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FOR THE RV ENTHUSIAST

MOTORHOME

JANUARY 2010

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TIPS FOR STAYING
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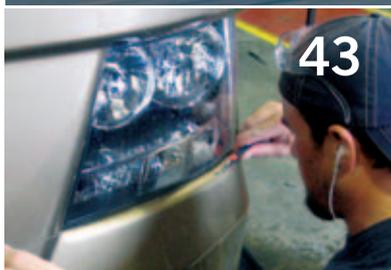
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On The Cover: More than 100 miles of forest trails serve double duty as winter recreation trails at Inyo National Forest in California's eastern High Sierra (see feature, page 26). Photo by Rich Cox Photography.

EXPERIENCING THE OUTDOORS

While hiking in the Channel Islands National Park in Southern California recently, I reflected on the amazing diversity of our park system — and how the insights of a few people led to their respective members of Congress setting aside the natural treasures that have helped popularize the RV lifestyle. Much of this reflection came to light as I beamed at the beautiful terrain surrounding the trail, at the moment feeling very proud that we ran the story on Ken Burns in last September's issue (see "America's Best Idea").

Burns' 12-hour documentary that aired on PBS last fall, "The National Parks — America's Best Idea," was itself a great idea. The series was beautifully filmed, exquisitely edited and, above all, an informative film on the national parks. Of course, the natural beauty in our parks was breathtaking, but Burns' historical presentation tracing the efforts of people with extraordinary vision was eye opening. Without the dedication of conservationists like John Muir, Stephen Mather, Theodore Roosevelt and John D. Rockefeller Jr., what's now the most incredible park system on Earth could have fallen to entrepreneurial greed that, no doubt, would have compromised or even eradicated this pristine geography.

After the first segment aired, Derrick Crandall, president of the American Recreation Coalition, told me that reservations to visit our national parks doubled the next day. That's really good news.

With all of life's distractions — especially virtual influences — competing for our time, getting ourselves and our young people to connect with nature has become very challenging. When visiting parks, I often see teenagers texting their friends feverishly rather than paying attention to a ranger's talk around a blazing campfire.

Part of this problem is our own fault. Motorhomes are filled with indoor enter-



tainment and communication equipment that compete with hiking trails and viewing nature. It's easy and comfortable to hang out inside our motorhomes — but going outdoors is the magnet that attracted us to the RV lifestyle. And besides that, spending time outdoors is therapeutic. Many studies suggest that spending time outdoors decreases stress, provides physical activities that promote good health, opens our minds to creativity and encourages social development (which is sorely needed to improve campground etiquette, but that's another column).

To help people connect with nature, the National Park Service (NPS) has teamed up with the National Association of State Park Directors and the National Recreation and Park Association to develop programs and policies that zero in on capturing the interest of our young people.

If we can get our children and grandchildren to turn off their cell phones, computers and TVs — at least for a little while — we'll succeed in expanding the horizons of the next generation and those who follow, and hopefully neutralize the overdose of virtual stimuli. Check out www.nps.gov/ChildrenInNature/BestPractices for ideas on how you can plan trips and activities that focus on the great outdoors.

Fortunately, Cabinet Secretaries Ken Salazar (Interior) and Ray LaHood (Transportation) are cognizant of the needs of RV enthusiasts. Both have expressed their support for retaining public access to motorhome owners who, of course, have greater "real estate" needs on the roads and in campgrounds (see page 46). As the NPS rallies toward its centennial celebration (in 2016), we hope the momentum to keep our parks accessible to everyone — and interesting to our young people — moves forward at a brisk pace. ♦

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p.o.box

from OUR READERS

WILD FOR YELLOWSTONE

What a great feature on Yellowstone National Park in the late fall ("Discovering the Call of the Wild," October 2009). It was a fascinating article with great pictures.

Yellowstone is a wonderful place to visit in the early spring as well. We visited in mid-May before the children were out of school and the sites crowded. One nice thing about the spring is that all of the rivers, creeks and waterfalls are full and flowing.

Most of the wildlife is out in the spring and most are raising their young. We saw a mother badger bring a squirrel back to her den and the young came out of the hole to feed with her. We also saw a male coyote come back from a hunt and regurgitate to feed the pups. Young elk, bison and moose were everywhere.

While the mornings can be brisk and there is always a chance of snow, early spring can be just as exciting as late fall.

BOB BARADA | VIA E-MAIL

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

I received my October 2009 issue and read, with great interest, Patrick Borders' story on Prince Edward Island ("Captivating Canvas"). It reminded me of our trip to the island in September 2007. We spent eight days and only covered the western half, approximately from Summerside west, although we did take in the Cavendish area of Anne of Green Gables fame.

We traveled the Confederation Trail for part of the trip but also ventured off onto the coastal highway. We followed Highway 14 along the coast, stopped for lunch at a fishing port and a lighthouse at West Point. What started out as a quick stop turned into an interesting afternoon watching the lobster boats come in with their catches.

We then went on to North Cape where we spent some time in the museum and watched the seals playing along the reef in the gulf. On the way back south from the North Cape we stopped at the town of O'Leary and spent a couple of hours at a potato museum.

We then traveled back to the Cavendish area and spent beautiful days along the beaches and the red sandstone cliffs exploring and just enjoying the scenery. One of the

things that I found most interesting is the residents' almost obsession with landscaping, maintaining lawns and flower gardens.

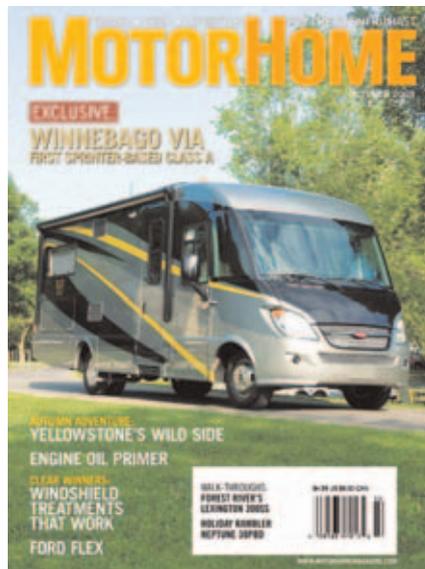
We also experienced the New Glasgow lobster dinners; the mussels came by the pail-full, as much as you wanted. The meals included fantastic lemon and cherry pies.

We only visited half the island in the time we were there and plan to visit again. It has been a real pleasure reading the story in *MotorHome* — it was akin to taking the trip all over again. Keep up the great stories.

JERRY ROOS | VIA E-MAIL

CLASS CONFUSION

I am new to RVs and confused as to what is a Class A, Class B and Class C motorhome. I used to think that the smallest van campers were Class B's, the big buses Class A's and the in-between Class C's. In your October 2009



issue you wrote up the 25-foot Winnebago Via ("Via 25") as a Class A and the longer 32-foot Forest River Lexington ("Lexington 300SS") as a Class C. What gives? How is it determined what is Class A, B or C?

BOB CALVES | URBANNA, VA.

Class A motorhomes (and bus conversions) can be identified by their body, which looks like it's all one design from front to back. These motorhomes start as a rolling chassis



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P.O. BOX

with a powertrain, suspension and a driver's position with a steering column and the dashboard; the RV manufacturer then adds the coach body.

Class B's, also commonly referred to as camping van conversions or camping vans, are compact units based on full-size vans to which the RV components are added. They usually have raised fiberglass roofs, and sometimes dropped floors, for extra headroom inside.

Class C coaches are built on cutaway chassis with an attached cab with driver and passenger doors for easy access. A subgroup in this category consists of an RV body built on a cab-and-chassis pickup truck. Many Class C's have a cabover section used for a bed or entertainment center, which gives the rig its distinctive exterior look. Some Class C's are larger than smaller Class A motorhomes.

CUSTOMER SERVICE PLEASE

We have decided to become full-time RVers but are becoming more and more discouraged about our choice because it seems like the nicer campgrounds have been purchased by resort-condo corporations.

The customer service at these facilities is almost non-existent; they fail to respond to e-mails and the central reservation desk is staffed with people who know nothing about the individual campgrounds or camping in general.

Their RV park fees are out of sight and out of reach for most retirees — we found it's almost \$3,000 for a month on the Florida Keys, with no weekly or monthly rate. There are also restrictions, such as no dogs over 40 pounds and no use of RV washers or dryers (campers must use the on-site laundry facilities).

Given today's economy, especially in Florida, I think that instead of getting more difficult to deal with and raising their rates sky high, these resort RV parks should try to do a better job of attracting business rather than discouraging it.

I have a feeling we are going to see a lot of resorts going out of business if they don't change their tune soon. Most of us will use state parks and family campgrounds that offer reasonable prices. We will exchange large pools and spas and WiFi for being able to eat a steak now and then.

SUE SHIFLETT | EAST BERLIN, PA.

Question:

What RV park amenities are the most important to you?

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or e-mail letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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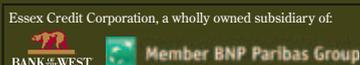
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escapes

edited by PATRICIA MARROQUIN

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | NEWS BRIEFS | CROSSROADS

OUT OF THIS WORLD

MINGLE WITH THE STARS IN A HEAVENLY EVENING AT MCDONALD OBSERVATORY

If you're lucky enough to get

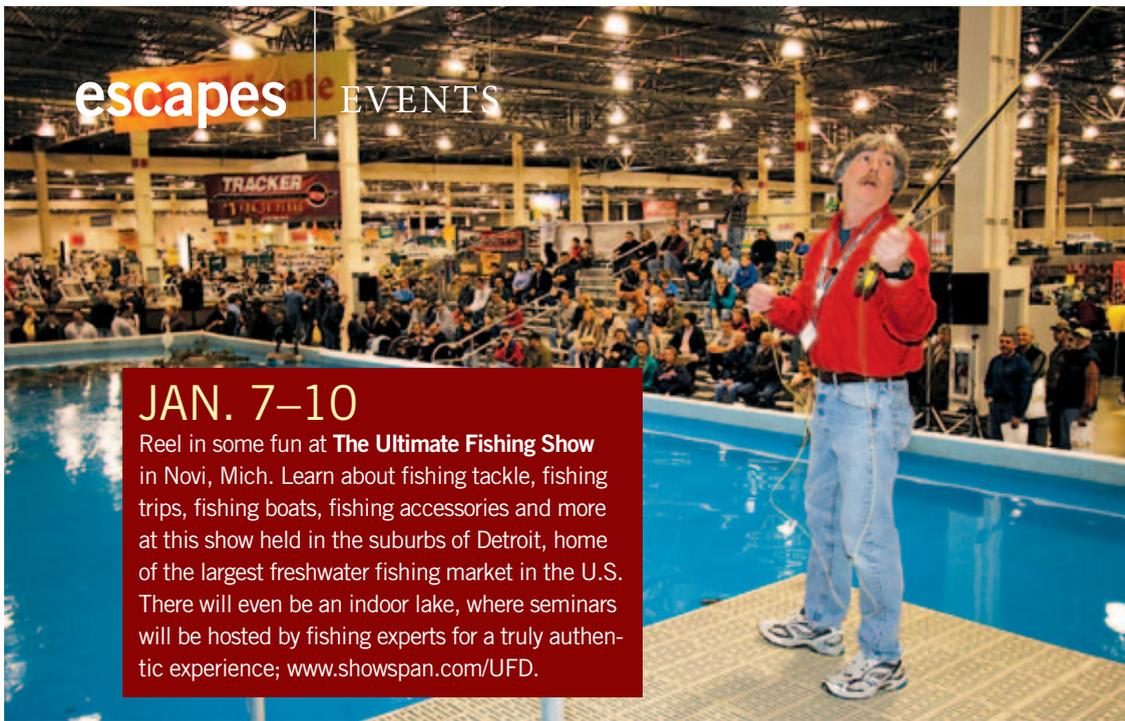
a reservation for one of the evening Star Parties at the McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis, Texas, you won't be rubbing elbows with Hollywood celebrities, but you may be mesmerized by the world of astronomy.

During our tour of the internationally known McDonald Observatory, which is operated by the University of Texas, we explored the beautiful 12,000-foot visitor center, featuring demonstrations, exhibits and visitor programs. A guided tour took us through several of the telescope domes — including the 107-inch Harlan J. Smith telescope and the famous 433-inch Hobby-Eberly optical telescope.

In the evening, we returned for a fascinating experience — the Twilight Program followed by a Star Party, both of which are offered on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday evenings. The program began with a constellation tour acquainting us with the planets and constellations in our own solar system and explaining the myths associated with them. Then we viewed heavenly bodies such as Andromeda and a nebula through several large telescopes.

Be sure to bring binoculars, a flashlight and a warm jacket. For more information, call 877-984-7828, or visit www.mcdonaldobservatory.org.
— *Richard and Ellen Thane*

PHOTO: FRANK CIANCIOLO/MCDONALD OBSERVATORY



escapes EVENTS

JAN. 7-10

Reel in some fun at **The Ultimate Fishing Show** in Novi, Mich. Learn about fishing tackle, fishing trips, fishing boats, fishing accessories and more at this show held in the suburbs of Detroit, home of the largest freshwater fishing market in the U.S. There will even be an indoor lake, where seminars will be hosted by fishing experts for a truly authentic experience; www.showspan.com/UFD.

JAN. 9-24 | Experience the Middle Ages (minus the plagues) at the **Florida Renaissance Festival** at Historic Virginia Key Beach Park in Miami. Historical reenactments, sword fights and authentic grub such as roasted giant turkey legs and freshly made kettle corn promise to provide a mix of education and revelry for the entire family. The festival will take place on weekends and will feature more than 100 costumed performers, 12 stages with entertainment and 20 stage acts; 800-373-6337, www.ren-fest.com.

JAN. 10 | Rev up your engines for the **La Jolla Motor Car Classic**, held at the oceanfront La Jolla Cove in La Jolla, Calif. The show will feature horseless carriages, Italian marques, British marques, woodies, 1950s classics, as well as more than two dozen juried classes of automobiles. The featured marque for the show is the Automobiles of Carroll Shelby; 619-233-5008, www.lajollamotorcarclassic.com.

JAN. 16-17 | Marvel at the animals, famous scenes and more brought to life in ice at the **White Pine Fire and Ice Show** at Cave Lake State Park

near Ely, Nev. The visually stunning ice sculptures are only part of what makes this event worthwhile, as it also features snow bowling, one-hole snow golf, music, and food and drinks served by the White Pine Brewing Company. A fireworks display concludes the event, and there are two campgrounds in the park; 775-728-4460, <http://parks.nv.gov/cl.htm>.

JAN. 21-31 | Bundle up the coach and head over to the **Saint Paul Winter Carnival** in St. Paul, Minn. Each year this event, dubbed "The Coolest Celebration on Earth," draws about 300,000 people for attractions that include an ice carving contest, snow sculpture competition, parades, family activities and a royalty coronation; 651-223-4700, www.winter-carnival.com.

JAN. 23 | Be prepared for the worst by taking the **Wilderness Survival 101** class at Little River Canyon Center in Fort Payne, Ala. This hands-on program will teach basic survival skills dealing with water, shelter, food, fire and rescues. It will take place outdoors, so dress warmly and be prepared to get a little dirty;

256-782-5697, <http://field.school.jsu.edu>.

JAN. 24 | Honor the nation's most patriotic bird at **Eagle Day** in Lawrence, Kan. This annual event celebrating the return of bald eagles to the area includes presentations on nesting and banding as well as a live bald eagle and several birds of prey. Attendees will also have the opportunity to view eagles in the wild throughout the day, and the hands-on exhibits will provide plenty of amusement for the kids; www.kawalley.eaglesday.com.

JAN. 29-31 | Satisfy your sweet tooth and dance the night away at the **Chocolate for Vets** chocolate festival at the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum in Denver. Sponsored by United Voluntary Services, a nonprofit serving veterans since World War II, the festival will feature cooking demonstrations, cookbook signings and chocolate samplings. On Jan. 29 the Manhattan Swing Band will perform "An Evening of Swing and Sweets" while guests enjoy delectable chocolate desserts and beverages; 303-595-0812, www.chocolateforvets.org.

by MEAGHAN ALFIER

RV SHOWS

JAN. 7-10

2010 San Antonio RV Show
San Antonio; 361-727-0423

JAN. 8-10

21st Annual North Carolina
RV & Camping Show
Greensboro, N.C.;
800-441-0013

JAN. 8-10

25th Annual Central Gulf Coast
Boat, Sport & RV Show
Lake Charles, La.;
337-436-4355

JAN. 8-10

Northeast RV & Camping Show
Hartford, Conn.; 860-529-2123

JAN. 8-17

54th Annual Houston Interna-
tional Boat, Sport & Travel Show
Houston; 713-526-6361

JAN. 13-16

20th Annual Colorado
RV Adventure Travel Show
Denver; 303-892-6800

JAN. 14-17

Grand Rapids Camper
Travel & RV Show
Grand Rapids, Mich.;
800-328-6550

JAN. 14-17

RV Vacation & Travel Show
St. Louis; 618-288-9952

JAN. 15-17

12th Annual Southern
Louisiana Boat, Sport
& RV Show
Houma, La.; 337-436-4355

JAN. 15-17

2010 Spring Outdoor,
Camping & RV Supershow
Atlanta; 404-343-9073

JAN. 15-17

24th Annual Washington
Camping RV Expo
Chantilly, Va.; 804-425-6556

JAN. 15-17, 22-24

Mid-America Boat Show
& Mid-America RV Show
Kansas City, Mo.;
816-931-4686

JAN. 21-24

Inland Northwest RV Show
and Sale
Spokane, Wash.;
509-466-4256

JAN. 22-24

43rd Annual New Jersey
RV & Camping Show
Edison, N.J.; 732-403-1610

JAN. 28-31

41st Annual Calgary
RV Exposition & Sale
Calgary, Alberta, Canada;
780-455-8562

January 2010 | **MOTORHOME**

SHORELINE RESORT



Another high-end RV resort has opened along the Gulf Coast in southeast Alabama, an increasingly sought-after Sunbelt destination roughly 30 miles from the Florida state line.

Heritage Motorcoach Resort & Marina in Orange Beach was slated to have its grand opening Nov. 13, 2009, with about half of the resort's 79 sites sold by mid-September, said Duke Gibbs, president and CEO of Tifton, Ga.-based Vizionworks LLC, which developed the resort.

Gibbs said sites have been selling quickly because the facility offers an exclusive RV resort setting along with 42 deep-water access boat slips on Bayou St. John. "We haven't been able to find another resort in the country like this," Gibbs said of the Class A-only resort. "We've got about 500 feet of shoreline on the bay, and within three minutes by boat you can be in the Gulf of Mexico."

Gibbs developed the 8.5-acre resort on a site that includes about 70 oak trees, which have been preserved to increase the park's aesthetic appeal. Each RV site is 40 by 80 feet and includes an 11-by-25-foot coach house that can be customized to suit each owner's needs. The resort also includes a 3,000-square-foot clubhouse with a kitchen, laundry facilities and grand room as well as a state-of-the-art fitness center, an outdoor pavilion with a fire pit and an infinity-edge swimming pool.

