the rain. Mind you he did live in Seattle as a child. Should have offered him a house exchange in Belthorn, he'd have been like a pig in shit.

Now in case any of you are wondering why the Americans have such an obesity problem perhaps this photo might help. In case you think I'm being a tad biased I should point out that there were 2 other calories / cholesterol special displays likes this, just perchance you missed the first one strategically placed as you entered.



Saturday - awake to clear blue skies and mountain views. We can clearly see the olympic ski jumping hills and no doubt with binoculars would be able to watch. By 09:00 the sun just creeps onto our balcony and by 10:00 I can be sat out finish off this blog with a well deserved coffee - missing Belthorn already!!!! Oh how strange it all seems without the snow.

We have a leisurely stroll into Kimble junction. Wendy gets her weekly fix at the local Walmart, not quite Asda but close enough. Then we sit outside having our luxury packed lunch of a plum. Yes, that's singular, but boy you should see the size of them, bigger than an apple. Then it a free sample, well more like a wedgy, of parmesan sourdough bread from an ex-pat who is now living out here. It's absolutely delicious.

Nip to the library to get out some free local DVD's then a leisurely coffee outside the Wholefoods store. It's all so relaxing and everyone's out walking, jogging, mountain biking, just generally being disgustingly healthy and happy.

Everywhere's so pleasant and clean. People here really care about their environment. It's amazing for instance a kid's paper serviette blows 30 yards away but the dad chases after it to put it in the bin; a lady is walking along and sees a rare piece of litter on the floor, she goes out of her way to pick it up and put it in a bin - just like Blackburn!

Stroll back for afternoon tea on the balcony.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Not Another Market

Sunday, 4 September 2011

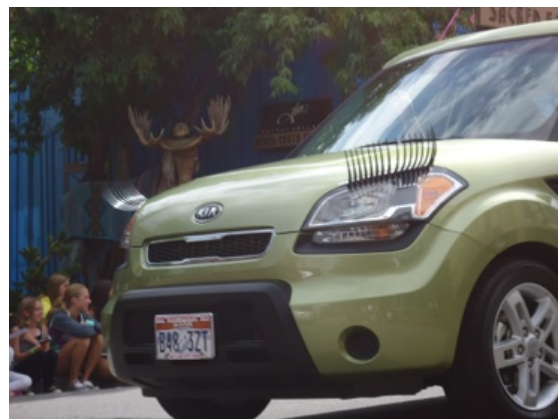


Sunday another sunny and warm day. Just my luck, all the way to America and low and behold there is a market. Yes its Park Sunday Silly Market. I just don't seem to be able to go anywhere without there being a market. It's quite entertaining. There's the usual stalls selling loads of things that nobody really needs, and I even doubt whether they want them. There's a band playing, a crazed teenager dancing with a hoola hoop; food stalls selling all manner of exotic dishes, including tasty fresh corn on the cob Southern style; even a beer tent, how liberal can Utah get.

What's also surprising is the number of people with silly small dogs. We sit next to a couple who have a dog in a pushchair; with a dress on; a diamond studded collar; pink ribbon in its hair. Can you believe it? Apparently their children have all left home and this is the surrogate child. I suppose on the positive side it may well shit on your carpet but at least it doesn't cost as much as children.

Wendy's come up with another stunning commentary on life. "It's grossly unfair that all the sunshine in the world isn't spread out more evenly. Why doesn't Belthorn get its fair share?" Well my phrase "If life was fair we'd all be riding around on bicycles sprang to mind". For some time now I've been a little bit concerned that an equal division of wealth throughout the world may result in us all riding around on roller skates. So I've spent some of my ample spare time researching this more thoroughly. Based on 2008 figures the worlds GDP amounts to \$53 Trillion; world population is 6.94 Billion; therefore each person share of GDP would be \$7,636 per annum. Now I appreciate that GDP isn't quite wealth but based on these figures I thinks it's save to say that each person could afford a bicycle out of their share of GDP. At least I don't have to sell the bikes and replace them with roller skates!

Monday another sunny day with a few clouds. It's Labour day here in America and to celebrate there is a Miners day parade in Park city. We catch the free bus into Park city and enjoy the parade. It seems like every time we come to America there's a parade, they're really into them. Now can you believe it, only in the USA, do they sell eye lashes for cars - see parade picture. After the parade everybody makes their way down to the local park where there's a barbecue; drinks; a band; races for the children. Yes they even have old-fashioned games like sack races and a wheelbarrow race. There are prizes. First second, third and children even come last. Children and adults all having a great time. Amazing isn't it. In England the loonies are so frightened that children might get a complex by coming last, these things have been banished. Where the hell have we gone wrong by allowing these loonies and politically correct imbeciles to take over and throw competition and common sense out of the window.



We just seen what must be the ugliest car in the world. I was going to go up to the people in the car and ask them if they minded if I took a photograph of their ugly car. Wendy felt that might be somewhat inappropriate. Anyway it's probably better that I don't include a photograph on this blog as I'm sure I wouldn't want to make people ill. The good news is it's made for the American market so there's very little chance that we will see it in England. Apparently it's aimed at the generation Y people, God knows who they are, but there is one thing for certain they can't have any sense of taste.



Tuesday another warm blue sky day with some clouds. Today we conquer the mountains. Well to be honest we take a ski lift up the mountain. Costs Wendy \$11, fortunately for me my season ski pass is still valid so I go for free - now there's value for money. I can't believe how slow these lifts go in summer. It takes 30 minutes to reach the mid mountain (6 minutes in winter), yet only takes an hour to walk down. We actually walk down Home run which is a green ski run. It's amazing how all the runs look so much so much steeper in summer but we both agree the place is so much nicer when covered with snow.

Wendy thinks she actually walks down faster than she skies.

We've just seen the typical American approach to walking. A woman sat waiting in her car for 5 min whilst another car reverses out of a parking spot. Now you may think that's because the car park is full and that's the last is space available. Actually the car park is only 20% full. At least it saved her walking an extra 10 feet. If things carry on this way I'm sure that Americans will have evolved into legless beings within the next 100 years.

In the evening we sit on our balcony watching a free thunder and lighting display. That helps cool things down a bit. But in typical American fashion everything has to be bigger - even the rain drops.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Mountains, Mountains and Hills

Wednesday, 7 September 2011



Wednesday - sunny and warm day. Another mountain walk. Only this time we do it the proper way, without artificial aids such as lifts. Walk up "Daily Grind" and just happen to come across a five star hotel at the top. By which time we're completely knackered so we lower the tone of the place by having coffee and sprawling out in their wonderful lobby. We draw the line at scoffing our lavish, gourmet lunch of an apple in the lobby and retire to the fire pit on the grand lawn. The hotel seems to operate some sort of ban on you opening doors. They employ that many staff that you never need to open one - more laziness. At this rate a hundred years from now Americans will have evolved without arms as well as legs!

Then it's the walk back down. Easy. Well not quite, there's a lot of loose scree and it takes some careful negotiation. I notice most walkers around here must be geriatrics as they have two adjustable walking sticks - perhaps we should give them a try. Give me snow, lifts and skis anytime, it's all so much easier.

In the evening we go out to dinner with Carol and family and finally get to meet Randy - guy who owns the condo we rent. Great steak and fish. But as usual there's just so much of it. Very enjoyable evening.



Thursday - warm and sunny again. Wendy still suffering with her nose - hay fever, mountain fever or just the dry air - so she gips out of a mountain walk today and heads off to get her weekly fix at Fresh Market and of course Walmart.



I set off to walk to the top of Park City (top of Bonanza), admittedly I do cheat a little by taking the Payday lift up to mid-mountain. Got very close to my daily goal, but called it a day when I encountered loose scree - really need to consider those walking sticks and some trainers with a bit of tread on them.

Friday - more sun and warm, although there is a 30% risk on rain / thunder. After the usual leisurely morning of balcony, news, coffee and of course Internet we set off to Antelope Island. It's a State Park in the middle of the great Salt Lake. Much to the Americans' chagrin their salt lake isn't quite as salty as the dead sea - I suggested adding a packet of Saxa salt.

Why Antelope Island, well it's a bird and wildlife preserve so we go armed with binoculars. Lunch overlooking a salty beach. Pass on a paddle in smelly brine. Have a pleasant hike up to the top of buffalo point, there's plenty of wild buffalo roaming free. Big mangy, smelly things best not approached. By now we've invested in one geriatric walking stick each - ditch the zimmer frame. They sure do help and make descent on loose gravel etc. a lot easier. Perhaps we should go the whole hog and have two each, everyone else seems to.

Down on the salt lake it's oh so hot, 86F unlike the mountains where it's around 73F.

Drive to the farm at the other end of the island. It has some interesting exhibits and I get to try my hand at roping a cow - see picture. What the picture fails to portray is how hot the steel horse was that I sat on. Suffice it to say that testicles can be fried. Could 5 minutes on this be a new contraceptive?



Now you're probably wondering what the picture on the left is? Well it's a 1850's coral for penning cattle in. I just had to photograph it as it so reminded me of an idea that a major European company pinched to supposedly improve customer service. Actually it was nothing to do with customer service, rather the opposite of how to make life more miserable for the customer and increase profits. Now the question is can you guess the Company and what it was used for?

Some clues. I encountered it regularly when travelling around Europe and I suspect you will have. Amsterdam Schiphol airport was the best example of the misery. They're a famous European airline. They're cheap.

Well if you've not guessed by now click on the [answer](#).

Two or three new birds spotted. No doubt we'll spend the evening arguing over their classification - sad.

On the way back we pass a Walmart - now there's a surprise. So succumb to the lure of the hiking sticks (not walking sticks or zimmers) and invest in two each.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

And Now A Proper Holiday

Saturday, 10 September 2011

Saturday - sunny and warm day, with a short cloudburst in the afternoon. I just love the weather channels description "... a stray thunderstorm is possible..".

Lazy day. Wendy thinks I should buy a new pair of trainers as mine seem to be a tad bald and lacking grip. What a waste, they're only 6 years old and still have years left in them. Mind you having slid down the mountain I have to agree. \$100 buys me a great pair of waterproof, vibram soles. At this price they'd better last at least 10 years.

We have a stroll up the Canyons, complete with new vibram soles and more walking sticks than we know what to do with. After half an hour we decide to abort our mission as we can see thunder clouds rolling in.

Pop in for a coffee at the local bakery along with free samples of pumpernickel and chocolate chip along with a cinnamon and berry. Delicious, massive samples so a full afternoon tea just for the price of a coffee. Meanwhile outside there's a cloud burst and then an hour later it's back to sunshine again.

We watch a library DVD, where 3 modern American families go back and live the life of a pioneer for 5 months on a free 160 acre land claim in Montana. Biggest problems seems to be women having no make-up, tears ensue, silly bitch. Mind you lack of toilet paper also seems an issue. But just to be on the safe side they have a safety specialist around. It does make you wonder how they survived back then!

Sunday - cloudy with thunderstorms forecast but at least it's warm.

Lazy morning. Then drive up to silver lake to do a Deer Valley walk. Quite a few of the lifts are working and it's a mountain bikers heaven - think most of them are probably scum boarders in winter.

Do a short walk as we think it may rain anytime. Followed by lunch out on the closed cafe's patio. Then we visit the Stein Erikson lodge for coffee. Very pleasant, complete with live music but as to be expected very expensive - makes Starbucks look cheap.

Deer Valley number one ski resort in the US. Supposedly customer service second to none. Yet they have a sign set up pointing to the non-existent coffee shop. When I ask two employees where this coffee shop is they tell me its closed for the rest of the season. You can imagine what comes next. Oh no they can't move the sign. They're not authorised. I move it for them. Now there's empowerment for you. I really do despair.

Get back mid afternoon so finally get around to some consultancy work.

In the evening it's more West Wing. Really getting hooked on this, one of the better soaps to come out of America.

Monday - sunny with clouds, not quite as warm 68F, but it'll do. Possibility of thunderstorms so we decide to be smart and get out early as any thunder / clouds / rain usually comes mid to late afternoon. Wrong, today it's cloudier in the morning and even get a sprinkle of rain.

Have a walk and photo session around the old barn. Coffee at the base of silver star, sat in their giant armchairs out on the



patio. Hike into Park City base for lunch. Then back to do some work - somehow it's all too relaxing to work.

Pop round to Carols to sort out next years ski trip. Great deal, 31 days (avoids tax) in Randy's condo for \$2,000, same as last year. Now we need to sort out flights. I can buy my season pass for \$100 cheaper if I buy now - perhaps this year we'll do Deer Valley - Wendy likes it, very posh and no scum boarders.

Then went round to see their new home. It's fantastic, space; verandahs; walk-in wardrobes; solid hardwood everywhere; secluded neighbourhood; oak floors to die for.

Didn't realise how much sun there was today, but my follicly challenged head did.

Meanwhile today's nerdy info is the Steffan algorithm (<http://arxiv.org/abs/1108.5211>) for boarding an airplane, nearly 50% quicker than the standard block method - saves \$110million pa for typical airline. Better still one less delay / queue for passengers. Sad - I know!

Tuesday - another cloudless start to the day. Breakfast excitement as 4 fire engines turn up to the next block of condos, fire alarms going off, everyones evacuated but no smoke.

We set off to conquer Bald Mountain - nothing to do with my head. It's only a hike (note the American terminology) of 1,300 in 2.5 miles, takes us two hours. Vibram soles and two collapsable hiking poles and we're like a couple of lethargic mountain goats. I finally learn a bit of sense and let Wendy lead. At the top we find a couple of nice deck chairs for lunch with some stunning views. Mind you at 9,400 feet it's none too warm.



Nip into the Deer Valley lift pass shop and buy my discounted season pass ticket ready for February. Unfortunately I have to smile yet again for the photo but I'm like a kid with a new prized toy and insist upon wearing it for the rest of the day. \$880 for a season pass, with 4 discounted buddy passes for Wendy brings the price down to \$716. If I ski 8 days in February - I'll try hard - I'm quids in as day tickets are \$95.



