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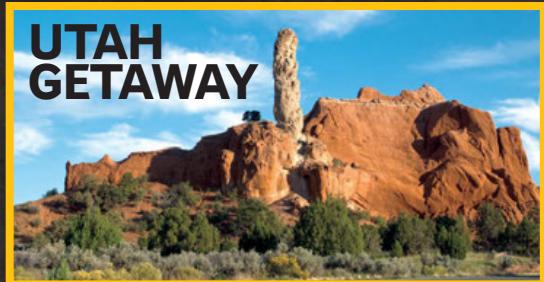
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On The Cover: Winnebago's Sightseer 33C, which is decked out with a long list of options, cruises along the California coast on Cabrillo Boulevard in scenic Santa Barbara. (See test on page 44.) **Photo by Rich Cox Photography.**

TALKING FOR FUN

Ever since I was a kid, I've been infatuated with communications. In my mind, I was a pioneer in the field, building my first tin-can walkie-talkies in elementary school. Range wasn't too good, but they were made with "premium grade" string and shiny cans. I'm not sure if we were more excited that these things actually worked or that we could talk to each other without being within earshot.

My next step into the world of communications came soon after we learned that tin-can walkie-talkies didn't go around corners too well. My friend and I installed a telegraph system between our two houses. Our battery-operated telegraphers were rather crude, but worked like champs. We even got pretty good with Morse code.

Nothing much happened in our world of communications once we abandoned Morse code. Hand-held walkie-talkies were cool, but they were the size — and weight — of bricks and way too expensive. Fast-forward to when I bought my first RV, a time when CB radios were becoming the rage. Popular movies portraying people doing silly things in cars made CBs a fad for years. Truckers glorified CB radio, often using colorful phrasing as drivers communicated among themselves on the road.

Naturally, I had to have one. It was a real beauty mounted proudly under the dash with the microphone positioned in plain sight, of course. I was legally licensed with a call sign and made up a bunch of calling cards to give out to anyone who would take one. That CB radio helped in a number of situations while traveling, even if my wife, Lynne, stared at that box under the dash, puzzled why it was even there. She was never captivated by that "10-4 good buddy" stuff.

Today, CBs are pretty rare among the RV crowd. I guess truckers still use them and a few diehards rely on CB during parking maneuvers, but as E. Don Smith



writes in his article, "Two-Way Radio in the RV," (page 55) CB radio is not regulated much anymore and the language over the air has gotten a lot more colorful.

Like Smith, I landed on ham radio as my two-way radio tool of choice, but to digress for a moment I also have a cabinet full of FRS devices in my RV. Almost everyone I travel with has FRS handsets and they are perfect for caravanning, keeping in touch in a campground or at an event, and of course, for backing the rig into a site. They are inexpensive and can be found everywhere, even drug stores. Moving up to the GMRS versions provides better range and performance.

In the world of communication, there's nothing more fun than hamming it up on amateur radio. As Smith explains, getting a license is easier than in the old days when Morse code was required. To get my license, I had to pass the code test, so I guess those homemade telegraphers I made when I was a kid paid off.

Hand-held ham radios are sophisticated and fairly intuitive to use; dash-mounted radios are pretty compact and are more affordable than ever. I have a 2-meter antenna mounted on the roof, but as Smith describes in his article, antennas for HF bands are readily available and easy to assemble, take down and store.

In today's world, the normal reaction from an outsider is, "why don't you just use your cellphone?" From a practical standpoint, there are still places a cellphone won't work, but from the communication enthusiasts' point of view, there's something more organic about getting out on the airwaves. ♦

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WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER RVERS WHEN DEALING WITH REPAIRS ON THE ROAD?

That's the question we asked in our March issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

FINAL ROAD FIX

We recently had the slideout fixed on our motorhome while we were on the road. It was a problem that had been fixed twice by our dealership. The disadvantage of having it fixed on the road was we had to live with the problem until we could get an appointment. This meant we couldn't use the slide for six weeks. Luckily it was the living room slide, which only created a slight inconvenience. The advantage was that this time it was fixed by a much larger dealership that had seen this problem before and could diagnosis it and fix it properly. Knock on wood, it hasn't broken since.

RANDY LACHERMEIER | VIA EMAIL

ALWAYS HAVE SPARES

Running a 1987 Tiffin Allegro with a GMC 454 engine on a P30 chassis is all about spare parts. We stow several quarts of oil, radiator fluid, new belts, the last full set of wires and plugs from the last tune-up, generator oil, fuses, bulbs, a small compressor, an electrical tester, electrical tape, screws, electrical connectors, zip ties, duct tape, silicone caulk, etc. Plus basic tools, wire cutter, pliers, 16-in-one screwdriver, small ratchet set and sand paper (for cleaning connections and such). On the wish list is a 20-ton bottle jack.

TINA AND PAT PAUL | DEALE, MD.

GET OUT AND ENJOY LIFE

I am 65 years old and have been "camping" nearly all my life in everything from tents, tent trailers, travel trailers, truck campers, travel vans to motorhomes. I have always enjoyed getting away, cooking and eating in the outdoors or sitting around a campfire and just visiting with friends, old and new. So, you can imagine my shock and amazement when I read the March issue of your magazine to find out that I have been doing it wrong all these years.

Reading the letter "Yes to Curbside Windows," from Mike Straub of Omaha, Neb., I discovered that the idea was to sit inside and talk to friends through the window and watch the fire. And, I guess no one told Eric Wells of

Hayesville, N.C., "Want to See Our Site," that he can open the door and talk to his wife while grilling.

Manufacturers build RVs to suit what customers want. If you don't like it, don't buy it. Stop complaining and get out and enjoy life, it's shorter than you think.

DALE DOMEIJ | SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA

DON'T MISS KEYS RANCH

The article "Endless Explorations in Joshua Tree National Park," in the March issue, didn't mention Keys Ranch. The ranch offers fascinating and informative lessons on early 20th century life in the rugged Southwest. The resourcefulness, ingenuity and dedication to principle displayed by the Keys family at the ranch are truly inspiring. We encourage anyone visiting the park and physically capable of an easy half-mile walk to arrange for one of the ranger-led tours of Keys Ranch.

LARRY BOND | BEND, ORE.

GREAT SERVICE STORY

I recently bought a 5-year-old Itasca motorhome. It was in excellent condition but unknown to me had not had a Workhorse fuel system recall performed on it. While on a trip I smelled fuel when starting the engine. Upon examination I saw fuel running out of the fuel manifold on top of the engine. Workhorse was contacted and said it would authorize the recall; it then had me towed to a local repair shop. I saw no burned wires at the time of the leak or when showing the repairman the leak.

After the recall was performed, I opened the engine cover and noticed a burned wiring harness and other burned wires around the repair area. Since the engine was running OK, I taped up the bare wires and took my coach to Roy Robinson RV in Marysville, Wash. They worked diligently with Workhorse, which agreed to pay for a repair of more than \$3,000.

Since it was not Workhorse's fault (the wiring harness was apparently burned during the repair) this seems to

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go way beyond standing behind its products. I would like to commend Workhorse and Roy Robinson RV.

DONALD R. HUBNER | VIA EMAIL

FRUSTRATING PLUG PLACEMENT

I own a 2008 Four Winds Chateau 31F. One of my biggest pet peeves is the placement of the interior electrical outlets. In the kitchen area there are two plugs mounted to the underside of the top cabinets. The cords of many small appliances are not long enough to reach the top cabinets. I had to install a power strip on top of the counter in order to plug in the appliances. The other plug under the dinette is located on the seat but on the inner-most area along the outside wall, requiring me to lay on the floor under the table to plug something in.

Maybe RV designers should try to use these items before deciding on final placement. Just put the plugs in the wall where they can be seen and easily used.

TIM FINNEGAN | WEST WARWICK, R.I.

JOB WELL DONE

I took our 2000 Winnebago diesel-pusher to Round the Clock Diesel in Plainfield, Conn., for service. I told the manager, Chris, the coach needed an oil change and had a transmission problem. I identified the problem as a rough clunk in the upshift. He told me the cause might just be a dirty filter.

The next day my motorhome was ready. The transmission clunk was just what Chris said it might be. I received a reasonable bill for the service, along with a few small recommendations, which were left to my discretion for a later date.

We're new to RVing and it's nice to do business with people who are dependable, honest and professional.

NICK AND DOLORES RAGOZZINO DANIELSON, CONN.