RV site prices range from \$150,000 to \$400,000, while boat slips are from \$40,000 to \$60,000. Sites are also available for renting during the winter season. For more information, visit the resort's Web site at www.heritageorangebeach.com. — *Jeff Crider*

MOTORHOME | January 2010

News Briefs

A century ago, the popularization of the automobile, improving roads, and America's passion for exploration gave rise to mass-produced, manufactured recreation vehicles, and the RV industry was born. This year, **Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA)** and the RV industry will mark this centennial with an array of special activities celebrating the 100-year journey of a uniquely American product. Through war and peace, booms and busts, fuel lines, fads and the cyber revolution, the RV lifestyle has endured and is still going strong, even in today's challenging economic times. "Think about how far we've come in the past 100 years in terms in technology, yet the reasons to RV remain the same," said RVIA President Richard Coon. "RVing has been able to thrive and grow because people still enjoy the freedom that it provides." The industry will celebrate its centennial this year with a series of events that showcase today's innovations and new products while emphasizing America's century-long love affair with RVs.

The new energy management system that is standard on **Tiffin Motorhomes' Allegro Bus** and **Zephyr** models for 2010 has been called a "revolutionary new concept" for RVs by **Precision Circuits Inc.**, which developed the feature. Previously, coaches operated either on shorepower or generator. The new energy management system harnesses additional available power from the motorhome's batteries for a short time and automatically sheds non-critical loads if power demand increases beyond capacity, according to a news release from the Red Bay, Ala.-based RV manufacturer.

Camping increased 7 percent and hiking rose 9 percent in 2008, while youth participation in outdoor recreation continued to decline, according to a new study released by **The Outdoor Foundation**. These trends show the beginning of adjustments in American lifestyles brought about by a challenging economy, shifting demographics and changing times. "In today's economy, people are returning to simpler lifestyles," said Christine Fanning, executive director of The Outdoor Foundation. "Historically economic downturns have resulted in increased participation in outdoor recreation. Nature-based activities provide fun, affordable recreation and vacation opportunities for individuals and families."

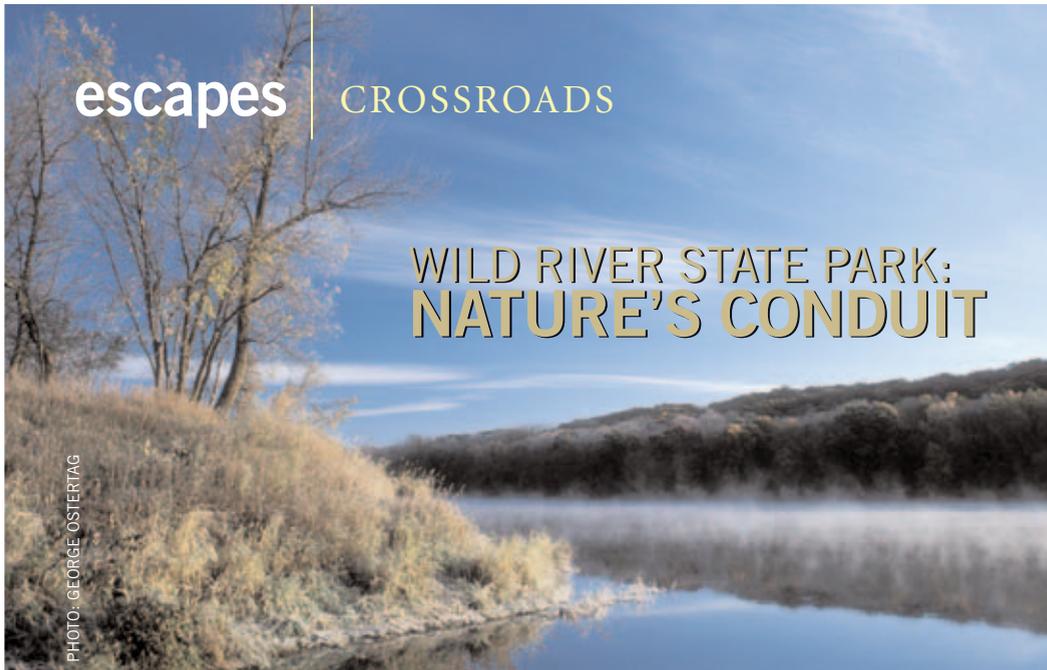




escapes | CROSSROADS

WILD RIVER STATE PARK: NATURE'S CONDUIT

PHOTO: GEORGE OSTERTAG



St. Croix River, a rare, undisturbed tributary of the upper Mississippi River and one of the original eight National Wild and Scenic Rivers, has held the pulse of Minnesota since the last ice age. It shapes a natural migration route for birds and wildlife; carried the canoes of native peoples, trappers and traders; and helped to deliver the state's natural resources to mills and markets.

Today, St. Croix River and its associated Wild River State Park near Almelund serve as portals to serenity and natural beauty. Hiking, canoeing, bird and wildlife watching, horseback riding, picnicking, camping, relaxing and watching the seasons change figure high on visitors' to-do lists. Nordic skiing and snowshoeing thrill winter enthusiasts.

The 6,800-acre state park borders 18 river miles and encompasses northern conifers, southern oak hardwoods and restored tall grass prairie. More than 130 bird species nest here. Deer, bear, beaver and even the occasional through-traveling wolf have caught visitors' notice.

The park has year-round camping and seasonal rentals of canoes, snowshoes and cross-country skis.

For more information, call 651-583-2125, or visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/wild_river. — *Rhonda Ostertag*



EROSION EXPLOSION

PHOTO: DONNA IKENBERRY

Natural Bridges National

Monument is home to some outstanding examples of erosional and geological processes, including three massive and spectacular natural bridges. The first of Utah's National Park System areas, the monument is located off State Highway 95 in southeast Utah.

Overlooks provide an easy way to view the three bridges — Sipapu, Kachina and Owachomo — but there is nothing like hiking below and through them. An 8.6-mile-long loop trail provides access. Sipapu Bridge is the highest and longest bridge, with a height of 220 feet and a span of 268 feet.

In addition to bridges, visitors may see rock art and structures left behind by the ancestral Pueblos who once lived here.

The night skies at the monument are among the darkest in the lower 48 states, making it a favorite with night-sky enthusiasts and astronomers. Rangers give astronomy programs during the high season.

There are plenty of boondocking opportunities within the park, and full-hookup sites can be found in Blanding, 35 miles away.

For more information, call 435-692-1234, or go to www.nps.gov/nabr. — *Donna Ikenberry* ♦

January 2010 | **MOTORHOME**

PHOTO: PALM SPRINGS AERIAL TRAMWAY



FROM SIZZLE TO SNOW

If you plan to travel to the warm desert oasis of Palm Springs, Calif., this month, don't forget to bring your parka. And maybe even some snow skis.

The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway — the largest rotating aerial tram in the world — will whisk you 2.5 miles above the desert floor.

The tramway was opened in 1963 as a way to get from the Coachella Valley floor to near the top of San Jacinto Peak. These days, the tramway — one of the steepest ascending tramways in the world — serves as a tourist attraction.

During your 10-minute ride from the Valley Station to the Mountain Station, you'll witness dramatic climatic changes, or "life zones."

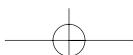
The 80-passenger trams, which are 18 feet in diameter, rotate throughout the ride so every passenger is guaranteed the same sweeping view.

Be forewarned: There could be a 30-degree difference in temperature from the valley floor to the mountaintop.

At the summit, visitors can go cross-country skiing, sledding and snowshoeing. There are gift shops in both stations, and two dining options: Peaks, offering fine dining with a view; and Pines Café, a cafeteria-style eatery.

For more information, call 888-515-8726, or visit www.pstramway.com.

— *Patricia Marroquin*





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Coach House
PLATINUM

by BERT GILDART

getaway

NO BARRIERS TO FUN

Kayaking, four-wheeling, birding and beachcombing engage visitors to Padre Island



The author tests his kayaking skills in roaring, warm waters from the Gulf of Mexico. Tranquil waters can be found at Laguna Madre (Mother Lagoon).

From the comfort of our RV, my wife, Janie, and I watched as the early morning sun slowly rose from a sea of turquoise-colored waters along the Gulf of Mexico. Twelve hours later and just four miles away, we repeated the ritual, watching as the evening equivalent dipped into another body of water, this time, the Laguna Madre. Such is the spectacular way the day begins and ends on this 70-mile-long spit of elongated land known as Padre Island National Seashore, located along the south Texas coast.

We began our 10-day stay at Padre Island by driving beyond the 10 miles of paved road that serve this narrow but much elongated park. From here, a sand route takes over, moving along the beach, where there's access to free, primitive camping. We settled in, then returned two miles by bike to the Malaquite visitor center, where we soon learned about the unique role of barrier islands.

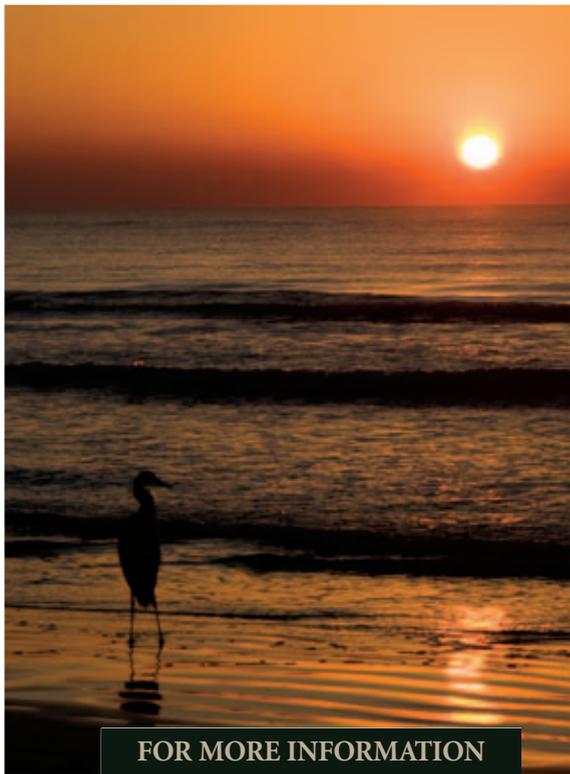
In North America there are 295 barrier islands, stretching from Maine to Brownsville, Texas. They protect the mainland from the erosive effects created by the ocean's



White pelicans take a dip in the waters of Laguna Madre at Padre Island National Seashore. Padre Island is a primary migration route for birds between North and Central America. Malaquite Campground, below, which is protected by sand dunes, has a boardwalk linking it with the beach.



PHOTOS: JANIE GILDART (LEAD); BERT GILDART



Visitors to Padre Island National Seashore can bird-watch, build sandcastles, go windsurfing or photograph the seashore's inhabitants, which include the elusive ghost crab. Consistent winds make the Laguna Madre a premier spot for windsurfing. Another popular activity is four-wheel driving at South Beach. At Little Shell Beach and Big Shell Beach, both birds and seashells are plentiful.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

MALAQUITE CAMPGROUND

www.nps.gov/pais/planyourvisit/malaquite_campground.htm

PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

361-949-8173,
www.nps.gov/pais/index.htm

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powerful winds and currents. At more than 70 miles long, Padre is our nation's — and the world's — longest undeveloped barrier island. And that's just one reason Padre has become such a magnet for campers — because of all the breathing room.

If you're camped along the beach (as we were) and own kayaks (as we do), you'll want to explore these waters. On some days waters from the Gulf punch with the kind of force you'd expect from a tsunami, but if you can make it here, you can make it most anywhere. Still, if you flip (almost to be expected), no matter. The water is warm, and it invites practice and experimentation.

When you've practiced enough there's the Laguna Madre (Mother Lagoon) with its tranquil waters made so by the protection of this barrier island. Push off and you can glide for miles, simultaneously taking in the flocks of white pelicans, and if you're lucky a sighting of the beautiful crested caracara.

Of course, kayaking may not be your cup of tea, and if that is the case, you can stay put at South Beach — opting instead for some four-wheel driving, one of the very best ways of exploring Padre. Begin by driving along South Beach, which stretches 60 miles from the northern barricade to the southern boundary of the park at Mansfield Channel. This channel separates North and South Padre island.

The first five miles of South Beach are composed of packed sand and can be easi-

ly driven on with a two-wheel-drive vehicle. The remaining 55 miles, however, contain areas of deep sand and the park recommends using a four-wheel-drive vehicle beyond mile marker five. Even then you should take precautions, for many things could happen. You could get stuck, generally remedied by releasing air from your tires, thereby increasing the surface area of your tires and, so, the traction. You could also get stranded by surging tides, remedied by taking a tide chart — and studying it. Call the park's visitor center ahead of time for beach driving conditions, as they change frequently with the weather and tides.

Unfortunately, as you are driving, you'll see that a considerable amount of marine debris (natural and man-made) has accumulated. Some is from Hurricane Ike and the destruction it caused in 2008 when it struck Houston and Galveston. The debris that arrives at Padre Island can range from treasures to trash, including seashells, seabeans, driftwood, barrels and plastics.

Near the 10-mile marker on South Beach, four-wheel-drive vehicles arrive at Little Shell Beach. The terrain is wild, and it is here that I was finally able to fulfill one of my goals — to photograph the elusive ghost crab.

In this remote section of rippling sand, sprawling shells and towering dunes, Janie and I saw them repeatedly, and we gave chase. Finally, we cornered one that preferred flight over flight, but its orientation

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NO BARRIERS TO FUN

was all wrong. Foolishly, I attempted to reposition it, and discovered just how mighty its small pinchers can be. And so I opted to wait, and was eventually rewarded.

At mile 20 we plowed our way onto Big Shell Beach, where the shells were plentiful and slightly larger than those at Little Shell Beach. Once again, birds were numerous and we'd now tallied more than 60 species but hoped to see many more, such as the much-revered caracara. But that night it was not to be, so we returned to our rig, hoping the now-increasing winds might soon abate.

Camping along the beach is compelling as long as the winds don't howl, but when they grow in strength, it's time to migrate to Malaquite Campground — or perhaps to Bird Island, where winds are almost universally worshiped.

Bird Island campground is embraced by the Laguna Madre, and it attracts visitors from all over the country. "It's the consistent winds," said Don Dennis of Vermont. "And, that's why I'm here."

Dennis is a windsurfer, one of a unique breed who attaches sail to board and then allows the wind to propel him over the water's surface. He works to angle his craft so gusts will accelerate him to speeds of more than 30 MPH. Though you might think of windsurfing as a young person's sport, most people camped at Bird Island were anything but youngsters. Dennis was 60 and many of the other RVers seemed older than that. In fact, everyone kept pointing to one elderly man said to have just celebrated his 85th birthday — by windsurfing. "One day that's going to be me," said a 22-year-old man.

During the days we camped at Bird Island, winds were blowing at speeds of about 15 MPH, and we watched as men and women who had obviously been surfing together for the past few days strung themselves into a line. Several veered off and tried to "helicopter," or make complete mid-air 360-degree rotations. Certainly, good windsurfers provide visitors with a grand spectator sport — and we considered the activity one of Padre's many gifts offered up from the sea.

But persistent convection currents created by the juxtaposition of land and water may at times interfere with the objective of lounging and reading and toe curling in these warm, tantalizing sands. Again, you can migrate, alighting 15 min-

utes or so later at Malaquite Campground, better protected by towering dunes of sand.

The park asks visitors to stay off the dunes, but it provides a boardwalk linking with the beach. At times you'll be rewarded, finding tracks of the Ridley sea turtle — yet another of my goals.

Sea turtles are endangered and normally don't begin appearing at Padre until about mid-April. We were several weeks early, but already the National Park Service was directing volunteers to search the sand for tracks. Some of the volunteers were RV enthusiasts.

We met one man who found tracks almost every day, and when he did he'd radio a biologist who'd then move the eggs to an incubation facility at park headquarters. Forty-five to 53 days later biologists would move hatchlings to the edge of the sea, simultaneously protecting them from the ever-present gulls as they scurried to their new, watery home. The effort has been a big success, and in recent years returns from marked turtles have steadily increased.

Though we found tracks (a rare find), we never saw a turtle, but our disappointment was more than offset when we joined George and Mary Eggenberger on one of their bird-watching van tours. Tours are popular because Padre Island is located on the Central Flyway, a major migration route, so there's much action and birds are plentiful.

One group of aves, the shorebirds, is so abundant that scientists have designated portions of Padre Island National Seashore as being of "International Importance," and that really carries clout. To qualify, a site must attract more than 100,000 shorebirds annually, and Padre Island serves as a significant resting stop for thousands of birds, some endangered species, as they make their way on their long journey.

"It's a main migration route between North and Central America," the Eggenbergers said. "Birds find us by flying to the Gulf Coast, and then they follow the shoreline south to Padre. But you're a little late for the plovers and sandpipers. Come back next February."

Some species are year-round residents and on almost any outing you might see great blue herons, sanderlings, brown pelicans, various tern species — and maybe even our much sought after crested caracara.

"There's been a pair hanging at a knoll off the road just this side of Laguna Madre,"

George said. "The pair was there yesterday," said Mary, "and I'll bet we see them today."

And so it was we were able to study Mexico's national bird, marveling at its red-crested crown, its ferocious-looking face, and that evil beak that enables this member of the falcon family to excel as a predator.

Though you are not likely to see the caracara in action, you will see both the white and the brown pelican, our nominees for Padre's most exciting avian species. Of the two, white pelicans are largest, though you can also differentiate by the manner in which they forage.

White pelicans gather together in large numbers and "herd" fish into large schools, at which time they simply dip their beaks into the water followed by a quick forward swish of their beaks. The action collects fish into their gular pouches, where the food is held for their young or until they themselves are hungry.

Though the technique is effective, it lacks the drama demonstrated by the squadrons of brown pelicans, seen most typically on the Gulf side of the park. They're searching the waves for schooling baitfish, and when they spot a school, they fold their wings and dive hard into the water. Other times they light onto the ocean's surface and, then, with beats of wings and thrusts of webbed feet, they pound the waves in a mighty confusion of bodies, gathering fish into their pouches.

Often such drama persists for more than an hour, and whether it was satiation or a dispersal in the schools of fish that caused the frenzy to cease, only the pelicans knew. We knew that we had been privileged to witness a special moment in nature, and although we'd seen many brown pelicans, never before had we seen such a frenzy of feeding.

We wondered what more might a little time here provide?

No matter, it was late, and time now to return to our rig. A full moon was rising, and we could hear the waves crashing against the shore, inviting sleep after a full day of exploring. And in the morrow? Surely some golden hew of an orb would lift from the Gulf, and with it would come more pelican squadrons. Would we follow them; or would we sit beneath our awning, reading and curling our toes in the sand?