At night we book the flights for February, out on the 9/2/12 and return on 9/4/12, flying with Virgin into Las Vegas. A tad more expensive but at least it's a direct flight so one less airport to contend with - has to be worth it. So thats it now I've got my all important proper holiday booked, although we haven't quite decided where we're going for the 2nd month after skiing.

Now you'll probably have gathered that we rather like it here in America but there are some things about the place that drive you to despair. Try and pump your tyres up at a garage. Costs \$1. Says the pressure gauge is on the end of the air hose. No pressure gauge at any garage. Could it be something to do with the fear of being sued if the gauge isn't properly calibrated. Then there's the excessive labour. Two guys paid at road works to hold up a sign saying "SLOW". Is this an instruction to the motorists or a comment on the dimwits who employed them because they didn't realise a static sign would do the same job?



Oh I nearly forgot, as a bonus we spot two new species of birds.



Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Kurt Qualifies As A Solicitor

Wednesday, 14 September 2011



Wednesday - a cloudy but warm day.

Catch the free bus to Park City - yes there all free, frequent and go everywhere, you can even phone up and they'll come and collect you within the next 2 hours and take you to doctors, library etc.

Walk the Rail trail down to Prospect park then back down to the old barn to pick up a bus back. A nice relaxing 2 hour walk but hot when that suns out.

Wendy's gone mad and bought a Pumpernickle and Chocolate Chip loaf from the local bakery. Very tasty for afternoon tea but best avoided.

Now I've been wondering how we did on our mountain ascent yesterday so I looked up Nasmiths rule for timing a hike. Basic rule says:

- *Allow 1 hour for every 3 miles forward, plus ½ hour for every 1000 feet of ascent.
- *The rule assumes hikers of "reasonable fitness" hiking on typical terrain, under normal conditions. In the last 115 years, several adjustments have been developed to make the Naismith rule more accurate, including:
- *add 25 or 50% to the time found with Naismith's Rule
- *when hiking on poor terrain, use 2.5 mph instead of 3 mph.

We ascended 1400 feet of poor terrain in 2.5 miles in 2 hours and descended in 45 minutes. By my reckoning our ascent should have taken - 60 minutes + (1.4 * 30 minutes) = 102 minutes plus 25% = 127 minutes. Quite impressed with our performance then.

Thursday - clear blue sky and warm.

Ascent to top of Bonanza / Home Run planned for today - Wendy's gipping out and doing the packing. Can't believe how fast this fortnight has gone and how relaxing it's been. Next two weeks are going to be a bit more hectic as we hit the road to explore 5 National Parks and more State parks than we can remember.

CONGRATULATIONS TO KURT ON QUALIFYING AS A SOLICITOR TODAY. WELL DONE, WE'RE VERY PROUD OF YOU. Just think how many people I can now sue!

Made my objective. Got to the top of Bonanza. I have to admit I did cheat a little by taking the chairlift up to mid-mountain but did the last 1200 feet on my own, only took 75 minutes. The weather was very considerate cloudy and a bit cooler on the way up, then as soon as I start back down out pops the sun. Knackering, but worth it when you get to the top, awesome views and great to see all these trails that are hidden by snow in winter. A completely





different perspective in summer. The ski runs look terrifyingly steep. Even walking up a green - beginners slope - is totally knacker.

Sat recovering at the top there you stop to think how lucky you are. All this awesome scenery; great experiences; great weather; seeing the world, well at least the civilised parts of it; do what I want when I want; my times my own. Instead I could still be working for the evil empire with retirement 4 years away! Now theres a gruesome thought.

Walk all the way back down as it's quicker than the chair.

Friday - another sunny but cool start to the day.

It's goodbye Park City, we've known 2 weeks fly by so quickly. This has to be the best place to live, fantastic skiing in winter; all those mountains; great hiking and mountain biking in summer; good weather; free bus service; lots going on; great coffee shops. Only down side is my nose thinks it's a tap when I get up in the mountains.

We'll be back in February.

Now I can let all of my blog reader, all two of them, into a valuable secret.

Wendy claims she found a gold nugget on the Daily Grind trail! Sorry not to disclose this information sooner but we didn't want a gold rush spoiling the rest of our stay.



Leave park city and drive down 2 of Americas most scenic highways. Awesome through desert then onto mountains finally arrive in Capitol reef . All the way you're being awed by the scenery and the evidence of the forces of nature on the landscape. 300 miles, an extra 100 to do the highways but well worth it.



Stop for gas (petrol) and a little old man suddenly pops out from behind the petrol pumps and starts scrubbing my car windows clean. I can see that happening in England!

I think it must be the Hells Angels Autumn teddy bears picnic judging by how many of them we see. Then we encounter a fleet of tour america mobile homes, this must be marked on their free Map.

Now as you know we usually seem to think most places in the US are pretty swish. Hanksville certainly dispels that myth. This place is a real one horse dump, more wrecked cars and debris. It's not a town, it's an above ground

landfill.

Howard Johnson Hotel very comfortable with great views fro the window - see picture on the right. We have a nice suite, best one in the house, only one major problem, you have to sit on the toilet to get wifi. Yet another place where the interior designers seem to think that people only watch TV in bed. You need a periscope to watch it from the couch (settee) - how

do these guys get and keep their jobs?

Where are we? We'll we're in Torrey on the edge of Capitol Reef National Park - awesome. There's National Park to the left, right, in front and behind. You can't take a step without coming across one.

Pop into Torrey. Not a great deal there but I'm pleased to report that the General store has over 60 different types of jerky and more fishing tackling than you need to feed 5,000.



Decide on a burger from Slackers, one of the top burger joints in Utah, Angus burger with pastrami, topped off with everything in sight, fantastic. Get my five a day all on one bun, now there's healthy eating - I'll be back. [next >](#)

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Chat to the girl serving. She's lived here all her life but never been along any of the scenic highways which probably explains why she thought that Switzerland was next to England - unbelievable how parochial some Americans are. Mind you she's a little stressed as all the recent rains making her hair curly - it does make you wonder.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Capitol Reef National Park

Saturday, 17 September 2011



Saturday - after the deluge overnight the day starts off sunny, but those stray thunderstorms are forecast for the afternoon.

Breakfast is a bun fight. Hotel's full, kids every where - not that I've anything against them, I was one myself once - fortunately there's a waffle machine, but note the singular. Not good when old mother Hubbard is in front of you feeding her brood.

Apparently there was thunder, lightning and heavy rain overnight. Didn't disturb me.

After breakfast and coffee we set off down to the Capitol Reef visitors centre. Invest in an annual National Parks pass for \$80 gives us a full years access to all 58 National Parks in the US, as well as National Monuments, Bureau of Land Management and anything beginning with the word "National" or "Bureau". Well worth it as after 3 parks it's paid for itself and Southern Utah has six NP's. California and Alaska have the most National Parks with 8 in each.

Like all NP visitor centres there is the usual highly informative video on the park, but this one has a stunning surprise in store. At the end the curtains draw back to reveal, no not a coffin slipping into a furnace, but a panoramic view through the windows of Castle Rock, awesome!

As thunderstorms are forecast we decide to take a drive down yet another scenic bye-way to Boulder, and then drive down the Burr trail. An awesome canyon trail. Visit the slot canyon on the way - see pictures.

Stop for afternoon tea and coffee in Boulder, in a quaint locals restaurant, really friendly staff; hunting party armed to the teeth, apparently they've just shot two massive Elk; great coffee and tea for that matter; Wendy tries the Blueberry cream pie, yummy.

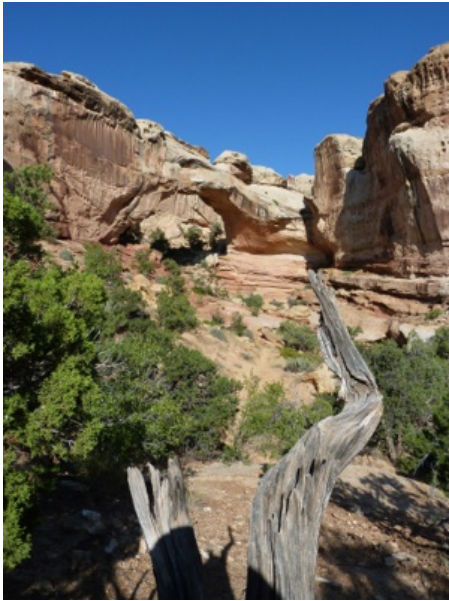
There is the odd thunderstorm and we do get a bit of rain while we're driving, but doesn't spoil the day. Makes Wendy panic though in case we're caught in another flash flood - she really should learn to Swim!

Back to the Hotel, where I enjoy a coffee in a fantastically comfortable rocking chair, in the spacious lobby with awesome (really must stop using that word and seek out some alternatives, but difficult with so many awesome views) views.

Sunday - blue sky, sun forecast and mid 70's.

Up at 07:00 as we've a a full day planned:





- ☑ hiking trailhead for 08:30 ready for a two mile hike to Hickman bridge, a breathtaking natural stone bridge;
- ☑ 3 mile Grand Wash hike, no its not a shower, but a very wide slot canyon, which becomes a raging torrent after a thunderstorm;
- ☑ visit the Fruita School House, only closed in 1941;
- ☑ visit the Gifford Homestead for a well deserved coffee and egg butties for lunch, purloined by Wendy from breakfast - passed on the freshly made fruit pies available;
- ☑ 10 mile scenic drive - very scenic - road peters out at the Burr trail we drove along the Westerly part of yesterday;
- ☑ brief walk down the Freemont river only partially achieved - blister from new trainers and steep muddy path stops play;
- ☑ drive up to Gooseneck and walk (it's only 600 feet, even I can't call it a hike) to Gooseneck point;
- ☑ Panorama point.

Then 7.5 hours later we head back to the hotel. Achieved 7 out of 8 of our objectives for the day. Yes, nerdy I know, but we have to have a plan with clearly defined objectives.

Wendy still can't cope with how Americans can desecrate tea by putting cream in it.

Back to Slackers for another burger in the evening. One way to get my 5 a day.



Well that's it for Capitol Reef, it's stunning. Glad we did it and today I think we've managed to do the highlights. Certainly makes you appreciate the power of nature. All of this was just created by time and water. It may well be a desert but we truly appreciate the dangers of flash floods in some of these canyons and their terrifying forces.

You're probably confused as to how come a desert can have so much water. Well here goes with todays useless piece of information.

Question - what is the definition of a desert?

Answer - an area where more water is lost by evapotranspiration than falls as precipitation.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Moab

Monday, 19 September 2011

Monday - clear blue sky start to the day. Early breakfast then it's goodbye Capitol Reef and off down to Moab. We take the long route, 250 miles instead of 150, but it's scenic bye-ways most of the way.

But before we move on I must comment on last night's dinner, the best burger I've ever had - see picture. Yes, it's another burger with pastrami from Slackers. I know it's boring having the same twice but the one on Friday was so good I just couldn't resist another.



Drive through Glen canyon and then stop off at Natural Bridges National Monument. Having the word National in it means it's free on our annual National Park pass. Not one but three natural bridges easily viewed from the circular scenic drive. Apparently there are loads more but these are the main three.

The extra miles were well worth it.

Arrive at the sunrise log cabin, our home for the next five days and one of my main bucket list wishes. It only looks small from the outside, but inside it's quite spacious with a mezzanine bedroom. Ideal for two. Awesome views of the mountains, complete with wrap around deck and rocking chair.

I'm in the dog house because there's no dishwasher or washing machine. How did those pioneers ever manage? Then to top it all there's no hair dryer. Oh my god how will we survive! Fortunately the wife's ok.



Tuesday - awoken to yet another clear blue sky and an appreciation of why this is called the sunrise cabin. Leisurely breakfast of buttermilk pancakes out on the deck. It's the first time it's been warm enough. Sit watching nature over breakfast, the sun coming up over the hills; the hawk sat on a telegraph pole for half an hour, takes us that long to figure it must be a Rough Legged Hawk; bunnies jumping like poggo sticks; butterflies as big as birds; all the other birds we just can't identify. End up coming inside it's so hot.

The cabins lovely, good views but road noise does spoil it. Another minor picky point is that the logs have been rough planned square. Log cabins are definitely my ideal accommodation from now on. Next one will be unfinished logs and more remote.

After a leisurely morning we set off to Dead Horse State Park. A scandalous \$10 for just one day, at least National Parks (NP) give you 7 days access. The maps an absolute disgrace, all these trails mentioned but no indication of where they start from. Then when you're on them the sign posting is a travesty. I think they'd best pack in and hand the park over to



NP as they certainly know how to do it.

Anyway have a nice hike around the rim with awesome views of the Colorado river, a frightening 2,000 feet below. The legend of Dead Horse point can be found here



<http://stateparks.utah.gov/parks/dead-horse/about>. It's in the mid 80's so after 3 hours we've had enough sun.

Drive back down to Moab and have a short walk around. It's a lovely touristy town, all very relaxing. Surrounded by 2 NP and Dead Horse point, so all very stunning. But drive South and it's like one gypsy encampment / rubbish tip / steptoes and



sons yard after enough, a stark contrast. Then to top it all I notice a UMTRA site, now theres an acronym that just trips off the tongue. Being the nerdy sort I look it up and apparently it stands Uranium mill trailings remedial action plan. Not content with above ground rubbish tips, it seems that all the waste from the Uranium mines of yester year are polluting the water table and they're trying to clear it all up. Given the amount of water you're advised to drink on the parks we'll be glowing in the dark by the time we leave.

Wednesday - another clear blue sky day and temperatures top the mid 80's again. Up early and off out to Arches

NP, got to get our moneys worth out of the pass.

Drive around the park and hike to Windows arches, Delicate arch overlook, Landscape arch, Skyline arch, Balanced rock and Park Lane. It's awesome, but oh so hot. I think we're suffering from ASF (Acute Scenery Fatigue) by now. Symptoms are speeding up and swerving to the opposite side of the road whenever you see a "Viewing Area" sign; cowering down behind the drivers seat munching on a sweat ridden hanky whenever you see an Arch; burying your head in the nearest patch of sand whenever you see a Natural bridge. We end up taking so many photos we then spend all evening deciding which to delete.



Does anyone know the difference between a natural bridge and an arch? They look very similar to me.