FAVORITE PRODUCTS

Quick Tips is my favorite *MotorHome* department, but I'd like to know what products others use in their RVs. We drive a Class B motorhome so size, weight and efficiency are major considerations. Here are a few of my favorite products; please tell me yours.

Tubular silicone ice cube trays (IKEA). Besides ice cubes for water bot-

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WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE:

We asked readers to share their tips for dealing with repairs. Here's how some of our Facebook fans responded:

John Schaecher: *Make sure you have tow service!*

Peggy Jarvis: *We're Good Sam members and they were great in our time of need.*

NAG's Tack & Western: *Safety first. Be prepared with warning triangles, flares, etc.*

Robert Even: *Make sure to carry water in your tank to cook and, well, go with.*



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ties, I use them for better air circulation while thawing meat in the sink and as trivets for hot pots.

Swivel Sweeper (Bed, Bath & Beyond). It's rechargeable, lies flat for storage and works surprisingly well on wood, tile, vinyl and low-pile carpet.

Foaming hand soap dispenser (Pampered Chef). It won't pump itself when changing altitudes.

Plastic knife sleeves (Ace Hardware). Because I keep my knives in a drawer, the sleeves protect the knife's edges.

We also used automotive trim double-sided tape to hang a coat rack where holes could not be drilled. It's not going anywhere!

P. CURTIS | LOVELAND, COLO.

QUESTION:

What products do you find most useful while RVing and what do you use them for?

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 3300 Fernbrook Lane N #200, Minneapolis, MN 55447; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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ASK A TECHNICAL QUESTION: Questions for our Coach & Powertrain column may be sent to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista del Mar Drive, Ventura CA 93001 (please include your name, city and state). You may also email questions to tech@motorhomemagazine.com. Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

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DOWN BY THE BAY

SEASIDE TRAVEL ON DELAWARE'S LEWES BYWAY

It may be just 12 miles long, but the Lewes Scenic and Historic Byway on Delaware's southern coast is replete with stunning seaside views and, of course, several historic stops that tell the story of the "First Town in the First State." Start on Cape Henlopen Drive, which displays the seascape of Breakwater Harbor and leads to a 7,000-acre state park of the same name. At Cape Henlopen State Park, climb the World War II Observation Tower for 360-degree views of Delaware Bay,

an 80-foot sand dune and Gordon Pond Wildlife Area. Then it's on to Savannah Road and the Lewes Historic District, filled with historic homes, quaint shops and restaurants. Nearby is Zwaanendael Museum, which showcases Lewes' maritime, military and social history.

Find motorhome accommodations at Cape Henlopen State Park or Tall Pines Campground Resort. For more information, call 302-655-7275 or visit www.byways.deldot.gov.



MUNCHING IN MONTANA

Crisp, clear days, rolling farmlands and soaring peaks awash in every shade of green make a trip to western Montana the perfect summer getaway for RVers. Gorgeous scenery and wide-open spaces, including incomparable Glacier National Park, have long made Montana a favorite motorhome destination. But traditionally we've come for the views, not for the food. And that's a mistake because a number of Montana chefs and food purveyors are using local ingredients with a Western flair to put this Rocky Mountain state on the map as a food lover's paradise.

Your first food stop on a Montana food trek should be Kalispell, a quintessential Western town tucked into the state's northwest corner less than 100 miles from the Canadian border. Kalispell's walkable downtown is filled with historic brick buildings, wide boulevards and tree-lined residential streets, and parking meters that charge 25 cents an hour.

Stop in at Colter Coffee Roasting on Main Street for a jolt of its award winning, locally roasted coffee. Named the best in Flathead Valley, its Kenya coffee is smooth and rich and a bargain at \$10.50/pound so we load up on a few pounds. You can also enjoy local art, free Wi-Fi and, on weekends, live music.

Across the street there's Wheat Montana, a small chain bakery that uses locally grown and milled wheat to bake breads and huge cinnamon rolls and bear claws, which, of course, we have to buy to go with the Colter coffee.

Another downtown bakery worth checking out is Ceres Bakery on Main. It offers handmade breads and treats like sweet potato sticky buns and potato, onion and goat cheese turnovers. Delicious!

A great dinner choice in Kalispell is Hop's Downtown Grill, an eatery that features seasonal offerings such as grilled flat iron steak with rosemary demi-glace, fresh smoked rainbow trout, and big, gourmet Angus beef burgers.

In the Seeley-Swan Valley, the quaint hamlet of Seeley is worth a stop for some foodie shopping at Stage Station. It boasts "a little bit of the best of everything," including local wines, handcrafted jewelry, hand-woven sweaters, antiques and all things Western. It also has an old-fashioned soda fountain with an antique back bar serving delicious huckleberry ice cream and local Montana Traders coffee.

For lunch, try the quintessential Montana roadhouse, the Filling Station Grille. But be forewarned: the burgers, chili, chef's salads and sandwiches are served in portions big enough for working cowboys.

Highway 93 south along the Bitterroot River takes you to Hamilton, home of Bitter Root Brewing and its artesian ales. At lunchtime the brewery is a busy gathering place serving its mouthwatering buffalo burgers with sweet potato fries.

Bitter Root uses local grains and hops to brew a variety of beers, including Sawtooth Ale, a crisp, dry brew, and Porter, a dark ale with a hint of peat-smoked malt.

Before you leave Montana, check out Hob Nob Café in Missoula. Its sourdough pancakes and banana bread French toast will make you agree that western Montana is perfect for a road foodie getaway.

Have a favorite spot to share? Email Bobbie at hasselbring@bctonline.com with "Road Foodie" in the subject line.



The Clearwater Canoe Trail in the Seeley-Swan Valley offers a way to burn off some of those calories.



Bitter Root Brewing in Hamilton is a lively neighborhood establishment.



Stage Station in Seeley Lake offers a full soda fountain, including seasonal huckleberry ice cream.



Kalispell's Colter Coffee Roasting roasts its own beans.

PHOTOS: BOBBIE HASSELBRING



IN-MOTION SATELLITE DISH

A compact, easy-to-install satellite system from **KVH Industries** lets

motorhome owners enjoy premium programming from Dish Network or DirecTV anywhere in the U.S. — even while the motorhome is in motion. Weighing just 7.5 pounds, the 13.5-inch TracVision R1 offers in-motion performance typical of larger antennas. The TracVision R1's small size, easy setup, single-cable design and Whisper Drive motor technology allow for convenient installation and simple operation.

The TracVision R1 comes in two configurations. The TracVision R1ST includes an exclusive, integrated 12-volt DC DirecTV receiver/controller — just add a TV and DirecTV service subscription to bring standard-definition programming on the road. For those who prefer DISH Network or want the freedom to easily switch among satellite service providers, the TracVision R1DX offers flexibility with a 12-volt DC multiservice interface box/controller that supports virtually all home receivers from DISH Network and DirecTV. The TracVision R1ST and R1DX have an MSRP of \$1,995.

KVH Industries, 401-847-3327, www.kvh.com/r1st



COOL YOUR COACH

Dicor Products has introduced a new heat-reducing coating option to its Two-Part Coating System for EPDM rubber motorhome roofs. Using MicroCells technology, CoolCoat Insulating Coating is said to reduce heat transfer from the coach roof to the interior. Dicor's testing shows this new ceramic coating can reduce the interior temperature by as much as 29 percent from the roof temperature.

The temperature-reducing coating material is an alternative to the acrylic coating RVers have used for years in Dicor's Two-Part Coating System for EPDM roofs. Dicor said the use of MicroCells, which are nano-size spheres, helps to dramatically slow heat flux — the rate of heat transfer from one surface to another. Using vacuum-filled spheres is similar to the way a Thermos works in keeping liquids hot or cold for an extended period of time. Like Dicor's EPDM Roof Acrylic Coating, CoolCoat extends the life of rubber roof membranes by forming a protective barrier with superior resistance to harsh weather and ultraviolet light. CoolCoat is available at RV dealers and stores nationwide. The retail price for 1 gallon is \$126.85. **Dicor Products, 800-837-2059, www.dicorproducts.com**

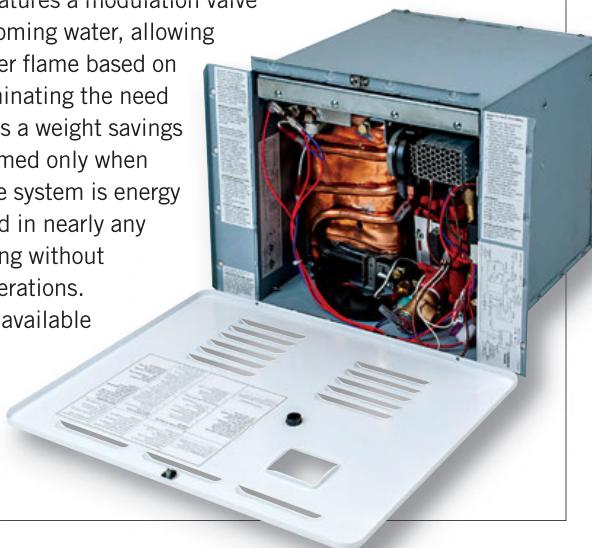
WATER, ON DEMAND

After several months of real-world testing, **Atwood Mobile Products'** On-Demand Water Heater (ODWH) is now available. The Atwood ODWH comes in a 50,000-Btu model, which provides up to 50 percent more output than any other large production unit on the market today, the company claims.

