

Three and one half months, 103 days; 8000 miles(1111 gal gasoline);1750 mi on TrailBlazer

Padre Island, Everglades, Florida Keys, Jekyll Island, Outer Banks, Great Smokeys and more

California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma.

March 21, 2009; Saturday

Got the spring RV windsurfing trip kicked off today, arriving at Quartzsite, Az to dry-camp for the night of BLM land. Next day made the easy 200 mi let to Picacho Peak State Park about 40 mi north of Tucson. Day 3 we moved on to Bisbee in south east Az with a couple hour stop in Tombstone for lunch. It's quite windy and cold in Bisbee gave up BBQ'ing dinner because of the unpleasant outside weather.

We took the tour of the Queen Mine at Bisbee. This is a horizontal entry by train into the mountain side of a mine where work stopped about 1943. Multiple ore species were extracted, copper, zinc, some gold, iron. Tour is interesting and I thought worth the \$12. Similar to a vertical shaft entry mine I visited in Broken Hill, Australia in 2007. In 2006 I came through Bisbee, but somehow missed the significance of this city. In visiting their very interesting museum, we learned that this was, for a time with population 10 – 12,000, now 6,000, the 3rd largest city west of the Mississippi, after St. Louis and San Francisco. Copper mining was huge and the city was growing at an extraordinary rate in the early 20th century until the easy copper ran out and until newer technology opened up surface mining. Another important event in US national history was the “Bisbee Deportation of 1917”, when striking miners were rounded up and many deported to New Mexico. Google it if interested. Surprising to me, Bisbee had a lot of significant history.

Made our way east through Douglas to my favorite rest area, the road runner, overlooking Las Cruces. This is the rest area with a large steel statue of the bird and tonight as usual the most spectacular panoramic view of the city lights. Thursday we moved on east through Texas stopping briefly at the quaint old towns of Marfa and Alpine, both county seats with interesting old court houses. Spent the night at Marathon which is reported to be interesting also, but we can't find why and wished we had stopped at one of the above. A very strong 'northerner' blew through about 3 am forcing me to get out and see if the boats were adequately tied to the top. They were!

Made Del Rio by mid afternoon – the very high winds prompted us to have dinner at the Pecan Station (La Hacienda) – BEST Mexican buffet I have ever had.

March 28, 2009; Saturday

Today we drove to and explored Laredo, Tx – five times as large as Del Rio and a major port of goods entry from Mexico. Sunday brought us to South Padre Island where we relax a couple days at the Isla Blanca, Cameron County, campground. This is a huge place with over 600 spaces, but we got right on the water so not bad. South Padre is a little odd this trip. The campground seems has many occupants, but otherwise the town is nearly deserted. Some hotels and businesses closed and most without customers – one drives down the main street and see nobody. Recession? Hurricane Dolly did a lot of damage here last July. Sheraton Hotel for example closed for repairs and remodeling triggered by the hurricane. Weather is quite nice.

April 2, 2009; Thursday

Arrived at Bird Island Basin, North Padre Island. We spent the preceding tow night at Marina Village RV at Flour Bluff (Corpus Christi). Sailed Friday (7.3m²) and Sat (6.6) and shuttled Ron the Corpus Christi airport on Sat morning. Day before Easter, een sailing the smoothest water I can remember as there is no fetch before the wind arrives at the sailing area.

April 18, 2009; Saturday

Life has been pretty routine here at Bird Island Basin. Probably sailed all but about 5 of the 16 days thus far, but today looks like a day off. Have been sailing all the way from 7.3m² to 4.5m² at various times and water and weather have warmed to the point that no wet suit is required. Easter dinner with my sister, Barb, from Padre and brother from Cleveland at Barb's yacht club. Following evening Ruth Kelley had her annual pot luck for sailors and others at her condo on the island. Every evening everyone gathers at a kiosk on the beach for happy hour. Life is good, the S&P closed above 850 this week and summer is coming. I do have a fresh water leak somewhere that is making the pump cycle for ½ second every minute or so that I hope to find soon. On overcast days I have to conserve power carefully, not too much computer or TV, to avoid running the generator. Then it seems I am behind when the sun returns, so still have to conserve. This is not a problem when traveling running the engine for long periods or spending nights "plugged in" at a campground – and of course simply solved by running the generator – a bummer!