Seriously a truly fantastic and memorable day, a great NP. Get back to our cabin 7 hours later for a very, very welcome cold Warsteiner and watch the sun sets shadows creep over the mountains.



In the evening we finally get to book our Christmas cruise. They've not come much cheaper so we book with this US company, saves us about £300 compared to a UK company. No flights involved as we'll already be in Florida. Ideally we would have left it to the very last minute as you get some spectacular deals but Wendy really fancies a cruise over Christmas - hey ho! So its 14 days on the Norwegian Sun around the caribbean with a balcony cabin with wifi but I dread to think how much it costs per minute.



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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

More Moab, More National Parks

Thursday, 22 September 2011

Thursday - sunny, clear blue sky as usual.



Now today we start a new feature of the blog for the benefit of Honey and any other childish blog readers. Wendy's got Dusty Duck the quackiest duck (DD) who will start to feature in some of our blog photos. Your mission is to find him. We start off with a few easy ones of DD and also each blog will have a DD count which tells you how many times he appears on photos.

Up early and off to Canyon Lands NP. It's a 40 mile drive just to the park entrance. Drive down to Grand View point and do a 2 mile hike. Takes 40 minutes to drive to the other end of the park so gives you some idea of how big the park is, and this is just the Islands in the Sky section.

Have lunch at a picnic site watching chipmunks, ravens and western scrub jays, these have a fantastic blue colouring. Then set off for a 2 mile hike to view Upheaval Dome. Now there are 2 scientific theories behind it's formation. One is salt bed upheaval and the other is meteorite. Of course there could be a third, created by Disney to bring the tourists in. This hike is quite a scramble and just about within my fear of heights tolerance - thank god for the hiking pole, but both of them would have been better.

On the way back down the park we call in at the various viewpoint. Wendy's had enough of the heat, 89F, so I wonder off and do the short hikes to Green River overlook and Mesa Arc.

Canyon lands was awesome but not quite as good as Arches. It's very spread out and by comparison has fewer scenic or points of interest. A good thing you might say for anyone suffering from ASF!

Friday - hot and sunny.



Start with buttermilk pancake breakfast on the deck with awesome views over the La Sal mountain range.

Wendy chooses the itinerary for today. So it's no parks, no hikes. Instead we have a gentle stroll down Mill Creek Parkway, a pleasant creekside walk weaving it's way through the centre of Moab. Then we drive along the Colorado river to the film museum at Red Rock Lodges. It celebrates all the films made in this area.



As we're halfway down the La Sal loop we take this loop road back over the La Sal mountain range. The road rises to 10,000 feet is best described as primitive with some hairy hairpin bends and steep drops. As this is the mountain we can



see from our cabin we thought we at least owed it a visit. it's amazing to see the onward creep of Autumn as the leaves colour change moves imperceptibly down the mountain. In a few weeks this area will be awash with the colours of Autumn.



Back for a late dinner of pepperoni cheese stuffed crust pizza, a typical wishy washy

American lager and some merlot to make up for the lager.



Saturday - hot and sunny but for the first time in a week we get to see some clouds.

It's good bye Moab, but not before we've locked the cabin up with a bag of dirty laundry still left in the bedroom. As one can imagine I remain placid and calm, drive off to get some petrol whilst we hope the housekeeper will attend. So, who's fault was it? Wendy says she told me

seeing it, but then got distracted and forgot it. Wendy has the overall house check responsibility to go round and check that we've left nothing. Anyway it's a pleasant subject of conversation for a while!



Take the Inter-State route down to our next place at Hurricane. We're going to do the scenic route but we've had enough scenery for now.

Our new Pueblo style house in Hurricane is awesome - see pictures. It's out on a limb with fantastic views and not a rattle snake in sight so far.

Meet up with Kevin and Anne.



Then disaster strikes. The house is superb and has everything, apart from a hair dryer. Now we have two failed pioneer women who cannot cope with a week without a hairdryer - I struggle to comprehend what all the fuss is about, one of the few benefits of being follicly challenged.

Sunday - hot and sunny again, 96F.

We decide to have a quiet day enjoying the house and it's surrounding.

Kevin and I take a stroll around the neighbour hood, hardly a bird in site. Whilst Wendy and Anne go off to enjoy themselves and get their weekly fix at the local supermarket. Plus of course they need to buy a hairdryer!

By 13:30 Kevin's getting a bit fraught as he withers away, becoming a mere shadow of his former self, neither Anne nor Wendy have left him any lunch - I blame the influence of all these modern women. Things get so desperate that Kevin starts rampaging around the kitchen, even contemplates making his own lunch, but then spots some food in the form of a juicy lizard - what on earth is the world coming to?



Afternoon is spent by all longing around the plunge pool and enjoying the shade.

DD count = 4

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Zion Park - Again

Monday, 26 September 2011



Monday - sunny, clear blue sky as usual.

Off to Zion Park, my favourite. Catch the bus up and do the Riverside walk, quite shaded and cool; visit Weeping Rock; lunch down at the visitors centre; the do the Pyrus Walk, well at least some of us do, Wendy and Anne catch the bus half way down as it is too hot (95F). But alas no chance to sit in my favourite rocking chairs with a coffee and watch the mountains go by. Never mind perhaps next time.

Watch a couple climbing - typical he's up top, the anchor,

pulling her up up.

On the way home we decide to call at a liquor store in Hurricane. Well that's a loose interpretation. It's actually 11 miles out of Hurricane, suitable hidden near the I15 off ramp. Advertising and signs, don't be silly the Mormons don't want you to know it's there. Anyway our intrepid determination - not that we have any alcoholics in the car - finally pays off. Now you may think that's ridiculous but actually we're told how lucky we are as up to 3 months ago we would have had to cross the state line into Arizona or go to St George.



What is it with religions and Mormons? Why do they have to impose their views on everyone. I don't try and stop them doing their thing. And what happened to the 3rd article of the Bill of Rights

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Isn't limiting the sale of alcohol respecting the Mormon religion. It certainly isn't respecting my rights to freedom of alcoholic consumption!



Tuesday - sunny and hot again.

Easy day today. Starts with a leisurely morning followed by a trip into St George. Visit the shopping Malls. In true American fashion we drive from store to store. No chance of walking as we don't have enough shoe leather to cover the distances.

Then it's a trip to Brigham Young's winter residence. All very interesting and a pleasant free tour. But in typical religious hierarchy how the top knobs do live.

On the way back Wendy has her usual trip to the local medical centre. I keep telling her that Dr Kildire is just a myth.

Wednesday - sunny and hot again.

It's off to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. A 130 mile drive. It's so dam vast. Save another \$25 with the park pass. Have a very leisurely picnic lunch on the deck of the Lodge - see pictures - can you believe its free and they don't mind you bringing your own butties.

Then do some strolls down to the viewing platform, do not like those drops.

Have a drive around the view points.

Rewarded with two sitings of a California Condor.

After a long, but rewarding day, and 300+ miles arrive back to a cool beer and some wine, no thanks to the Mormons.



Thursday - more sun and hot.

Drive over the mud road - now tarmac - to Bryce Canyon. Spectacular hoodos yet again, but after a while you do get fed up with them.

Come back the scenic route to I15 to pick up a glimpse of Cedar Breaks - a mini version of Bryce Canyon. By now Kevin has a fevered brow as he lets the car roll down the hills to conserve the fumes the cars running on with only an eighth of a tank of petrol. This is not the place to run out as it's miles from anywhere. Finally find a lone 24 * 7 petrol pump in Brian Head. Great

example of the American way of exploiting supply and demand with a 20% premium.

A long day but some spectacular scenery.

But no day would be complete without a "nip into the supermarket". Here we meet your typical American 17 year girl who has lived here all her life; has only visited one park, she thinks; not even sure whether she's visited Zion, on her doorstep; worse still not even aware of some of them - how typically sad.

Just a hint on locating liquor stores, we notice that the Mormons seem to have a liking to place them near the interstate inter-section - keeps the truckers well oiled! I've noticed a niche in the book market for a rough guide to liquor store locations in Utah. Whilst it will no doubt be invaluable to normal, healthy, alcoholic traveller I can't see it running to many pages - there few and far between.





Friday - more heat and sun.

Wendy and Anne are suffering from ASF (Acute Scenery Fatigue) and are rocked out, so they decide to have a female bonding day in doing what women like best ironing, cleaning and packing.

While Kevin and I have a male bonding day and venture into the great outdoors to explore Kolob Canyon - back entrance to Zion. Now I've visited all of Zion. More awesome scenery and meet yet more Americans

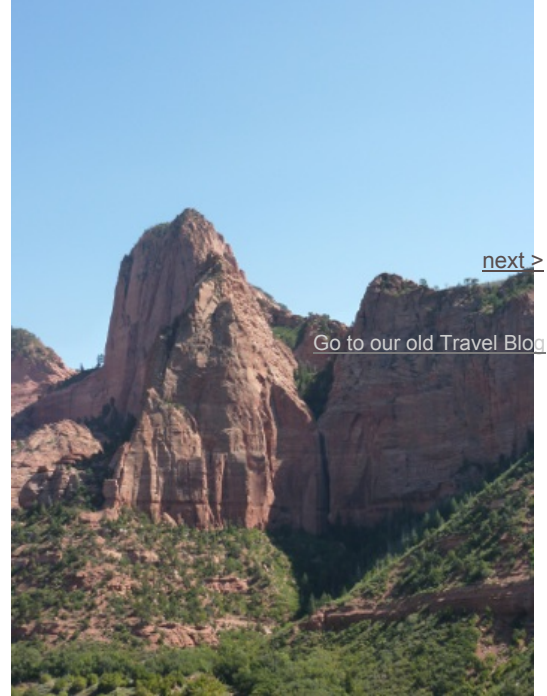
who seem totally unaware of the awesome parks and landscapes that surround them. Have a pleasant walk up to the viewpoint followed by the usual lavish picnic, well in my case a plum. Fortunately Kevin's been provided with a hamper full of food (mind you no Smarties), good job or else I could see me ending up like a member of the Donner party - Americas first attempt at fast food.

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Evening sees Wendy back down to the Saw Bones to see how her blood pressures going - probably a side effect of being married to me. Followed by a sumptuous meal of beans on toast - how we do live.

DD Count = 1.



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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Return to Sedona

Saturday, 1 October 2011

Friday - another sunny day.



It's goodbye Cliffdwellers at hurricane. A great week, only regret is we didn't get more time in Zion Park. I so wanted to sit in the rocking chairs at the lodge and watch the mountains go by, but it just didn't happen. Perhaps I should have listened to Wendy - right as usual - and passed on a trip to Bryce. Bryce is awesome but one trip in a lifetime is probably enough.

Drive down to Oak Creek Village, about 300 miles. More awesome views on the way, it's all so vast.

Now this is what I call weird - see picture. Must be shipping

instant coffee to Starbucks!



On the way we stop at a lovely park for lunch. We watch family blobby get out their car and rather than walk an extra 10 feet to the path, Ma and Pa stride over the lovely flower beds, knocking the plants as they go. And of course the young kids follow their parents example. Yes, there are scoots over here to.

Arrive at Oak Creek to our new home for a month on Horse Ranch road. It's fantastic. Awesome views over Bell Rock and Court house;

lovely two bedroom house, massive and well equipped; great patio and pond; two dogs also. Awesome! PS Wendy's a tad upset that there's no wardrobe space in the 2nd bedroom and Anne can't find the ironing board. Good wifi, what more can you want.



Sunday - hot and sunny, but the clouds do gather in the afternoon, no rain though.

It's Anne and Kevins wedding anniversary. Annes being mythering all week about an eye pad and we just can't understand why. But Kevin won't buy her



one, so we nip to the pharmacy and treat her to one for her anniversary, not to forget a bag of Smarties for Kevin - see picture.

Breakfast on the patio. Those views are just awesome. Leisurely morning, Wendy and Anne get their weekly excitement with a trip to the local



supermarket, Kevin and I take a walk into Oak Creek and experience the delights of the Red Rock cafe. Sadly coffees a tad more expensive this year and there's no guitar player strumming away, but at least there's still free wifi. A great place to people watch and observe the world going by. Two hours and too much coffee later the wives finally emerge from the



supermarket and pick us up.

Afternoon we drive into Sedona and watch the Indian (red variety) hoola-hoop dancing. Although on the way in I have to say the bikini clad young girl waving a piece of cardboard advertising chilli was a tempting diversion.



Have a pleasant stroll around Sedona, all the spiritual mumbo jumbo vortex merchants are still going strong. They obviously make money at this so there must be a goodly percentage of dingbats who believe these charlatans - takes all sorts. It's a typical tourist town, 90% of the shops selling things that nobody needs nor even wants - what a cynical view.

Finish the afternoon off with coffee - yet again - in the Wildflower Cafe. Free wifi, free bread samples; free awesome views; great coffee and free top ups. Very civilised.

Meanwhile, let's consider what's happened to the English language. I saw a sign on the roadside saying "Do Not Pass". Now being an upright member of society I was very tempted to stop, but thought it might be rather a long time before someone came along and dug the sign up to allow me to proceed, so I have to confess I ignored it. What is wrong with saying "No Overtaking". Oh I know too many letters!



But to be scrupulously fair I have to say that "Yield" does seem so much better than our "Give Way".

Has anyone seen Wendy's dongle? She can't decide whether it's mislaid or she forgot to bring it!



Monday (we think - not seen East Enders for over a week so we're not sure) - hot and sunny to start but with clouds and rumbles of thunder by tea time but still nice and warm.

Day starts with a visit from the two golden retrievers for a bit of fuss, which usually involves plenty of tummy tickling, with serious upset if one gets more attention than the other.

We're off up to Flagstaff to try and get a haversack, pair of shorts and look at a new camera. Complete waste of time we fail on all three counts, but at least have a pleasant lunch in historic Flagstaff.

We also witness more evidence of the charlatans around here with a shop advertising "aura cleansing" and "chakra



balancing". What the hell is it? How do you know if your auras clean, do you glow in the dark? Who pays for this? How come they're not prosecuted?