The Atwood ODWH features a modulation valve that senses the flow of incoming water, allowing the unit to adjust the burner flame based on hot water demand. By eliminating the need for a tank, the ODWH offers a weight savings and, because gas is consumed only when hot water is demanded, the system is energy efficient. It can be installed in nearly any current water heater opening without any cutting or side wall alterations.

The Atwood ODWH is available through major distributors and retails for \$978.

**Atwood Mobile,
800-546-8759,
www.atwoodmobile.com**





PET-FRIENDLY PARKS FOR 2013

When it comes to selecting a campground, many RVers seek out parks that offer a wide range of pet-friendly amenities, from dog runs to trails for dog walking to flexible rules that allow their particular breed of dog. To help pet owners find the RV parks that open their arms to canines and other travel companions, the editors and consultants of the Good Sam RV Travel Guide and Campground Directory have compiled a list of the Top Pet-Friendly Parks of 2013. Featuring RV parks from across North America, the list is tailored for RV travelers seeking facilities that welcome pet owners with open arms.

The Good Sam RV Travel Guide's Top Pet-Friendly Parks are: Good Life RV Resort and Sun Life RV Resort, Mesa, Ariz.; Sunflower RV Resort, Surprise, Ariz.; Circle RV Resort-Sunland, El Cajon, Calif.; Rio Bend RV and Golf Resort, El Centro, Calif.; Garden of the Gods Campground, Colorado Springs, Colo.; Royal View at Royal Gorge Campground, Canon City, Colo.; Ocala Sun RV Resort, Ocala, Fla.; Deer Creek Valley RV Park, Topeka, Kan.; Evergreen Park RV Resort, Mount Eaton, Ohio; and Horn Rapids RV Resort, Richland, Wash.

News Briefs

ITC Inc., an RV lighting manufacturer based in Holland, Mich., has partnered with Camping World to bring its after-market division, Manufacturers' Select, to a 90-retail store launch for 2013. Lighting display rollouts began earlier this year in Camping World stores across the country and are scheduled to continue. Camping World service center stores will display ITC's Manufacturers' Select offerings including dinette lights, pendant lights, pin-up lights, overheads and LED options.

Nappanee, Ind.-based builder Newmar Corp. advanced its contribution to the RV Learning Center by donating \$25,000 for the 2013 annual campaign. To date, Newmar has donated \$160,000 toward its overall pledge amount of \$260,000. According to a press release, Newmar's pledge amount of \$260,000 puts it into the "Major Gifts" category of donor, which is the highest level of giving. Donations fund the Learning Center's many educational programs designed specifically for RV dealership personnel.

San Juan Island National Historical Park grew by 34 acres earlier this year with the addition and conservation of property on Westcott Bay. The National Park Service (NPS) and The Conservation Fund announced the newly protected land is located along 2,500 feet of pristine shoreline in northwest Washington. The Conservation Fund and the NPS worked together to design a plan that would preserve the land's natural state, while enabling the family or subsequent owners of the historic sea farm to continue to use a portion of the tidelands for oyster farming operations.



GOOD SAM PLANS SYRACUSE RALLY



Thousands of RV enthusiasts and Good Sam members will converge on the Empire Expo Center in Syracuse, N.Y., June 13 through 16 for the Camping World/Good Sam Rally, where they'll tour hundreds of new RVs, peruse the latest gear and enjoy a full slate of RV seminars.

Syracuse is rolling out the welcome mat for plenty of Rally favorites, including Robin Dickson, president

of Dogs for the Deaf, who's presiding over the Rally Dog Show, and Fred Moore, Flags4Vets founder and Good Sam's 2012 RVer of the Year, who's leading the Salute to Veterans. TV chef, cookbook author and culinary adventurer Bob Blumer will be back with his innovative recipes and simple cooking techniques, and *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome* publisher Bob Livingston will unlock the mysteries of RV ownership. And let's not forget the world-class entertainment. Reba, the Queen of Country, is back for an encore performance after wowing the crowd last year at Florida's Daytona International Speedway. Legendary singer Wayne Newton will also take the stage. To find out more, visit www.therally.com.

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— D. Crowell
Fleetwood RV Discovery Owner

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RVers traveling in Wisconsin can drive 30 miles east of Madison on

Interstate 94 and step back in time 1,000 years. It was here, within what is now Aztalan State Park, that ancient Middle-Mississippian people once settled and thrived from A.D. 1000 to 1300.

Aztalan got its name from early settlers who believed it was related to the Aztecs of Mexico.

The park is a National Historic Landmark and site of many archaeological excavations that determined the village once covered 35 acres and contained three earthen platform mounds surrounded by an imposing log and clay fortification. Artifacts such as clay pots, a Mississippian deity figure, shell beads and copper ear decorations were also uncovered.

Two of the mounds have been restored, along with portions of the stockade, and visitors can walk trails that wind through open prairie and along Crawfish River. Also worth a visit is the Aztalan Museum just north of the park. Operated by the Lake Mills-Aztalan Historical Society, it includes two pioneer church buildings and other structures from the 19th century, plus displays of pioneer life. The museum is open Thursdays through Sundays from mid-May through late September.

For more information, call 920-648-8774 or visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks

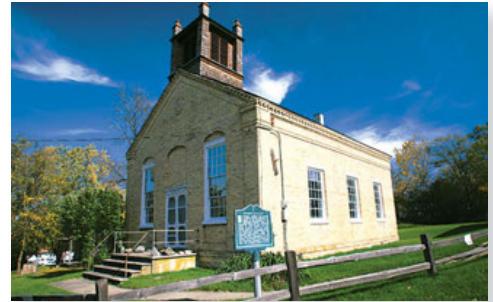


PHOTO: RJ AND LINDA MILLER



PHOTO: NORTH DAKOTA TOURISM

ACRES OF EXPLORATION

Dubbed North Dakota's must-see historic attraction, Bonanzaville in West Fargo lives up to both its billing and its name. A true treasure trove of antiquity, Bonanzaville boasts more than 400,000 artifacts, 43 historic buildings and museums such as the Dahl Car Museum, Eagles Air Museum and Telephone Museum, all packed onto 12 acres. The Cass County Historical Society has been collecting buildings and other pieces of history from around the county

since 1967 and today visitors can see everything from an 1883 Northern Pacific steam locomotive to the restored St. John's Church. A walk through the Pioneer Village includes stops at the 1895 Dobrinz School, the Thue-Brink Store and Embden Depot, plus 24 other buildings. The Lucien C. Barnes Pavilion showcases rotating exhibits. Bonanzaville is open seven days a week and admission is \$5.

For more information, call 701-282-2822 or visit www.bonanzaville.org. ♦

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Mention Utah and most people think of destinations like Bryce Canyon and Zion national parks. No doubt these places are worth a visit, but there's also a brilliant treasure to the east of those well-known attractions, a 2,241-acre gem named Kodachrome Basin State Park.