April 19, 2009; Sunday

Picked up my brother and spouse (visiting sister from Cleveland on North Padre) and went to the Sand Festival at Port Aransas. This is about half mile of sand sculptures constructed by contestants from all over US. Some sculptures were fairly intricate and artistic, but they and the festival are dwarfed by a similar saw I saw in 2007 south of Melbourne, maybe around Frankston or Dromana? Some sculptures there were two to three stories high. Got back to BIB in time for about 1.5 hours of windsurfing on a 7.3m² sail. Finishing up my 2nd book for the trip: 1) *The Secret Warriors*, (Men at War Series), W.E.B. Griffin (Alex Baldwin); 2) *Return with Honor*, Col. George Day.

Went to the Corpus Christi "in water" boat show and drooled over the "*Ruling Angel*," an 80 ft "cutter rigged" sloop. What a beauty, \$1.7 million.

We are having terrific wind 15 – 25, 30 mph for large parts of almost every day. Everyone agrees, more than in recent past years. Friday evening as I was de-rigging, as usual I tie the board to an anchor in shallow water (2.5 ft) and stack the components on it as they come off the rig, then float the whole ensemble 200 ft to shore. This time I was a bit careless about tying the board, and as I was rolling up the sail I noticed the board with all components aboard, boom, mast, etc., about 200 ft out in the Laguna Madre blowing down wind. No hope of catching it on foot or swimming, so I grabbed a big "beginner board and sail from a nearby anchor and went sailing after it. Caught up and got it stopped about ¼ mi out, and with some help of another sailor, Andy, got it towed back to shore with all components present. May 2 (Sat) more wind. Some say the strongest 'southeast' warm wind in memory. They had a downwind race up in the city, Corpus Christy Bay, and, according to Andy Brandt whose here at BIB, all racers dropped out except two. US Open Windsurfing Regatta next week in CC. I had three good but short sessions on a 4.5 m² sail, and James video-taped my single, but

spectacular, crash. So now -- we have a video of js sailing, but he missed all but one of the good jibes I made.

Monday May 5, 09

Time to move on. Left BIB this am and drove east up the Texas gulf coast – avoiding the interstates for now, Aransas Ferry, Rockport, Port Lavaca and other small towns. Beautiful “green” country all around – and flat as a table with huge agricultural fields, but not rivaling West Australia at all. Lush green pasture lands with many picturesque trees. Went into Matagorda Bay, nice campground, but was early so I decided to move up the coast to Quintana Beach County RV Park, near Freeport. Very nice campground next to the beach and a large commercial waterway. There are some serious seaports along here. But they had MOSQUITOES for the first hour I was there. I anticipate this is going to be a frequent occurrence on this late spring trip through the southeast. The bridge to nowhere, crossing to Matagorda is a small 500 ft drawbridge, soon to be replaced by a ½ mile long overpass bridge to serve only the campground and a few vacation cottages – those folks must have been cowering when the Alaska earmark was getting the publicity.

Tonight, Tue I have chosen to stay at a rest stop in east Texas about 10 miles west of Orange and the Louisiana border. Had planned to go to Lake Charles area, but spent so much time changing the coach deep discharge batteries at Costco that things got late. Rest stops in east Tx aren’t as nice as other locations, but this one is quite nice and if you are a bit aggressive, as I, about taking a parking place it can be OK. And, for the first time the rest area free internet seems to work. Quite HOT in the coach, but nice sitting out with a martini – hopefully will cool some later. Noisy with trucks too, but may quiet down as the evening progresses. As I write this the internet tells me the wind has been pretty poor at BIB since I left. Frogs are croaking loudly in a neat green linear marsh beside the Winnebago. If I were clever enough I could probably have then for dinner – but soon I will have to control such thoughts for fear of alligators in the marshes.