Tuesday - rain clouds, a tad cooler and it rains. The heavens open up for some brief showers. We have a day around the house and I do some real paid

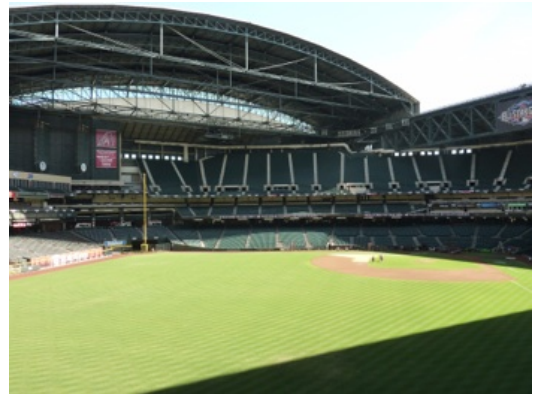
work.

Wednesday - forecast in Sedona is for clouds and possible rain. A good day to visit Phoenix, where its hot (85 F) and sunny. Shuffle around in the heat and eventually even find the tourist info office. Typical big American city; massive sky scrapers; very clean and pleasant, surprisingly little traffic, need a 2nd mortgage just to park; not really much to see but we do manage to find



the historic district, about 5 houses all of a hundred years old. Then have a very pleasant lunch at a restaurant in the baseball stadium with great views

over the stadium. Only in America would you get a baseball stadium with a swimming pool inside it. Hire the pool and you can have a cooling dip while you watch the game - this is Phoenix after all, a tad hot.



Visit the Wells Fargo museum. It's free. And one day after the launch of the iPhone 4S we get to see the iPhone 0 back from 1870 - see picture.

Driving out we encounter one of those ugly cars. Then to top it all Anne declares she thinks they're quite cute. That's it we're surrounded by the dam things. I'm sure they must have sensed the extremely rare aura of someone liking them - unbelievable! No the picture on the left isn't the ugly mobile, rather it's state of the art equivalent Mercedes from the 1870's.

Then to finish the day we can overhear Kevin singing in the shower - worrying, what is the world coming to. I should add we're not in the shower with him.

Thursday - a bit of a miserable day again, Belthorny. But it picks up and there is only really a 10% chance of rain according to the American weather forecast - if you can believe that accuracy.

Pack up a sumptuous lunch in the cool box, gear up and drive the whole 2 miles to our hike. Pleasant walk round Bell Rock and Courthouse and its ideal walking weather. Unfortunately we then make the fatal mistake of going to a supermarket. Kevin and I are told to get



lost, thank god, so we promptly do and wander off in search of a coffee shop.

Now I know I'm constantly banging on about empowerment and today we had a classic example. Can't find a coffee shop so we pop into the garage. Got two coffees, went to pay, nice lady says "have a nice day" and won't accept payment. We finally recover from the shock and twig that she's giving it us free, must have felt sorry for us. Now there's empowerment in action.

DD Count = 2.



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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Sedona

Friday, 7 October 2011

Friday - a sunny but cool day.



Drove down Verde School Road and did the walk around Cathedral Rock and then down to Red Rock Crossing. As picturesque as ever.

Saturday - weathers getting back to normal 70's and blue sky.

Obi-Wan Kenobi Knees (Wendy) wants to go to the Camp Verde celebration day. What a cracking good day. A great parade; cookery demo with dutch ovens, just up my street; a 1870's fashion show; a 1870's game of baseball;



Cavalry drills; infantry drill; a fun fair; lots of historical events to explore; free coffee; lots of great friendly people to talk to. And to top it all I get to sample three culinary delights of Kettle Corn; Pork Rind an acquired taste, not for wimps - mind you I did have some difficulty even giving it away; Corn Dog, now there was a surprise as I didn't realise there was a Frankfurter in the middle. Needless to say my travelling companions, including Obi-Wan Kenobi Knees, demurred from trying it and made many derogatory remarks - wimps!



You have to admire small town America. Fantastic communities. Very patriotic. Good family values. Health and safety would make a parade in the UK a nightmare of red tape. Then if we celebrated our troops bravery we have weirdos protesting and I'm sure we'd have the do gooders and politically correct brigade on the rampage.



Where have we gone so wrong.

Well done Obi-Wan Kenobi Knees, a great choice.

Return to a 5:00 beer; visit from family Quail; visit from a Heron, mind you he did leave the goldfish in our pond alone; and flying instructor Kevin trying to teach two Siamese cats to fly!

Sunday - sunny but a bit cooler - 65F.



Quiet day in doing some real work. It's just lovely to enjoy this fabulous house and the awesome views.

Monday - sunny and getting back to normal temperatures 75F.



Its wheely bin day here - yes they're a worldwide blot on the landscape. Mind you its somewhat different over here. Big truck as per the UK, but there the similarity ends. One man not 4 or 5. He stays in the cab and all of a sudden, as if by magic, the wheely bin flies in the air over the truck and dumps its load. Then I finally see how its done. Metal arm comes out from the truck and scoops up the bin. How very efficient, but then again its a private refuse collection service. Mind you he does manage to destroy the image by not releasing the bin and driving 20



feet down the road with the wheely bin dragging on the floor. Wrecks one wheel and severely damages the rest of the bin. Perhaps things are the same over here after all.

Drive out to Tuzigot National Monument. Note the word National, means free admission with out National Park Pass. Another \$10 saved, the original \$80 paid has saved us well over \$100 so far. Plus it's valid for a whole year and there are more parks down in Florida to explore.



Then drive up to Jerome, an old copper mining town that now seems to exist as tourist magnet full of arty farty shops selling stuff, along with the occasional ghost walk.

Driving out we were stopped at the road works and the red flag passed to me as the last car on the one-way - see picture. I have to hand it to the guy at the other end who can then allow the other lane through. A simple but effective token system, mind you radio controlled traffic lights would



have saved two men. I think last time I felt this proud I was milk monitor in junior school.

Anyway back to Tuzigot. Not a great deal there but you do get an impression of how the native indians lived. Also discovered a new pottery technique of paddle and anvil - worth investigating further.



Then drive up to Jerome. Old copper mining town now turned into a tourist trap full of arty farty shops selling nothing anybody needs and in most cases nothing anybody would want.

On the way back join the local library, pick up a couple of cowboy films that were filmed around here.

Tuesday - sunny and getting warmer.

Drove up to the North East of Sedona. Never been to this area before yet its another Sedona, very beautiful.



alk but it was a tad hot. By the end of the heat. There's a whole load of canyons and walks to explore up here. Wendy's really excited!

Now we've just read or 89 things to do in Sedona. Will we really have enough time to do them all? Mind you must have been written by a real marketing numpty. Number 33 was master the rules of how to negotiate a



round about - incredible, mind you most Americans do not seem to understand these new fangled inventions.

Wednesday - hot and sunny.

Up at the crack of dawn, yes I do mean the crack. Out at 07:20 to catch the 08:00 bird walk in Red Rock State Park. Fantastic 18 different birds spotted, 9 of them being new ones to tick off in our Eye Spy Bird book.

Page Springs Restaurant for lunch, yes they do eventually serve food there but no signs of birdlife down the creek.



Thursday - hot and sunny.

Set off early, to avoid the midday sun, up to West Fork. Obviously need to get up earlier as by the time we arrived the car park was full.

It's a stunning 6 mile hike down a stream, criss crossing the stream and canyon wall towering either side. Not a place to be during or after a rain storm. Awesome trees just trying their Autumn colours, some really stunning reds. Certainly not a bird haven. Finally arrive at the end of the canyon walk. There's no End or Stop sign; no Starbucks or MacDonaldis; just a river in a canyon and the only way on is to walk the river - just like the narrows.

DD Count = 1.





Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

How To Sex A Vortex

Friday, 14 October 2011

Friday - a hot sunny day - 92F.



Have a drive over to Prescott, home of the Worlds oldest rodeo. Unfortunately not on this time of year.

Pleasant lunch in the town square / park followed by a visit to the saloon for coffee. Wendy's accosted by a Colt 45 totting cowboy complete with spurs - see picture. Yes the guns real, along with real bullets - only in Arizona. He gives us the history of the place and then proceeds to tell us about his tartan he wears and his trip to Edinburgh. Kindly takes us in the saloon and settles us down into some comfy seats. Then tells his mates about us, so the Colt 45 totting sheriff wanders over to tell the Brits all about the saloon. In its heyday it offered a one stop shop where you could get drunk on anything from red eye to beer, unlike Utah; get fleeced at cards or roulette; get a haircut in the barber shop; get a tooth pulled; get shot; even get laid by one of the two working girls on 24 * 7 duty. Allegedly Doc Holiday won \$10,000 and Wyatt Earp frequented the place!

Of course no trip to a town would be complete without a browse around yet another typically empty, of shoppers that is, mall.

Now if you've ever been held up by a school bus, heaven forbid you should pass one while it disgorges its load of little darlings you'll probably notice how totally unaware the little darlings are of traffic. They just wander across the road, chatting and on their mobiles without a glance at the traffic. No wonder American adults just wander across the roads without looking, its part of the inevitable evolution into traffic unaware adults.

Saturday - hot and sunny again - 90F.

Out early for the 08:00 bird walk at Red Rock State Park. A great experience as always. Three more new birds to add to the Eye Spy bird list, including a fantastic pair of American Kestrels.

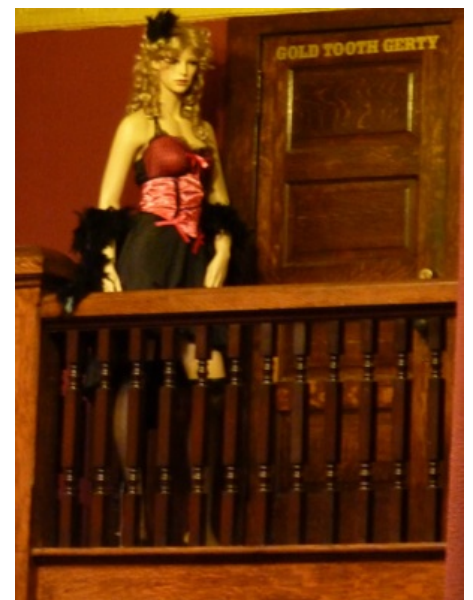


Then it's a local craft fair, pick up some fresh bagels and grind some fresh Sumatra coffee. This is the life. No wonder everyone's so happy.

Leisurely afternoon around the house. In true Blue Peter fashion we make a bird feeder out of a coke bottle.

Move into the master bedroom as

Anne and Kevin have left today. Awesome views of Courthouse and Bellrock; a



shower you can hold a dance in, complete with three shower heads, don't ask why; a king sized bed that's so high you need crampons and oxygen to get into it, and run serious risk of decapitation from the ceiling fan; a giant jacuzzi bath that takes a week to fill; adzed oak floor to die for.

Roundabouts are lethal. Another close shave with a numpty who has no concept of how a roundabout works or even a ten year olds understanding of the word yield. They should be No 1 on the "what to do in Sedona" list. In fact there should be a test before you're allowed in.

Sunday - hot and sunny again.

Now this place is a real birders paradise. After awakening to the stunning views from bed, of the sun rising on Courthouse rock we realise that in future we'll need binoculars and camera on the bedside table in order to catch the early morning bird activity - sad I know. But we lay in bed watching a blue Heron stalk its prey and very patiently but cautiously head towards the goldfish in the pond. Then we have the pleasure of a common black hawk swooping across the horizon like a jet fighter.



After a leisurely morning Wendy tootles off to the supermarket for her weekly fix. While I sit outside on the deck doing some real work. What a place to work, warm; sunny; lovely garden; awesome views of the red rocks all around; pond with an artificial stream bubbling down; birds all around; butterflies; two dogs bathing in the pond; great Sumatra coffee; and of



course wifi.

Later in the day, thinking it might be a bit cooler, we tackle the Baldwin trail. It was still in the 85's F. Need a new strategy.

It's a lovely place we're staying at but it does have some quirks. There's more cupboards and draws than you could fill in a lifetime, but not a single handle on any of them - weird.

Monday - hot and sunny.

Drive down to the V Bar V ranch to see the petroglyphs - that's just another name for ancient graffiti. All very sacred. Now this is really not something I could normally get excited about but the guy (volunteer) there giving the talk was amazing. All very interesting. Especially when you consider these ancient indian tribes - Sinagua - had calendars on the rocks - they didn't need Eastenders to know the day of the week.

After the talk we have a picnic down by the creek, followed by a lazy afternoon.

More roundabout madness, it's just a nightmare. No wonder they publish leaflets. There's obviously a golden business opportunity for "Roundabout Training".

By teatime I've had enough relaxation so go and do the Mystic trail for a bit of exercise, Wendy passes. Trails vortex free.



Tuesday - hot and sunny.

New regime starts today. Up early and out by 09:00 to beat the midday heat - typically 90F. Drive up to Dead Mans Pass for a walk.



Then pop into the Wild Flower for lunch. Well Wendy has lunch I make do with bottomless coffee cup and free wifi. Wendy tootles off to “look at the shops” - fortunately I’m excluded from this activity, sad!

As I’m not sure what a Healing Vortex is I pop into the shop to see. Interrogate this hippy looking geezer. So here’s “The Idiots Guide To Vortexes”.

The vortexes in Sedona are swirling centers of subtle energy

coming out from the surface of the earth. The vortex energy is not exactly electricity or magnetism, although it does leave a slight measurable residual magnetism in the places where it is strongest.

There are four main energy vortexes in Sedona. The subtle energy that exists at these locations interacts with who a person is inside. The energy resonates with and strengthens the Inner Being of each person that comes within about a quarter to a half mile of it. This resonance happens because the vortex energy is very similar to the subtle energy operating in the energy centers inside each person. If you are at all a sensitive person, it is easy to feel the energy at these vortexes.

Juniper trees respond to the vortex energy in a physical way that reveals where this energy is strongest. The stronger the energy, the more of an axial twist the Juniper trees have in their branches. Instead of going straight down the branch, the lines of growth follow a slow helical spiral along the length of the branch. This spiraling effect can sometimes even bend the branch itself.



Can it heal my pain in the knee? Well it “may” help!