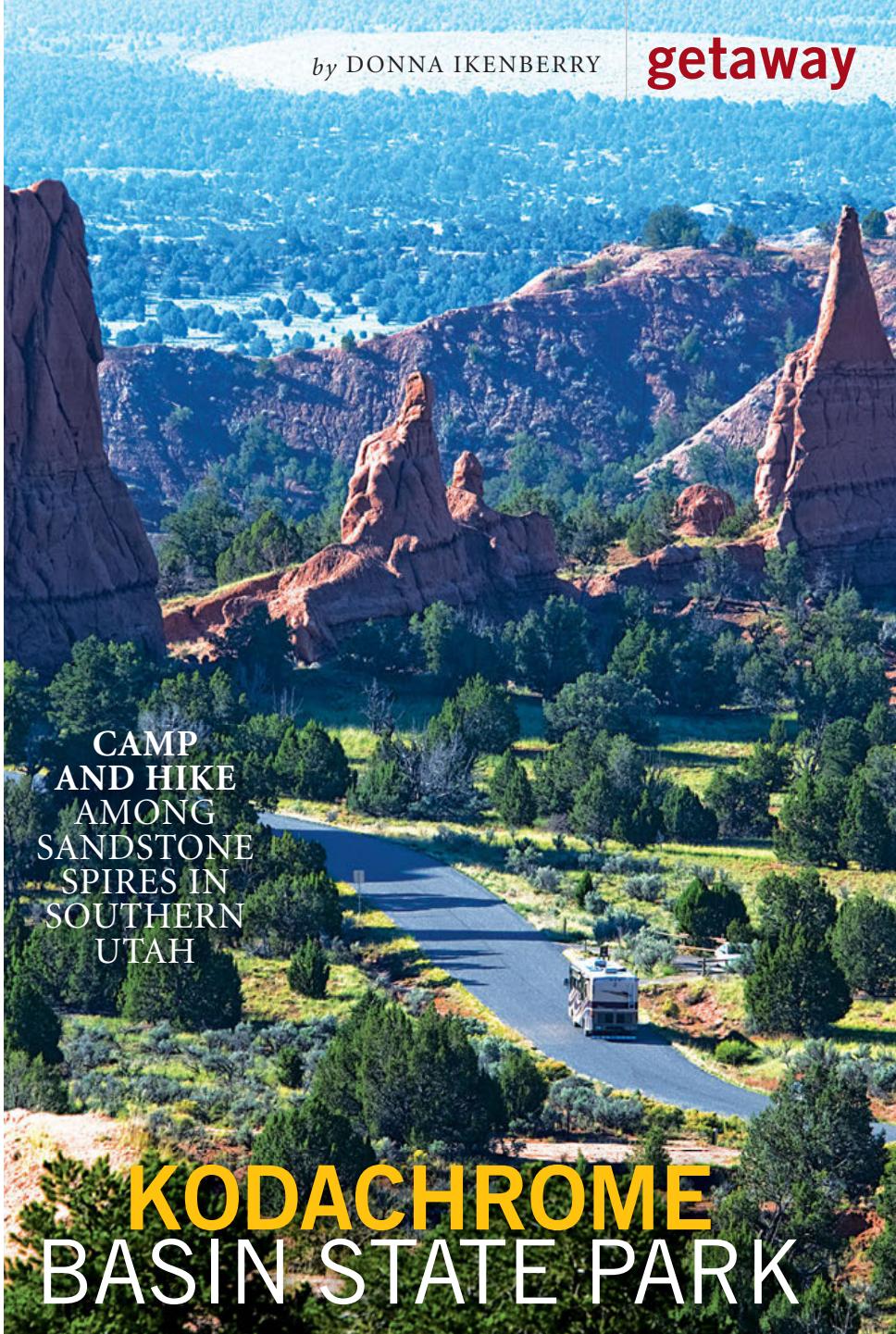
There are plenty of things to love about colorful Kodachrome. It's a special place with an idyllic campground set amid lofty sandstone spires and red-tinged cliffs. The many hiking and biking trails make it ideal for outdoor enthusiasts like me, and if you enjoy the solitude of long desert drives, then this is the place for you, too.

My husband, Mike, and I spent a few days at Kodachrome Basin, reliving memories of our previous trips to the area and finding new routes to hike. We thought we'd traversed all the trails in the park, but this time discovered Big Bear Geyser/Cool Cave Loop, an offshoot of the popular Panorama Trail that boasts sweeping views and leads to the aptly named Cool Cave geologic feature.

With its spectacular color and contrast, Kodachrome Basin is a photographer's delight, adorned with sandstone chimneys and unique petrified springs called sand pipes. It was this color and contrast of the landscape against the blue sky that prompted the National Geographic Society in 1949 to get consent from Kodak Film Corp. to name the park after its iconic film. Kodachrome was designated a state park in 1963.

There are nearly 70 monolithic spires in the park, ranging in height

A motorhome makes its way along Kodachrome Basin State Park Road. Fellow hikers snap photos along Angel's Palace Trail, which showcases Kodachrome Basin, Bryce Canyon and the surrounding area.



CAMP
AND HIKE
AMONG
SANDSTONE
SPIRES IN
SOUTHERN
UTAH

KODACHROME BASIN STATE PARK





Counterclockwise from top: Countless handprints cover the walls of what's known as "Indian Cave" on the Panorama Trail. This late afternoon image shows massive Chimney Rock standing guard over Utah's Kodachrome Basin State Park. The sagebrush lizard is one of many reptiles that make its home in the harsh environment of Kodachrome Basin State Park. An up-close look at Cool Cave on the Panorama Trail.

from 6 to 170 feet. The beautiful, natural towers seen today began life more than 180 million years ago. Located on the Colorado Plateau, a region that covers much of the Four Corners area of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico, exposed formations range from the middle Jurassic Period (180 million years ago) to the Cretaceous Period (95 million years ago).

The most notable features in the park are these large columns of sedimentary rock that reach into the heavens from the basin floor. Sixty-seven colossal pipes have been identified in the park and nearby areas. No one knows for sure how the pipes were formed — there are only theories. Some geologists think earthquakes, coarse sediments and erosion formed the pipes. Others believe remnants of ancient springs or geysers became choked with sediments, which eventually cemented together. A newer theory suggests water-saturated pockets were forced upward by pressure from overlying sediments, creating a wet slurry that later hardened and was exposed by erosion. Regardless of how these pipes were formed, the only thing that really matters is that

you visit and enjoy their beauty.

Plants and wildlife are also abundant. Classified as semi-desert in the upper Sonoran life zone, Kodachrome Basin is located at an elevation of 5,800 feet. Plants are hardy in this part of the country, adapted to drought conditions and extreme temperatures. You'll see pinyon pine, Utah juniper, yucca, Mormon tea, big sage, and many other plants and grasses. When hiking look for the flowers of yellow flax, Indian paintbrush and evening primrose, to name a few.

Many animals also call this harsh environment home, including coyotes, grey foxes, black-tailed jack and cottontail rabbits, chipmunks, and reptiles such as sagebrush and whip lizards. Birds include ravens, golden eagles, scrub jays, pinyon jays, chipping sparrows and other species.

When you visit be sure to hike Angel's Palace Trail. One of my absolute favorites, the trail climbs a mere 150 feet above the basin floor, yet it provides magnificent views of the area. Look west and you'll see the beautiful pinkish orange cliffs that belong to Bryce Canyon. Gaze about and be amazed by the scenes that are Kodachrome Basin and Grand Staircase-



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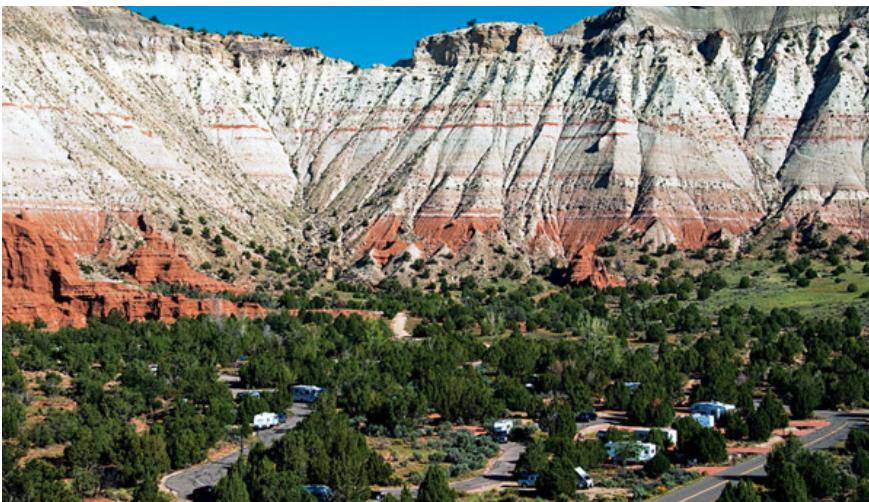


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Angel's Palace Trail provides the perfect spot from which to view the Kodachrome Basin State Park campground.

Escalante National Monument. Spend plenty of time exploring this 1.5-mile trail. If you want to learn more, be sure to hike the half-mile Nature Trail. Informational panels introduce visitors to the geology, animals and plants in the area.