Weighty decisions, yes, but we were reveling in the skills required to handle them. ♦





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HEALTHY TRAVELING TIPS



Staying active during winter is fun and easy with family-friendly sports including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and ice hockey. When making reservations at RV parks, look for campgrounds that offer activities such as tennis, softball, swimming, kayaking and volleyball — vigorous exercise has been proven to be an excellent stress reducer. Hobbies such as bird-watching and plant identification are also fun ways to challenge the mind and body.



MAINTAIN YOUR WELLNESS GOALS WHILE HAVING A GOOD TIME ON THE ROAD

by LYNN DIFLEY

The most popular seminar I teach at RV rallies is, by far, my “Healthy Living On the Road” class. The majority of my students want to know how they can maintain a commitment to eating well and exercising regularly without putting a crimp in the joys of traveling the open road.

The answer is easy: A healthy lifestyle is the same whether you live in a high-rise apartment or a home on wheels. Once you make the commitment, you can maintain your goals no matter where you are.

STAY ACTIVE

Setting priorities such as eating well and exercising regularly requires planning your trips to include outdoor and physical activities, as well as stocking your refrigerator and pantry with nutritious choices. Instead of just going to the beach, for instance, choose a campground that has swimming areas, kayak rentals, biking and hiking trails and nature study activities.

Even if you don’t consider yourself to be athletically inclined, set your sights on increasing your daily quota of exercise as a positive step toward wellness. Walking can be done nearly anywhere. In urban areas, check the visitors centers for self-guided walking tours — you can enjoy the architecture and history of a place while you are strengthening your endurance.

The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Mayo Clinic, the American Heart Association and many other health organizations recommend a 10,000-step-a-day walking goal for optimal health. Buy a pedometer and see how many steps you can accumulate. Don’t worry if you can’t reach the 10,000 mark at first, just gradually increase your daily steps until you reach the goal. A couple in one of my classes shared that they strap on their individual pedometers every morning and then compare the results at dinnertime. The loser has to wash the dishes.

Walking and cycling are both ways to increase fitness and enjoy the outdoors. Cycling is a great aerobic activity, no matter how fast a pace you choose. You can run errands or explore areas on two wheels, saving fuel as well as burning calories. During winter, consider adding fun activities such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing to your exercise routine to stay fit off season.

Vigorous exercise is also a fantastic stress reducer. Authorities link stress with many major health problems — from heart attack and stroke to cancer — as well as more minor ones, such as backaches, insomnia and digestive disorders. You can help to reduce your stress by



Try out new recipes in your galley using fresh fruits and vegetables. When exploring on your travels, keep an eye out for local farmers markets and produce stands. Many health experts recommend a 10,000-step-a-day goal — hiking is one way to get your daily quota.



HEALTHY TRAVELING TIPS

traveling at a slower pace, enjoying long walks and bike rides and leaving the worries of everyday life behind.

Incorporating hobbies into your daily exercise routine is a fun way to increase your activity level. Hobbies such as bird-watching, insect collecting or plant identification challenge your mind, senses and body. Binoculars and a field guide can open a world of vivid and rewarding experiences and most state and national campgrounds offer nature walks you can join.

If you travel with children or grandchildren, you have even more opportunities for staying active. During summer travels, bring along their bikes, jump ropes or balls; during winter, pack their ice skates and hockey equipment. National parks offer a wide range of year-round activities to entertain kids, from nature walks and campfire programs to Junior Ranger programs.

TAKE A BREAK

While driving long distances, be sure to stop and take frequent breaks from sitting — go outside, look around, stretch and

get the blood circulating. Rest stops and local parks are great places to explore. Driving (and sitting) can create back muscle tension, and wears on the body after an extended period of time.

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends getting up every 50 minutes to move around — to prevent blood clots as well as to improve back health. Get out of the motorhome and do a few gentle back bends, reach your hands up toward the sky and stretch side-to-side, circle the arms, twist and rotate the body around to loosen the spine. Try to walk around for at least five minutes as well. A quick game of catch or Frisbee is fun and burns a few calories, too.

MAKE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

As you explore, stay alert for roadside farm stands and produce markets. Find a local vegetable stand or farmers market — some can be found on the road right in front of the farm where its produce was grown, selling what was harvested that day. Foods grown locally and picked at the height of freshness generally taste better and are

more likely to be free of harmful chemicals.

When choosing produce, shop for a rainbow of colors, which not only looks beautiful, but also guarantees a variety of nutrition. Be willing to try new foods; if you're not sure how to prepare it, ask the farmers; they will be glad to add to your recipe collection.

When collecting new recipes and improving nutritional standards in your galley, focus on keeping foods as close to their original form as possible. Quality fruits and vegetables, prepared as simply as possible — steamed, sautéed in broth, or roasted on the grill — add a delicious and healthful mealtime treat that has long-lasting benefits.

An expedition to a fisherman's wharf or fish market can provide a vitamin-packed seafood substitute for beef or pork. Seafood is tasty and full of heart-healthy fats. A squeeze of lemon and a sprinkling of fresh herbs are all you need to encourage delicious grilled goodness of fresh-caught fish.

Healthy eating includes snacks, too. Prepare your favorites to avoid the fast-food traps and sudden hunger pangs. Use the same standards you would for main meals,

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just downsize the quantity. Be sure to include some protein for satiety and carbohydrate for energy — for example a cup of nonfat plain yogurt with fresh berries.

During hot weather, mix up your own fruit pops. Take 2 cups of fresh fruit pieces, blend with 1 tablespoon sugar or sweetener and 1 teaspoon lemon, pour into molds and freeze. Conversely, freeze a carton of yogurt (with or without fruit pieces mixed in) and enjoy a creamy frozen treat any time.

Experts agree that those who eat breakfast consume fewer calories the rest of the day, have more energy and are more active. Leftovers from last night's dinner make a delicious start to the day if you want a change from whole grain cereal, fruit and nonfat milk.

Carbonated soft drinks are the single biggest source of calories in the American diet. Avoid the empty calories of sodas by preparing your own favorite beverages. Iced tea and coffee can be prepared early in the day and provide a healthy, economical option when thirst strikes. Fruit juices provide vitamins and minerals, and a couple of cans of all-juice frozen concentrate take up little space in the freezer and are quick and easy to mix up and serve.

BE PREPARED

Eating well and exercising regularly will go a long way toward improving your health, but at the same time, be prepared to take care of any individual health condition.

If you have a chronic health situation, consult your physician and follow that expert's advice. Keep copies of your medical information, as well as emergency contact information, in a readily accessible place in the motorhome. A listing of any conditions you have, medications you regularly take and a copy of your health insurance policy should be in the RV.

Pack any prescription and over-the-counter drugs you take on a regular basis, and stock extra to be sure you have an adequate supply while traveling.

Make sure you know the phone number and location of the nearest clinic or hospital. If you need ongoing care, your physician will be able to help you find a resource to fill your need. Anticipating any possible problems and having solutions on hand are the best ways to prevent unnecessary medical situations.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY

As you pack up the motorhome for your next vacation, consider leaving the electronic games, computers, portable TVs and video players at home. The stress level of our multitasking society is taking its toll, contributing to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, digestive disorders and a world of other ailments. Leave the work and everyday worries behind; don't bring the stress with you. Don't waste your precious time and opportunity; use this chance to connect with nature and each other wisely. Downtime is essential to preserve health in this modern hurry-up age.

Now that many RVers are seeking destinations closer to home — which means driving fewer miles — it's a great opportunity to spend more time exploring along the way, hiking, biking, relaxing and getting to know each other. You may not cover as much ground, but you'll have a more direct, personal experience.

Consider your next trip an opportunity to try out some of these healthy living ideas, reduce stress, improve your fitness level and make your own wellness a priority. ♦

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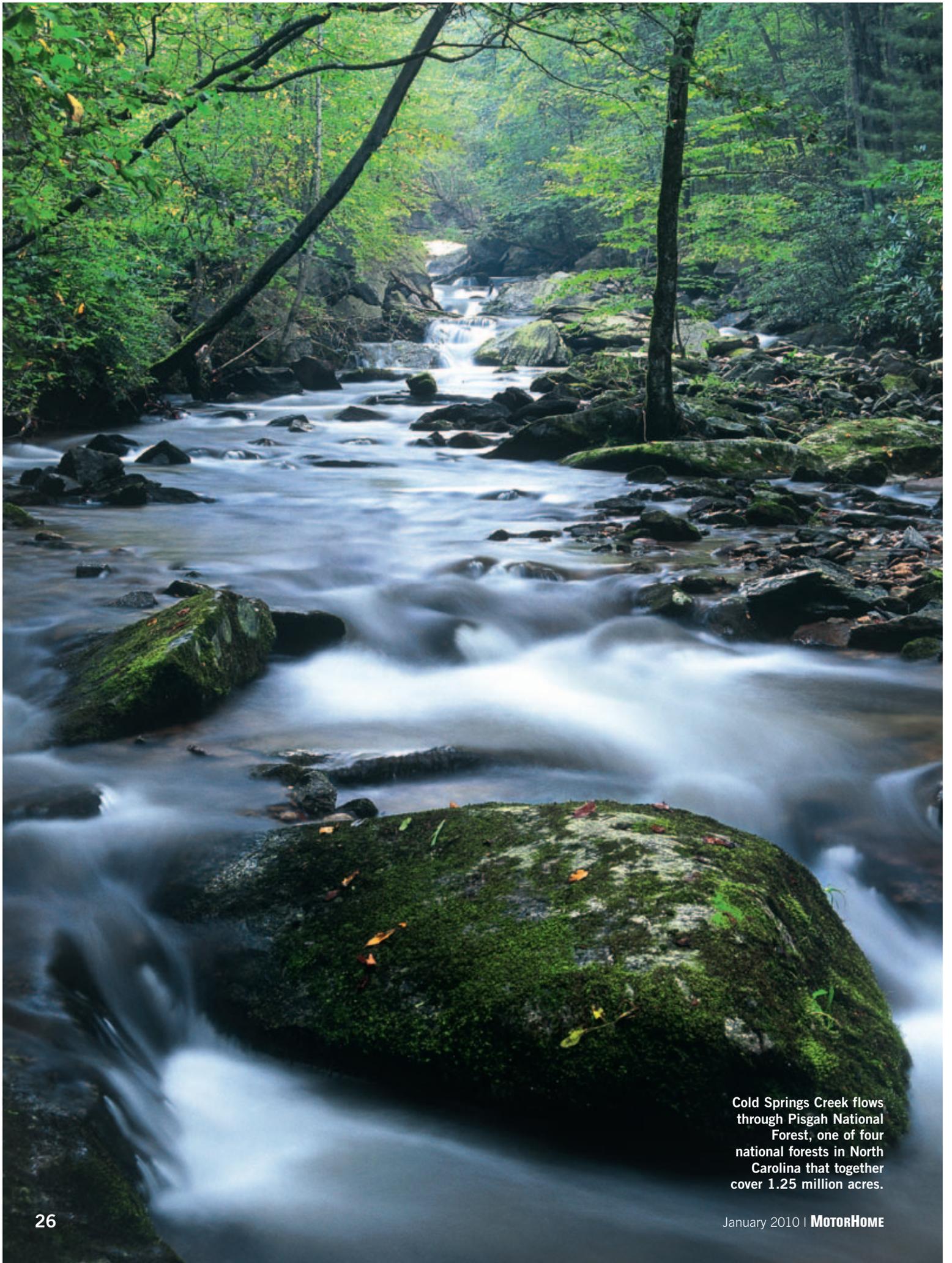
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Cold Springs Creek flows through Pisgah National Forest, one of four national forests in North Carolina that together cover 1.25 million acres.



10 FANTASTIC FORESTS

No matter the season or the region, the U.S. Forest Service has a **vacation destination for you**

by RHONDA OSTERTAG

For more than a century, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands have served our needs. According to recent Forest Service statistics, there are 350 million recreational visits a year to our national forests.

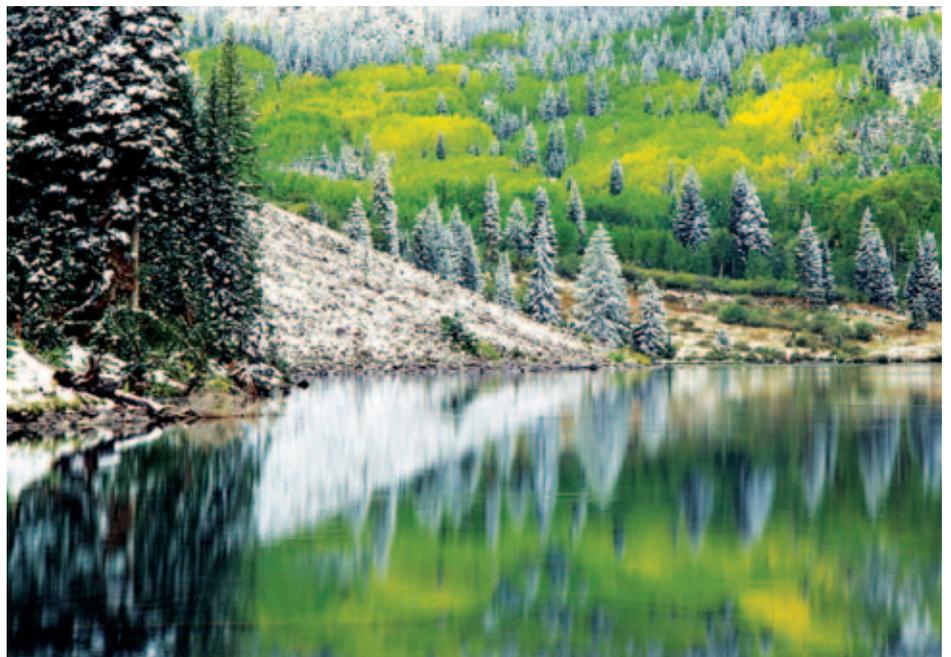
The Forest Service system has 136 scenic byways to present the big picture, and more than 130,000 miles of trails for more intimate discovery. Campgrounds serve travelers with both heart-of-the-action and rustic, remote locations. Picnic and viewing areas, visitor centers, historic sites, boat launches and more cater to recreationists. Sightseeing, car touring, photography, wildlife watching, fishing, hunting, hiking, mountain biking and canoeing are all popular.

And forests don't sleep in winter. Where winter white dominates, downhill ski resorts operate under forest permits, and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and even dog-sledding engage hearts. Southern forests hold attraction year-round with winter-comfortable temperatures for exploring.

Listed west to east, here are 10 top USFS forests. Each represents a key region; focuses on recreation; has ample access with developed campgrounds, recreation sites, trails, and paved or good surfaced roads; and encompasses important habitats in the national forest system.

PHOTOS: GEORGE OSTERTAG

MOTORHOME | January 2010



Top: White River National Forest in Colorado offers some of the best winter recreation opportunities in the nation — from downhill skiing at a world-class resort to cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Below: A distinctive bristlecone pine tree can be found in Patriarch Grove in Inyo National Forest in California. At nearly 5,000 years old, the weather-ravaged bristlecone pines are as old as the pyramids.



MOUNT BAKER-SNOQUALMIE NATIONAL FOREST, WASHINGTON

Mount Baker-Snoqualmie's 1.7 million acres encompass rain forest and the North Cascade rugged mountain wilds, punctuated by Mount Baker, one the most photographed peaks in the nation as well as one of the snowiest.

The forest extends from the Canadian border to the northern boundary of Mount Rainier National Park. It is home to more glaciers and snowfields than any other national forest in the lower 48.

The forest offers more than 1,500 miles of trails and 150 miles of scenic byway. Mount Baker Scenic Byway (State Route 542) leads to one of the best drive-to vistas in the country. At Heather Meadows, Artist Point and Picture Lake, all eyes lock onto Mount Baker and Mount Shuksan and the outstanding alpine ecosystem. Normally, nature withholds such views for hikers' eyes only. Because of the forest's proximity to Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, you'll find developed public and dispersed campgrounds.

DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST, OREGON

Twice the size of Rhode Island, this central Cascade Mountains-High Desert national forest unites premier ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests, wild and scenic rivers, nearly 160 shining lakes, volcano views and lava flows.

Part of this forest, Newberry National Volcanic Monument, is a broad shield volcano cradling two crater lakes that rival the renowned Crater Lake in origin and blue clarity. The headwaters to the Deschutes and Metolius Wild and Scenic Rivers originate in the forest, and it is home to the largest downhill ski area in the Pacific Northwest — Mount Bachelor, attracting 700,000 users annually.

Among the 1,400 miles of trails are 60 miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. The forest offers great access and recreational diversity. In addition to more than 90 developed USFS campgrounds, private RV parks and resorts are dispersed throughout the forest.

INYO NATIONAL FOREST, CALIFORNIA

Inyo is home to eastern High Sierra splendor and the world's oldest trees, the bristle-



Above: Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in Washington state encompasses 1.7 million acres and extends from the Canadian border to the northern boundary of Mount Rainier National Park. Mount Shuksan towers in the background at Picture Lake. Right: White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire is the largest alpine zone on the East Coast. Just off State Highway 112, Albany Bridge crosses Squam River. The forest often makes the top of lists for best places to view fall color. Left: Douglas fir and ponderosa pine trees fill Deschutes National Forest in Oregon, also home to rivers, lava flows and 160 lakes. In this forest is Mount Bachelor, which has the largest downhill ski area in the Pacific Northwest.



cone pines. The climate-tortured bristlecone pines live high in the White Mountains northeast of Big Pine. Gnarled and twisted, these nearly 5,000-year-old relics are as old as the pyramids and unmatched as living climatic records of time on Earth. For winning an audience, passenger vehicles are better suited to the winding mountain road.

Other forest boasts are Mono Lake (a unique chemistry lake, birthplace to 90 percent of the California gull population), Mount Whitney (tallest peak in the lower 48 states) and Mammoth Lakes Basin (a year-round recreation center).

More than 100 miles of forest trails do double duty as winter recreation trails. The forest covers 2 million acres and currently shares management of seven wilderness areas, among them John Muir and Ansel Adams. Inyo is Native American for “dwelling place of the great spirit,” and it grows the human spirit, too.

FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST, MONTANA

Stretched over 2.3 million Rocky Mountain acres along the west side of the Continental Divide south of the Canadian border,

this forest, adjacent to Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake, contributes to a great ecosystem and critical wildlife zone. Its proximity to the national park draws national and international visitors, leading to a complement of recreation sites that this forest wild might not otherwise suggest.

Bob Marshall, Great Bear and Mission Mountains wilderness areas account for nearly half the forest acreage. Outfitters lead horseback riding trips, fishing trips and river-running expeditions into remote forest reaches. The 35-mile-long Hungry Horse Reservoir is a popular drive-to recreation center with big mountain beauty.

Some 2,600 miles of trails web the forest, 200 miles of which are national recreation trails. Huckleberries stain the fingers in late summer and nourish bears (grizzly and black) for hibernation. Whitefish Mountain Resort attracts winter downhill skiers.