How much would one of these Healing Vortex sessions cost? About \$60. But no guarantees of a fix.

Oh and by the way we need to go to a male vortex. God knows how you tell the sex of a vortex. Unless of course it depends whether it’s clockwise or anti-clockwise. Is it different in the Southern hemisphere? Any body has an answer please email me.

I’ll stay \$60 richer. Bunch of charlatans. How do they get away with it?

I think I’ll have a photograph taken of my aura instead!

Wednesday - hot and sunny.

Out early again and up to the Jordan Trail. More stunning views. Somehow we manage to get lost, apparently it’s not a circular trail and despite popular belief there isn’t a MacDonalds or Starbucks at the end of each trail. This is the wilderness.

Afterwards we decide to call in at the Sedona Memories Bakery & Cafe. This place is amazing. The guy who runs it, fat slob slouched in the corner, only contribution seems to be rude to customer. He’s obviously created a whole new business model and paradyne shift in customer service levels. Surely he’ll end up on the front page of Time magazine before long. The place is aptly named - Sedona Memories - once visited you’ll never forget it. So lets give you a hint of some of his customer care and management philosophies. Only open rarely; even when you’re open leave the closed sign up; ensure

that staff have an aggressive tone when speaking to customers; ensure that coffee machine is broken so that the cafe can't serve coffee; you want to buy the bread on display in the bakery, slobby tells customers that's for sandwiches not for selling; one of the only shops in Sedona not to accept any credit cards - cash only. I'm sure if we hadn't walked out in disgust we would have been able to tease out some more of his hidden secrets. Don't go there.

Meanwhile we've been here nearly three weeks and still not experienced one of the many vortices swirling around - could it be my lack of sensitivity? Nor have we seen a rattle snake or a road runner, but did see a dead coyote, so perhaps road runner finally won!



For Honey and the older children frittering away their employees bandwidth the DD Count for this blog is 2.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Our New Scarfs Keep Us Cool

Thursday, 20 October 2011

Thursday - a hot sunny day - 92F.



No early walk today we're off to Out Of Africa - yes a zoo, Wendy's quite excited!

First encounter is with some snake fanatics. Just to show willing we both overcome our dread and try one on as a scarf - see pictures. Well done Wendy. Fortunately they're well fed - only need 1 rabbit every two weeks - so don't see us as there next nosh up. May well keep you cool on a hot day but they're quite heavy and would be no use on our morning walks. Perhaps if we're ever lucky enough to encounter a rattler we can one of them instead!

I suppose the zoo lives up to expectations of a local zoo, full of imaginary animals - mind you it was in the 90's so the animals probably had more sense than the punters and kept out of the heat.



Interesting white tiger splash display where they repeatedly con this white tiger into making spectacular leaps into a pool, not before it had marked its territory by having a small but well aimed slash onto each pole. Amazing it had any left.



Main animals seemed to be an excess of lions, tigers and white tigers.

School bus ride - yes now we know what its like to be an American child and totally oblivious to traffic - around the Serengeti was good. As you get on the bus they gave us all some carrot - just like being on an American Airlines flight for lunch. Started to eat mine but apparently it was for the animals. Some fantastic close encounters with a lonely sex starved giraffe who seemed to want to practice deep throat with its tongue on anyone who gave it a slither of carrot - what a tart.

Amazing close up encounters with other animals and I have to say it made the day.

Now just a warped observation but the ratio of blobbies - humans that is - at the zoo seemed out of all proportion to the normal you encounter over here. Is there some innate attraction between blobbies and animals, or do they just see them as a potential source of calories?

Talking of blobbies, afterwards we drive up to Johnny Rockets at the local casino for a cholesterol special and of course the casinos full of maniacs feeding the slots. Again interesting the ratio of blobbies, mind you they all have massive biceps on their right arm, apart of course from the lazy ones on the button press slots. I have to say it was a fantastic chilli burger, got the endorphins and sweat flowing, along with a great old fashioned strawberry milk shake.



Friday - yes you guessed it hot and sunny again - 88F.

Up early and out for 09:00 - new regime, proves this isn't a holiday.

Tackle the Wilson Canyon trail up Oak Creek. Very pleasant but views aren't quite as good as usual. Fortunately this walk has a sign saying end of trail, now there's a good idea - mind you a Starbucks would be better.

Afternoon spent leisurely around the house.

Every 3rd shop around here seems to be some New Age charlatan mumbo jumbo. Still if you can't beat them perhaps we should join them. I'll declare my Zen garden the centre of the Belthorn vortex, that should put Belthorn on the tourist map. Vortex could swirl up from the centre of my standing stone; Wendy could do entrails readings; I could do PC based aura photographs and aura cleansing (would I need to wear yellow rubber gloves?); Fiona could do hippy hairstyling and tribal face painting; perhaps we could persuade Pat and Kim to do barbecued magpies and starlings; I'm sure we could find someone on the Mount to grow some magic mushrooms - hmmm, now there's a challenge; and Kurt could defend us from false representation claims.



Oh and remember that mumbo jumbo about vortices twisting Juniper trees. Well turns out the Juniper tree twists the world over. No one seems to know why though.

Saturday - hot and sunny.

Up at the crack of dawn for the 08:00 bird walk. Bit disappointing this time as there's no new birds for our Eye Spy Birds book. Mind you we do get to see a Javalina. Its not a coffee plant, looks like a wild boar and is actually a

member of the rat family - bloody big rat and can be quite dangerous when it's young are around.

However make up for it on the way out of the park as we see a Ferruginous Hawk and a Boat Tailed Grackle.

On the way back through Sedona we call in at an Indian market that's sprung up. Just like Provence you can't go anywhere without a bloody market. Mind you there's some superb free entertainment - or at least it was free to us as the tip collector never caught us. Indian music, dancing and of course hoola-hoops - see pictures.



Then drive down to Red Rock crossing and have a lavish picnic by Oak Creek with Cathedral Rock as a backdrop - no John Wayne galloping by though.

Now I know I keep going on about the roundabouts here but they are a life threatening buggers muddle. I don't think even the police understand them. There's a major tailback driving into Sedona and there they are at a round about directing traffic. Do they not understand they're self regulating.



Out early to do Little Horse and Llama trail. By the end of it Wendy's absolutely wilting.

Meet a mountain bike safety patrol guy. Just like a ski patroller, with red cross tee shirt, only he's on a mountain bike and wearing more body armour than robo-cop. Apparently

there's 10 of them, all volunteers.

Interesting guy to talk to and even get a free sample of peanut butter dog bone for Lexi. Apparently none of the local trust the roundabouts as there are so many visitors who are clueless about how they operate.

Leisurely afternoon and do some work testing on the patio, while Wendy enjoys herself with her weekly supermarket fix - these women have it so easy!

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Sorry kiddies no DD on these pictures.



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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Clouds At Last

Monday, 24 October 2011

Monday - first time in a long while we see some clouds and those stray thunderstorms may pop up after lunch, but it's still 85F. Over breakfast the cry woodpecker, woodpecker goes up and we dash around like headless rattlers looking for camera and binoculars. Yes it's truly sad when we get so excited, but it turns out to be an Acorn Woodpecker yet another entry in our Eye Spy Bird application on the iPhone.



Meanwhile our investment in bird seed is paying dividends and lots more birds now infest the garden much to the delight of the two resident cats. Our species count in the garden is 18, whilst our American species count now runs at 122.

Sadly none of the birds have yet tackled our home made, Blue Peter award winning, bird feeder.

Off out early to do the Fey Canyon trail. A lovely walk among the trees along a dry canyon, and we even get to see some birds. Mind you a party of cackling female homo-sapiens probably manages to frighten away most birds and hikers for that matter.

Tuesday - for the first time we wake up to clouds, are we back in Belthorn already?

Off out on the Huckaby trail. Bump into John - our resident bird walker - on the trail. Turns out he does Friends of the Forest trail walks 3 days a week; guide at Montezuma Castle 2 days; bird walk 1 day; and it's all voluntary.

Great walk even though we have two rain spells of about 3 minutes all of 94 drops. It's a moderate 5 mile walk, probably the most strenuous we've been on. Hardly a moan or groan from Wendy, mind you it's only 70F so she's not wilting. Miss



the last quarter mile as the stepping stones over Oak Creek are submerged. Like all the walks around here there amazing, varied and awesome new vistas every 200 yards.

I've also finally learnt it's best to let Obi-Wan Kenobi be the point person on our walks, not only does she spot more birds than

me but it also saves me walking along a mile ahead, ch-unerring away and wondering why I'm getting no response.

Return back to the ranch for 14:00 and the heavens open up for half an hour and then it's over.



Wednesday - well it's a true Belthorn day today - 55F. The heavens just open up most of the morning and just like everything in America the rain just has to be bigger. Good job we're not walking as there will be some serious flash



floods out there. Even the dry gulch at the back of our garden is gushing.

Wendy puts the heating on - just like home.

We've even seen people wearing coats today, now that's a first. It's all good preparation for our return to Belthorn, helping us acclimatise - oh how we're looking forward to it!



So it's a day in. Get some serious work done in the morning.

Today's tip on living longer. Live in a bungalow. It's true. Einstein's theory of General Relativity predicts that time runs more slowly in strong gravity, so you grow old more slowly living in a bungalow than in a skyscraper: being closer to the ground, you are in marginally stronger gravity.

Hertz Mobile has a "Maint Req" light on. Ring up a nice Hertz call centre on their emergency help line where a nice lady's first question is "are you safe". Told to swap my Hertz Mobile out at the local Hertz.

Thursday - back to clear blue skies but temperature's down in the upper 60's. Really preparing us for Belthorn. Great walking weather.



In view of all the rain we decide to avoid any dry creeks today so we do the Airport Loop hike. It's 3.5 miles and must be the best walk in Sedona for views of most of the major red rocks. Every 200 yards reveals another awesome vista. Mind you the first half of the walk has some rather precipitous edges and drops. Just about the limit of my tolerance for heights, thank god for a walking pole.



Call in at Hertz. Tell them there is a problem. Again "are you both ok?" - is this the new Hertz customer care mantra? No problem sir, they swap our car for a SUV (All wheel drive for us Brits). They tell me it's not a big one it's only a top of the range GMC Acadia SLT - one hell of a president's circle upgrade. "Not big", I know it's a relative term but they obviously have no comprehension of the word. It's big; need a step ladder to get in it; 7 seater; big enough for us to live in; all leather luxury; reversing camera; I think the radio must be satellite; Bose surround sound system; climate control for each seat; everything's electric, even the tailgate. Dread to think how many gallons per mile it needs, but it's one hell of an experience to drive - sheer unadulterated luxury and excess.

Well done Mr Hertz all very slick and professional, as usual. Not very often I get the chance to be complimentary these days but credit where credits due they really are the best.

Relaxing afternoon sat in the sun with a good book - Kindles on the blink.

Now what is it about all this political correctness. We're watching BBC where the word "handicap" is described as politically incorrect. So what's the new word? How long before it becomes politically incorrect? Will they eventually run out of

politically correct words or do they eventually recycle words? So will “cripple” ever come back into fashion? I think its about I started a “Reject Correctness” (RC) campaign. I’ve no wish to offend anyone - other than these politically correct nutters, lunatics, weirdos and do gooders,they deserve all they get - but how can words become politically incorrect. From now on I’m on a mission to flaunt the politically incorrect. I’m sure I’ll have a field day when I get back in Blackburn - home of the politically correct mafia.

Join the RC campaign and fight political correctness.

PC Terms:

Died - “failed to fulfil his / her wellness potential”

PC Christmas Wish:

“Please accept with no obligation, implied or implicit my best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral celebration of the winter solstice holiday, practiced within the most enjoyable traditions of the religious persuasion or secular practices of your choice, with respect for the religious/secular persuasions and/or traditions of others, or their choice not to practice religious or secular traditions at all”

Sorry kiddies no DD on these pictures.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Wot No Road Runner

Friday, 28 October 2011

Friday - clear blue skies again and mid 60's. Great walking weather.



The geezer on the left is Kokopelli - not a footballer - but an Indian (red type) god of fertility.

He carries unborn children on his back and distributes them to women, for this reason, young girls often fear him. In his domain over agriculture, Kokopelli's flute-playing chases away the winter and brings aboutspring.

Originally he was show with a giant phallus but the PC brigade got rid of that in modern images - it may offend.

Rumour has it that originally he was a flute playing travelling salesman who travelled to the Southwest from the North. He brought goods in sacks slung across his back and got many women in the family way.



As I can't find an Eagle ring, despite it being the national emblem, I have now adopted kokopelli, without the giant phallus, as the stamp for all my pottery - assuming I ever get time to do some. So gone is the Eagle.

Unbelievable reward this morning for early risers. There's a Sharp Shinned Hawk sat on the tree outside our bedroom. Some may say sad, but it's awesome - don't worry yea who mock it will come to you all.

Out early to do the Dawa and Arizona Cypress trail. Not one of the best walks, sorry hikes.

For lunch we have coffee at the Red Rock Cafe and of course Obi-Wan Kenobi has to have some food.

RC Campaign. See this Un-PC sign outside my favourite coffee shop in Oak Creek Village. Seems like I'm not alone.

When will the word "disabled" become Un-PC?



PC definition of fat - enlarged physical condition caused by a completely natural genetically-induced hormone imbalance. Of course, this is very difficult to say in one breath-- so people will find it easier to not say it at all. The term "fat" is simply too short and to direct. It all too clearly points out that the reason that an obese person's skin appears so swollen is because it is being buttressed by large amounts of... well... Fat. I suppose blobby is totally un PC!

Tonight its a Mexican take away for dinner. Massive Burrito and Chimichanga, with an excess of shredded beef - no wonder over 33% are obese.

Saturday - sunny yet again 70F.

Acorn Woodpeckers back again, right on the tree outside our bedroom.

Our bird seeds are certainly pulling in the birds - feathered kind. Even get a Finch on our home made feeder, mind you it's not quite figured out that there's food in there. Perhaps I'll have to give my Blue Peter badge back. There's a regular rhythm to the day. About 08:00 they all congregate in the garden; lunch time and afternoons tend to be quiet; teatime birds are back and the Quail migrate across the gulch to our garden. We've now seen 19 different species just in the garden.



