

Christmas 2017

From our winter home on Vancouver Island, Jennie & I would like to wish you a very



Christmas is a time to get together with family & friends; to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas; and for a few days to forget the insanity of the world. Let us hope that calm heads will prevail wherever and whenever conflict might rear its ugly head.

So for a few moments, why don't you sit back, relax and let me tell you a little of what Jennie & I have been up to this year. Following two months in Pedder Bay, west of Victoria, our friends, Betty and Frank, offered us a spot to set up our rig on their 10 acres. So over the summer we built an RV pad and decided to spend this winter in our tiny house on wheels, *Ali*. Ali works very well for us. I must admit, sometimes I wonder what people think. What the heck we are doing; living in a tiny trailer? What kind of a life is that?



Well, for us, it's a great life. This coming February, we will have lived in Ali for 2 years (Feb. 15 to be precise). Neither of us are sorry that we don't own a house; Ali means we are free to roam wherever and whenever we please—and while we are healthy, we plan to do just that—to continue our journey.

In April, we began a 2-month trek to the US desert south west. You can view our entire trip at www.tusker-international.com/blog.html.

On the way down the Oregon coast (one of our favourite places), the weather was on again, off again until we reached Brookings just a few miles north of the California border. The sun shone brightly as we had an awning installed on Ali.

Due mainly to the previous winter's storms, the coast highway (Hwy 101) was damaged, actually closed further south in California so we scrapped our plans to continue down the coast and turned inland.

On the way to Nevada, we camped in forest service campgrounds and then visited Lassen Volcanic National Park. Unfortunately we couldn't really go anywhere as there was still 6' of snow on the park roads.



So onward into Nevada. Reno is a very busy casino city, so after a twisty, 8-mile, 2,800' climb out of town, we stayed for a couple of days in windy and dusty Virginia City. We did a couple of day trips to Carson City and South Lake Tahoe, CA (a high-priced tourist area—lots of hotels/motels and casinos—not our scene). Then after a 13-mile drive down the hill, we stopped at Dayton State Park for a couple of days.



"Stink-e" and his sweetheart, Adeline in Virginia City.

Back in Nevada, we drove south towards Las Vegas and camped at Walker Lake BLM (Bureau of Land Management). This was a turning point for us; sure, the only facilities were washrooms, but for \$6 a night it was a bargain. We vowed to do more of this kind of camping; we much prefer the large open sites to the cramped sites typical of expensive RV parks.



Cutting back to Hwy 395 in California, we wanted to see if we could sneak into Yosemite National Park from the eastern side but no such luck; still 150' of snow on the road. Drat!



We continued south on Hwy 395 towards Death Valley. We enjoyed a delightful couple of days at Tuttle Creek BLM, close to the majestic Sierra Nevada mountains and the town of Lone Pine, CA.



As we strolled around the desert landscape we noticed cactii flowering along with other plants—what a neat sight to see.

Then, from almost 5,000' at Tuttle Creek, we dropped into Death Valley, to a small place called Panamint Springs. After coffee there, we climbed up and over yet another mountain range and then down into Furnace Creek (190' **below** sea level and **HOT** - 36C). We had thought of camping at Furnace Creek, but a combination of the heat and an RV park with literally **no** shade, we decided otherwise.



Through Laughlin, across the Colorado River, we stopped in Bullhead City, AZ. The next day, we continued our trek to Kingman. What a great little place...



...that was until we drove up the hill into "modern" Kingman—wall-to-wall malls, shops, buildings, concrete, and tarmac. We drove scenic Route 66 towards Williams, Arizona. From Williams the Grand Canyon is due north. There are two ways to get there: drive or take the Grand Canyon train. Bet you know which way we went!



In all honesty, there wasn't a whole lot to see on the 2-hour ride to the Grand Canyon, but it sure beat driving. Just like at Rocky Mountain National Park last year, sometimes it is just really nice to be chauffeured.