WHITE RIVER NATIONAL FOREST, COLORADO

This 2.3-million-acre national forest in the heart of the Colorado Rockies — surrounding Vail, Glenwood Springs and Aspen — claims the nation’s greatest number of recreational visits. Many are recorded in winter to the area’s prized ski resorts. Proposals for the first ski area were made in 1936, and by the 1960s, the area’s ski regency was established. A host of 14,000-foot peaks reinforces the forest’s wild aspect.

The forest’s signature aspens turn color from late September through the first two weeks of October. Campgrounds typically open from mid- to late May and close anywhere from Labor Day to mid-October. Campers here fluff their pillows at some of the highest elevation campsites in the country.

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST, ARIZONA

Snuggled up to Phoenix, this important watershed forest is the fifth-largest forest in the USFS, and one of the most visited urban national forests. The San Carlos and Fort Apache Indian reservations shape the eastern border of Tonto, formed in 1905.

Its 3 million acres cover a striking elevation change from 1,300 feet to 7,900 feet that encompasses saguaro cactus in the lower reaches and mountain pines in the loftier reaches. It’s crisscrossed by some 900 miles of trails.

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10 FANTASTIC FORESTS

There are 2,600 miles of trails in Montana's Flathead National Forest, which comprises 2.3 million Rocky Mountain acres.

When exploring here, know the danger of heat and the value of water. The elevation extremes dictate recreation patterns. The Sonoran Desert cacti and canyon settings attract hikers and campers in winter, while cool mountain realms, together with the Salt and Verde rivers and associated six reservoirs, spell relief from summer heat.

SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST, MINNESOTA

This northerly national forest, the eighth most visited in the nation, is home to hundreds of miles of cold- and warm-water streams — including 2,000 of the state's acclaimed 10,000 lakes — and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, which National Geographic named as one of the world's 50 great destinations to see in a lifetime. The American Bird Conservancy named this forest one of the 100 globally important bird areas.

Water is key in this forest, with 695 square miles of the forest surface constituting water — more than 1,500 miles of canoe byways unveil the magic. The boreal forest ecosystem, abundant winter snow and alluring summer temperatures provide the setting for a full range of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities year-round. Calls of the wild include the mournful cry of the loon and the howl of the gray wolf. To protect the Canoe Area Wilderness' character, user permits are required in order to control and distribute use across the 1-million-acre wilderness.

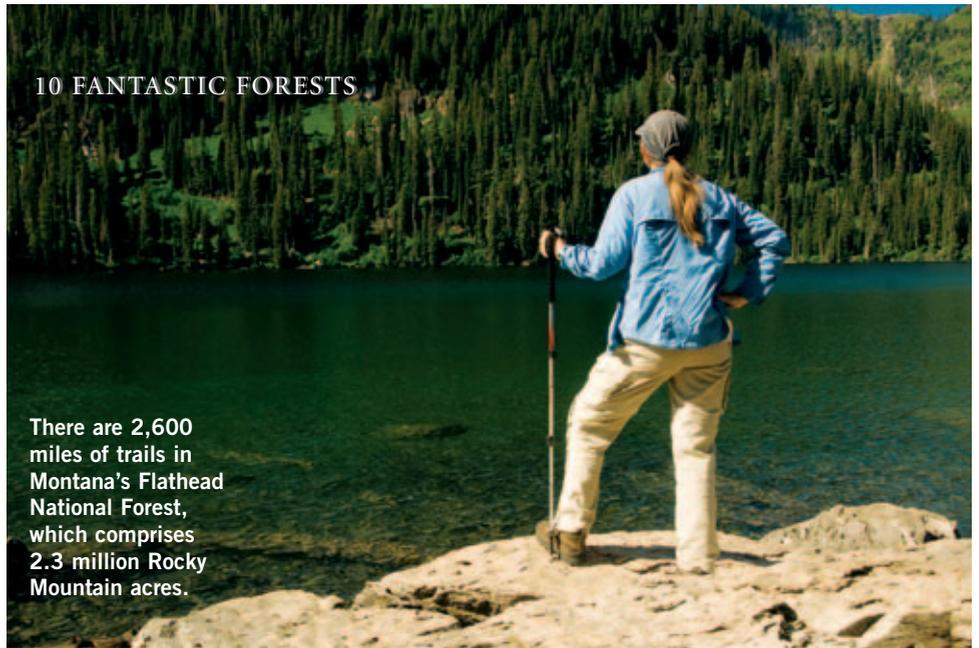
WHITE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST, NEW HAMPSHIRE

This historic forest has drawn visitors for

centuries and captures the heart and spirit of outdoor recreation. The first recorded ascent of the forest's Mount Washington came in 1642; today, it's a bumper-sticker boast. White Mountain National Forest encompasses nearly 800,000 acres and is the largest alpine zone on the East Coast. For viewing on foot, some 1,200 miles of trails traverse the forest, as do 160 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail on its skyline route from Georgia to Maine. Most access roads are paved and the forest often tops "best" lists for places to view fall leaves. In fall, leaf-peepers can outnumber state residents. Rocky Gorge Scenic Area and more than 100 waterfalls decorate the forest.

ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST, PENNSYLVANIA

At more than 500,000 acres, this is one of the largest national forests in the East. It sits within a day's reach of one-third of the nation's population and houses enclaves of rare old-growth white pine and eastern hemlock forest, as well as the characteristic hardwood canopies. The forest's 80 species of trees create an electric color show in fall. Hearts Content National Scenic Area out of Warren is a 121-acre national natural landmark, where centuries-old trees tower 150 feet above the forest floor and boast diameters of 4 feet. In the Seneca Highlands, Kinzua Dam captures the Allegheny River in a 27-mile-long reservoir, a recreation centerpiece. Longhouse Scenic Byway encircles the Kinzua Bay arm. The North Country National Scenic Trail winds through this forest, and the Allegheny and Clarion Wild and Scenic Rivers grace its landscape. When it's time to sleep, camp-



grounds provide nearly 700 sites.

THE NORTH CAROLINA FORESTS

North Carolina has four national forests: Nantahala, Pisgah, Uwharrie and Croatan, covering 1.25 million acres from the southern Appalachian Mountains to the coast. The Pisgah and Nantahala comprise more than 1 million acres in the southern Appalachian — the highest mountains east of the Mississippi. The Uwharrie is in the ancient Uwharrie Mountains in central North Carolina, and the Croatan is on the coast just south of the Outer Banks near New Bern.

Special attractions include Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, along Nantahala's

Cherochala Skyway, and the Cradle of Forestry in Asheville, along Pisgah's Forest Heritage National Scenic Byway. The Cradle of Forestry, site of America's first school of forestry, houses the history of the USFS. Promontories, rhododendron and azalea blooms, and tumbling waterfalls accentuate the forests. Whitewater Falls spills more than 800 feet, passing through both Carolinas. Its upper 411-foot segment is in North Carolina's Nantahala. The Appalachi-

an Trail contributes 226 of the 1,700 miles of trails in these forests, and the Nantahala River rolls out a major white-water playground. Camping and fishing engage visitors, while sea kayaking and wildlife viewing are intriguing opportunities for those who visit the Croatan on the coast.

As in any Top 10 listing, selection is subjective. I'm sure readers will have others they would include. Often the best forest is the one nearest you. ♦

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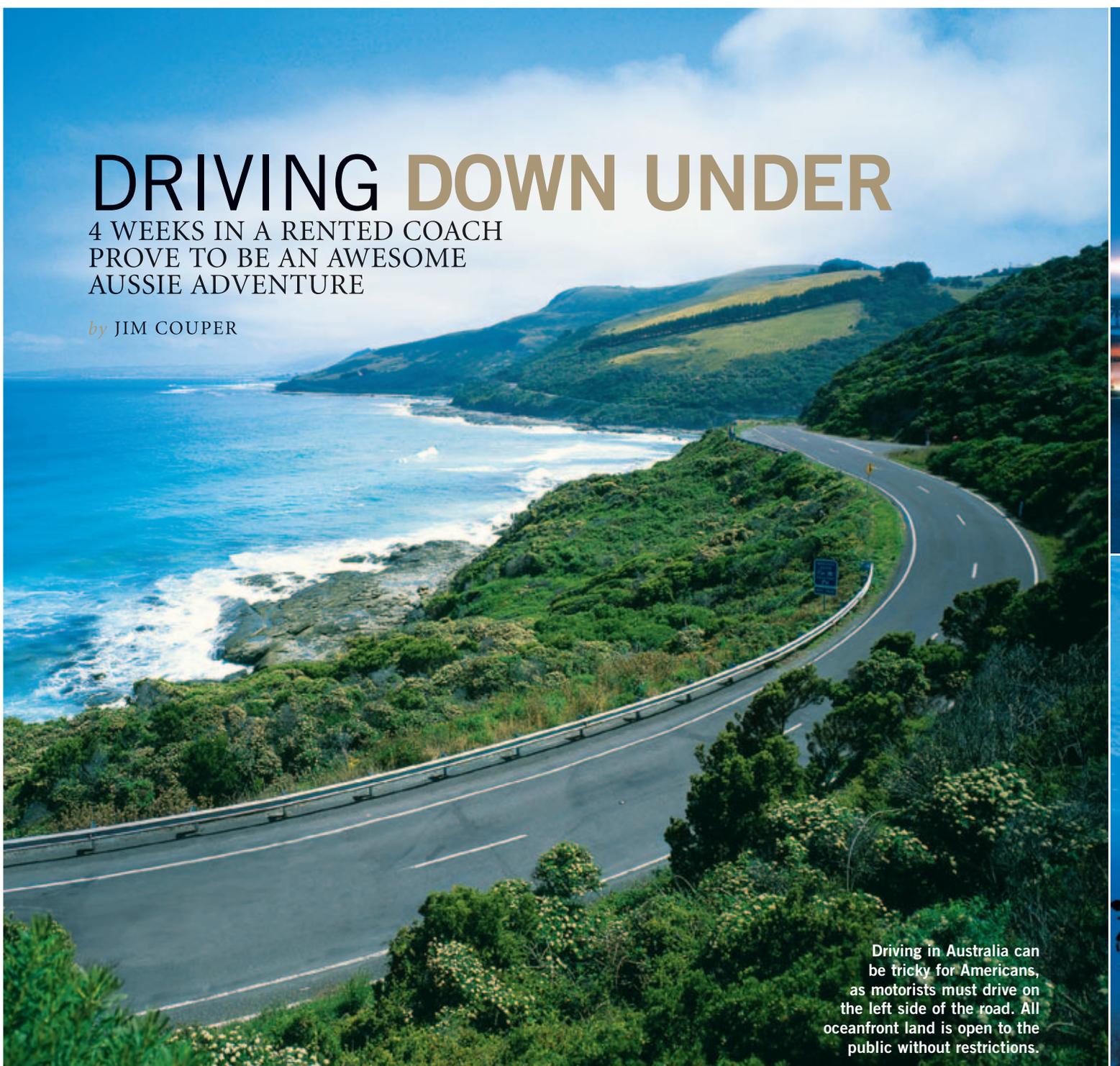
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DRIVING DOWN UNDER

4 WEEKS IN A RENTED COACH
PROVE TO BE AN AWESOME
AUSSIE ADVENTURE

by JIM COUPER



Driving in Australia can be tricky for Americans, as motorists must drive on the left side of the road. All oceanfront land is open to the public without restrictions.

Underestimating Australia is easy: It's an oversized desert island with a rock in the middle, an opera house toward the bottom and a reef on the right side.

For several decades I dismissed Down Under as too much like North America. But when several friends, coincidentally, mentioned its beauty, its excitement and the fact that it's not at all like home, my interest was piqued. Qantas Airways' overnight flights (taking advantage of the time difference) from Los Angeles cemented the decision.

Because traveling without a motorhome

is like painting without a brush, I made arrangements with Maui (www.maui.com.au), an Australian RV rental company, to rent a coach for our monthlong vacation.

Our flight landed on Australia's east coast first. This region offers a good sampling of Australia — surf, sand, mountains, lakes, caves, plantations, waterfalls, museums, rain forests, rivers, the Great Barrier Reef, artists' colonies, big-city culture, gondola rides, factory tours, scuba diving, fishing, national parks, fish-and-chips stands and, of course, camping.

From Brisbane, we hopped on another



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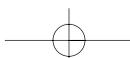
plane and headed north to Cairns, where we picked up our Iveco Class C and started driving on the left side of the road (see sidebar). This second flight allowed us to drive 1,600 miles south down the coast to our city of departure, Sydney, retracing only the short northern section between Cairns and Port Douglas. The extra charge incurred to drop off the RV in a different city than it was picked up in was worth it and made the touring much easier.

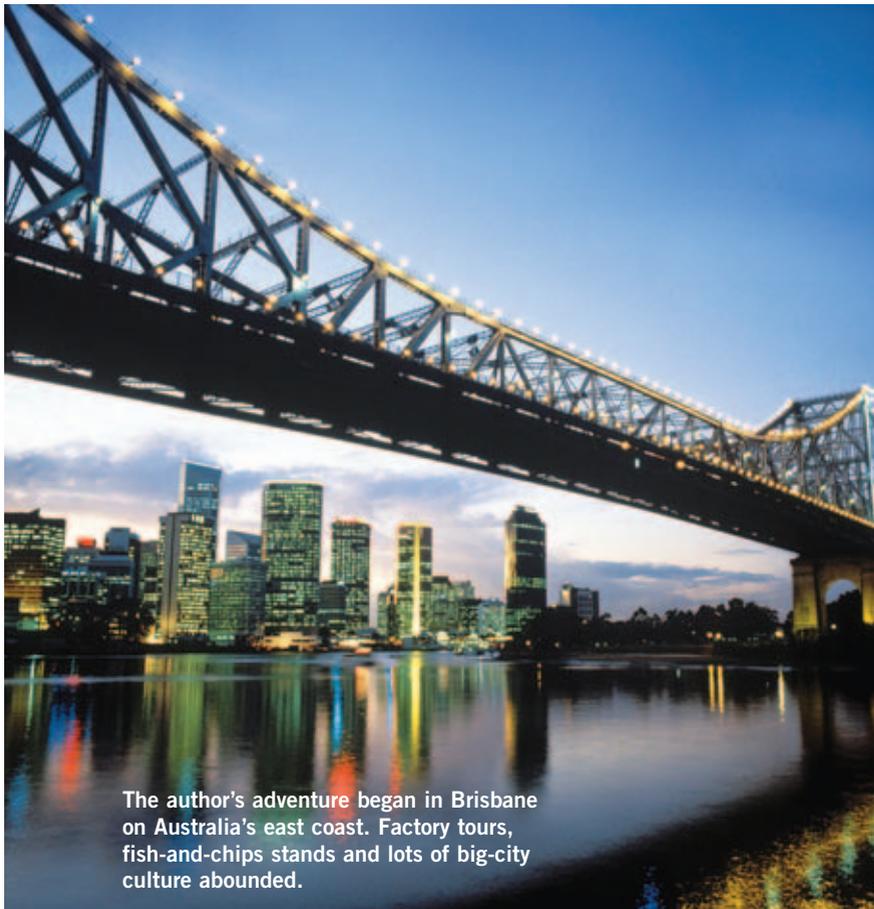
Our first morning at Palm Cove, just north of Cairns, was positively magical and verified all we had been told about Australia. It start-

ed at 5:15AM with the sounds of birds flitting about in giant eucalyptus trees. Every caw, chirp, cackle, tweet and even meow was unlike anything we had ever heard. Huge, white cockatoos squawked, stone curlews hissed and rainbow lorikeets sang as they flashed their colors.

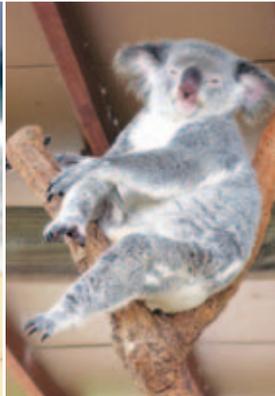
What had looked like an ordinary swamp in the previous evening's twilight blossomed with brilliant lotus flowers, their painted petals open to welcome the morning light. Rail-thin birds hopped atop lily-like pads and tiny black frogs scurried into the water while variations

Clockwise from left: An undersea world of vivid coral, fish and plant life awaits snorkelers and scuba divers in the Great Barrier Reef. Sydney offers a multitude of things to do and see, including the distinctive Opera House in Sydney Harbour. A visit to Australia's east coast should include a side trip to Fraser Island, the world's biggest sand island. Here there are multicolored sand cliffs and rusty shipwrecks planted on white beaches.





The author's adventure began in Brisbane on Australia's east coast. Factory tours, fish-and-chips stands and lots of big-city culture abounded.



In addition to city life, Australia is home to much wildlife. Wallabies (similar to kangaroos), rainbow lorikeets, koalas and dingoes (wild dogs) are a few of the species inhabiting the island.

of cranes and egrets waded along the shore.

Like lemmings we instinctively herded toward the roar of the ocean. As we walked across a field, a cluster of what looked at first glance to be brown rocks moved. They were wallabies — marsupials that are similar to kangaroos — and they stood up and hopped into the woods. Bushes and shrubs blossomed with flowers we could not identify by name and large trees drooped with loads of wild mangoes, avocados and nuts.

At the beach 4-foot waves curled onto a vast sandy shore and we wandered along it into the town — where no buildings infringed on the shoreline and every inch of oceanfront was open to the public without restrictions. That's the way it was in every town with a river, lake, ocean or lagoon — pretty much every settlement on the southern continent. The shore has not been sold to industry, commerce or the wealthy. At national parks that philosophy prevailed: no gates, no tolls, no permits.

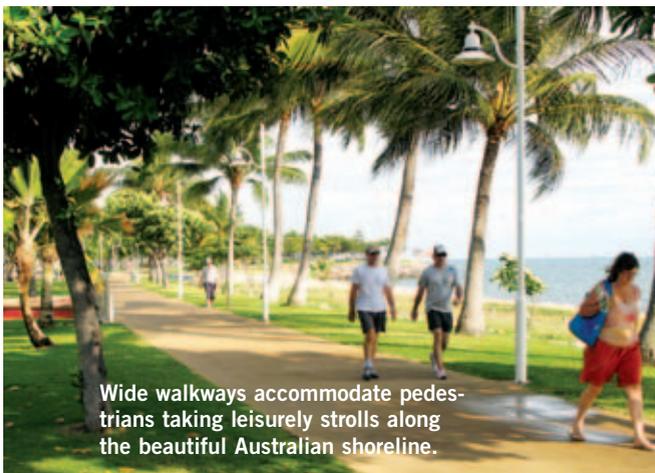
Port Douglas, 60 minutes north of Cairns, was our most northerly destination. Its tropical harbor offers easy access to the Great Barrier Reef. The difference between the lush plant life of the Caribbean and the coral of the Great Barrier Reef is the difference between a rain forest and a cactus-filled desert.

