

See the U.S.A. in Your Chevrolet

and/or

Corona Corona

OK...first, you must probably be of a certain age (and know Dinah Shore and Roy Orbison) to get either of these little title ditties and second, it was an Airstream, not a Chevy. But I think you have the idea.

We had planned to take the most northern route across Canada in our Van RV, arriving at the Vancouver Airport in time to take the one-a-day flight to Bella Bella, a village midway up the B.C. coast where we would get on a former Catholic Hospital Ship, which is now a “mother ship”. That is, a ship that takes kayakers into hard to go places like the Great Bear Rain Forest, which is where we were going. So, of course Canada erected a non-travel wall (ironic, right, considering the wall thing?) and we could not do that, and the “mother ship” did not sail because of virus restrictions and common sense.

So...7,000 + miles later we are back home in Wellsboro having driven and hiked our way across some of the most rural areas of the lower 48, going almost the entire way from the Mackinaw Bridge of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to north of Seattle, on U.S. Rte. 2 and thereabouts.

We had given up trips planned in kayaks to Tortuga (the fort) and Bella Bella, BC. because of the dreaded virus since being in very small ships among folks from different places was not a good idea. Along with this, we had a son asking us to come to visit in rural Washington in the

shadow of Mt. Rainier and we had not seen him, his wife, and our grandsons for some time.

Have you ever driven U.S. Rte. 2 across the northern portions of the U.S.? We had, one way, once. That time, not so long ago, was super relaxed with literally almost no real tourism craziness and a very rural population and a relaxed way of life. For example, during that first time across, we stopped at a County Fair in North Dakota one morning (just pulled in) and ate breakfast, got up to pay and were told that it was free. Then we got a free lesson in bull judging. We watched the wheat harvest as we progressed, with huge piles of harvested grain and miles and miles of train cars waiting across much of the Great Plains. Literally no hassles, no traffic jams, and lots of great back country to hike. It was like being back in the 50's...

So...few people, relaxed, lots of space, hiking, and we were self-contained. Could we do it and remain uninfected? The short answer is yes.

The long answer is focus. Theoretically we had the means since we were self-contained, but at every stop we saw and/or were involved in different conditions and situations with people. For example in the little town of Medora, on the edge of the Teddy Roosevelt National Park, we had signed up for a special little play (with Teddy being the main character) via the internet as we traveled, and when we arrived there found that it was inside an old building and there were a lot of folks going in. We did not. It was sad really, but reality intruded. North Dakota, at that time had one of the steepest rises in positive virus tests. Idaho, Montana, and Wisconsin also were in that category. The more rural we got, the fewer masks we saw depending on whether there

were many outsiders or not. Most folks had not had neighbors or family members die of the virus at that point, hence belief that it was real and could affect them was low.

In order to get off the roads and hit the big State Parks, National Forests, and National Parks and have time to spend at least one-half day hiking each time, we really varied our driving strategy. Some days were driving days, and some were no driving days, camping and hiking close by. In fact, on some driving mornings, as is my routine, I awoke between 4 and 5 AM, pulled the electric plug and stowed it, locked down all compartments, and drove away in semi darkness with Janet waking up sometimes in another place and in one situation, another State.

On our way coming and going we hiked in many places, but most notably the southern shore of Lake Superior in the Porcupine and National Lake Shore areas, the Teddy Roosevelt National Park of North Dakota in both the Northern and Southern portions, Glacier National Park in Montana, and Mt. Rainier in Washington.

In the "Teddy" we had buffalo and wild horses up close. In Rainier the marmots were everywhere up in the alpine and sub-alpine areas sometimes in the remaining snow. Many of them looked and acted like the marmot version of Elmer Fudd. Aside from the hiking, we began to smell smoke and see clouds of smoke midway through the open country of Montana. We drove through ground that had recently been burned in Washington State (in one case, our son Raed had been there on the fire with his Air Force guys fighting it with local fire fighters). We saw smoke and flames from fires not yet extinguished as we drove on. We experienced very poor air quality in Glacier while hiking. We stayed

in many government and private campgrounds from excellent to not so much. We visited the reservation where I had worked as a federal forester 51 years ago where Chief Joseph is buried (and where I fought fire), and listened to Native American versions of NPR as well as reading many local newspapers. We walked among 1000 year old trees in rainforests, visited many farmers markets, and even danced in one. We also noticed that many historical markers in the American West have been amended to include different versions of what happened with the native tribes.

My reason for writing this was simple. This pandemic is not going to end in a hurry. There is at least a decent chance that it will extend into next summer and fall AND travel in this situation is not only possible, it is doable.