We arrived at the south rim of the Grand Canyon and after a short uphill walk we had our first glimpse of the canyon.



We coined a number of acronyms to politely describe what we saw. The Grand Canyon was "PFI". Pictures do not do the Grand Canyon justice; you will just have to visit yourself if you haven't already. It truly is impressive.

Back to Williams on the train, we were robbed by three masked cowboys on horseback. They even stopped the train so none of them would be injured! Yes, proceeds went to charity.

From Williams (after an overnight snowfall), we headed south to Sedona, AZ, (Monument Valley on steroids as it was described to us), very lush with incredible red rock formations—wow!

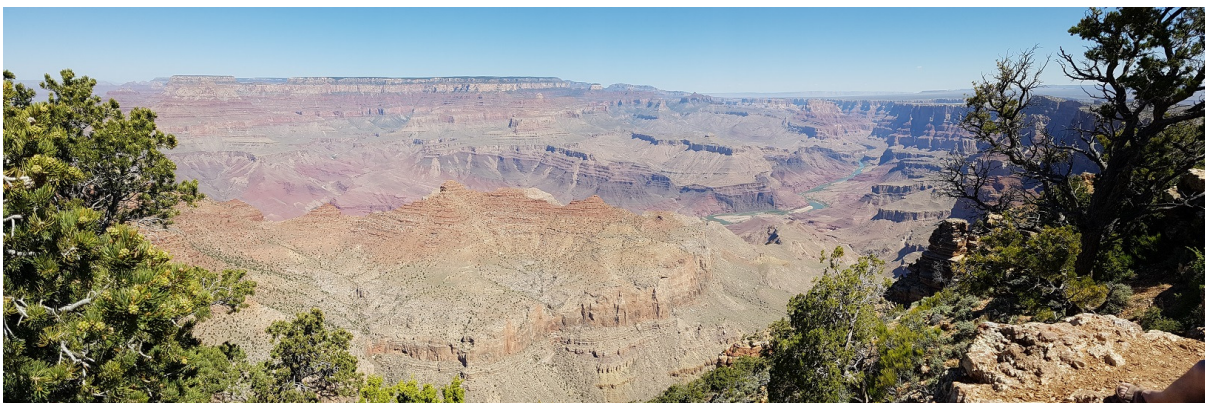




We turned east and headed towards Winslow, Arizona. Remember the Eagles song Take It Easy? "Standing on the corner in Winslow, Arizona..." Well, we stood on the corner.

We then headed west towards Flagstaff. Along the way we spent a day at Meteor Crater—a big hole in the ground but nonetheless very impressive.

A few days later on the way north to Page, Arizona and Antelope Canyon, we stopped at the eastern entrance to the Grand Canyon. This was even more impressive than our south rim visit.



Back on the road to Page, it was hot, even though it was only May. The next morning I toured Antelope Canyon. Again, this is a place you should see for yourself.



Antelope Canyon is a "slot" canyon—typically quite narrow, but nothing to be concerned about, except when it rains.

The colours were incredible.



We continued on to Kanab, Utah, close to Bryce & Zion National Parks and the north rim of the Grand Canyon. It was the US Memorial Day weekend. We were lucky to find an RV park so we stayed the weekend.

We drove out to Bryce the next morning. You can drive the entire length of the park so we did. At the end of the drive, we saw this. Truly spectacular!



The next morning, Memorial Day, we drove to Zion National Park. The only way to move around this park is by shuttle bus. The lines were long ("This is the busiest day of the year", one young Park Ranger told us.) so we decided to come back another time. What we did see on the drive into the park was majestic. We will return!

Our next stop was Cave Lake State Park (7,198 ft 2,194 m) near Ely, NV. Then it was time to start heading west. After discussing numerous routes, the "Loneliest Road in America" sounded interesting. Between Ely and our destination Fallon, Nevada (300 miles west), there were 11 passes that we summited that day. Up one side and down the other. Eleven times. Attaboy, Alfie!!