Eager to experience these waters, we took the plunge with a daylong Quicksilver outer reef trip. The 147-foot catamaran tied up at a floating dock, where snorkeling, scuba diving, helicopter tours, a semi-submersible submarine ride and ocean walking with air hoses are offered.

The scuba instructors had perfected the training and preparation so that we were underwater within 30 minutes of donning the heavy dive gear. We swam beneath the waves for almost half an hour. Our instructor encouraged us to place a hand inside a giant clam, which instinctively snapped closed and caused us to jerk our arms free. Our instructor knew that the clam harmlessly moved an inch at a time and couldn't close completely. He also showed us a sea anemone whose tiny tentacles cleaned our hands.

The surprises continued as we left the Port Douglas area and headed southwest — our only excursion away from the coast. The Atherton highlands are like Switzerland without snowy peaks. We stopped at parks with names such as Millaa Millaa, Malanda and Elinjaa, and swam in limpid pools fed by waterfalls that cascaded onto our heads.

The upland villages were charming, with narrow streets shaded by umbrella-like fig trees whose spreading branches are supported by hundreds of roots. We toured a coffee plantation that featured a museum with thousands of grinders,



Wide walkways accommodate pedestrians taking leisurely strolls along the beautiful Australian shoreline.

filters, plungers and ancient espresso machines. Visitors gulped dozens of varieties of coffee.

Back along the coast, we averaged less than 100 miles a day and found an abundance of campgrounds with plenty of space. On average, our camping fees in Australia ranged from \$12 to \$32 a night, and gas (petrol) was \$5 a gallon.

When it comes to campgrounds, BIG4 Holiday Parks are similar to KOA RV parks, offering easy access, full hookups, clean washrooms and plenty of locations. We encountered nothing comparable to resort-style parks during our stay; most of the parks we chose had a salt water pool with a waterfall set in a lush garden, squeaky-clean washrooms, a small games room, laundry facilities and friendly staff.

Campfires with marshmallows and hot dog roasts are definitely not part of the camping tradition here as we didn't see a single flame flicker during our stay. Many Australian campgrounds feature "en-suite" amenities — a private sink, shower and toilet in a small building next to your campsite. This comes as a standard feature in some parks or at an extra cost in others. Nearly all parks have a common kitchen with fridge, stove and barbecue for use by guests.

When it comes to free camping we didn't encounter any Wal-Mart-style camping, but several towns have very pleasant dry camping areas with picnic tables where visitors can stay for a few nights without charge.

During our travels, we found that the average Australian RVer is more likely to pull a caravan (trailer) than to own a motorhome. Despite this, motorhomes appeared to make up about half of the transient population in campgrounds because of all the rentals from companies such as Maui, Britz and KEA. Large Type A's were extremely rare, with the majority being van conversions with a smattering of C's. Off-road Toyota Land Cruisers converted into campers were a prominent niche vehicle and quite a few were diesels with roof bars, water containers, extra gas tanks and snorkels for traveling on flooded roads.

A road map of the two states we visited — Queensland and New South Wales — shows a highway following the coast, but most of the time



A MONTH WITH AN IVECO

If the name IVECO doesn't jump

to mind when you think of motorhomes, that's because it's an Italian worker's truck. You know it's for workers because there's no passenger air bag, the engine is a 3-L, four-cylinder diesel, the seats don't swivel and have no arm rests, and the transmission is a peculiar device.

While the cab and the mechanicals left a few things to be desired, the Class C's cabin, made by CiMunro of New Zealand, was bright, spacious, functional and well equipped. The overhead bunk was, as is often the case, a bit tight for two adults, but the folded dinette resulted in an extremely comfortable bed.

The living quarters had the usual amenities such as fridge, stove and microwave plus a side air conditioner. Equipment included cutlery, dishes, coffeemaker, toaster, grill, bedding and towels. It didn't have a TV, but we didn't travel all that way to watch TV. A clever, compact bathroom had a shower, sink and toilet that was emptied by carrying the small holding tank to a dump station.

At 22 feet by 7.5 feet, the rental wasn't huge by North American standards, but we were mostly driving on narrow, two-lane roads with no shoulder. The noisy little diesel seemed capable of maintaining 80 MPH (unlikely, except on the divided highways in the south) and fuel consumption topped out at a pleasant 20 MPG.

My introduction to left-side driving was watching British and Australian movies and imagining I was controlling the cars in the films. That, and the 10-minute taxi drive from the airport to the rental agency. When other vehicles were sharing the road I had no trouble keeping to the left, but on several occasions when I pulled into a long drive or was on a country lane I instinctively wandered right. That's where the worried navigator applied a gentle reminder with a jab to the ribs.

Motorists visiting Britain or Australia talk about the dangers of opposite-side driving, however touring pedestrians face far more danger. Automatically looking left and then stepping in front of a cement truck coming from the right is a bad habit rarely repeated. After a month we knew what side to drive on, but as pedestrians we were constantly confused about where traffic was coming from.

Overall the motorhome performed well, offered excellent comfort, and we had no incidents. Next time we would choose a narrower, lower vehicle without an overhead bunk that was only good for storage. We would make sure it still had the best feature — big windows — because there was nothing more wonderful than pulling back the curtains in the morning and looking out at huge waves breaking on soft, sandy shores. — J.C.



DRIVING DOWN UNDER

the road is actually five to 20 miles from the ocean. In the north there are two long stretches (120 miles) of somewhat non-scenic driving where the narrow two-lane highway pushes through fields of sugar cane that block views from the road. When it does reach the ocean, the scenery is spectacular and in the south you can see the ocean as often as not. Here surfers ride the waves and schoolchildren take their physical education classes in the water.

A side trip to the world's biggest sand island, Fraser Island, should be on any east coast agenda. Near the town of Maryborough, the approximately 80-mile-long island is coated in jungle foliage and 100 fresh-water lakes and numerous rivers provide perfect swimming. Dingoes (wild dogs) can be seen at this World Heritage site, where renting a 4WD vehicle allows motoring along the shore, traversing the island's narrow, sandy tracks and visiting

spots where multihued sand cliffs abut white beaches where wrecked ships rust.

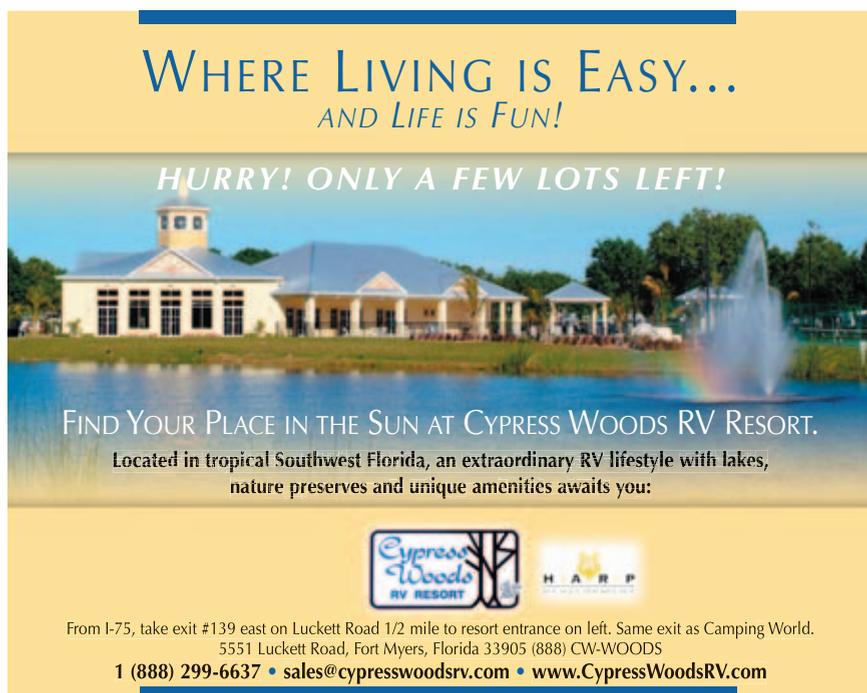
We have little to report about night life as a fish-and-chip dinner eaten on a park bench overlooking the ocean often started our evening and a glass of wine at a café and a walk through town and around the campground ended it. Then early to bed in preparation for the 5AM sunrise was our rule. Those looking for evening adventure will find it in Brisbane and south along the Gold Coast in places such as Surfers Paradise — where hotels shoot skyward, slots are open at the casinos and college students party on the beach. Alternatively, one can hunker down at any small-town bar where the locals gather in the evenings for a pint or two of beer.

When we arrived at Sydney, we turned in the keys to our motorhome and opted to stay in a downtown hotel to maximize our day and a half in this beautiful city. We rode the monorail the first afternoon; toured a marine museum and a replica of Captain Cook's ship HMS Endeavour; and dined at a Korean restaurant. The next morning we walked to Hyde Park to see the gardens and a monument, then headed to a museum, followed by an old mint, a library, a famous fountain, a restored jail and finally the yacht basin. At 4PM, we had a sandwich at a café next to the famed Opera House and stared at the Sydney Harbour Bridge, where tourists walked along the arched girders high atop the famed structure.

The Opera House is overwhelmingly immense, housing five theaters and the world's biggest mechanical organ under 10 soaring, sail-like peaks coated with more than 1 million tiles. We immediately bought tickets (\$50 were the least expensive) to a symphonic performance, and that night we sat in one of the world's most beautiful concert halls listening to the world's most beautiful music.

At intermission we talked about a western Australia trip and tried to ignore the fact that the next morning we would be boarding a plane back home. ♦

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TOTAL VISION PAN & TILT BACKUP CAMERA

A second set of eyes

by GARY WESCOTT



Top: The Pan & Tilt monitor, Sirius radio, GPS, tire pressure monitor and secondary navigation on a laptop computer offer the driver all the necessary information he needs. Above: The “hitch” button automatically gives a programmable view of hitch, bumper and towed vehicle. Below: The basic Pan & Tilt kit comes with everything the installer needs, including detailed instructions and enough cable for any size coach.

Top: Small side mirror cameras eliminate blind spots instantly when the turn signal is switched on. The Pan & Tilt camera and its micro servomotor are enclosed in a sealed dome.



PHOTOS: GARY WESCOTT

f you're driving a big motorhome pulling a dinghy vehicle, utility trailer or boat, there are so many blind spots that it can be scary. Most of us with modern motorhomes have some sort of a backup camera, which is great, but they can have their limitations.

Keep your head steady, and roll your eyes around. It's amazing what our little eyeballs can see without moving the head. Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of control at the back of your 40-foot pusher? Now you can.

Thanks to expertise, engineering



A small hole was made in the front wall behind the grille, allowing us to feed the cable into and behind the driver's console.



Once inside the basement of the coach, it was easy to route the cable into the engine compartment and out the rear.



A long, stiff wire was used to fish the power and control cables over the axle and through the engine compartment.



A metal template plate makes exact positioning of the remote control pads easy.



Ribbon-style wiring looms were routed to the "switcher" control center and plugged in.



When installing the color-coded wires into the camera plug, it's important to make sure the small barbs are fully engaged.

and years of testing, Rod Thomas, owner of Total Vision Products, is offering a new Pan & Tilt camera system. From the driver's seat, you can have the Pan & Tilt camera do what your eyeballs do, just by pushing the scroll buttons on the control pad — left, right, up, center or hitch. A centering button instantly brings the camera back to a normal rear view, all displayed on your existing monitor, or on the Total Vision high-resolution TFT 7-inch color screen.

While the Pan & Tilt is amazing in itself, the Total Vision system can switch between as many as eight cameras for watching the front wheels and bumper, or keeping an eye on the dog or kids in the back bedroom. It is also capable of operating two Pan & Tilt cameras from the same control pad.

Many motorcoach manufacturers and dealers have made Total Vision Pan & Tilt systems available as factory equipment, including Foretravel Motorcoach, Liberty Coach, Monaco RV, Newell Coach and Newmar.

We wondered if an owner could install one himself. We used a 1996 36-foot Safari as a test unit. This coach was originally fitted with a fixed factory rearview black and white camera running through a somewhat inconvenient overhead 120-volt AC TV monitor.

After laying out the pieces and familiarizing ourselves with the Total Vision system's components, the first step was to run the coaxial and control cable back to the rear of the coach. This turned out to be surprisingly easy. A small hole was made in the front wall behind the grille, allowing us to feed the cable into and behind the driver's console. The other end of the cable was fed back through the various basement storage compartments. A stiff length of wire was used to "fish" the cable back over the axle and through the engine compartment. By raising the master bed, the engine compartment was totally accessible. Supplied rubber grommets were used wherever there was a chance of abrading the cable. Liberal use of wire ties secured everything to existing pipes

and wire looms.

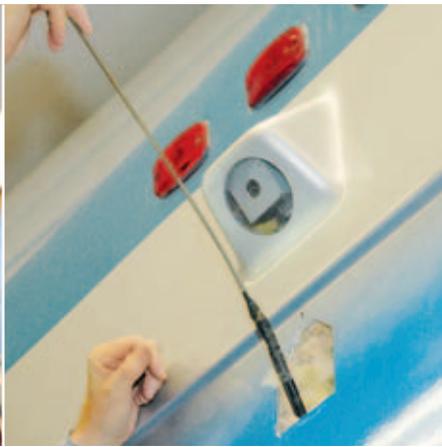
At the rear of the coach, using the metal template supplied, we used a small reciprocal saw to cut an opening for the back of the camera. On the inside wall of the bedroom, behind a mirror, a second access hole was cut. Now our "fishing" wire was used to feed the cable up to the camera opening. Excess cable was coiled and tied up out of the way.

Using the special Total Vision Air Plenum Leveler, the metal camera air plenum was installed and sealed with clear silicone. The Pan & Tilt camera is mounted in the air plenum. The clear dome was then installed using a special lubricant that helps its silicone foam gasket to seat properly and allows easy removal for cleaning if necessary.

Now we moved up front to the driver's seat. The optional mounting locations for the 7-inch high-resolution color monitor, switcher control box and control pads will vary with every coach or vehicle, and with driver's preference. We decided to have the Pan & Tilt control pads and the color



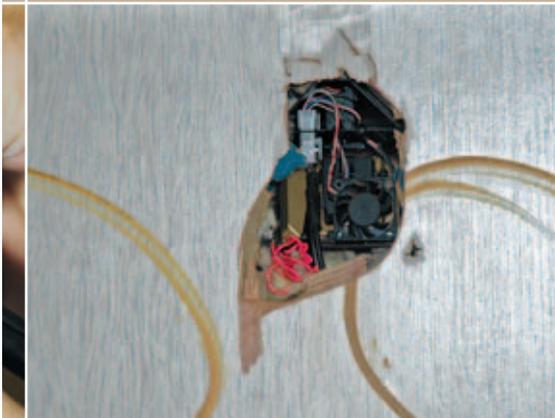
The long wire is used to fish the cables up the back wall to the camera.



A special Air Plenum Leveler is supplied to ensure proper positioning of the camera bracket.



With the opening cut, the steel camera bracket was installed with four screws and silicone seal, using the special Air Plenum Leveler.



An access hole was made behind the mirror on the rear inside wall of the coach.



The camera has a 180-degree view side-to-side and 115 degrees up and down.



A weather-sealed clear globe and visor protect the camera but can be removed for cleaning if necessary.

monitor on the left, allowing the driver to see the rearview mirror and camera image at the same time without taking his eyes off the road. There was ample room for the switcher control box to be located under the dash.

Using the metal control-pad template, the desired location was marked and a small reciprocal saw was used to carefully cut the necessary holes. In the case of this Safari coach, there was plenty of fiberglass behind the padding to attach the keypads.

Because the Pan & Tilt switcher control box can handle up to eight cameras, we installed a couple of Total Vision side mirror cameras. These were mounted on the mirror arms and aimed to capture the blind spots along the sides of the coach. The control box automatically switches to the left or right camera when the turn signal is activated, or can be selected using a button on the switcher keypad. Coaxial cable for the 40-degree spot cameras was routed through the mirror arms directly into the coach for a

clean look. These versatile little cameras can also be mounted directly on the side of the coach.

With everything installed, we used the Total Vision Micro Tester to check all the wiring connections before plugging in the rear camera. Detailed instructions were followed to customize the different programmable camera positions such as hitch view and rear view. Each time the camera is turned on, it digitally re-centers itself.

The handy remote control for the monitor adjusts contrast, brightness, wide or normal view, and instant on and off. These features can also be adjusted using buttons on the monitor, but from the driver's seat, it's faster, easier and safer to use the remote.

The quality, completeness and attention to detail of this system were impressive, and the clarity and color of the monitor's picture were remarkable. There's even a mini-fan inside the dome that can be switched on to clear any condensation on cold mornings.

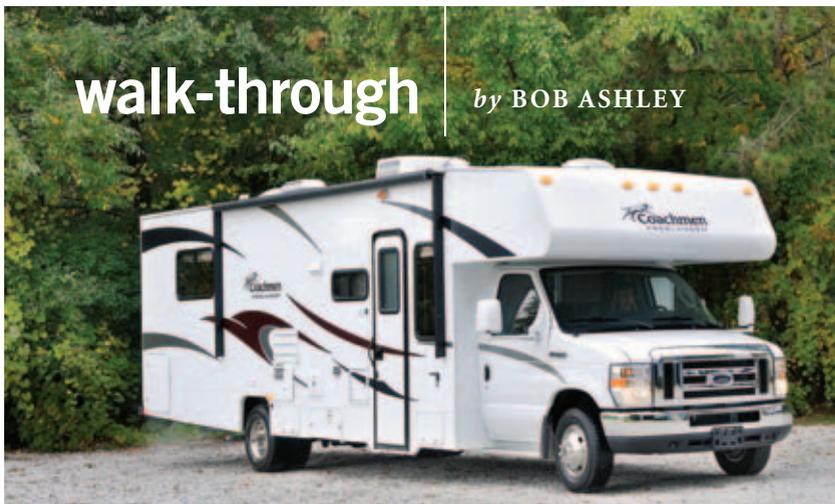
Installing this system yourself may

not be for everyone, but considering that estimated shop time is eight to 10 hours at \$85-\$100-plus an hour at today's RV dealers, the average do-it-yourselfer can save a bundle. Tech help from Thomas at Total Vision is a phone call away. The cost of the basic Total Vision Pan & Tilt system is \$1,295 from the manufacturer, but for a limited time *MotorHome* readers can receive a \$200 discount off that price. The monitor runs \$195. Both come with a one-year warranty. Suggested retail price at your local RV dealer is \$1,850 with the high-resolution TFT color monitor.

Now the big question is what to do with the five other camera inputs. Options include installing an eye on the rear of the dinghy vehicle and maybe one in the bedroom to watch the grandkids. ♦

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walk-through

by BOB ASHLEY



COACHMEN

The focus is on value for this subtly redesigned 2010 Class C motorhome

At first glance, you might not realize that Coachmen has redesigned the Frelander 31SS Class C motorhome along with the four other 23- to 32-foot Frelander layouts. The changes are subtle but distinctive — from the ladder and safety net for the cabover bed that easily becomes a secure storage area to the Roman-style pleated shades to the quilted feather bed-like duvet on the rear queen bed.