If you have more time, hike the 1.7-mile loop trail to Shakespeare Arch and Sentinel Spire. Shakespeare Arch is the only large natural arch in the park and is a must-photograph late in the afternoon. If you don't have time to hike the entire loop I suggest hiking to the arch, which is only a half-mile one way.

The Grand Parade Trail is open to hikers, but it is also open to mountain bikers and horses. Mike and I biked the trail, but we had to walk at times thanks to heavy rains in the days prior to our visit. The 1.5-mile trail stays on the basin floor and is a good place to explore the two box canyons. You'll have to do so on foot, however, as horses and bikes are not allowed in the box canyons.

Although we've visited in the past, neither one of us could remember hiking the Panorama Trail. We headed out on the six-mile loop in a clockwise direction, first hiking to Panorama Point. The view from the top showed off the park's rugged landscape. Next we traveled past enormous spires to Cool Cave. More a slot canyon than a true cave, the view upward showed slices of blue sky carved by the rocky vertical walls. We passed some other fun sites, including the Ballerina Slipper spire, and lastly, we were in awe of "the

hands." Though no one knows if ancient inhabitants or more recent ones made these handprints on the walls of what's known as "Indian Cave," the sandstone prints are certainly unique.

If you'd rather not hike the Panorama Trail you can bike it, or if biking is not your thing you can visit on horseback. Check out Red Canyon Trail Rides (800-892-7923) for more information regarding one- and two-hour rides.

No matter your mode of transportation, it's important to stay on the trail, especially in this part of the country, where cryptobiotic crust is so important. This crust is a community of organisms that thrives on desert soils, its nutrients helping prevent erosion. Notice the soil when it is mature and you'll see a lumpy black crust. When it is in its early stages it is difficult to see. Staying on the trail means you won't trample this fragile layer of biotic organisms.

There is certainly plenty to see within Kodachrome Basin, but nearby Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument possesses another formation worth a visit. Standing at 152 feet high and spanning 92 feet, Grosvenor Arch is a double sandstone arch a mere 10 miles from Kodachrome. The dirt road leading to the arch can get washed out during heavy rains, so travel carefully.

Now that you know what there is to see, you'll have to decide when to visit. Spring is often quite pleasant, with warm daytime temperatures, though 20s at

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KODACHROME BASIN STATE PARK

night are not unusual. Summer months are hottest, with highs in the 90s to near 100 degrees. However, nighttime temperatures are often in the 50s and perfect for sleeping. Summer thunderstorms can cause roads to wash out with heavy downpours, flash floods, fierce winds and lightning. Fall days are warm with cool nights. Look for very cold nights by the middle of October. It doesn't get much above freezing in winter with overnight lows capable of dropping well below zero. Heavy snow can make travel dangerous if not impossible.

Kodachrome Basin is located nine miles south of Cannonville, via Cottonwood Canyon Road. Open year-round, the park's campground offers 30 RV sites, 10 with full hookups, and there are central bathrooms with hot showers and flush toilets. There's also a dump station, fresh water and firewood. Sites sans hookups are \$16 a day, while full hookup sites are \$25 a night (campground fees include \$6 daily charge). There are two large group

sites as well. If you need some snacks or beverages, stop by Red Stone Cabins' general store located in the park. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

KODACHROME BASIN STATE PARK
435-679-8562,
www.stateparks.utah.gov



Donna Ikenberry is a full-time freelance writer and photographer. She lives in South Fork, Colo., with her husband, Mike Vining. They travel half of the year in their RV.



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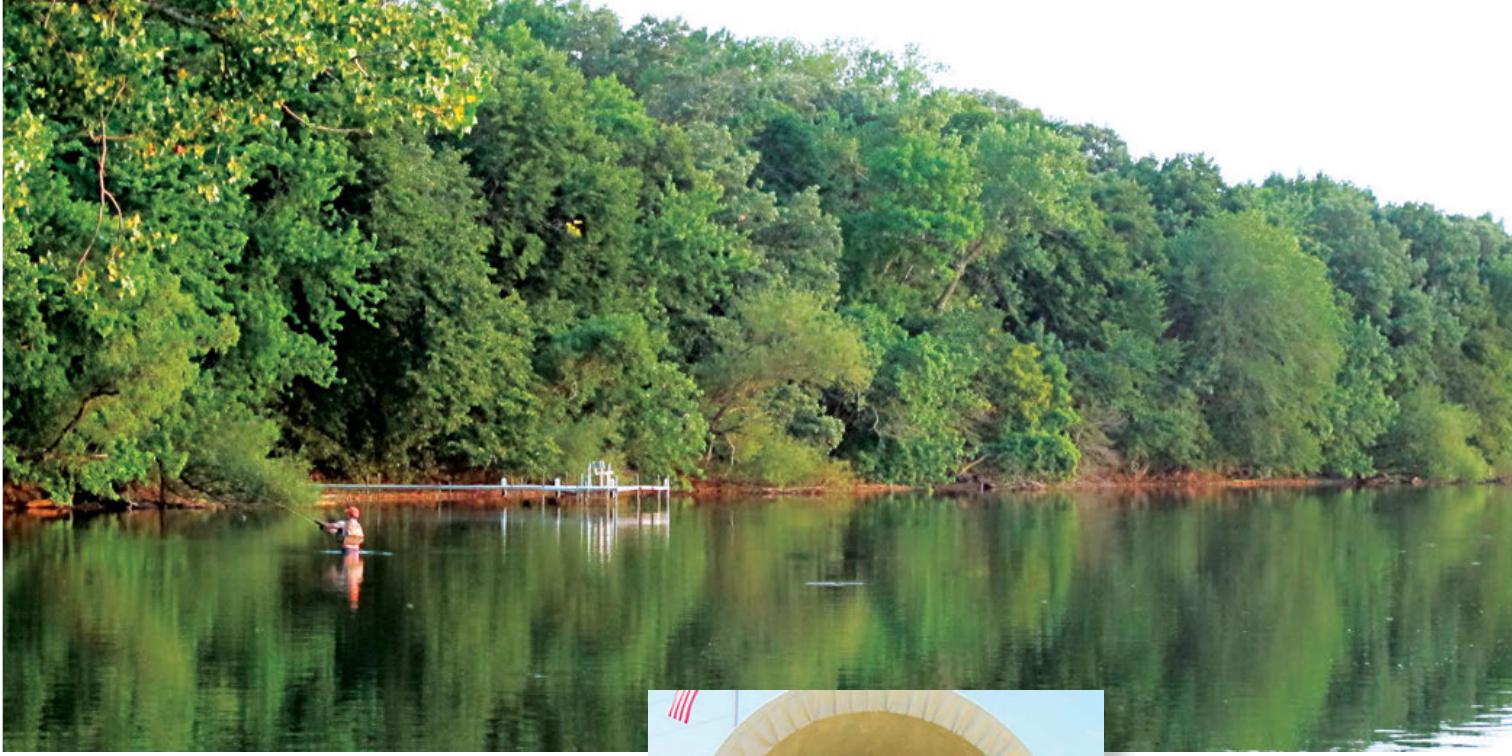
LITTLE RV ON THE PRAIRIE

HOMESTEAD HOPPING ALONG
LAURA INGALLS WILDER
MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

by CYNDI HOELZLE



Main: The author's motorhome sits amid the vast prairie in South Dakota. A replica dugout home on the Ingalls Homestead.



It started out innocently enough. My

kids and I listened to the first *Little House on the Prairie* on audiobook on a long road trip. The simple language captivated them and kept them quiet for hours. So, like any smart mom, I checked out the others from the library. It didn't take long before we had read every book in order, and my children became interested in the history behind the stories.

As a kid, I was familiar with the books and the TV show, but I never imagined the places Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about still existed. As I began my research, I found that not only do they exist, but that you can camp on or near many of the homesites.

And so, a plan was hatched. We'd follow Laura's path west, from her birthplace in Pepin, Wis., to DeSmet, S.D., where the Ingalls family finally settled. Only instead of a covered wagon, our explorations would take place in a 29-foot Class C motorhome.

I knew if we were going to make this journey, we'd have to do it soon. My daughter was about to turn 10, and would soon be past the prairie dress stage. My son, about to turn 13, would put up with sunbonnets only so much longer. It turns out they were the perfect age, old enough to appreciate the history, but young enough to revel in the hands-on demonstrations we found along the way.