Last night, Wed, slept on the berm between a flooded rice paddy and a bayou a little north of Pecan Island., after driving the south shore of western Louisiana, Holly beach, bike tour of Sabine National Wildlife Refuge (no alligators, many ibis) – got too late to search for an RV park. Most remarkable day’s adventure was “offshore liftboats.” Not sure how they keep the cm below the center of support. Tonight at Fairview Riverside Park on the Tchefuncta River north of New Orleans. An idyllic beautiful place. But only got it for one night as it’s full the weekend. Coming here from last night’s rice field campsite I came down the south side of the Mississippi hoping to tour one or more of the Plantations there, but got too late and have to devote too much effort to finding a place to stay - so had to forfeit. In addition to the great facilities, this place has good WiFi and honors Golden Age cards!

Haven’t got this worked out yet – spending all my time looking for a place to live. Long time learning how, and getting reservation for next weekend at Topsail near Destin, Fl. - and still have to change campsite every day! This camp ground is kicking me out for this weekend – fortunately long time friend lives 14 miles away in the forest and has graciously allowed me to dry-camp in his driveway for the weekend – well not quite dry as I will have water and some power. Looks like I will have several days to explore New Orleans area though.

Saturday went down to NO and explored the French Quarter again (after 10 years ago) and rode my bike around the city and the entire river (Mississippi) walk! Sunday went to Big Branch March and Fountainbleau Parks, both a bust but got in a nice short bike ride in each. Then went to the Ponchartrain Maritime Museum in Madisonville. I thought that was very interesting and worth the trip. Later I followed the Garmin to Acme Oyster, but it wasn't, I asked someone and they just pointed me to where the Garmin did -- which was Buster's. After inquiring inside was informed that Acme moved out of that location some time ago ---- but I got some good oysters on the half-shell and beer for a late lunch (4 pm) anyway. Monday, mostly hung out and rode a few miles of the Tammany Trace, a nice bike path from Covington to Slidell. Radio is non-existent for me here, there are three stations, New Orleans jazz, religion, and sports. All the stations repeat similar stuff, can't even get Rush or John & Ken !!!

Tuesday morning moving east, stopped for breakfast in Slidell and gas went up 6 cents while I was eating - \$2.09 when I went in and \$2.15 when I came out. Wished I had gassed up before breakfast. Drove the scenic route along the Miss. Coast, Gulfport, Biloxi (looks like Surfer's Paradise Australia -- but not quite as good), a big gambling Mecca. Camping the night at the Gulf Islands National Seashore. A very nice green and shady campground, while the gulf seashore, like many places along the gulf, is better if you are fishing, i.e. not too inviting for swimming. There is nice beach a few miles west around Biloxi. Tent camping seems to be going through an evolution. Couple years ago up at the Columba River gorge I saw an electric cord snaking into someone's tent, and surmised that they might have a small cooler or TV inside. Yesterday at this campground some guy was remarking that equally content camping in his tent as his van --- but later I noticed he has an AC under the flap of his tent and a DirecTV antenna (HD no less) on a tripod outside the tent. Seems like he might need a furniture truck to come camping! Thursday evening at Gulf Shores, Ala. -- a highly regarded beach resort spot. I have a pleasant camp site, but Gulf Shores is way over-rated. Miles of barren white sand burning in the sun. (this is a problem at Redondo, Hermosa Manhattan too). Best beaches are Caribbean, followed by Australia and Maui in a tie maybe. Surf Style stores on 3 of 4 corners at Hwy 59. but hardly sell surf stuff, just hats, tee-shirts, and mask and snorkel set though there is nowhere to see anything in the water that I can discern. I am sorely regretting that I didn't think to bring along mask, fins and weights that I am sure I will want somewhere in Florida. Couldn't find a bar with good beer or atmosphere. Not sure what the attraction here but sure glad I chose Maui. Friday evening, Destin, or rather Topsail Hill State Campground. The beach sand is just as reported, sugar white, and I had a nice romp in the benign surf, but nobody surfs here?? The second of my three morning "musical chair" campsites at Topsail (Destin). Sunday am 5/17. There was a beautiful soft rain all night, and things are fresh, clean, green and alive. This site is a few feet from a lily pad edged lake and very idyllic. Monday, I moved about 160 mi eastward to the Ochlockonee River State Park just south of the confluence of this river and the Dead River and 30 miles SW of Tallahassee. It's a beautiful, clean river with sandy beach banks and tree lined banks. Weather has turned cool and a little breeze keeps us free on mosquitoes. A very peasant place. Why didn't I schedule 6 -- 9 months for this trip. Cell phone and computer connections vanished somewhere around the southern tip of the panhandle and have not returned.