Built on the Ford E-450 Super Duty cutaway chassis with a 14,500-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and a 223-inch wheelbase, the Elkhart, Ind.-based manufacturer's 31SS Class C is powered by a 6.8-L 305-HP Triton V-10 engine. (Two shorter 23-foot Frelander floorplans are built on the lighter Chevy/Workhorse chassis with a GVWR of 12,300 pounds.)

Smooth fiberglass side walls are laminated to Azdell Superlite composite substructure mounted on an aluminum frame to provide both strength and lighter weight.

Inside, textured linoleum floors throughout give the Frelander 31SS a clean appearance, with the 12½-foot-long streetside slide that houses the jackknife couch and convertible booth dinette creating a spacious feeling in the combination living room/kitchen. The cabover bunk is notched with a removable panel for easier access to the driver's compartment.

A Jensen CD and AM/FM Sirius satellite-ready radio is in the centerpiece in the automotive dashboard, the top of which

is indented in front of the passenger seat to keep maps and other items in place.

The cabover also can be outfitted with an optional entertainment center with a 20-inch LCD TV/DVD player on a swivel base for viewing from the bunk or the living area.

Shaker-style kitchen cabinets with hardwood doors and storage cabinet doors throughout the Frelander 31SS come standard with a dark Brazilian cherry finish that is matched with laminate on the double-door Dometic refrigerator/freezer.



January 2010 | MOTORHOME



FREELANDER 31SS

SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD E-450	INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 11"
ENGINE: TRITON 6.8-L V-10 GAS	WHEELBASE: 223"
FUEL: 55 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
GVWR: 14,500 LBS	GRAY-WATER CAP: 29 GAL
LENGTH: 31' 11"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 37 GAL
WIDTH: 8' 4"	LP-GAS CAP: 11.8 GAL
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 11' 3"	BASE MSRP: \$76,600

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Custom laminate thermo-foil countertops prevent separation in the event they get wet. An aluminum sink has dual brushed-nickel fixtures while the galley also is outfitted with a Magic Chef three-burner range.

The coach is cooled by a Dometic DuoTherm ducted rooftop air conditioner and heated by an 18,000-BTU furnace. A thermostat and all-in-one control center system are stationed in the kitchen and a monitor panel indicates the status of the water and LP-gas tanks. The AC generator start-up and manual slideout switches are next to the monitor panel.

A one-piece shower surround with a domed skylight is across the hallway from the toilet and features a vanity, mirror and power vent.

It's a single step from the hallway into the bedroom; the step is necessary because of the 110 cubic feet of exterior pass-through "warehouse" storage with side-swinging access doors on both sides and a lift door in the rear.

In the bedroom, two wardrobes — one smaller than the other — are on each side of the bed while dome lights are located at the foot of the bed and in the hallway between the living area and the bedroom.

The redesigned Frelander 31SS' price has been repositioned downward as well — to \$76,600 retail. ♦



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CLEARLY PROTECTED



A professional installation of clear paint protection results in straight edges like this area under the front windshield. The installation is perfect on this Tiffin.



On the AC generator slideout the clear film wraps around the edge. This helps prevent it from fraying and fully protects the paint.



Another important area to protect is below the entry door. This prevents shoes from marking the paint upon entry of the coach.

During the past few years we have noted an increase in the number of motorhome manufacturers and aftermarket suppliers of invisible bras. Prior to this trend anyone wanting extra protection for their coach was forced to choose between two very conspicuous options. The most common was the traditional vinyl bra and next was a clear Plexiglas shield. As if the prominent appearance was not enough, the vinyl bras required fasteners to be installed on the front nosepiece of the coach to secure the bra while the Plexiglas shield required bulky mounting hardware.

Now that invisible paint protection is more commonplace, motorhome

HERE ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF INVISIBLE PAINT FILM, AN ALTERNATIVE TO VINYL BRAS AND PLEXIGLAS SHIELDS

by E. DON SMITH

PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH



The installer starts with a wide precut template to eliminate any seams as the “clear bra” is installed.



Next, the installer soaks the Diamond Shield film and paint with a special solution to aid installation.



After the film is set in place, the installer uses a squeegee to smooth the film and eliminate any air or water bubbles.



Next, he trims the edges around the headlights to give it a professional look. This is where experience pays off.

owners have a “clear” choice as well. Invisible paint protection is very different than earlier versions of paint protection, and if you are considering equipping your coach, you should know the advantages and disadvantages before you make a decision.

Clear paint film is actually made from a thermoplastic urethane and is typically 8 mils (.008-inches) thick. For a reference point, a human hair is about 3 mils thick and the paint on your coach is about .4 mils thick. Therefore, most clear paint films are about 20 times thicker than the paint on your coach. The main reason most people consider these products is to protect the front of a motorhome and in particular the paint. Because the front is the area most exposed to debris from the road as well as bugs, it makes sense to protect this area. It is also the area most often viewed, so keeping it looking good will enhance your ownership and resale value too.

The manufacturers of film claim their products protect against punctures, tears, abrasion, corrosion, UV rays and minor impacts, with emphasis on the word “minor.” It is doubtful that any thin flexible paint protection system can protect against major impacts,

but when faced with small pebbles, bugs and other more typical impacts, it is our experience that these invisible films do offer a measure of protection to help keep your coach looking its best.

Most owners either buy the coach with the film preinstalled or hire a professional installer. Many motorhome manufacturers offer paint protection film as standard equipment on high-end models or as an option on entry to mid-level models.

There are several clear film manufacturers, including 3M Scotchgard, Diamond Shield, Llumar and VentureShield. When you decide to pursue this, your first choice will be whether to install it yourself or hire a professional. Most manufacturers suggest that you have a pro do the work, but if you are very patient and willing to follow instructions, it is possible to make this a DIY job.

If you do attempt to tackle the job yourself, you’ll then need to find out if precut kits are available for your coach, or if you will be forced to buy rolls and cut your own. The latter is very difficult and usually results in edges that don’t exactly line up around cutouts such as headlights and generator door openings. We

suggest you attempt to find someone with a pattern for the nose of your motorhome, as it will greatly improve the appearance of the final product.

Once you decide which film to use, you can usually find a certified dealer by searching online. We went to 3M's Web site and noted that most major cities had one or more dealers. Diamond Shield offers a toll-free number (888-806-5862) to locate its dealers. Installation requires that the paint be completely cured and you should also know that if you have applied any touch-up paint it will likely not survive film removal if it is ever needed.

The films are backed with a very strong adhesive and once applied need to cure for 24 to 48 hours before used. Although it is possible to remove the film, it should be considered a permanent fixture. We have heard several horror stories of inexperienced owners attempting to remove their film and having a lot of paint come off with it. If your coach incurs minor damage, most professionals can patch the film, but in some cases major damage will require complete removal and repainting of the entire front of the motorhome, making this the major disadvantage of the product. Most manufacturers claim that if the film is properly applied to a fully cured surface, it can normally be removed in one piece without paint damage.

Most of the owners we spoke with are very pleased with their paint film and report it does a good job of protecting against paint chipping. However, those who have needed to remove it say it ends up costing as much or more in the long run than not protecting the nose of the coach at all because of the time-consuming removal. I have owned a Tiffin Phaeton for two years that was factory-equipped with Diamond Shield paint film, and thus far it has served well. Diamond is one of the leading suppliers to the OEM market and comes factory-equipped on coaches from Coachmen, Dynamax, Fleetwood, Holiday Rambler, Newmar, Tiffin and others. In my case only one or two small impacts have penetrated the film and nicked the paint, but even though there is a tiny chip it doesn't spread because the film is in place and acts as a sealant to prevent future issues.

The film is virtually invisible and from a few feet away it takes an eagle eye to

notice it. In the case of the Phaeton, the film wraps around the front edge all the way to the cap molding, providing extra coverage. Some companies also install it on the entry door around the lock and kick plate area to prevent key or foot damage.

Taking care of the film is simple as it can be treated just like automotive paint. If you use interstate truck washes or a pressure washer you need to be careful not to blast the water against the edge of the film or the water pressure could lift it and cause peeling.

We also talked to a few owners who reported that the excessive use of "dryer sheets" or other highly aggressive methods of bug removal can lead to long-term, unsightly scratches. Most owners report simply washing and waxing the film just like the paint. However, 3M and others caution against using harsh cleaners or abrasive waxes such as polishing or rubbing compounds.

Diamond Shield suggests the use of 303 Aerospace Protectant or Protect All to provide additional UV protection. It also suggests the use of Novus products for cleaning and removal of minor scuffs. For waxing, Diamond Shield suggests Mothers or Meguiar's liquid wax. If you're faced with serious bug stains that you can't remove using traditional methods, Diamond recommends you blot the area with rubbing alcohol daily (in the sun if possible) for several days in a row.

All major manufacturers of the film offer some type of limited warranty covering major problems such as cracking, yellowing, blistering and loss of adhesion.

For example, 3M offers a five-year warranty on its products and Diamond Shield includes a repair warranty should paint damage occur in a protected area. Most certified installers also offer their own warranty on installation issues, but if you choose the DIY route, make sure you're willing to accept the risk and potential cost if you waste film or encounter other problems during the tricky process.

Cost can range from a few hundred dollars for a small roll of film to a thousand dollars or more for a professional installation of computer-cut film designed specifically for your coach.

Based on our experience, the precut packages installed by a pro look much better because of the neat edges around head-

lights, windshield wiper arm holes and other areas. They also tend to have fewer or no air bubbles under the film and tend to stick better because of the professional methods and tools used during the install.

If you are buying a new coach (or currently own a nearly new coach) and clear paint protection is an option, we suggest you consider it a small investment to protect your paint.

Like most owners we talked to, we are happy with the product on our coach and would not be without it. ♦

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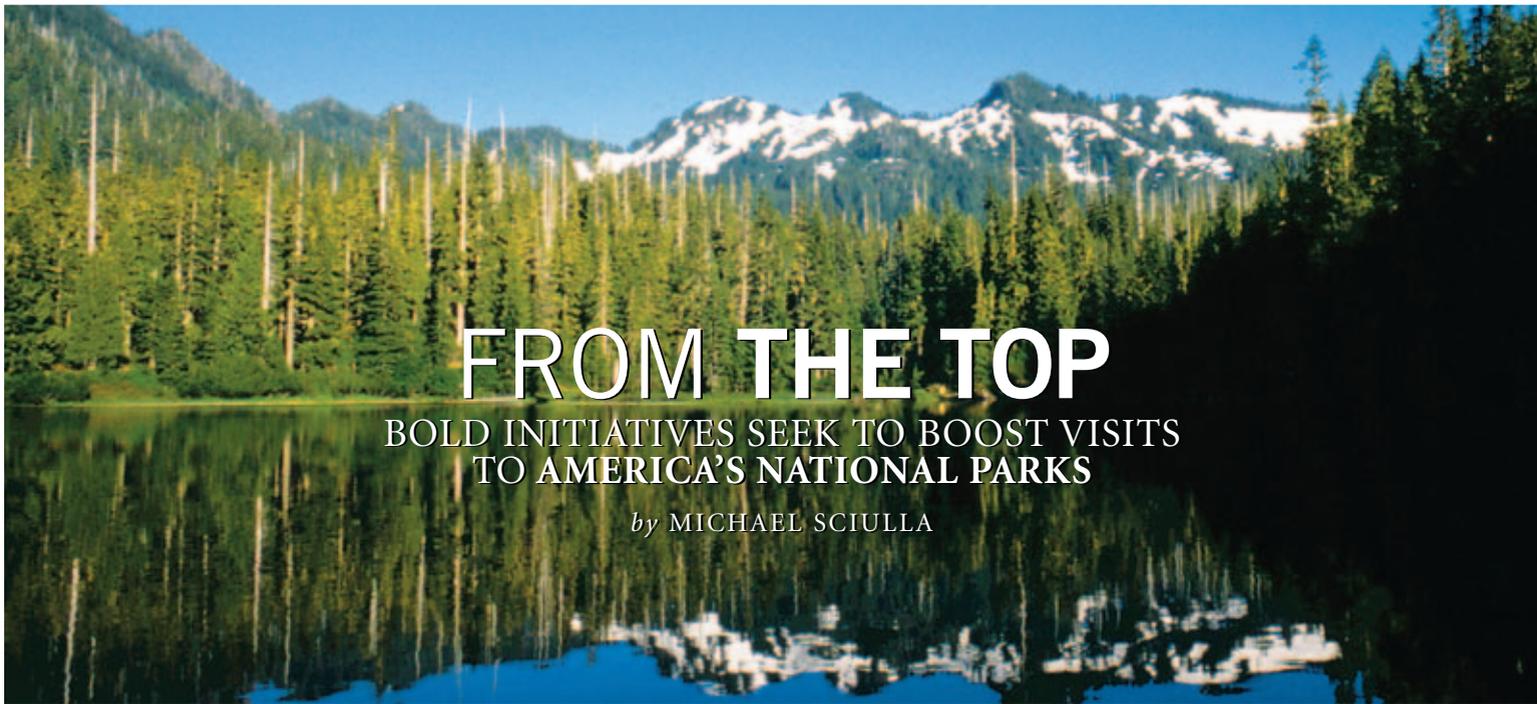
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FROM THE TOP

BOLD INITIATIVES SEEK TO BOOST VISITS TO AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

by MICHAEL SCIULLA



American Recreation Coalition President Derrick Crandall, center, makes a point with U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, left, and U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar outside the U.S. Department of Interior in Washington, D.C.



RVIA President Richard Coon, left, shows off some of the amenities of a Winnebago Via to U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar during a recent conference promoting outdoor recreation in Washington, D.C.

Long a favored destination for RVers, our national parks got a welcome dose of attention last summer as the first family took advantage of one of three “fee-free” weekends by visiting Yellowstone and Grand Canyon national parks. Add in Ken Burns’ 12-hour PBS documentary, “The National Parks — America’s Best Idea,” and renewed interest in getting Americans off the couch and out into the great outdoors has definitely taken hold.

To that end, steps are being taken by the Obama administration to reverse a two-decade decline in visits to national parks. U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, whose

department manages 25 percent of the nation’s surface, used a June 2009 visit to Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio — where he was joined by Airstream President Bob Wheeler — to announce the first of the fee-free weekends to kick off a promotion of the 391 national park units.

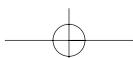
More recently, at a Washington, D.C., forum on stimulating gateway communities through park visitor spending, Salazar was joined by U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who outlined a new “livability” focus for transportation policies that encourages time outdoors. Salazar echoed the thought, suggesting that the administration would soon launch just such a crusade.

Focusing on actions and not words is

a good rule of thumb when trying to decide if Washington is serious about an issue, and there is encouraging news here. The park entrance fee waiver experiment was a tangible step in helping to stimulate demand for recreation, but the Obama administration also has directed almost \$1 billion in stimulus money for road rehabilitation, facilities maintenance, and restoration and protection projects across the country. According to Salazar, the money will “create jobs and preserve American history and heritage for future generations.” Additional funding to provide new and upgraded shuttle systems to reduce congestion in the parks is also in the works.

Beyond the immediate stimulus fund-

PHOTOS: NPS (LEAD); TAMI HEILEMANN, U.S. DEPT. OF INTERIOR



Q&A WITH KEN SALAZAR

MH: Many Americans are concerned that today's youths spend little time in the outdoors. Does that concern you, and are you taking steps to connect young Americans with the outdoors?

Salazar: *More and more, Americans — and in particular, young people — are losing touch with the landscapes that give us a sense of place in the world that have long shaped the American experience. An average young person today spends six hours a day in front of a computer or TV and less than four minutes playing outdoors. From 1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50 percent in the proportion of children age 9 to 10 who spent time in outdoor activities. Helping kids get outdoors has been a priority of mine for a long time, and I am proud of the progress we have made in the Obama administration on this agenda. I signed a Secretarial Order creating the Office of Youth in Natural Resources in the Department of the Interior, and President Obama has asked Congress to increase the budget of Interior's youth programs by \$70 million in (fiscal year) 2010, an increase of \$50 million over (fiscal year) 2009. The Office of Youth in Natural Resources headed by Bob Stanton, former director of the National Park Service, will coordinate present and future youth initiatives, the signature program of which will be a 21st Century Youth Conservation Corps.*

MH: You helped line up funds for parks from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act shortly after taking office. Will those investments make a difference to park visitors this summer?

Salazar: *We are already seeing the benefits of the president's economic recovery plan in national parks, wildlife refuges and public lands across the country. The \$3 billion that the Department of the Interior is investing through the Recovery Act is creating jobs while delivering lasting value for the American people. You can see the investments in parks across the country, from Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas, where we are rehabilitating 20 miles of trails, to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where we are investing \$30 million to fix roads and improve the visitors' experience. The president's economic recovery plan represents the most significant investment in our national treasures in generations.*

MH: How can Americans get involved in aiding our parks and other public lands?

Salazar: *Volunteers have long been essential to keeping our parks and public lands in good condition, and to helping educate others about their value. Every year, more than 170,000 park volunteers help with everything from clearing trails and staffing information desks to counting species in a BioBlitz. You can find information about volunteering at*



www.nps.gov/getinvolved. In addition, last summer President Obama and first lady Michelle Obama launched the "United We Serve" initiative in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service. United We Serve is a clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities. Americans who are interested in volunteering can use this tool to locate opportunities to

serve across the country. I would encourage your readers to go to www.serve.gov to look for opportunities to volunteer in their local communities.

MH: You took an unusual step shortly after taking office — announcing a number of fee-free weekends in national parks. We know a part of your message was to reassure American families feeling economic pain that there were great and inexpensive places to go in the summer. But do you feel that there can and should be an ongoing effort to promote visits to parks and public lands and waters, especially during non-peak periods and to those areas that are lesser known and less visited?

Salazar: *Last year, with the fee-free weekends and with President Obama and his family visiting Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon, we were pleased to see a significant increase in visitation to our national parks. Particularly with the economic troubles we are experiencing, Americans seem to be choosing national parks as affordable vacation destinations. That is great to see. We have to continue to remind people of the outdoor opportunities that are near their homes, and work to expand access to all Americans.*

MH: The National Park Service will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2016. Any special plans?

Salazar: *The 100th anniversary of the national park system is a terrific opportunity to look ahead to the next century for America's parks, wildlife refuges and public lands. ... We have restored the nation's commitment to wise investments in our parks and public lands after years of cuts and declining operational budgets. We have received counsel from the Congress, from the public and from blue-ribbon commissions on how we can use the centennial of the National Park Service to protect all of America's great places, including our parks, and we are looking at new ideas for how we can better protect our treasured landscapes. When I was the director of the Department of Natural Resources in Colorado, I helped create a program called Great Outdoors Colorado that has proven to be one of the most successful land conservation initiatives in the country. This is the type of long-term thinking that we should apply at the national level so that we can create a strong legacy of stewardship that we can pass along to future generations.*

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FROM THE TOP

ing, Secretary Salazar has hinted at a “crusade for America’s landscape” that would involve getting the government to spend billions of dollars that were authorized but never appropriated under the long-dormant federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. Fed by offshore oil revenues, the fund was created in the 1960s and was supposed to provide a major and steady source of funding for land acquisition and outdoor recreation.