Our first stop, Pepin, Wis., is a quaint town only an hour and a half from Minneapolis, Minn. It was the site of Laura Ingalls' birth in 1867, and the setting for her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*.

These days the Big Woods have been cleared, but there is a replicated cabin on the spot where the original once stood. There is also a small museum in town, where we stocked up on slate pen-



Top to bottom: A view of Lake Imogene came with the site at Flying Goose Campground in Fairmont, Minn. The covered wagon outside the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, Minn., makes for a great photo op. Picnic dinner at the campsite at Flying Goose Campground.



PHOTOS: CYNDI HOELZLE



cils and stick candy. For my kids, however, the main goal was to pick up rocks at Lake Pepin (as Laura did on her first trip to town, famously ripping the pocket of her dress). We had lunch in town, pressed pennies on the railroad track and camped right next to the lake.

Early the next morning, we packed our provisions and headed west on U.S. Highway 14, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Highway. Our destination was Walnut Grove, Minn., the setting of *On the Banks of Plum Creek* and the town mentioned in the TV series. We had planned our trip to coincide with a Wilder Pageant weekend, when the city puts on an extravagant outdoor performance. The pageant began in 1978 and now draws 7,500 people over three summer weekends to the hillside amphitheater near Walnut Grove.

The show, full of song, dance, live animals and pyrotechnics, was quite a hoot. My kids were mesmerized by the simulated prairie fire, elaborate sets and, of course, the famous scene of Nellie Oleson getting dunked into Plum Creek.

We camped that night at Plum Creek Park, one of the few overnight facilities in Walnut Grove. It's a small, friendly park

run by the city, with water and electric hookups, playgrounds and nearby Lake Laura to satisfy the kids.

We learned that Laura never mentioned the name of the town where they got their store-bought supplies in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. It wasn't until Garth Williams began to illustrate the *Little House* books that Walnut Grove was identified, when he took Laura's hand-drawn maps and went out in search of the dugout home on Plum Creek. He found the site in 1947, on a private farm north of Walnut Grove.

The same family still owns the farm, and has strived to keep the site as they found it. Visitors are welcome; when you pull up to the farmhouse, put \$5 in a can and drive down to the creek. My son couldn't believe our motorhome was rumbling down the same trail that led the Ingallses' covered wagon to their home carved out of a hillside.

Like others before us, the first thing we did was take off our shoes and wade into the creek. The original dugout is collapsed and the "wonderful house" the Ingallses eventually built on the site is long gone, but the spring still feeds the creek, surrounded by plum thickets. Thankfully, there were no leeches, like the ones that plagued Nellie.



Going for a sunset swim in Lake Imogene. Below: The author's daughter enjoys the hands-on laundry exhibit outside the reproduction claim shanty on the Ingalls Homestead in DeSmet, S.D.

After a peaceful hour at the creek, we dried off, hopped back in the motorhome and headed for the festival at the town square. The weekend event features pioneer crafts and demonstrations, as well as the annual Laura and Nellie look-alike contests. Girls from near and far signed up, decked out in their prairie finest. Not surprisingly, there were more Laura contestants than Nellie ones, but we all agreed the Nellie wannabes were far more entertaining.

Our next stop was the town's Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum, which is much more extensive than the one in Pepin. The



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Clockwise: The author's Winnebago Outlook sits near the Little House Wayside in Pepin, Wis. Heading back to the motorhome after a long day on the prairie. A furnished bedroom at the Surveyors' House in DeSmet. The Ingalls family spent a winter in the house, and Laura describes running up the stairs to see a room just for the girls.

museum holds artifacts that Laura owned as well as props from the TV show. But the real fun is exploring the outbuildings, including a chapel, a dugout display, an 1870s jail cell, a one-room schoolhouse and a covered wagon. My kids most enjoyed playing postmaster in one of the displays, and we all lingered over the array of *Little House* books from different countries.

From the obligatory photo op in the covered wagon, to the excellent gift shop, expect to spend some time at the museum. And moms, beware. Not only are there prairie dresses and bonnets of all shapes and sizes, but children can also get dresses, bonnets and lunch pails for their dolls. We were only able to lure our kids away from the gift shop with promises of pie at nearby Nellie's Café.

Fortified, we packed up our rig and headed west, following the trail the Ingalls took after the great grasshopper plague of 1875 ruined the crops and devastated Walnut Grove. The family went in search of jobs with the railroad and free government land, which they found outside of DeSmet, S.D.

The small town, which now beckons visitors to "discover the Wilder life!" is the setting for the last five books in the series. Just east of town, we turned down the dirt

road to the Ingalls Homestead.

The homestead is open to day visitors, but if you plan ahead, you can reserve one of the four RV sites on the property (which also features covered wagons and a bunkhouse). Since we wanted to see the DeSmet pageant, we reserved far in advance and scored the last site on the bluff,

overlooking the Big Slough, the cropland and the cottonwood trees Pa planted at the end of *By the Shores of Silver Lake*.

We pulled into the homestead just in time to set up camp and walk over to the pageant grounds. The community was doing a production of "The Long Winter," one of the books set in DeSmet. We carried over our lawn chairs, and set up on the bluff. The pageant was nothing like the elaborate Walnut Grove production, but it was true to the story, and it was pleasant to sit there in the shadow of the cottonwood trees, slurping our snow cones.

The next day we went into the city and saw the site of the Ingallses' store (where the family weathered that winter), the site of the Wilder brothers' store and others mentioned in the books. The Loftus store is still in business, although these days it sells souvenirs instead of sugar and salt pork.

The main attraction in town is the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum and surrounding exhibits. Docents lead small groups into the Surveyors' House, where the Ingallses spent the first winter in DeSmet. It has been moved from its original spot near Silver Lake and lovingly refurbished to look just like it would have when

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Laura first ran ahead and peeked into “the biggest house she’d ever seen.” By modern standards it was tiny, but we had already seen the 10-by-10 footprint of the dugout, so we could understand her excitement.

Next on the tour was the one-room schoolhouse, where layers of plaster and wallpaper had been peeled away to reveal the original chalkboard. We also toured the last house that Pa built, still standing on a quiet side street. Laura was married by the time the house was built, but her parents lived in it until they died. It was interesting to see the craftsmanship of the house, with the original floors and handbuilt cabinetry.

When we pulled back into the homestead that evening, the kids ran to the playground and it didn’t take long before the seesaw was surrounded with girls in prairie dresses. The boys gathered around my son, who had bought a slingshot at the Loftus store and was shooting pebbles into the Big Slough.

The Ingalls Homestead was by far our favorite campground. During the day, the site was abuzz with bonnet-clad girls mak-

ing corncob dolls, doing laundry by hand, playing the pipe organ or helping drive the team of horses to the one-room school.

But it was at night, after the day visitors had left, that we truly came to appreciate the homestead. The kids could run through the huge expanses of prairie at twilight. They pumped water at the well, and my daughter even took some of our laundry down to the wash bucket to show the other girls how the process worked. In the morning the staff let her take care of the chickens and the calf, cuddle the barn kittens and set up the exhibits before the day visitors arrived.

It was peaceful and quiet. Ingalls described the feeling when she first saw the land as “an enormous stillness,” and that perfectly described our mornings at the Homestead.

We were sad to leave, but we had one more destination: the big city of Mankato, Minn. As we were planning the trip, we found out Alison Arnglim, the actress who played Nellie Oleson on the NBC TV show, was performing her one-woman act as part

of the biyearly LauraPalooza conference. Yes, you read that right. Each year, a group of Laura Ingalls Wilder scholars gathers in Mankato; the theme of this year’s event was “What Would Laura Do?”

It was easy to poke fun at Laurapalooza until I saw some of the events — a speaker from the National Weather Service discussing the events of *The Long Winter*, a documentary called “Pa’s Fiddle” about the music of the time — and realized they sounded interesting. Maybe I was a Laura nerd, after all. “We prefer the term Laurati,” laughed Sarah Uthoff, vice president of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Legacy and Research Association. OK, I could accept that.

Arnglim was hilarious and the perfect end to our crazy adventure. It was time to leave the bumpy, gravel roads behind and get back to the 21st century. ♦



Cyndi Hoelzle is a freelance writer who has interviewed stars such as Clint Eastwood, Will Smith and Dolly Parton. She lives in Nashville, Tenn., with her husband, singer-songwriter Radney Foster, and their kids.

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DISCOVER HISTORIC SITES,
SCENIC WONDERS AND
FRIENDLY LOCALS ON THIS
NORTH ATLANTIC ISLAND

by CHRISTINE GOODIER





“Are these towns really 500 miles apart?”