Wed May 20, 2009

Arrived in the Dunedin, Clearwater, Tampa area. Visiting with an old High School classmate and a former Hughes colleague in the area. It is raining about half the time so the windsurfing I had anticipated in Tampa area is not happening yet. Got soaked on a short bike ride Thursday and completed a nice ride on the Pinellas Trail today between St. Petersburg and Tarpon Springs. Sunday 5/24 – moved south to Jack Phelp's rental duplex in Indian Rocks Beach – I of course living in the Winnebago (Jack is on Maui wishing the wind would blow for windsurfing). I am one house from the bay and 1 ½ blocks from the Gulf. Really neat town is the first impression. Good to get out of that trailer park I was in at Dunedin! Rode a couple miles to meet and have a beer with Jack's friend at his house on the bay and the full-size brass buffalo in the yard. After a swim in the gulf, rode my bike north through Belleair Beach and Clearwater, both unfriendly places with zero place to park a car along the main thoroughfare and everybody imprisoned in high-rise condominiums or hotels or frying like strips of bacon on lounge chairs in front of same. Sunday: Jack's friend came by and invited me to breakfast. John turns out to be a very interesting guy with whom I suspect my acquaintanceship is not over. He's a commercial realtor, pilot, ex engineer, has a 42' Bertram in the Bahamas, was Ross Perot's guest at a POW reunion in Texas recently by virtue of his brother-in-law who was a POW in Hanoi for 6 years and wrote a book about it (*Six Years in Hell: Lt. Colonel Jay R. Jensen*) – besides having a brass buffalo in his yard. We found quite a lot in common, not the least of which, I just finished reading *Return with Honor*, Col. George Day, a fellow POW, as previously noted above. This place is pretty neat, reminds me of camping up the east coast of Australia in 1992 around Byron Point. Real estate about ½ price of California – looked at a new 3400 ft² place with good Bay view on top floor for \$480k, would be > \$1m in Ca. Unfortunately it is not inverted so living area is on top like Ca. Beer at the local (you can tell it's local because everyone still smokes here) beach bar is ½ price too, only thing missing was Jimmy Buffet – guess he's on Maui. Indian Rocks has a very nice nature preserve with long elevated boardwalk. Tue 5/26 went south along the barrier island route and across the spectacular St. Petersburg bridge. By mid afternoon settled in Koreshan State Park near Ft. Meyers. Drove the TrailBlazer over to Sanibel Island. Couple windsurfers with their 9.5 m² sails wishing along the island causeway, but not sailing. The 6 mile bike ride through the Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge is reminiscent of the Amazon to me – very good couple hours. The park incorporates a historic 1800's utopian village occupied the Koreshians, a celibate religious group that has vanished (sounds like David Koresh, but seems unrelated), with interesting machinery and artifacts. Got my kayak off the Winnebago and paddled up and down the Estero River a couple miles looking for water moccasin and alligator. Found one of the latter. Good thing I got the kayak down as it was half full of water from recent rains, doubling the weight on the roof.

Thursday morning 5/28 Down the Tamiami Trail (Hwy 41) through Naples, across the Big Cypress Preserve, and east to the Everglades NP. Ft. Meyer to Naples is a continuous shopping mall with all construction neat and new. Alligators visible now at most bodies of water when you take the time to look. Dry camped in Long Pine Key campground in the Everglades. The campground is, except for one lone tent, EMPTY. It's on a nice lake but not at all swampy about, instead pines, green grass and under growth. This could almost be in the Sierras, except for the -25 ft elevation. I chose the best camp site with some shade, overhead sun access for my solar panels and a view to