“There has been no greater broken promise than what has been allowed to happen to the Land and Water Conservation Fund,” said Salazar, noting that upward of \$22 billion could have been spent on outdoor projects had successive Congresses actually allocated what they authorized.

Whether Salazar will ultimately succeed is an open question. However, based on his record in Colorado — where he led successful efforts in the early 1990s to guarantee use of state lottery proceeds for outdoor projects — he seems to be up to the challenge.

The renewed emphasis on the great outdoors and the potential of more funds for recreation is music to the ears of Derrick Crandall, president of the American Recreation Coalition. “We are fortunate to have outdoor champions and experienced Washington insiders like Secretary Salazar and Secretary LaHood going to bat for outdoor recreation in the highest councils of government,” he said.

What this will mean for RVers and the RV industry is unclear. But with more than 63 percent of those responding to a 2009 Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) survey saying that RVing in a national park was a “favorite activity,” it seems that the administration’s efforts will find favor not only among the 8 million current RVers but also potential new RVers.

In fact, RVIA President Richard Coon was delighted to show Salazar and LaHood around a new Winnebago Via Class A motorhome parked at the front steps of the U.S. Department of Interior, three blocks from the White House — and to celebrate with them the first significant increase in park visits in years. Nudged, perhaps, by the first of the fee-free weekends, the National Park Service noted a 3 percent upswing in attendance through the end of July 2009 compared with a year earlier. ♦

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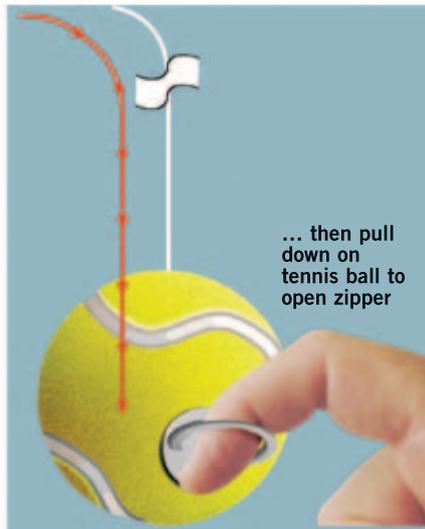
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from OUR READERS

quicktips



Throw tennis ball attached to key chain over to other side of RV ...



... then pull down on tennis ball to open zipper

DROP SHOT▲

In my area, covering an RV for the winter is a must; however, once I put the cover on it's difficult to raise the zippers high enough to allow clearance for the top of the door without climbing up a ladder.

To remedy this, I cut two lengths of nylon cord long enough to go up one side of the RV, across the top and down the other side. Then, I punctured two tennis balls and ran one end of a cord through each of them. I tied nylon washers (to protect the cover) on the end of the cord threaded through each tennis ball to keep it from pulling out, and a metal split key ring on the other end of each of the cords.

Now, when I need to get into the coach, I attach a split key ring to the loop in each zipper pull, pull the zipper up to take out any slack in the bottom of the cover, step back and throw the tennis ball over and across the top to the other side of the RV. I can then pull the cords down from the other side until they stop and the zipper is pulled all the way to the top (being careful not to wear grooves in the cover material). This allows full access for entry through the door. Once I'm done I simply reverse the process.

To keep the cords from tangling during storage, I wrap them tightly around opposite sides of an electrical cord wrap and push the tennis balls through the center.
DENNIS J. BOSWELL | ST. CHARLES, MO.

ANCHORS' AWAY▶

Storing the 12-inch awning anchors between campsite stops is problematic as the sharp ends of the augers will eventually dig through whatever material is used to contain them. My solution was to cut a 12-inch length of 2-inch diameter PVC pipe, which is available in 2-foot lengths at most building supply stores. I simply screw the anchors into each other from opposite ends. It doesn't rattle, the anchors don't fall out or make holes in the storage device.

TOM BROWN | DANBURY, CONN.



RATTLE & HUM NO MORE

Here are some of the quick fixes I've used to minimize noisy rattles and squeaks in my motorhome:

- For the plastic window rod that bangs against the window: Roll on a ¼-inch-round rubber faucet washer to the tip of the rod. It still hits the window, but makes no noise.

- For squeaks between the cabinets around the edge of the refrigerator or around the edge of the shower: Put a little baby powder in the palm of your hand and blow the powder into the space between the cabinets or refrigerator or edge of the shower and wipe off the excess.

- For rattling pots and pans: Make cloth envelopes that are the size of the pans and stack them.

- For rattling glassware: Make a thin, flat cloth envelope the size of the cabinet, fill it with rice, and lay it on top of the cups and glasses. This holds them steady while driving and is easy to place and remove.

- For rattles coming from the air conditioning vent in the ceiling: Remove the screws holding the circular ceiling vent. Remove the vent and with the A/C fan on, look up inside using a small mirror and flashlight to look for loose foil flapping around. Use a coat hanger wire, small pliers, or any such tool to pull or smash the foil flap and the rattling sound will disappear.

**JOSEPH VOLK
PAHRUMP, NEV.**

quicktips

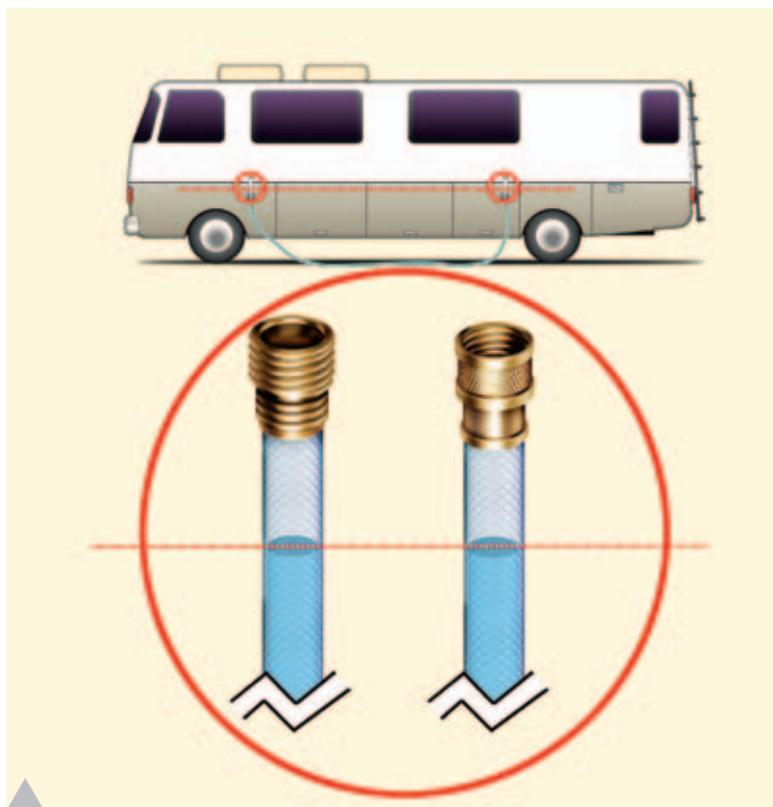
from OUR READERS

A POSITIVE SOLUTION ▶

I keep our motorhome plugged in when it's not being used so the three-stage inverter/charger can maintain the house batteries charge. This works fine, but when I cover the coach the solar panel for charging the chassis batteries doesn't work very well. To fix this problem, I put a short jumper cable between the 12-volt positive terminal of the house batteries and the 12-volt positive terminal of the chassis batteries. I made the jumper using two car battery clips connected with paralleled 10-gauge insulated wires.

Now all batteries stay charged. I put a labeled clothespin on the steering wheel to remind me to remove the jumper when the motorhome is put back in service.

JAMES KOHLS | BELMONT, MICH.



SEE LEVEL

To initially set up the auto-leveling system on my motorhome, I first had to get the coach level and then push some buttons to let the system know the coach was level.

I found level by taping the ends of my 25-foot water hose even with a seam line on my coach, then filling the hose with water. I manually operated the jacks until the water was at the same level on both ends. To do left and right, I ran the hose under the coach and followed the same procedure.

ROBERT FALK | LOS ANGELES, CALIF. ♦



GETTING ▲ A HANDLE

My idea came from not being able to control the door on my motorhome and having it slam shut, getting unwanted attention from fellow campers. I bought a simple cabinet handle from a hardware store that looked and felt good to me. I replaced the soft screws with hardened ½-inch screws with an Allen head. I installed mine in the middle of the door handle. Now less effort is required to open the door because you push with the thumb as you pull with the hand.

PAUL SHIPLEY | CROSSVILLE, TENN.

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Quick Tips, *MotorHome's* monthly column of useful, handy and simple tips by fellow RVers, is looking for submissions. Please send your favorite do-it-yourself ideas to: *MotorHome Quick Tips*, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA, 93001. Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings, if necessary. If your tip is selected for publication, you'll receive \$35.

techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & CHASSIS | POWERTRAIN



HANDS-ON | by DAVE RIGGS

SQUEAK-FREE AND SQUEAKY CLEAN

These two products will control corrosion, keep stainless steel shiny



Motorhomes are complex vehicles so it's common for things to squeak, stick, squeal, bind, creak and lose conductivity. Most RVers have used lubricants; some work and some don't. Corrosion Block is a penetrant/lubricant that also removes moisture (the causes of corrosion) and protects anything metal from corrosive environments, which are just about anywhere for a motorhome owner.

Corrosion Block is available in 12-ounce aerosol and 4-ounce pump cans with the ubiquitous straw that fits into the spray button. As a lubricant, it effectively — almost instantly — removes any binding in things such as hinges, entry steps and awning arms. For this application, we sprayed it on a number of places where metal-to-metal contact had caused annoying squeaking, and the obnoxious noise was eliminated very quickly. It worked great on door hinges and entry steps where the ocean air created binding — leaving a protective layer to resist future corrosion.

We then tested the product on a fastener that had seized due to rust. Amazingly, the fastener came back to life after the chemical was allowed to soak in for a few minutes. Corrosion Block also works nicely in stubborn entry and compartment door locks, leaving a protective coating to prevent sticking.

Since the chemical is also designed as a moisture inhibitor, it's perfect for use on switches, battery terminals and other electronic components where resistance between contacts is an issue — such as the connectors between the dinghy vehicle

and motorhome. In this case, the contacts can be protected from corrosion, eliminating poor conductivity and improving lighting performance on the dinghy.

Corrosion Block was originally designed for use in the marine industry, where moisture is always a problem. You can find it online or at most marine supply stores.

The bigger can sells for \$14 to \$20 and the smaller one is \$6 to \$10, with the less expensive prices available online.

While we were squelching squeaks, we also tried out a product designed to clean stainless steel — something that should be near and dear to all owners who have stainless steel wheel liners. Wow is a nontoxic, biodegradable cleaner that works with very little effort, without leaving a chemical build-up. The fact that it's environmentally safe makes it ideal for cleaning stainless steel barbecue grills and even aluminum pots and pans.

Our obvious aim was to check out Wow's value for cleaning wheels (sprayed on the rag, not the wheels), which always fall prey to the environment. In this regard the product did a very good job. It's available in 16-ounce spray bottles (\$14.95), a canister full of towelettes (\$8.95) or a pouch with one 9-by-10-inch towelette (\$1.50).

For more information, visit www.learchem.com (Corrosion Block) and wowezeffinish.com (Wow). ♦





Better Late Than Never

FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO SECURE A REIMBURSEMENT FROM HIS SERVICE CONTRACT PROVIDER, A READER ASKED *HOT LINE* TO GET INVOLVED. HE WROTE:

In February 2009, I had the cooling unit for my refrigerator (and the converter) replaced in my 2004 Fleetwood motorhome at a local RV repair shop. The repair facility obtained prior approval from Heritage (my Platinum RV Service Contract provider) for the replacement of both units, and I paid for the entire bill.

Administrative Services Inc., which I guess is the clearinghouse for Heritage Warranty company, submitted the claim to Heritage the first week of March. I thought that it should take three or four weeks to receive reimbursement for the part of the repairs that the company had authorized.

I began calling Administrative Services in April and was finally able to talk to a representative on April 14. I was informed by the service representative that they had e-mailed copies of the repair work orders to Heritage and that it was now out of their hands. When I asked for a number to contact Heritage, I was told that they don't have one — that everything was done through e-mail. I waited until April 29, and contacted Administrative Services again and was told the same thing.

I am still waiting for reimbursement for the repairs. I would appreciate any assistance *Hot Line* can give me in resolving this issue.

**CARTER OAKES
FREDERICK, OKLA.**

Hot Line sent a first inquiry letter dated May 28, 2009, and a follow-up letter on July 1 to Heritage Administration Services in Dublin, Ohio, in an attempt

THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN SECURING A POSITIVE RESOLUTION IS A WELL-WRITTEN LETTER, WHICH SHOULD SPELL OUT YOUR ISSUE(S) SIMPLY AND INCLUDE WHAT YOU WOULD CONSIDER A FAIR RESOLUTION.

to facilitate a positive settlement for Oakes. We did not receive a response from Heritage, but four months later we received a follow-up letter from Oakes that filled us in on the conclusion of his case. It read:

I am writing to inform you that I received a check from Administrative Services. I am sure that *Hot Line's* intervention had a lot to do with the check arriving so quickly. I thank you for your help.

C.O.

LOSING PATIENCE

Experiencing a delay in trying to collect a refund on service agreements, two readers asked for Hot Line's help. They wrote:

In October 2008, we purchased a 2006 Monaco Monarch Class A motorhome with 11,800 miles on it from Foley RV Center in Burlington, Wash. At the same time, we also paid \$4,186 for a service agreement, \$1,048 for Safe-Guard Alert/Coach-Net and \$759 for Tire Guard insurance, for a total of \$5,993 for extra guarantees on this coach.

Two months later, we upgraded to a 2009 Tiffin Allegro. When we traded in the Monarch the odometer reading was 14,302.

We contacted Foley RV in January to request a cancellation of the contracts on the Monarch, and were told that the necessary paperwork would be forwarded to us. We didn't receive anything

in the mail. In March, we called again and were told to contact the individual organizations to retrieve our money. When we contacted those companies, we were told that the money would be returned to Foley RV and that Foley RV Center would refund the money to us.

We still haven't received any acknowledgements from Foley RV, or our money. We would greatly appreciate *Hot Line's* help in reconciling this matter.

**CHET AND KATHY NICHOLS
MANSON, WASH.**

In an effort to help the Nicholises with their problem, Hot Line petitioned Foley RV Center on their behalf. The controller from the dealership responded to the Nicholises as follows:

I am in receipt of your July letter in which you expressed your frustration with trying to obtain a refund for the cancellation of several contracts you purchased with your 2006 Monaco Monarch. First, on behalf of Foley RV Center, please accept my sincere apology. It is unfortunate that you have not received the customer service you deserved.

Enclosed please find a refund check in the amount of \$5,492.80 representing the full refund of your Tire Guard contract, a prorated refund of your extended warranty and a prorated refund of your Coach-Net service contract. I regret to inform you that the Safe-Guard Alert contract is neither cancelable nor refundable.

I do hope this solves your dilemma satisfactorily. If not, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

**RACHEL M. HOLTGARD
CONTROLLER
FOLEY RV CENTER LLC
BURLINGTON, WASH.**

UNHAPPY LANDING

Attempting to obtain a refund from the manufacturer for service on his motorhome's electronic jacks, a reader sought the intervention of Hot Line. He explained:

Last June, as I was getting ready to leave the Allatoona Landing Campground in

Cartersville, Ga., I noticed that the jacks on my 2007 Damon Astoria were in the down position and would not come up. The system had five blinking lights and would not turn on.

I tried everything to fix it, but to no avail. I looked through the manual and couldn't find the solution, so I called Lippert Components Inc. (the manufacturer of the jacks). It was a Saturday morning and there was no answer, so I left a message on the company's emergency line.

I decided to call a mobile RV repair unit to come to the campground to help me out so I could get on with my trip. The cost for the repair was \$175 and I gave the man a \$25 tip for his hard work.

Later that day I received a phone call from Lippert Components and was told that the fix was to press and hold four buttons for six seconds. The next day I pushed down the four buttons and the system works fine. Too bad this information wasn't in the manual; I could have saved \$200.

I think Lippert Components should pick up the bill, minus the tip. Thank you for your help in this matter.

**VINCENT VETERE
ORLANDO, FLA.**

Hot Line contacted Lippert Components Inc. and Damon Motor Coach on Vetere's behalf. Shortly thereafter, we received the following response from Vetere:

I would like to thank Hot Line for its help. You sent my complaint to Lippert Components and Damon Motor Coach and I just received a check for \$175 from Damon. If it wasn't for Hot Line, complaints like mine would just be ignored.

V.V.

SUCCESSFUL COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

Periodically, we like to remind readers of a few things that may be helpful in securing a positive resolution to their Hot Line complaints. Approaching this process with these things in mind will increase your chances significantly of achieving a settlement, while expediting an answer to your concerns.

The most important element in the process is a well-written letter, which should spell out your issue(s) in simple terms and include what you would consider

a fair resolution. The tone of your complaint can also be crucial, as many resolutions from the business world are made on a goodwill basis. If you are hoping for something of this nature, it's prudent to curb the invective and state your case simply.

Complaint letters must be typed, should only include points that are relevant to your case, and be no more than two pages in length. Do not include laundry lists of everything that ever went wrong with your motorhome, and please refrain as much as possible from editorializing about your travel itinerary, unless it relates directly to your complaint.

Finally, we'd appreciate a follow-up letter from you, if you've received a positive resolution from a company and it looks like Hot Line was not notified. This way, we can give credit where credit is due, involving a situation that may be of interest to all of our readers. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO *HOT LINE*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, on page 8.

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Silent Generator

I have a 2006 Monaco diesel-pusher with an Onan 7.5 kW diesel, 120-volt AC generator. It's supposed to start automatically and charge my batteries when they get low. It worked fine when the motorhome was new. Lately, it doesn't do it.

I tried to start the generator from inside and outside the motorhome; sometimes it starts right up, and sometimes it doesn't start at all. Do you know why my diesel generator won't start? I depend on it whenever I travel, because I don't hook up in campgrounds very often.

PAUL GRAHAM | PORT HURON, MICH.

AS MOTORHOMES GET OLDER, THOSE WITH LP-GAS TANKS EXPOSED TO THE WEATHER AND ROAD SALT NEED TO BE CAREFULLY WATCHED FOR CORROSION THAT CAN LEAD TO A PINHOLE LEAK.



I've had a number of letters on large diesel generators that won't start or start erratically, Paul. Having had one in our shop with the same complaint, I may have the answer.