I asked my husband, Bob, as I opened a map of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada's easternmost province. He was preparing our Class B Sprinter motorhome for a long summer drive while I worked on our itinerary. We had allotted three weeks and would need every bit of it to explore the 42,000-square-mile island of Newfoundland and track down relatives my husband had never met.

In late July at the Marine Atlantic terminal in North Sydney, Nova Scotia, we joined cars, trucks and other RVs lined up for our northbound ferry. After a smooth, six-hour sailing of 112 miles across Cabot Strait to Port aux Basques, we were greeted by rain as we set our watches a half-hour forward to Newfoundland Time and drove north.

Numerous yellow signs on the well-maintained Trans-Canada Highway (TCH) warned us to watch out for moose on the road. Hundreds of collisions annually, the signs reminded, have resulted in damage and even fatalities for both man and beast, so we kept a close watch in the fog.

We entered Gros Morne National Park, a geological World Heritage Site on the Northern Peninsula situated between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Long Range Mountains. At Lobster Cove Head, the keeper of the park's 1897 cast-iron lighthouse provided our first taste of Newfoundland hospitality.

“Come inside for tea, dear, and I'll teach you how to speak Newfoundlandese,” she said. It was a timely offer — we had already encountered thick local accents and unfamiliar words. “Tuckamore” was the term for wind-stunted evergreens; “bakeapples” were summer berries we'd noticed alongside hiking trails. A “scoff” was a big meal, a “scuff” was a public dance and a sunny day might turn “mauzy” if it was foggy and damp.

Mauzy days were gone for good the next afternoon as I donned shorts to hike a 1.8-mile trail leading to the park's largest lake, Western Brook Pond. Onboard a tour boat, our guide pointed out waterfalls cascading hundreds of feet down to the lake as passengers gazed up at billion-year-old granite cliffs carved by glaciers.

We drove 186 miles north the next day on the Viking Trail, a coastal highway adorned with fields of berries, lupine and other wildflowers. Isolated roadside wood piles and garden plots were far from any towns but seemed to need only makeshift scarecrows for security.

Our destination for the weekend was the northernmost tip of Newfoundland and

Clockwise from top left: Tours of the Quidi Vidi Brewery near St. John's include samples of Iceberg Beer made from pure, 25,000-year-old water. Nine RV sites in La Scie on the Baie Verte Peninsula offer spectacular sea views. Reconstructed sod huts at L'Anse aux Meadows re-create the Viking era. In Elliston, visitors spend a sunny afternoon watching puffins burrow on a nearby island.

PHOTOS: ROBERT GOODIER





Above: Cod fishermen clean their fish, caught during a limited, strictly enforced catch window. Newfoundland has 18,000 miles of scenic coastline.

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SCUFFING AND SCOFFING THROUGH NEWFOUNDLAND

to La Scie harbor and up a hill to Island Cove Park. “I’ve been expecting you,” said Beverly Shea, our genial campground hostess, directing us to a cliff-side 20-amp site with a millionaire’s view. We set up camp chairs, built a fire and drank in an orange-pink sunset that painted the rocky coastline.

The next morning we inquired about “Come Home Year 2012” signs around town. “Ah yes, I’ll be full come Friday,” Beverly said. Such homecoming celebrations draw visits by Newfoundlanders who had to leave to find work elsewhere. Jobs disappeared after the 1992 governmental cod fishing moratorium, but recent discoveries of offshore oil are helping turn the economy around.

Beverly directed us into town for free Wi-Fi at the lace-curtained Outport Museum and Tea Room. After serving coffee and homemade raisin buns, owner Valerie Whalen learned of our mission and brought out a binder. “Here’s the history of Tilt Cove,” she said. We read hair-raising tales of a shipwreck and avalanche as she prepared components of a “jiggs dinner” of salt beef and vegetables for her evening menu.

We stayed on for pea soup with dumplings as others arrived and ordered lunch plates of fisherman’s brewis, a traditional dish made with cod and hard bread. Mid-meal, Valerie demonstrated an “ugly stick” musical instrument made from broomstick, boot and bottle caps. Soon an impromptu kitchen party was underway, complete with guitar and drum.

Before leaving, we toured Valerie’s small museum. “Outports” like La Scie, we learned, were fishing communities scattered along the island’s 18,000 miles of coastline that relied solely on boat transportation in days before connecting roads and electricity. Wooden sheds we had seen by the water were “fish stages” with platforms called “flakes” used for salting and drying cod.

That afternoon, accompanied part way by a nervous moose, we drove down a gravel road to Tilt Cove to meet Margaret and Don Collins and see the tiny museum they maintain to preserve the history of a town where 2,000 people lived before the mines closed. They are two of just seven remaining occupants.

the L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, the only authenticated Viking settlement in North America. Costumed re-enactors in reconstructed sod huts gave us a look at what life might have been like 1,000 years earlier after the first Norsemen landed.

Nearby in St. Anthony, no bergy bits were visible in “iceberg alley” offshore, though they linger throughout the spring and summer some years. To search for whales instead, we boarded Paul and Lewis Alcock’s Northland Discovery tour boat, the *Gaffer*. Biologist Paul scanned the horizon with binoculars while Captain Lewis manned the helm and steered toward spouting humpbacks. The boat cruised past sea caves and islands populated by migrating arctic terns before returning to St. Anthony harbor.

After five days exploring the peninsula, we turned south, rejoined the TCH and headed east off the beaten track to the Baie Verte Peninsula. Our mission: to visit Bob’s mother’s birthplace, a once booming mine town called Tilt Cove.

“I’ve written to tell everyone you’re coming,” my 100-year-old mother-in-law had said last December. A fifth-generation Newfoundlander who had left in her youth and returned only once years ago, Renee Goodier had warmed to the idea of our RV trip. But she had died in February, leaving behind a sorrowful family and the list of people we now hoped to find.

Where to stay for the night? After much searching online, I found a nine-site campground in a fishing port a few miles from Tilt Cove. With low expectations, we drove north over rugged roads, down

"I'm not sure exactly how we're related," Bob said after chatting a while with this couple that had been sending Bob's mother holiday cards for years with photos of icebergs, cod fish and their small daughters, now grown and gone.

"We're not related," Margaret said. Her husband nodded.

"When Renee visited Tilt Cove, we invited her up for a cup of tea," Don said.

With a reluctant farewell to Tilt Cove and La Scie, we returned to the TCH and continued on the long cross-island drive southeast with an overnight at the Sanger Memorial RV Park in Grand Falls Windsor. We loaded up on groceries at Dominion, a grocery chain that had become my favorite, and filled our tank at a "gas bar." Although our diesel was less expensive than gasoline in Newfoundland, all fuel prices were at least one dollar per gallon higher in Atlantic Canada than in the U.S.

Following a relaxing weekend in Terra Nova National Park, we continued to the Bonavista Peninsula. Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) landed

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here to claim the island for the British on June 24, 1497, an important first step by continental (non-Viking) Europeans on North American soil. At Bonavista's Ryan Premises National Historic Site museum, we gained deeper appreciation for the key economic role played by commercial cod fishing and seal hunting for centuries here.

On the other side of the peninsula, in the coastal village of Elliston known for an abundance of root cellars, we happened upon a large colony of Atlantic puffins burrowing on an island across the water

from a grassy cliff. We grabbed our binoculars for a closer look at the orange beaks and feet of Newfoundland's official birds as they waddled around the sunny hillside.

In Trinity we strolled through a charming 19th century village, a film location for "The Shipping News," and stepped into reconstructed buildings including a merchant's home and a working blacksmith's forge. At Trinity Cabins, the modest campground where we stayed, owners Coreine and Glen Johnson offered coffee,

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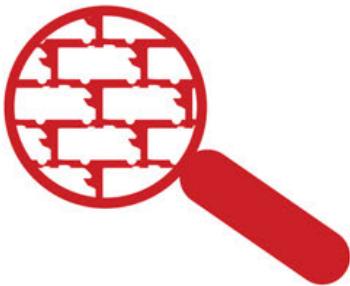


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For a last burst of sightseeing in St. John's, capital of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we headed for the Avalon Peninsula and Pippy Park, a city-owned campground on the north side. We drove up Signal Hill Road for a beautiful overview of the city from Cabot Tower and out to the easternmost point of North America, Cape Spear Lighthouse.