the southwest for DirecTV. A few showers in the night, some gentle, some hard – ranger says they keep the mosquitoes from hatching so maybe I am lucky. One other motor home showed up with a German couple escaping from their “day in hell” at Key West. Their rental motor home got towed for parking violation they didn’t understand, costing \$350, and a camp site for the night cost \$100. I’m not going near Key West with mine, bicycle or TrailBlazer only. At this Everglades site, no phone, no internet, but a great quiet place to spend a couple half-days working on my Measat consulting task. This campground is turning out to be one of the most pleasant on the trip. It’s raining for 10 min every half hour which seems to be keeping it cool and relatively bug-free. Thought I get only a couple hours of cloud-free sun each day, my two panel solar system is keeping up so far with lots of computer operation and all the TV I want – aided by the fact that there’s nothing on the damn thing. Everglades are much different and less interesting than I hoped. Had envisioned paddling my kayak around some among the cypress forests, alligators, birds etc. Where the land is flooded enough to be so navigable, the water is totally stagnant and murky red and severely bug infested (no surprise). In hindsight I think the Henderson and Pearl River swamps in Louisiana/Alabama will be much more appealing for this. The Flamingo campground at the south end is very unappealing unless you want to launch a boat in the Straights of Florida which it borders. Sunday, moved on to Pennekamp Park on Key Largo and got a campsite with two large (4 ft) dragons to greet me. Thirty two years ago while attending a technical conference in Hollywood, FL I visited this park for a day of snorkeling (out on a boat) and within a few days after returning to Ca I was signed up at Dive n’ surf for SCUBA certification. Tue morning I moved about half way to Key West and am fortunate enough to get several days at Curry Hammock State Park on Marathon Key. Very nice park, nice beach but not premium. Pretty much like Corpus Christi gulf side except no surf. Park people tell me folks do frequently windsurf here. No beach on the trip comes close to that right outside my house on Maui! – which has clean clear water, moderate surf, good snorkeling and attractive scenery of trees, grass, growth, and rock outcroppings to make the shore interesting. I’m getting the impression that all the people I hear raving about Florida beaches, haven’t seen many beaches. Tuesday - day trip to explore Key West. A severe squall and poor drainage around the streets made the beginning wet. Key West is nearly indistinguishable from Lahina, quaint, old, touristy, a place to visit – infrequently. Thursday – went north a few miles to paddle my kayak around the Hungry Tarpon restaurant (were they apparently feed the tarpon and I saw 50 or so – 3 to 5 ft long fish) and through the mangroves where I saw a crocodile (yes, not an alligator). Finished off the day at the Castaway with some good draught beer and oysters on the half-shell. I baled out of the Keys Friday morning and made it to Jonathan Dickinson well north of Miami by evening just in time for a very dramatic thunder storm. Living in the west, one forgets what these are like - rather pleasant really if you are in shelter. Next day I first went north to Stuart to meet Pete, brother of a carpenter and bike rider friend of mine, Tom, on Maui. Then north 50 – 60 mi to Titusville and Kennedy Space Center, staying two nights at Manatee Hammock campground. The area I am seeing on the barrier island from about Vero Beach north is very nice with lots of waterfront homes currently available for a fraction the price of Calif homes. This area is quite nice, green, neat, manicured – by far I think the nicest part of Florida I have seen. Pretty sure if I were looking for real estate in Florida, this would be it. We shan’t ever tell anyone, but the

Keys are trash – I don't expect to return without some unique motivation. Spent a long day Sunday 6/7 at the Kennedy Space Center. This was very interesting and worthwhile – even to me who already knows all that stuff. Monday morning, headed north to Anastasia SP but found the campground full – on a Monday! Got a good place at Indian Forest, private RV park nearby that isn't like a trailer park. I considered hanging around Titusville for 5 days to watch the Saturday Shuttle launch - *but hindsight says glad I didn't as 3 weeks later it is still not off*. Turns out St Augustine is the jewel of Florida, as well as they claim, the oldest city in America. It's a very nice area with a lot of character. Fort Matanzas is a mildly interesting visit that you have to go to by boat, while Castillo de San Marcos and all the old downtown is quite interesting and laced with history – the Paraty of America! Searched all over Jacksonville for the Costco to gas up my 100 gallons, Garmin seemed to be a little off? When I got there it happened to be the one Costco with no gas station - bad luck. Then they told me Jekyll would be 10 mi from the highway – it is 22 – more bad luck.