There is a plastic block with two molded studs for battery cable attachment at the rear of the Onan diesel generator. The studs extend through the plastic block into the generator where generator connections are attached. We found loose nuts on both ends of the studs and corroded cables.

We also found corroded serrated lock washers between cable ends. Serrated lock washers make good contact initially, because the serrations dig into the cable ends. However, when the connection gets wet, the serrations collect water and corrosion begins.

Removing and cleaning the cable ends, placing them together without serrated lock washers, and installing ordinary lock washers before the nuts made a very secure connection that is less susceptible to corrosion and loosening. The only downside to this repair is the very large generator must be removed from the motorhome to get at the studs. This generally requires the help of a forklift truck and a couple of technicians.

Once the studs and cable ends were cleaned and tightly reinstalled, and the generator was put back in the motorhome, it started without hesitation.

Since the house batteries were down, we let the motorhome sit outside our shop for a while, and turned lights on inside the motorhome. After a couple of hours the generator started automatically and charged the house batteries. It's a simple fix once the generator is removed from the motorhome to obtain access to the cable studs.

RUST EATER

I recently purchased a used Class A motorhome with a water heater that uses engine coolant to heat the water when the motorhome is traveling down the road. I thought this was a great feature until I found it didn't work.

There is a heat exchanger around the water heater, and engine coolant hoses to and from the heat exchanger.

Since the heat exchanger didn't get hot, I assumed it was plugged. I disconnected the coolant hoses and tried to blow compressed air through the heat exchanger. Only a little air came out. The heat exchanger was definitely plugged.

After trying to rod the heat exchanger out with little success, I mentioned the problem to a friend of mine. He told me his father had taught him to clean out plugged radiators and heater cores with white vinegar.

I bought two gallons of white vinegar, and an inexpensive pump that is powered with an electric drill. The outlet of the pump was attached to one of the heat exchanger pipes with a short length of garden hose. Another short length of garden hose was attached to the inlet of the pump. Its end was placed in a bucket.

Lastly, a short length of rubber hose was attached to the other heat exchanger pipe. Its end was also put in the bucket.

I filled the bucket with the white vinegar and started pumping. At first, there was only a trickle coming out, but it gradually grew to a small stream. The stream grew bigger and bigger until I had a steady flow of white vinegar.

I dumped the vinegar, and filled the bucket with water to flush the heat exchanger. The engine coolant hoses were reattached, and I took the motorhome for a drive. When I returned home, I turned on a hot water faucet, and got very hot water.

JOE MARLIN | BOSTON, MASS.

Congratulations, Joe. Some very old fixes get lost with the years. Most motorhome owners would have simply replaced the water heater.

While you were able to unplug the heat exchanger, you should watch your hot water carefully for a while. Older heat exchangers on water heaters have been known to perforate the hot water tank and leak engine coolant into the hot water. Newer heat exchangers use double tube construction to keep this from happening.

Keep an eye out for engine coolant in your hot water. It's usually greenish

yellow, but other colors are in use.

Engine coolant often heats domestic hot water very hot, because engines get much hotter than domestic hot water. Scalding is possible.

Atwood supplies a Heat Exchanger Valve Kit that shuts off engine coolant when water in the hot water tank reaches 140°F. It is mounted near the engine where it can be supplied vacuum and 12-volts DC.

CLASS A?

I need to find out what class motorhome a GMC motorhome is. I have a motorhome lot in a Class A only area. The board has asked me to tell them what class motorhome I have. Can you help me? Thanks, and keep up the good work.

LARRY SCHMITT | ALABASTER, ALA.

The GMC motorhome was completely built by General Motors Corp. from 1973 to 1978, Larry. It is a Class A motorhome, and has front-wheel drive and a tandem rear axle with air suspension (see www.thegmcmotorhomepeople.com for pictures).

Many Class C motorhomes built on GMC cutaway van chassis are sometimes wrongly called GMC motorhomes instead of the name of the manufacturer that built them. That's because the GMC emblem appears on the front of the vehicle.

LP-GAS ORIFICE

You have had articles about rust on the gas orifice in the refrigerator. How do you clean it out? Thank you.

**DEAN MELLING
ROHNERT PARK, CALIF.**

Open the burner box and carefully vacuum the rust out, Dean. The orifice itself rarely requires cleaning. If for some reason it is plugged, remove it and only use compressed air to clean it. It is a precision part. Attempting to ream it out with any tool will ruin it.

LP-GAS LEAK

From time to time I have smelled the proverbial LP-gas perfume outside my 1990 Malard motorhome, but can't find the source. I've used a soap solution on all the connections, valves and hoses connected to and from the tank, and even took it to an authorized LP-gas dealer that certifies tanks.

While I had the motorhome in a shop to have the rubber roof replaced, the problem was located. It turned out there was a pinhole in the tank wall itself. The hole was behind a small metal plate attached by what appeared to be spot welds on the four corners. The plate identified the tank type, model number, manufacturer, etc.

Over the life of the tank, moisture, dirt, perhaps road salt, etc., had accumulated behind the plate and the hole, however small, was the result. The hole was found almost by accident when the roof technicians flushed a large amount of soap solution on the tank, and it splashed over the plate.

It may be worthwhile to alert readers with older motorhomes to have their tanks inspected in detail and recertified, as it could save their lives. I was not aware of it prior to my tank being replaced, but in Canada all LP-gas tanks, including RV tanks, must have new valves installed and be recertified every 10 years. The onus is on the personnel who fill the tanks to ensure there is a certification stamp less than 10 years old on every tank they fill. I do not know what the regulations are in the United States.

JERRY ROOS | THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

Permanently mounted horizontal LP-gas tanks are called ASME tanks, Jerry. As odd as it may seem, they never require recertification in the United States. Removable cylinders installed on travel trailers and those used on barbecue grills must be recertified every 10 years as in Canada.

As motorhomes get older, those with tanks exposed to the weather and road salt need to be carefully watched for corrosion that can lead to a pinhole leak like the one that was found in your original tank. Unfortunately, you cannot completely clean and paint under the manufacturer's plate.

RATINGS

I am under the impression that when you tow four wheels down, the gross combined weight rating (gcwr) is no longer an issue. I have a 1997 Newmar with a gcwr of 21,000 pounds, and a gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) of 16,500 pounds. The hitch is rated to tow a maximum of 4,000 pounds.

I am now towing a 500-pound dolly, and purchased a vehicle weighing 2,700 pounds so I could safely be within the

4,000-pound hitch rating and the gcwr.

Am I correct in thinking that I no longer have to consider the weights and capacities by towing four wheels down?

WOODIE WALKER | HERTFORD, N.C.

No rating should be exceeded, Woodie. I can't imagine where you got that impression.

The gcwr should never be exceeded. Towing capacity is usually measured by subtracting the gvwr from the gcwr. In your case, that yields 4,500 pounds.

The hitch is only rated to tow 4,000 pounds, so that is the maximum weight you can tow. The hitch also has a vertical load rating specified by the motorhome manufacturer. It's usually about 10 percent of the tow rating, and probably would be 400 pounds in your case.

You're correct that your dolly/towed vehicle combination is within Newmar's weight ratings. Towing four wheels down does not negate those ratings, and you should never use your towed vehicle to haul extra stuff. Stuff weighs. Sometimes, stuff weighs a lot.

BATTERY CHARGING

I have a 2005 Class A motorhome on a Freightliner chassis with a 300-hp Cummins engine. I would like to keep the two 12-volt chassis batteries and the two six-volt house batteries charged with a 15-watt solar charger when the motorhome is not being used.

Is it OK to connect all the batteries together to charge them all at the same time while they are still in the coach? The chassis batteries are four years old, and the house batteries are brand-new.

LARRY BANKSTON | O'FALLON, MO.

If all the batteries are new, and the solar charger has a controller that turns off after fully charging the batteries, it would be OK, Larry, but not ideal. Connecting new batteries together with 4-year-old batteries is not OK, because batteries of differing ages have differing charging requirements.

Ideally, charge the six-volt batteries, and then the 12-volt batteries separately. They can be isolated and combined for down the road charging with a Perko-style battery switch. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & CHASSIS, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, on page 8.

Having a Fit

After doing research on picking the best car to tow behind my coach, "MotorHome's 2009 Dinghy Towing Guide" (February 2009) gave me the answer: a 2009 Honda Fit. The problem I encountered with the Fit is with its battery.

After my first day on the road, I stopped at an RV park for the night. I unhooked the towed car, and tried to start it, only to find that the battery was dead. (I should mention that you must plug the auxiliary BrakeBuddy into the 12-volt DC car outlet to power it.) The Honda dealer told me the battery in the Fit was not designed for medium or heavy use, and it would drain under the conditions I was using it. The dealer replaced the battery under the car warranty.

Do you know of anything that might help with this problem? I would greatly appreciate you advising me; otherwise I will have to continue jumping the Fit after every tow.

ROBERT NAHAMA
BAKERSFIELD, CALIF.

Frequent brake use can quickly drain a battery if you don't have a charging line from the motorhome. The BrakeBuddy uses about 15 amperes of current when the air compressor is operating, which is about the same amount as headlights and running lights use. There are two modes, full braking and proportional; the proportional setting uses more power over time than the other setting. Whichever mode you choose, it seems like you are a good candidate for the Battery Maintainer kit part no. 39332 (approximately \$24) from Hopkins Manufacturing's Brake Buddy (www.brakebuddy.com; 800-470-2287). If you add a charging line from the motorhome, it will solve the problem.

Completely discharging a battery will ruin it very quickly, so this needs to be addressed right away.

COLD-START NOISE

Winter is here, and I need an answer to a cold-weather problem. I have a 2005 Damon Challenger with a stock 8.1-L gas engine. On cold mornings (25°F or lower) when I start the engine I get an awful grinding noise from the engine area and immediately shut off the key. I had the power steering pump replaced under warranty, but that didn't help. To solve this strange problem I have mounted a small electric heater under the hood facing the engine (but clear of anything combustible), and use a timer to start the heater at about 5AM. I also had a water jacket heater installed.

I believe the problem to be either a power steering pump that seizes up in cold weather, or the serpentine belt is just too cold to make it around sharp bends like the alternator or power steer-

ing pulley. What are your thoughts?

RAYMOND JORDAN
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.

It's a good idea to use a block heater before starting in cold weather, but you shouldn't have to do all this to get it running in winter. First, make sure you have the proper fluid in the power steering pump and that the engine oil viscosity is correct for the expected temperatures. Also, test the antifreeze concentration to be sure it is sufficient for the minimum temperatures, and that it is still chemically in good condition with no rust present.

You should open the engine compartment before starting the engine on a cold morning (without the heaters). Have an assistant start the engine while you listen. It's also a good idea to remove the engine cover in case the noise is farther back. Often, you get belt squeal when the alternator tries to recharge the battery after starting. Power steering will usually give a moaning sound. However, a grinding noise may be a failing idler pulley bearing or other component.

A QUICK WAY TO TEST THE EGR IS TO CAP OFF THE VACUUM LINE GOING TO THE EGR VALVE AND TRY IT. IF DRIVEN VERY FAR WITH IT CAPPED, IT WILL SET A TROUBLE CODE. THIS CAN BE RESET WITH A SCAN TOOL.

STALLING PROBLEM

I have a 2000 Pace Arrow Vision with 28,000 miles on the Ford V-10 engine. It has a problem occasionally when trying to start moving, which occurs at high and low ambient temperatures and with a full or quarter-full gas tank. After sitting overnight or when pulling away from a start with a warm or cold engine, it will stall.

It will then restart normally, but as soon as I put it in gear it will roll a few inches and then stall again. After many rolling restarts, I can get it going by feathering the throttle. It will then run all day at interstate speeds until I have to stop again.

I have tried four gasoline brands and used throttle body cleaner, replaced the air filter, crank position sensor, the mag flow sensor, output speed sensor and the valve air pass assembly. Since this is a sporadic problem, I have not been able to get in to a Ford dealer when the problem is actually occurring.



The dealer's computer shows no stored trouble codes, and they unfortunately have to resort to guesswork at my expense. Also, since the coach runs fine once the RPM and speed builds up, I think that it is not a fuel flow or vapor lock condition. Can you help?

RICHARD GONSALVES
SEBRING, FLA.

A tip-in stumble and stall like this can be caused by a number of things. The dealer should have test-driven the coach with a scan tool that can capture malfunctions when they occur and record the data. These include a faulty throttle-position sensor (TPS), mass airflow (MAF) sensor and a sticking EGR valve, low fuel pressure, etc. I think the most likely culprit is the TPS, which might have a dead spot in it from dirt or wear. This can be checked with a portable lab scope, which most good drivability shops have.

A quick way to test the EGR is to cap off the vacuum line going to the EGR valve and try it. If driven very far with it capped, it will set a trouble code. This can be reset with a scan tool, or by disconnecting power to the ECM. I also recommend connecting a fuel pressure tester that can be seen during the test drives. These models very often have low fuel pressure, which can cause drivability problems. Old gas or high alcohol content in fuel also causes problems.

FALTERING FORD FOLLOW-UP

This is regarding the letter from Gary Van Lydegraf ("Faltering Ford," October 2009) about the problem with his Ford engine. I had a missing problem with my 1995 Four Winds that has a 7.5-L V-8 engine with 50,000 miles on it.

My local Ford dealer checked the wiring, called the Ford hotline several times, and finally discovered it was the powertrain control module (PCM), which Ford no longer makes. The PCM is available from an after-market company in Canada. The dealer had to order it, but that solved the problem.

JIM KOTHMAN | FOLEY, MINN.

The PCM usually isn't at fault, but it can be difficult to diagnose. Typically, you have to eliminate everything else as a problem and then assume it's the PCM. We're glad

you were able to get it fixed, and thanks for sharing another possible cause.

THE BUCKING STOPS HERE

I, too, had a "Faltering Ford" (October 2009) 7.5-L V-8 engine in my 1997 Pace Arrow. It started bucking this summer. Eventually it refused to start, and I had to have it towed to a Ford garage. Technicians went through much of the same process trying to find the problem as Gary Van Lydegraf described.

After finally convincing the garage to do what I told them, they checked the timing manually (which turned out to be OK), and then changed the distributor cap, rotor and coil. It turned out the ignition coil was firing, but it was too weak. That caused the engine to refuse to start.

The coil is in an area of the engine subjected to extreme heat, which more than likely caused it to fail. I hope this is helpful to anyone else experiencing this problem.

VINCE HARTIGAN
NEW CONCORD, KY.

Thanks for writing, Vince. I believe a lot of coil problems get missed because they cool off, and start working normally. Readers should take note of this.

EASY FIX: THE 'HARD START'

Regarding the "Can't Cool the Coach" letter from Tom Goris (September 2009): I had a problem that resulted in a fix that would help Goris. Call the A/C manufacturer, and ask for a "hard start kit." It is a capacitor and relay that changes the power curve of the A/C motor only when it starts.

It made a huge difference in the current spike when it first kicks in. I can now run my A/C unit on my Kipor 3000 digital generator using the eco throttle mode instead of having to run it at full power to handle the starts. Huge savings in gas used there too. Hope this helps.

DON HARTWICK | VIA E-MAIL

Thanks for writing, Don. This is sure to help quite a few readers and will be welcome news to them. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO *POWERTRAIN*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, on page 8.

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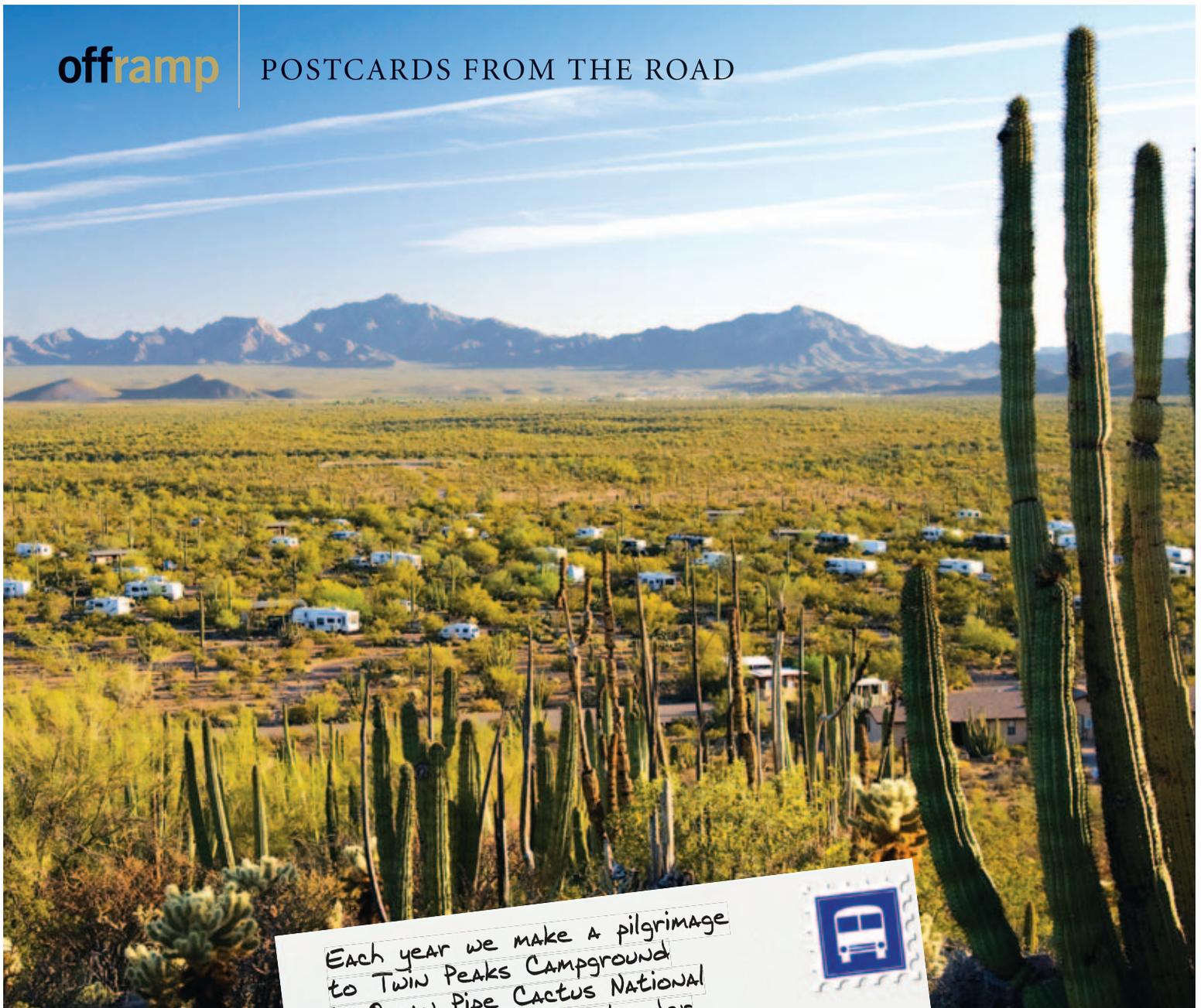
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