From Fallon, we headed towards Crater Lake, Oregon, a major bucket list destination.

We decided to head back out to the Oregon coast—it had been a few weeks since we'd last seen the Pacific.



I guess we are definitely west coast people 'cause it was sure nice to see the ocean. We endured a somewhat brutal drive up Hwy 101. The highway was so rough that when we got to Nahalem Bay State Park, just south of Cannon Beach, I noticed a broken spring on the rig. Fortunately, other than the broken spring, we had no other damage.

We had the rig repaired and headed north to Fort Stevens State Park west of Astoria, OR for a couple of days. Then it was on to Port Angeles and the Black Ball ferry to Victoria. As it turned out, our young Czech friends, whom we had arranged to stay with overnight, were in Victoria at a Reggae concert at the inner harbour.

We partied for a couple of hours enjoying the lively music then headed out to their place in Sooke. The next

morning, after a lovely breakfast, we walked down the path to the beach. They sure have a nice spot.

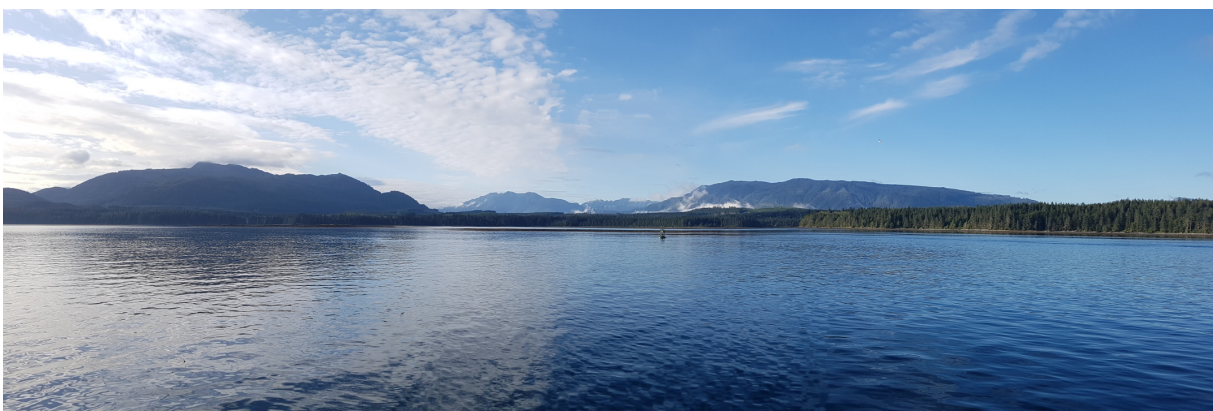
Later that day we arrived back in Errington.

In September, after being home on the Island for the summer because of the raging forest fires in the interior of BC, we headed north on Vancouver Island for a couple of weeks.

We made Alder Bay RV Park, just a few miles west of Telegraph Cove our base. After setting up camp, Jen suggested we quaff an ale (or two) so off we went to Telegraph Cove in the sunshine. What a neat place; a lot of history here.



We visited Port McNeill numerous times during our 5-day stay at Alder Bay. Port McNeill is a thriving community; it was from there we took BC Ferries to Alert Bay. We truly live in beautiful BC when you see views like this.



The U'mista Cultural Centre was very well done. Alert Bay is also home to the world's tallest totem pole along with many others dotted around the island.



Back at camp, we saw the Seabourn Sojourn visiting Alert Bay.

Well, after 5 days, we decided it was time to begin heading south.

On the way down island, we stopped at Woss, a Canfor lumber "town". It is the headquarters of the only remaining logging railroad in Canada. On display is a steam engine that ran on the railroad.

We walked on the beach just north of Comox airport a few days later and found this wooden heart that had been constructed the year before for a wedding.



So that was our year. As I write this note on an early, and snowy, November day, we can't wait for next Spring and the opportunity to get back on the road.

In the meantime, Jennie & I wish you a very