Tuesday June 9, 2009

Leaving Florida behind. After visiting St Augustine I moved north about 120 mi to Jekyll Island, Ga. This is the former home of the rich and famous, but now a state run bureaucracy –nice place with a cluster of early 20th century palatial homes etc. given to the state by those rich and famous that belonged to the Jekyll Island club. Firestone, Ford, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Crane (the toilet guy), etc. I'm sure much detail is readily accessible on the web. It is said that 1/6th of the world's wealth was represented by the club members in the early 20th century. Then on to Savannah. This city has a wonderful historic district associated with both wars, Revolutionary and Civil. Couldn't decide between biking around or taking a bus tour. Settled on the latter, but would like to follow it with a long half day leisurely bike tour. The district is full of historical buildings that you wouldn't know about without the guide, or a written one. It also has about 20 “squares.” These are parks carved into the city with important statues, fountains, etc. More like you find in an old European city than in America. After that tour, I headed about 50 mi north toward Charleston, SC and found a place to dry camp in the bush for a change. It's hot though! Sometime after dark the Broward County Sheriff came by, but when he learned I wasn't bothering anybody, he left telling me to call if I needed help! Thursday – continued to Charleston and after getting into and out of a couple jams following incorrect instructions to get to the visitor center and parking in the middle of downtown with my 52' rig, became a tourist. Took the ½ hour boat trip to Fort Sumter (where the war began), then toured all the important historical buildings in Charleston by bicycle. Then headed north toward Myrtle Beach. Passed a lot of neat dry camping sites (in my imagination) in the National Forest land, but pushed on. Found Myrtle Beach to be a real zoo – and was briefly panicked for a place to stay for the night - but not to worry. Another 10 miles north and I found a great place to dry camp – dark out and a nice rain beating the roof as I write. Will return to Myrtle by TrailBlazer and bike for a look around tomorrow. I did it! Total waste of my half day – why not just go to Redondo Beach and avoid the hotels. Stopped in Wilmington (NC) to bike around the sights and have a beer by the river front. Friday night – dry camped again very near to a little place Folkstone, NC, probably on marine Camp Lejeune property – at least I hear the machine guns firing in the distance and have had a couple helicopter flyovers.