We're getting close to the end of our stay. Mind you we could easily stay another month and live in this giant SUV.

Spotted more crank shops, this time it's a UFO shop.

We tackle the Jim Thompson trail up to Midgely bridge and back. Just more awesome views, a geat hike - yes Americans hike we walk.

Roundabouts again. Some bitch in a jeep is pipping me to go when there are cars on the roundabout - how I wish I had a Colt 45 - a quicker solution than the coliseum or the wall. They really

don't understand.

As it's our last visit to Sedona we pop into Wildflower for lunch. Well coffee for me, but yet again Obi-Wan Kenobi can't resist the Turkey, Cranberry walnut stuffing, cranberry sauce, crispy bacon on stuffing bread, oh by the way it's a sandwich.

Get back early afternoon and have a leisurely afternoon with a book admiring the awesome views and bird watching.

Then at the corkscrew hour I crack open a great bottle of war starter (Warsteiner), and the Quail family start their daily trek.

PC time - Why do men find it difficult to make eye contact?

Breasts don't have eyes.

It's a make do dinner tonight. Omelette with lashings of pepperoni - there just has to be blood on my plate. Now that's pretty awesome, but on top of that I've found a tin of Spam. It's probably about 10 years old but it's just within date. Now this brings back childhood memories. The luxury of Spam for tea, while on a poor day it'd be sugar sandwiches or cornflakes with tea on them as there's no milk. All I need now is to have some Polony, Haslet, Faggots (is that PC) and Colwick Cheese and I'm back in my childhood. At home I've been mithering (bloody spell checker can't ssem to cope with this 17C word) about having Spam for months, now Wendy has no excuse.





Just to remind us the picture on the left is the early morning view from our bedroom window.

American TV is a bit like American food (don't get me wrong I love most American food, especially junk food and fast foods) quantity, but in the case of TV certainly lacking in quality. Prudish and sadly lacking in respectful or any other form of nudity - not PC I know. Thank god for my Mac Air and VPN so that we can watch British TV.

RC campaign - now here's a guy who should be made PM - <http://www.patcondell.net/> - just visit his site and view his rants on YouTube.

Sunday - hot and sunny again.

Out early to hike the Phone, Thompson, HT and Bell Rock Pathway. Wendy so into our daily hikes even she can't resist and gives up some valuable cleaning / packing time to do a hike. God help us when we get back, grey miserable walks just won't be the same.

On our way back into the car, surrounded by some of the most awesome scenery you can imagine, a blobby comes up to us and in all seriousness ask "Is there anything worth seeing out there?" I look at him like he's just escaped, wave my arms all around and say "Only this".

Monday - hot and sunny again. But not that it matters we have to leave.

300 mile drive up to Las Vegas in our tank. I dread to think how many petrol stops we'll have to make, but it manages it easily on a tankful - all of \$60.



Our overnight hotel has many claims to fame such as clean, nice rooms and cheap - in fact so cheap we've stayed there twice now and because of their screw up on the original stay it's not cost us a penny. But it's main benefit is its close to the airport and even closer to the Hofbrau House.

Now the philistines amongst my regular readers - all two of you - may wonder what's the Hofbrau House. Well it's a brewery from Munich, complete with a famous drinking cellar come restaurant, fantastic atmosphere and humpa band. Hitlers brown shirts met there, at least shows they had good taste in beer and food if nothing else. In my humble opinion they produces one of the top 5 beers of the world - but don't take my word for it try some.

Anyway for a real treat we walk to the HB for dinner. This to me must rate the same as a Muslim going to Mecca. It's heaven.

Buxom serving wenches (very un PC) kitted out in traditional Bavarian costume, which helps emphasise their ample charms. I manage to resist asking "which night of the week do the Hitler youth meet here" - not very PC. Great beer, not

your traditional yellow coloured water they serve in the US; sauerkraut and proper smoked sausage; live hum pa band; buy a schnapps and get paddled by a buxom wench wielding the snaps tray (it's a wooden paddle they line shot glasses up on) - not a Munich experience, dreamed up by the Americans no doubt; potato and herb dumplings; meats; unfortunately no spatzle; beer served from a 1 Litre mass, usually resting on a buxom wench's boobs; even raddishes.

Reminds us how good German food is. We really must think about a trip there in the caravan.



Tuesday - up at 05:00 to catch our flight.

For the first time in 2 months I get back into long trousers. On the shuttle bus from car rental to airport everyone looks so miserable. Is it gamble losses or merely that they too just don't want to go home?

I have to say the airport experience wasn't too bad. Hardly any queues. I refused to use the idiot check in machine and got assistance from a real person - being a silver surfer has some advantages, they look at me and think doddering old fool can't cope with modern age computers. Mind you as well as the usual TSA screening shit they now have you stand in a full body scanner. No problem with that, except you have to take everything, including handkerchiefs, paper etc, EVERYTHING out your pockets and remove even a plastic belts. Meanwhile my iPhone and laptop are in distinct danger of being nicked off the conveyor by some passing scroat. Perhaps one day some intelligence will be applied to this process with profiling, how un PC would that be, and worldwide consistency.

Mind you this will never go away, it's too big an industry with too many vested interests.

~~We'll~~ after 2 months we've still not seen the elusive Road Runner. Mind you we did see a dead Coyote so perhaps Road Runner's won one battle.

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What have we learnt? Give up living in the UK. Why are we putting up with the grey weather. Come out to Sedona for 3 months at a time. It's sunny, warm, relaxing, healthy, every body is happy and friendly, with great hiking. I suppose the only downside is the new age charlatans with their vortices, and Americans on traffic roundabouts.

We'll really miss our morning hikes.

DD count = 1

Carpe Diem - Seize The Day

Wednesday - hot 87F and sunny. Up bright and early for a pretty good hot breakfast.

Back to airport to pick up car. As always with Hertz a good experience - let them run the airports and we might get some pleasure back into flying. Brand new Chevy Cruz LT waiting for us. Plenty of room and good spec.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

But before we set off down to the Keys we have to go to the Mall, some early retail therapy, to buy Wendy's birthday present. A Kindle - \$79 in USA and they're £89 in UK. Rip off Britain again - goldfish for pans and pots for rags.

Tuesday, 6 December 2011

In the Best Buy car park we see a modern day Ben Hur's car - see picture. I've always thought American drivers were aggressive but this brings a whole new slant on road rage - can it be legal?



It's brilliant sunshine coming out of Best Buy in Miami. Wendy comes out with the quote of the day, "it's like being in Florida, lovely and hot" - doh.



Take a leisurely 2 hour drive down to Conch Keys to our home for the next 10 days.

We're right on the ocean front - Gulf of Mexico - with our own dock; loungers; hammock; outdoor dining; fishing rods; great views and of course no American place would be complete without an oversized gas barbecue - see pictures. There's even a speed boat with the keys left in the ignition - very tempting. All very relaxing and laid back, house has been left unlocked with keys on the table.

Wendy has even been loopy enough to buy Lexi a dog advent calendar. But Joannie takes the dog biscuit, she's taking her dog to have it's Christmas photo with Santa Clause - only in America!

Leisurely afternoon but then comes the pain with a trip to the supermarket, nearest one is 15 miles away. It is a bit isolated down here.

Thursday - mixture of sun and clouds about 70F. Leisurely day. Test the hammock. Read the advice leaflet on what to do in the event of a hurricane. Unpack. Explore Conch Key, that takes all off 10 minutes. Watch the Kite surfers and the fishing boats return.



This place is a haven for bird watchers. Brown Pelicans put on diving displays and meanwhile we have a Double Crested Cormorant patiently sat outside on a post all day. On the way down here we saw a Red Shouldered Hawk, Bald Eagle and a few Belted Kingfishers.





Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Breakfast with Dolphins and Low Flying Coconuts

Friday, 9 December 2011

Friday - sun and clouds 84F. Sat having breakfast and "Dolphin, dolphin" the cry goes out - makes a change from birds. There's two dolphins frolicking outside our dock. Grab the camera. One dolphin comes straight into the dock, amazing how fast they are and they turn on a sixpence - £0.025 for the youngsters.



Later I'm sat having coffee and an Internet moment when there's a sudden thud. Nearly spill my coffee. A coconut just obeyed Newtons Universal Law of Gravitation.

Better luck next time.

$$F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$$

bridge. Navigation in the Keys is simple. There's only one road - Highway 1 - and you can either turn left or right , North or South.

Off to Key West this morning. A long held travel objective. It's about 60 miles away, right at the end of the Keys; the most Southerly point in the USA; drive over many Keys (bits of land / islands) and bridges, including the famous 7 mile

On the way we pass the Turtle hospital complete with two emergency turtle ambulances - unbelievable, only in the USA. Christmas greetings from the turtles.

Key West was a tad disappointing. Mainly grot shops selling loads of things you certainly don't need and I don't want. You can easily be trampled by the hoards of cruisers as they come off their boats like a herd of buffaloes rampaging down Duval Street in the hope of buying the most useless piece of tat in Key West. For my part I kept a tight grip on Wendy's hand, not from fear of the buffaloes, but it is a well known gays watering hole. Although I have to say the gay meters were tuned down to a respectable 2 - 3 , unlike San Francisco where nothing less than a 10 was considered gay enough.

Somewhat quirky toilet arrangements. It seems that once you're this far South in the USA your normal bodily function cease to operate before 12:00, so public toilets don't bother opening until then. Could it be the humidity, the after effects of all that Key Lime pie or the proximity to



the equator that causes this strange physiological effect. Or is it in any way related to the density of gays in the population?



Glad we've been. Disappointing, won't be going back. One to tick off the list.

worrying.

Makes you question how we appear when we come off a cruise ship, complete with group label, cruise card and outlandish clothes - Wallace Arnold ahoy,

On the way back we call in at the supermarket, now there's a surprise. Outside is a Salvation Army lady tinkling her bell and

collecting for Christmas. Now I'm sure you all have the stereotypical image of a Sally Ann - 60+; Bonnet; dark stockings; flat shoes; no make up; carrying a trumpet case or tambourine. Well not here in the keys - well preserved 50'ish; long blond hair; tight fitting, slinky, short dress; high heels; full make up; with a pekinese dog in a pink skirt. Amazing. But wherever you go in the world they seem to be there doing their good deeds - good on ya!

Saturday - sun and clouds again 82F. Decide to drive down to Key Largo to explore and buy a wet suit - my birthday present from Wendy.

On the way we call in at the [Florida Keys Wild Bird Center Sanctuary](#). A voluntary organisation well worth the visit. Free admission but there is a donation box.

Key LARGOs a strange non-existent sort of place. Seems to stretch for about 10 mile either side of highway 1 with no perceivable town centre. At least Key West was a town, this was just an out of town American experience. Sole less. Well there's more dive shops than Brown Pelicans. Everyone trying to get you on a dive or snorkelling trip. Decide on a 3mm full wet suit, seems about right for this time of year an and around the Caribbean, but much too thin for the UK - not that I ever intend diving in the UK anyway. I'm a fair weather diver. Warm waters, sunny, 25 -30 feet is deep enough with plenty of pretty fish and coral reefs - that'll do me just fine - bugger diving in cold quarries or wrecks in the North sea.



Sunday - sun and clouds again 78F.

It's a lazy day around the dock.

Our new home from home is very comfortable and has a stunning location but you have to wonder at the mind of the interior designer. Now if you've ever been in one of those seaside grot shops where they sell wooden fish; birds; carved signs with chincy sayings, cane furniture and seaside pictures, then that's what the inside of our home from home looks like.

We're asked to try and conserve water yet there's no plugs in the sink - now that's well thought out.

Monday - sun 84F.



On the way to Key Largo we pass a Chain gang, well state prisoners working on highway. Not a chain or guard with shot gun in sight. But at least they're making the scroats earn their keep. Of course you couldn't possibly do this in the namby pamby country we live in, the bloody do gooders would be up in arms. Being slightly to the right of til of the Hun I think it's a brilliant idea. Why should our prisoners be better off than our pensioners - what planet do our politicians live on?

Drive down to Key Largo and go out on a catamaran to snorkel the reef, Wendy lazes on deck enjoying the sun, complete with life jacket on in case she falls overboard. Mind you we have a lifeguard on board she's all of 4' 6" tall, weighs 5 stone and looks 10 years old - really inspires my confidence should we need rescuing.

New wetsuit comes in very handy to keep me warm, protected against jelly fish and the sun. Dick head hat, looks like something out of a 14 century horror - see picture. It comes in very handy to stop my hair getting in my eyes as I swim - truth be know it's to stop me frying my pate. See some very pretty fish. Would fish spotting be more acceptable to our kids than Birding? Reefs ok. Very shallow, you can't swim over it but have to swim around it. Now this is my sort of diving, pretty fish and reef and not too deep.

On the way back we discover the real benefit of a single track road in and out over all these bridges. There's been an

accident. 1 fatality and a 1 hour traffic jam. I remain impeccably calm and placid playing sad uko. Wendy moans at me. I really can't win.

Tuesday - sun and wind 82F.

I drive down to Looe Reef to go diving. It's a 3 tank reef dive on one of the top reefs around. Have to be there for 09:00 to be told that the dives been cancelled due to the high winds making it unsafe. No problem with safety but a phone call would have been nice. Spit and feathers everywhere.

Spend the morning lazing around the deck. Then after lunch we decide on a trip to Long Key State Park to do their nature trail etc. Nature trail my arse. Not an animal or bird anywhere to be seen, which is absolutely amazing around here as the places is teeming with birds, but not in the no fly zone of the Long Key nature trail. How did they manage that? \$6 bloody well wasted. Didn't even get



to see the poisonous snakes they warned you about. At least got to see a poison wood tree.

Back to deck for a little more sun, Kindle and cup of afternoon tea - no cream cakes though.

Then the highlight of the day as a deck chair blows into the sea. How to rescue it without getting wet now there's a challenge. Then as we're trying to recover it a giant sea turtle swims up to see what we're up to. Must have been 4 foot from sharp end to blunt end. An amazing creature. Not that he's any help with the chair rescue.