Sunday June 14, 2009

Caught the Cedar Island to Ocracoke ferry to enter the NC Outer Banks, a bit more than 2 hour ride over 25 miles. Biked around much of the inhabited part of the island and got a swim in the Atlantic. Waves are medium, but, rising far out, so seems not practical, for a lone stranger at least, to swim out past them. Hence, a 'swim' means playing in the surf. Elevation sensor is broken on my DirecTV, but I seem to be getting it aimed for reception by fiddling a while. Oops – next morning water is more like a lake – dependent on wind and tide I presume. Monday, another ferry to Hatteras Island. Dry camped at Frisco Natl. Seashore campground, I think this is the prettiest campground I have been in for the whole trip. Climbed the Hatteras Lighthouse, 200 ft. – tallest in the US. This is the lighthouse they moved several years ago because it was washing into the sea. The move was somewhat like the Space Shuttle being crawlered out to the pad, with the lighthouse vertical and intact. Seems like Outer Banks is made up of 4 islands, Ocracoke, Hatteras, Bodie, and Roanoke. Not putting any windsurfing together – no wind, not finding many launch points. Did find on the sound at Haulover (odd name), south of Avon. Guess you can sail the ocean lots of places, but only reasonable access it to drive out on the beach – otherwise too far to carry. Basically they let you drive most of 100 miles of beach here – but I don't want to do it alone without good motivation as I have nobody to help dig me out, or to send for help – and certainly don't want to abandon a stuck car on the beach with tide coming in – if it's mine. I've seen how that works in Mexico before. Tue, moved up another 50 mi and another island – Bodie. Got in a significant bike ride to the Bodie Lighthouse. I'm getting this lighthouse technology psyched out. At all the lighthouses they have people in government uniforms, but they don't seem to know much. A typical lighthouse of reasonable height, 1 – 2 hundred feet with a Fresnel lens can be seen for about 20 miles. They seem to focus on 20 miles out to sea, but that's not important. 5 miles might be fine. More important, if a ship is 5 miles out, but 15 miles down the coast, it needs to see the light. So the lighthouses are about 40 miles apart so as one goes out of view, another comes in. And, theoretically, there is a chain of lighthouses along the entire ocean coast – though none are necessary in areas where cities provide enough lights to detect the coast. Tuesday night the wind blew hard all night getting my juices going for a little Hatteras windsurfing. But not to be. When the sun came up the wind went down some. Also driving around finding some shops with pro who know local conditions I learned the direction is wrong (NE) so the wind on the water is light and about a mile off shore. So, I went to the Wright Brothers National Memorial – for me this was another great trip. From the presentation in front of the Wright Flyer I might have thought this was the birth of modern engineering. They didn't have much formal education but they did study all the available and applicable technology of the time – they got ideas, built hardware, experimented with it, failed, noted the problems and started again! There were many unsolved problems, lift, balance, mass properties, propulsion efficiency, an engine, launching, etc., etc. --- it's almost like these two guys invented modern 'systems engineering'. Sometimes my entourage gets a lot of attention in the parking lots etc. – people staring and counting all the vehicles – Winnebago, TrailBlazer, kayak, several windsurfers, bicycle. After my inspiring visit to Kitty Hawk, I turned west toward California ----- and writing this from near Rocky Mount, NC - -- an area where they still grow tobacco, what do they do with that stuff – ship to the gullible in the Orient and Europe maybe. Thursday evening coasted in to Black Mountain above Asheville about 15 mi in a torrential mountain rain and accidentally got a

nice campsite in a big Baptist Church convention center park. The RV park is simple, but the convention center is a big deal with many large respectable buildings. Also right beside a famous railroad tunnel built with convict lab in the late 19th century. In the morning I watched a long train crawl, empty, up the mountain at very low speed. Spent much of the day at Biltmore, former home of George Vanderbilt – I chose to bike in from the main gate, which got me about 12 – 15 miles and at least one Torre Pines hill. On this whole trip I seem to be rushing from one activity to another – today typical with first food at 2 pm when I got back to the Winnebago. Then off to Smoky Mountain National Park by evening – and another bike ride of 10 miles there to see sights after arriving – including the Mingus Mill, a working grist mill that despite the “Open” sign in front, was closed. Gosh, I am tired. Saturday cruised up and down the 5000 ft elevation summit of Newfound Gap in Great Smoky NP, then crawled through the zoo of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, both in Tennessee. I am informed, the latter has something to do with the popularity of Dolly Parton. The two areas are crowded with tourists, hotels, condominiums? And every kind of commercial entertainment you can imagine. Spending the night far from this (200 mi), about 25 miles west of Nashville in a very nice state park, Montgomery Bell, which has a free blue grass concert and also free hot dogs and soda. Unfortunately they always seem to get these campgrounds tucked away ½ mile out of cell phone and internet range.

Sunday June 21, 2009

Today marks 3 months into the trip. Drove from Nashville area to West Memphis, Ark., to Tom Sawyer’s RV Park and have a site just 75 ft from the big muddy (Mississippi). Huge arrays of connected barges go by frequently on the river. There is strong down stream current so tremendous power must be required to push them upstream. The park facilities are ho hum, but the scene is superb. And then so frequently the RV parks promise WiFi, but don’t deliver – this is one and I always feel ripped off as they thwart my plan of taking care of affairs with skype phone calls. Otherwise my access to the internet through laptop, Bluetooth, cell phone, T-Mobile has been quite reliable and not blazing, but fast enough. Book #7 I am reading, *Harvest Home*, Thomas Tryon, is quite an oddity. The setting is Connecticut about 1973, when the book was written. The author has captured one thousand expressions that I haven’t heard since leaving Western Pennsylvania, some which my brother still retains (I don’t have to worry – he will never read this). Like ‘worshing’ for washing; ‘redded up the dishes’, ‘lookee’ and many I won’t recall at the moment. Even I still find it awkward to say creek instead of ‘crick.’ Today visited Memphis, the Riverfront, Mud Island, the convention pyramid, and the Blues section around Beale Street. Stopped in for ribs on Beale and they were soooooooo tender and delicious that I could easily cut them with the damn plastic knife they served me. Sometimes I BBQ ribs for my guests in Redondo Beach – but I hope none ever have these to compare to what I give them – but at least I serve silver and beer in a glass. After two evenings of brief encounter, with my neighbor in the Tom Sawyer campground upon parting I learn that he is Rick Saunders, Arkansas State Representative. With wife BJ, a very nice couple who gave me good advice about where to visit in Arkansas and promised to be helpful if I had any need in the state. Lately these legislators are popping up all over in my life – noting that I have recently reconnected with a high school classmate who has been a Florida state legislator. Much of Arkansas that I passed is quite poor and all the chicken we eat is raised along highway 10

northwest of Little Rock and Hot Springs. Fortunately they keep the smell there, so the chicken is good when we get it. Stayed at a beautiful COE park (Blue Mountain Reservoir) at Waveland. North of Hwy 10 in the northwest corner on Arkansas looks like a great wooded low mountain area with some lakes that looks like great area to visit again for a longer term. This is the Ozarks. California and Arkansas were competing for most pot holes in the interstate highways, until I got to Oklahoma. Highway 40 in Oklahoma is terrible but at least they are working on it, so in a year they may be ahead of Interstate 5 in Calif. For much of Oklahoma they procured a very talented contractor who built the interstate from about 10 ft long rectangles of concrete. Each rectangle is successively set down or up about 2 inches from its predecessor, ensuring a violent bump at each crossing. Maybe they got the same contractor who built Interstate 5 in Calif. Wednesday evening, dry camped under a majestic big tree out in an open area very close to Weatherford, Ok. Next day across the Texas panhandle and into NM, camping at Santa Rosa Lake, NM. Then two very pleasant nights in Albuquerque staying with Pat & Tom Hoff. We went to the new Nuclear Museum which has exhibits about the bomb and about other uses of nuclear energy. One night north of Flagstaff and two of camping in the Arizona bush got within reach of home in Southern California.

Wednesday July 1, 2009

Final night out – maybe. I am back at San Bernardino and looked up an RV park up Sierra Canyon. When I went there, electric was only 15 amp (not adequate for microwave or ac – no better than my solar) couldn't drive up to the dump stations due to overhanging trees, and couldn't level because of camp site slopes – who needs this? I got my money back and tossed a coin between going back to Redondo late tonight, or dry-camping up in this National Forest canyon. The latter won.

Things to fix. DirecTV antenna elevation sensor, inverter, weeping AC, keyless entry, toad signal cable – probably not too bad for 3.5 mo on the road??

The last book of the trip, *Yeager*, remains to be finished after return, but here's the review. Yeager had a real talent for flying airplanes, maybe like playing the saxophone or something. But I didn't get the impression he earned it much. When not flying he was carousing and drinking. "I was just a lucky kid who caught the right ride" He comments "the public didn't really understand the sound barrier,," but nowhere in the book does he help the public – I'm not even sure Yeager understands it. He makes a big point about not being educated enough to be a test pilot, but never did anything about it. He just depended on Ridley. Talks a lot about arrogance, but not much about his own. But – nevertheless, I am enjoying the book.

Books I enjoyed on this trip:

- 1) *The Secret Warriors*, (Men at War Series), W.E.B. Griffin (Alex Baldwin)
- 2) *Return with Honor*, Col. George Day.
- 3) *Secrecy*, Belva Plain
- 4) *A Burglar Who Liked to Quote Kipling*, Lawrence Sanders
- 5) *Natalie*, Lana Wood
- 6) *Hammerheads*, Dale Brown
- 7) *Harvest Home*, Thomas Tryon
- 8) *Yeager*, Chuck Yeager, et. al.