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Made on a Mac



Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Relax It's Windy

Wednesday, 14 December 2011

Wednesday - sun and clouds 84F.

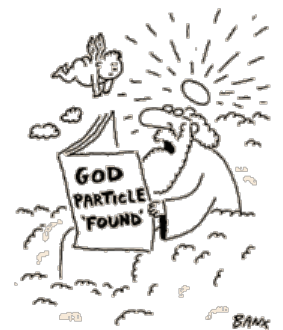
Yet another lazy day.



A bit similar to the 3 wise men - see picture - these are 3 Brown Pelicans who everyday meet and spend the day sat on the sand bank, just like some old geezers from last of the summer wine. Now I think they could represent the answer to the current financial crisis. Instead of relying on the bwankers who have got us into this mess we could consult these three wise men. Tannoy all financial / budget / economic questions to them and depending upon left, right, up or down head movement make a decision. The results can't be any worse than the mess we're already in and we'd save a fortunate in exorbitant, immoral bonuses.

We drive down to Bahia Honda State Park and have our lavish lunch on the beach there. Now we're both great fans of National and State Parks but take a warning from us "State parks in Florida are a rip off". \$9 to get in and yet another example of a no fly zone - bloody hell this is the keys you can't look anywhere without there being a bird in sight. Even the railway bridge in the park is cut short.

Meanwhile great news the Billion of \$ spent looking for the elusive Higgs Boson looks like it may have paid off. Early days but promising.



"Bloody hell - I've been hacked into!"

Thursday - hot, sun, clouds and windy 80F.

I was meant to do the aborted Looe Key dive today, but the winds are still to high so it's been abandoned yet again. Very disappointing as Looe Key is one of the best reefs in the Keys and has a maximum depth of 25 feet, ideal for fair weather divers to see some pretty fish and a colourful reef.

Instead we have a day around the house. Wendy's washing and ironing ready for our departure tomorrow and two weeks aboard a cruise with no washing machine, irons, dishwashers or kitchens in sight. This is Wendy's holiday. She loves to have a couple of weeks with no housework or cooking, makes such a change for her. But as I point out it doesn't provide me with a change 🤔.



Meanwhile the picture shows how you take your dog for a walk, Florida Keys style - walking along a sandbank out at sea.

All we need now is to see a Manatee in our dock and thats completed our Florida Keys experience.

Friday - Hot and sunny. Winds dropped and I can dive today. typical need to drive up to Port Canaveral ready for the cruise. 300 miles takes 5.5 hours at the

speeds on these interstates.

Stop for lunch. Just how lucky can you get there's a Walmart super store, Wendy's eyes light up. Will we ever get back on the road.

Finally find the hotel after the Sat Nav takes us down every back street in Port Canaveral. Bottle of Pinot Noire and Subway for dinner tonight. I have to say a brilliant hotel choice it's just 20 yards from Hertz car drop off and we even get a free shuttle to the cruise.

Saturday - hot and sunny again.

Get to the cruise terminal for 11:00. Luggage drop-off very efficient; screening without having to strip naked; check-in very efficient and friendly; short wait in waiting room and we're on board.

In the waiting room we have a blobby sat on the floor next to us. She had to sit on the floor the seats just weren't big enough and probably not strong enough. Now she's in shorts and decide to adopt a reclining pose - you know how sexy women recline on a couch and lean on their elbow. This has put me off sex for life. Like a basking walrus, folds of blubber and then to top it all she starts popping giant chocolates in her mouth. Has to increase her girth somehow. She struggles getting up, will they bring in a mobile crane!

Then we're on-board all fairly painless. Have lunch and then our room, sorry stateroom, is ready. By now I'm starting to get that geriatric sheep feeling. I'm too young to be on this floating Wallace Arnold fleecing palace. Cheapest wine \$30 a bottle. Is this an Alcoholics Anonymous franchise where they cure you by bankrupting you? Never mind tuck in.

I sit looking at my glass of water, surrounded by all this food the water just seems so mundane and yet there must be over a billion people in the world who would consider that glass of water a sheer luxury. There's a rude awakening coming. Never mind sit back and enjoy it.



There's the usual range of activities / clubs, including as always the friends of Dorothy, GBLT, sounds like a subway sandwich.

One of the great things on this NCL cruise is that it's very informal. No need for jackets; ties; dinner jackets; black shoes etc. Of course if you want to go for these trimmings then you can. Freedom of choice. Now that's what I call civilised.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Nassau

Sunday, 18 December 2011

Sunday – hot and sunny 70's.



Early Breakfast greeted by the little Chinese Lady – “washy, washy, happy, happy”. She sprays us all with delousing agent before we enter the restaurant.

We dock in Nassau in the Bahamas. Off the boat early and set off for a walk around to explore. Call in at MacDonald for free wifi to pick up email – god bless MacDonalds, you can always rely on them for good cheap coffee and free wifi.

Unlike NCL boats where piracy is still rife on board, Internet access at \$0.75 a minute, the brass balls to charge a \$3.95 for set up and to add insult to injury they have a sign saying it will be slow – at these rates I'd at least expect a terabyte speed link. But I have a cunning plan, their web says it's “included”.

Anyway back to Nassau. Pick up most of the sites and then set off for a longer walk down to Paradise Island. Looks decidedly dodgy down here. Get as far as Potters Key which looks very salubrious not a bit like the tourist description. Decide to bail out and catch one of the local jalopy /taxi / buses back to the harbour – see picture. For

\$1.25 we get a 40 minute grand tour of the Island with colourful characters hopping on and off. Mind you the state of the vehicle we do wonder whether it will make it up the hill.

I'm sure our tour took us around the real Nassau rather than the sanitised tour we'd have got with NCL and at a fraction of the cost. I suppose you can best describe the place as an extended Steptoes yard (rubbish tip for the uneducated young). Interestingly there seem to be two different types of natives on the Island, those dressed up to the nines, very smart even with suits, ties and colourful dresses, fit for any formal evening, then there's the more laid back scruffy shorts, tea shirt and dread lock brigade.

Overall not a bit like I expected Nassau to be. I'd always assumed it was for the rich and glamorous.



Back in the main shopping district it's heaving by now. 5 cruise ships in and everyone out to spend, spend, spend. I think I've probably identified the most useless of gifts – 2oz of pink Nassau sand for \$2, but it's not even pink!

Embarrassing to be here. Visit the straw market and then return to the ship. We saved a fortune by doing our thing; a good 4 hour walk; tour of the real island; seen most of the sites. All for \$2.50 plus a \$6 fridge magnet. Who says we're tight?



Go to guest services to ask them for my free Internet. Their web site says it's included. Oh no sir "there's a charge", now there's a surprise. I show them their web page, but the duty manager is not empowered to do anything – has to refer to HO. I mention fraudulent misrepresentation and suing in the court. "We'll get back to you."

Entertainment on board can best be described as cheap Saturday night TV style, at least there's no Bruce Forsyth. We watch the Nearly Newly Weds show. Now this is bizarre. 4 extremely extrovert and loopy couples, honeymooners through to 47 years married. They fight to be picked and then proceed to have the piss taken out of them as they answer the most embarrassing questions. "Where is the crazy place you ever had sex"? "What was sex like last night"? "My Husband has the largest / smallest....."? Well you may think perhaps it's all worth it for the prize – a cheap bottle of champagne – unbelievable!

Monday – sunny, warm but very rough and windy – pewk bags are stationed everywhere and by the end of the day there are hardly any left.

Is this the Captain (see picture) trying to walk on water?



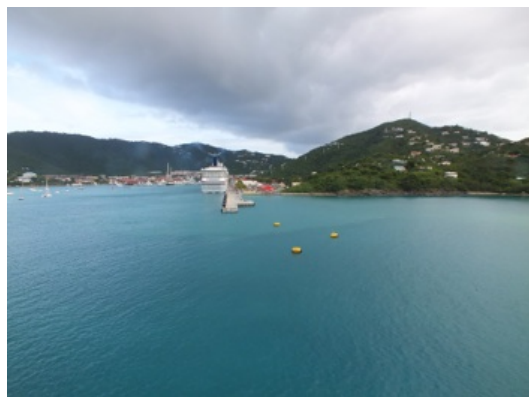
We've both signed up for a yoga class at 08:00 – a somewhat ungodly hour.

Now Yoga's bad enough on dry land but doing it in a rough sea, on an empty stomach, is a nightmare. Fortunately they pass on the one legged tree pose.

It's a sea day today so they've got a whole series of so called entertainments laid on. This seems to consist of the 3M style of entertainment – Mindless, Moronic, Merchandising. There's such an opportunity to have stimulating lectures from educated guest speakers or boat tours, no chance. You can guarantee that any free lecture revolves around a Merchandising opportunity. There's a talk on St Thomas, San Juan that could be interesting until you learn that it's dedicated to getting the best shopping; weight loss / detox lecture trying to sell you seaweeds and colonic irrigation, now there's a delight; art auction selling paintings at prices that make you thinking working for a livings definitely gone out of fashion; Martini tasting, at a price. Whilst any other entertainment is cheap Saturday night TV style – Mindless and Moronic. Very disappointing.

Meanwhile the guest services manager has just rung to apologise for the misunderstanding with the free Internet. I had no misunderstanding, included means free, they're the ones with the problem. "No ones ever complained before, but as a one off gesture they'll give me two free 100 minute Internet packages" at \$59 each and are arranging to have their web site altered – victory for Victor, power to the silver surfers.

Tuesday - warm, cloudy and some rain showers.



It's St Thomas today. Now we weren't impressed last time and clouds and intermittent showers don't add to the charm. But never mind we've booked on a snorkelling trip on a catamaran. Very choppy on the way out but we get to see some very pretty fish and a wreck. It's not too cold but my new wet suit at least helped. Picture of people not snorkelling.

I think Wendy, sat on board, probably got wetter than I did. On the way back there's the usual free flowing rum punch and a golden merchandising opportunity to buy a tee shirt - now theres a surprise. Oh and by the way tips are greatly appreciated as we

don't really get paid. My tip is "don't work for less than minimum wage employees". Overall a good excursion despite the weather.

Wednesday - warm, cloudy and sunny with some rain after we set sail.

It's San Juan, Puerto Rica today. No tours booked. Instead we wandered off the dock and take a \$10 old city tour. Pay at the



end if your happy with it - now there's a refreshing attitude. Tour lasts about 80 minutes; very informative guide on the way; photo opportunity stops; only \$10 instead of the \$50 to \$75 dollars charged by the ship.

After the tour we have a walk around the old town and buy the inevitable fridge magnet. Not really that impressive a place, although pleasant enough to walk around and a very visible police presence. Yet another Caribbean Island I don't think will be on our holiday list.

I have a coffee in a speciality coffee shop. A double espresso, one of the nicest I've ever had. Had a very sweet finish, I thought they'd put sugar in it but apparently that's

one of its key features. Then we call in for a free rum tasting session. Some very nice plain and flavoured rums. You could really get legless here with the size of the free measures. Wendy really likes the coconut one and throws a tantrum when she realises she can't buy one - no space / weight left.

Highlight of the day is the sighting of a Magnificent Frigate bird, almost prehistoric looking.



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Made on a Mac



Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Happy Birthday Wendy

Thursday, 22 December 2011

Thursday – hot and sunny 80's.



Wendy's already had her birthday present of a Kindle and case, so she only gets a card.

A sea day thank god. Whilst the Caribbean may have nice weather most of these island don't really have much to offer.

Sat at breakfast and lunch surrounded by all this food one can easily be tempted to excess, just a little of this, a little of that. But there lies the path to blobby oblivion and waddling of the boat. Mind you all you need to do is look around for 2 seconds and there's enough blobbies bobbing around to put you off food for life.

Being a sea day and very sunny everyone is on deck fighting for deck chairs. As usual there are plenty but typical human nature the towel brigade are there reserving deck chairs they don't need or use. A strict regime of throw anything overboard after 30 minutes unused and for a 2nd offence throw the individual overboard - the world would be a better place without them!

We've had a letter describing Saturday. Written by some joker who seems to think it reasonable that we should get up at 06:30 to clear customs, have our passports inspected and then at 10:00 we are escorted off the boat and straight back on board. NCL claim it's all due to the custom and border patrol.

Apparently other cruise lines do not submit their passengers to this madness. Whoever, it's absolutely pots for rags. We have no desire to go ashore at Port Canaveral - there's nothing there. We booked a 14 day cruise, yet its classed as 2 seven days back to back hence the madness. What planet do these people live on? All the Islands we've visited are US and yet there's not been this palaver. Anyway we'll see what Saturday brings.



Lazy day. Gym in the morning. The inevitable lunch - food, food, food. Then lazy afternoon on deck. Get rid of a few lingering towels and get two deck chairs in a good spot. Pass a couple of desert island and spot a Masked Booby hovering and diving.

Friday - hot and sunny.

We're at Stirrup Cay, NCL's own private island. We're tendered ashore and of course there's the mad lemming rush to get on the first tender and get towels on deck chairs. Considering there must be thousands of them it's amazing they've all sprouted towels.

After a leisurely breakfast and a visit to the gym by Wendy we saunter across to the Island about lunch time. As you



probably guessed we're not that enthusiastic. It looks like a disused quarry. Mainly consists of a beach around a lagoon / bay, with a few small buildings.

Waters not that warm so thank god for my wet suit. Do a bit of snorkelling in the bay but it's very shallow, no reef and not that many fish of interest. Good barbecue for lunch and by 15:00 we're on our way back.

I suppose for NCL it's a cheaper than docking in a port and to be fair the majority seemed to enjoy the beach, activities, snorkelling

and swimming. But it really was a cross between a quarry and a building site, perhaps the ultimate in little Caribbean islands. Although at least it didn't have the usual merchandising opportunities

Wendy goes to the carol singing but is not very impressed. The boat isn't really that christmasy at all you'd hardly know it was christmas apart from the one tree and our neighbours who have a big Christmas sign on their door saying believe!

Saturday - hot and sunny.

We dock back in Port Canaveral where we have the pleasure of US Customs Border Patrol (CBP). The less said about this fiasco the better but I'm going to document it in case we forget:

- *We booked a 14 day cruise. Not two 7 day back to backs.
- *Receive a letter on Thursday written by some comedian who says we have to go ashore and need to be up at 06:30 for CBP - is this a holiday?
- *Go to meeting and of course I protest. Discover that it's probably ok if you turn up at 07:15 and they literally take you ashore and back, just 10 minutes.
- *Turn up on Saturday morning at 07:10 and CBP are only just arriving the majority of passengers have been there since 06:30.
- *CBP stamp my form and only bother to look at one passport, so one of us could have stayed in bed.
- *10:00 meet for our escorted trip ashore. Letter says no sticky label needed. They say we need it.
- *10 minute trip takes an hour.
- *Ask numerous people for a logical explanation and all I can get out of them is so they can clear the ship of passengers. Why do you need to clear the ship? No one knows. Perhaps they've always done it this way and I suppose it keeps people in jobs.
- *Come back on board spitting feathers and ask for the email address of the Hotel Director. Not allowed to give it out.
- *Now comes the clever bit 30 minutes later call to the room asking if the Hotel Director can meet with me. How did they do that. Well guy on the desk listed all those doing the circular tour. Not many Brits so he then checked photos and identified me. Now that's impressive customer service and initiative.
- *Hotel director comes to see us. Discuss the issues and he agrees it's diabolical. Takes it on board - no pun intended - along with my complaint about the appalling wifi service and sticky bannisters. Get more free wifi minutes.
- *Impressed they take the trouble to listen.
- *The whole process is in dire need of some process re-engineering.
- *CBP should be renamed "Deter US Tourists" (DUST).

Never again.

Rest of the day is Gym and read on deck.

Evening meal is interesting. We're sat with a Red Neck couple from Texas and a blobby couple.

Now imagine the fattest person you've ever seen and then double his girth and dress him in a revolting brown bell tent -



probably the only thing that will fit him. This guy is gross. Enough to turn you anorexic for life. To maintain his girth he has not two but three starters and two main meals each with double portions and miraculously only one large sweet. Every time he shovels food into his gob he has to pull his stomach in so he can reach the table. To top his performance his wife keeps pace with him, I'm sure she's trying to match his size. I wouldn't mind we have to sit around while they shovel there food down, a bloody revolting site.

The other couple are Red Necks from Texas - always good for some stimulating conversation. He has the instant solution to the Iran nuclear weapons problem, or that matter anybody else who has nuclear weapons. Sit down round the table with them - talking is he really a red neck? Them comes the kicker tell them "if you ever use one of your nukes we'll (that being the US of A) fry you, turn every inch of your country into a crisp and make sure that nothing ever lives or grows there again. We've 7,000 nukes too back this up".

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

Happy Christmas or Happy Holiday

Sunday, 25 December 2011

Sunday - hot and sunny with a few clouds.



Open our three Christmas cards we've bought with us. Got to keep below that 22Kg weight limit.

Here we are on board a boat infested with Americans, a very religious society, yet most people wish you happy holiday rather than happy Christmas. Are they all so damned politically correct?

It's another sea day. Late lazy breakfast; lounge around; drink coffee; book a jeep / snorkelling tour. Then at 13:00 there's a talk on history of watches and yes you guessed it

by now, it's another merchandising opportunity - why am I so surprised. Entertainment on board is very disappointing.

After a lazy lunch we lounge on deck reading.

Christmas day and no Christmas pudding anywhere on board. How can it be Christmas without Christmas pudding?

Monday - very hot and sunny.



It's Cozumel today. I was doing the dive until I discovered it was 80', too deep for PADI Open Water qualification. So its a snorkel and jeep tour. Well there not really jeeps but Polaris dune buggies. Great fun to drive. Ours develops a puncture so we get to drive a different beach buggy, with stick shift that jumps out of gear whenever you go over a bump, then swap to a open top jeep. Pure luxury but hardly any petrol, will we make it back? Just our luck we have to share with the two most miserable introverts in America - joy.

Turns out there's an opportunity to do a dive at our snorkelling stop, so I open up my wallet and get to go on a one to one dive tour with an instructor. It's only about 25' deep; fantastic pretty fish; pretty reef; underwater statues and cannons; with plenty of time to explore. My ideal first sea dive.

After snorkelling we go to the Eco park; see a couple of crocodiles, I think they were plastic; see a small Mayan temple with clever conch shell hurricane warning system; another beach and lunch; then a lighthouse and pirates museum. Best tour so far, well worth the \$60.

Well we really enjoyed the tour and Cozumel looks good. It's the first island we've been to that we would consider coming back to.



Back to port. Fridge magnet shopping then back on board. Deck chairs have already been adorned with the orphaned beach towels and its back to stem to stern food, food, food; booze, booze, booze; bobbies; partying. Remember Little Britain and the blobby in the health club, well there's a bus load of those on board. Legs fatter than my



waist. Truly revolting sites.

Tuesday - hot and sunny.

Grand Caymen today. I took my emergency £50 note ashore with a view to opening up a tax haven account, but none of the banks were really interested - now there's a surprise.

We're tendered ashore in a floating greenhouse, must have been at least 120F on board. Never mind at least it will have sweated off some of the excess pounds.



Nothing booked today so we just have a wander around town. Spend ages looking for Fort George, one of the few historical sites in the town. No wonder we struggled to find it, two cannons, two litter bins and 4 foot of wall all in an are the size of our lounge.



Town consists of the usual merchandising. We treat ourselves to a lavish Pina Colada and Strawberry Daiquiri for lunch. The guide books were right when they said there was nothing much here.

Get back on board at about 15:00 and have a late lunch. Meanwhile we discover our balcony looks like it's got dandruff. Turns out to be white paint flakes where they've been scraping of the paint above. Another undocumented feature of an NCL cruise - bless them!

Evening meal is flexible dining which usually is an interesting experience as you get to meet so many different people. Well tonight we met a family of three, long drawl and very slow bouncers - I think they probably auditioned for the Duelling Banjo scene in the film Deliverance but were rejected as being too slow. Not a very stimulating dinner.



Entertainment this evening is a comedian. It's about the best so far all 35 minutes of it.



Wednesday - hot and sunny.

It's Ocho Rios, Jamaica today. We dock at a rusty bauxite pier - I bet it was cheap. Turns out it's the James Bond pier where they filmed Dr No.

Real excitement we receive a letter saying "we have been selected as one of our few special VIP guests to join us for a champagne designer event in the jewellery store". Now a cynical person,

not me of course, might think they are trying to sell us something!

After a disappointing day in Grand Cayman and a pier that looks like it's in the back of beyond and about to collapse - should have looked on the Port side at least you can see the town - our DIY resolve weakens and book the Best of Ocho Rios tour. Unfortunately there's no scuba or snorkelling here.



Turns out to be a pretty good tour of Shaw tropical gardens with amazing plants; drive along the coast; shopping stop off, well no tour would be complete without it; Dunns Waterfall. The waterfall was excellent; crazy, but great fun; 900 foot climb up a very picturesque waterfall. Proud of Wendy she did it, including wading through boob high cold water. Overall the tour didn't seem bad value for money.

aboard.

I've just heard that there's a Fat Pride movement - unbelievable. Perhaps this is a Fat Pride cruise, certainly explain the number of blobbies

Meanwhile Internet access continues to be appalling. It just doesn't work consistently and worse still never tells you you've logged off for sure nor how many minutes you've left. A cynical person might think they are trying to milk you by wasting your minutes. Mind you in a sense I can't complain - but I will - as I now have 300 minutes free - more than I know what to do with. Mind you I think the Internet Help Desk guy is ready to clutch his security blanket and go cower in the corner when he sees me coming - weird starting to feel sorry for a Help Desk guy.

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Wendy & Tony's Travel Blog

The Brits, Priest and Broadway Music Star Meet The Fockers

Thursday, 29 December 2011

Thursday - hot and sunny with a few clouds.



Visit the gym. Laze around the ship reading and trying to avoid the food. As usual the deck chairs were infested with abandoned towels.

Wendy treats me to a new watch for Christmas. A Citizen EcoDrive (needs no batteries as its solar powered - mind you might be a bit of a problem in Belthorn). It's a ver clever dive watch. Tells you depth, logs details and gives off alarms if you surface too quickly or go too deep - it's amazing.

Now we always go for the flexible dinning option on board where every night we share a table of 6. You sure meet some interesting characters. But tonight has to take the biscuit, it was just like something out of a comedy sketch. Lets

introduce the Dramatis Personae of those we broke bread with:

First, theres Father Ron, a retired Catholic Priest who's getting a free cruise in return for a few masses having smuggled some holy wine and hosts on board - tonight he was in disguise with no dog collar.

Secondly, Jeri something or other, is the sexy star of many broadway musicals and last nights entertainer - actually she wasn't too bad, at least I didn't sleep through her show. Interesting to talk to when she could get a word in edgeways.

Thirdly, there was the couple who owned a sex shop - unbelievable but she looked like Barbara Streisland from "Meet The Fockers", even down to being goby and the red hair; they were both raving atheists, always a plus point when with a priest; they ranted on about nudism all night - "we're nudists so what you see is what you get"; apparently they're going on a



swingers cruise next; she kept puffing on her electric cigarette, she's got an aural addiction and always likes to have something in her mouth - at which point everyone, including the priest nearly choked on their food and splattered the table cloth; this was then followed by a description of the different vibrators sold in their shop along with some sort of rabbits - more food splattered on the tablecloth; then the sex shop husband finally dared to speak in the wake of his wife, and started f...ing and blinding.

A thoroughly entertaining meal and the best nights free entertainment we've had so far.



Friday - hot and sunny.

We're back at Stirrup Cay, NCL's private Work In Progress building site and quarry, sorry private island. Nice beach, lagoon and good barbecue.

I go on a wave runner. Wendy declines the opportunity. Spend about 10 minutes signing multiple waiver forms, good to know I can't sue them for anything "from the beginning to the end of time". Then watch a safety video and then finally I'm let loose on it. It takes me at least 15 minutes to get my head around steering it. It requires only minor steering movement, really need to spend more time on computer games to get the fine control. Also is a lot easier when you go faster, 25mph plus. Something I've always wanted to do, a tad expensive but great fun.

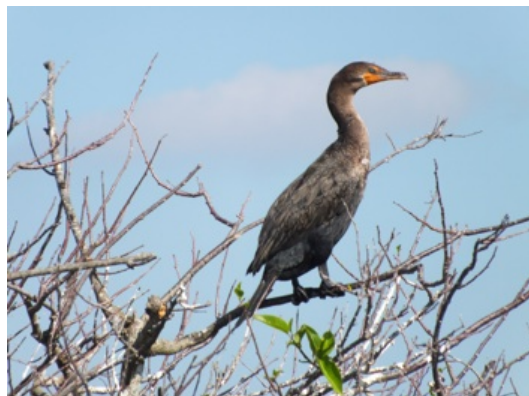


Saturday - hot and sunny.

Dock in Port Canaveral and of course they want us to be up at 06:45 to clear customs. We ignore it and arrive at 07:15 and the Deter US Tourists (DUST) geezers are on just arriving. It seems like NCL love to have everyone sat waiting before the DUST guys start work - absolute typical DUST crap.

Disembarkation is quite quick and efficient. Hertz finally turn up and we're greeted at the Hertz depot with a car already - as usual very efficient. Pity Hertz don't do cruises as they sure understand good customer service. Better still why not sub-contract the US Customs to them them, that would cut the crap!

Cars a great Chevy Aero Cruz, top of the range good upgrade as always. Mind you it's spooky and ungodly. There's the



usual key / fob but no ignition key. There's an engine start button but when you press it nothing happens! Apparently you have to have your foot on the brake. Then we try locking it, two clicks and the horn beeps, but doesn't lock as usual until you walk away from it. To unlock it you just walk up to it. Keep your key in your pocket. All very un-nerving and I bet it's a night mare when your fob goes wrong. But after a few days I have to say I like it.

Drive down to Florida City about 4 hours away.



Staying at a Travel Lodge for the next 4 days. Now I don't normally like Travel Lodges but this is a nice suite, a reasonable breakfast and cheap.

Now for posterity and so that we're remind what the cruise was like lets review our Norwegian Sun Cruise.

The good in descending sequence - best first:

- Staff in general, especially cabin steward and waiters, were excellent and friendly.
- Food although as usual there's too much of it and it's all so tempting
- Cabin - sorry state room
- Itinerary was good
- Tours that we went on were pretty good and not too badly priced.

Now we come to the bad - worst first:

- Pathetic customs (DUST) experience. Yes I know that a lot of this is beyond NCL's control but a lot was within their control and was appalling customer service. For this reason alone we would be reluctant to sail NCL again.
- Internet as usual was day light robbery - piracy on the high seas - and to top it all they have the brass balls to say it will be slow and it was. Log on and off was an inconsistent nightmare; most of the time it just didn't work as it should; screens were misleading; and a cynical person - not me of course - might think it was to screw more minutes out of you. The sort of SNAFU experience that makes me cringe and be ashamed to say I worked in IT.
- Entertainment during the day was virtually non-existent. Nothing stimulating. Any entertainment there was usually

revolved around a merchandising opportunity. What was wrong with having some guest speakers. Such a missed opportunity.

Evening shows etc were cheap, amateurish and a lot relied upon guests making fools of themselves - Saturday night TV style. I must have slept through more than my fair share, with Wendy digging me in the ribs to stop me snoring.

The bannisters on the stairs were revoltingly sticky.

Room service was inconsistent.

We enjoyed it, but after 14 days we were glad to get off, it's long enough. Nice to have a balcony but despite the good weather we hardly used it and I have to question whether it's worth the extra. Still think Celebrity is *****, with Princess ***+ and NCL coming at ***.

Sunday - hot and sunny.

It's a bucket list day. The Everglades a place I've always wanted to visit. Awesome. More birds and alligators than I have room on my memory card for. We go on three guided ranger walks / talks one on birds and wildlife; Manatess; Botany of the Hardwood Hammocks. All free and very interesting. More stimulation in one day than in two weeks on the cruise.

What a fantastic way to start the new year. I'll let the pictures above speak for themselves.

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