The capital city's youthful atmosphere was irresistible. We parked the motorhome to walk steep streets lined with brightly painted houses, and ducked into a bustling pub popular with Memorial University students for lunch. On a tour of Quidi Vidi Brewery (pronounced *kiddee viddee*), we sampled five craft beers including blue-bottled Iceberg Beer made with 25,000-year-old water melted from local bergs.

At The Rooms, a cluster of museum and archive buildings, I was absorbed for hours by historic exhibits and began to understand where those thick Newfoundland brogues originated — more than 50 percent of the island's population has Irish roots due to an 18th century migration of men seeking work in the cod fishery.

In the final days of our trip, Bob's many phone calls and scribbled directions led us down highways and byways to meet his mother's cousins. In Shoal Harbour, 93-year-old Edna insisted we stay for chili. In Paradise, Doris brought forth laden platters and introduced us to 10 family members she had gathered for the occasion. And in Robinsons, back on the west coast, Ellen and Calvin invited us to lunch and gave Bob a big hug before we left for Port aux Basque and our return ferry.

We now understood why RVers often return to spend an entire summer in warm-hearted Newfoundland. We felt a new kinship, not only with Bob's relatives, but also with many other Newfoundlanders who embraced us. Scores of scenic outports still waited to lure us off the beaten track. A "Come Home" visit was in order for the future. ♦



Christine Goodier is a freelance writer and editor who lives on the North Carolina coast and travels with her husband, photographer Bob Goodier, in a Class B Sprinter motorhome.

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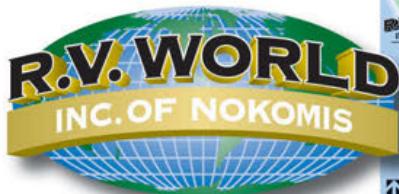
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SIGHTSEER 33C

WINNEBAGO NOT ONLY CATAPULTED THIS COACH TO A NEW COMFORT LEVEL, IT DESIGNED A FLOORPLAN THAT'S VERSATILE AND PROMOTES EASY LIVING | by BOB LIVINGSTON



Clockwise, opposite page: An optional buffet with “disappearing” TV adds versatility to the front living room. The cockpit is simple and comfortable, and the cup holders actually work. A king bed occupies most of the rear bedroom, but affords a great sleep. The shower in the bathroom is surprisingly roomy even though space may be tight for some. The optional Comfort sofa/sleeper and Euro chair are positioned perfectly for watching TV, and offer Ultraleather luxury.



When Winnebago introduced the Sightseer in 2002, it was aimed at buyers looking for a value-priced Class A but with enough niceties to step up from entry level. Over the years the Sightseer has been a bread-and-butter coach for the company and has served its owners well.

While its popularity hasn't waned, the Sightseer has gone through a transformation that started in 2008, and every year since the company has injected changes and upgrades that have taken this coach to a new echelon, even though it's still only one step from entry level in the Winnebago Class A lineup. The 2013 33C is one of four floorplans under the Sightseer nameplate, and at 34 feet 7 inches, it's right smack in the middle of the size offerings. Using three slides, one nearly full length, the configuration of the 33C is one of the most versatile and livable plans we've experienced. A front living room with an optional buffet and expanding table with freestanding chairs highlight the front portion of the coach while the galley and bath take center stage. A rear bedroom rounds out the floorplan.

Former optional or unavailable items that are now standard, such as Corian galley countertops, MCD American Duo roller shades, aluminum wheels, upgraded entertainment equipment, 1,000-watt inverter, power management system and an LP-gas/120-volt AC water heater, change the look and feel of this coach. Add in a number of targeted optional items like full-body paint, Ultraleather furniture, side-view camera system and an outside entertainment module and the Sightseer lives like a much more expensive coach than the retail sticker price of \$148,317 on this fully loaded test coach.

The entryway is just about center coach, which, at first glance, seems like a departure from the popular front doorways that are commonly seen in floorplans similar to the 33C. While the exterior stature, handsome full-body paint and 22.5-inch aluminum wheels give the impression that the coach is a pusher, it takes a moment to recognize it's really built on a Ford F53 chassis. That being the case, it's natural to place the door rearward of the cockpit seats. Several guests we had over to fill the cabin to capacity during a birthday celebration actually thought they were in a much higher priced coach.

Buyers can choose from a number of options when configuring the living area. Standard is the BenchMark dinette, a proprietary component that uses spring-based cushions for added comfort. Opposite the booth dinette on the standard plan is a sofa/bed and a recliner. Opt for the buffet structure on the streetside that houses the retractable TV and opposing Comfort sofa/sleeper and Euro lounge chair, and the front living room becomes a wonderful place to hang out or host socials — especially after the cockpit seats are turned toward the room.

Visibility of the TV from the couch and Euro chair is superb, as long as the occupants can stay awake. We're talking about exceptional comfort with this furniture. We had no problem showing a movie to a full house in this living room. The 40-inch TV in the buffet blocks the view out the window, but it only takes a push of a button to send the screen down into the cabinet.

The expandable table is built into the structure and can be easily pulled out to seat two more diners — after adding the extra chairs stored under the bed. Surrounding storage



2013 WINNEBAGO SIGHTSEER 33C

WHAT'S HOT

Wide-open floorplan, buffet with retractable TV, MCD American Duo window shades, handsome exterior graphics and aluminum wheels, Corian countertops, practical galley

WHAT'S NOT

Plastic toilet, leveling jack system, restricted space in bedroom



The Sightseer 33C's optional exterior entertainment center includes a 32-inch LCD TV, AM/FM stereo and DVD player.

cabinets and drawers swallow up a lot of stuff, but adjustable shelving would make the facility even better.

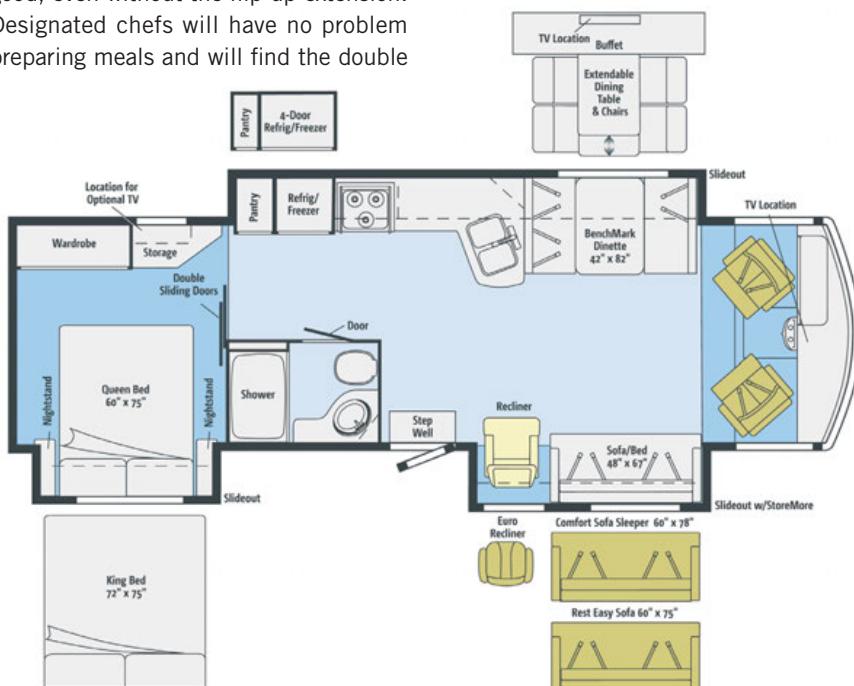
Winnebago's buffet concept isn't new, but has been refined. The first ones had a lip on the floor that was part of the slide mechanism/structure, which made placing the chairs on a level floor difficult when all four are used. The improved flat floor makes all the difference, and since the carpeting gave way to attractive Beauflor vinyl flooring throughout the coach except for the cockpit and bedroom, the chairs are even easier to position. Cleanup is also less problematic and overall the décor is more appealing.

Adjacent to the buffet unit, the L-shaped galley fits perfectly within the overall floorplan scheme. Counterspace is good, even without the flip-up extension. Designated chefs will have no problem preparing meals and will find the double

stainless sinks, stovetop, microwave and refrigerator all within arm's reach. With the optional four-door refrigerator, the pullout pantry shrinks in size, although it's still usable and necessary for taller items. Generally, there are plenty of cabinets and drawers to handle anything needed to fully equip the kitchen.

Opposite the refrigerator and pantry is the bathroom. For our tastes, the bathroom is right sized for this coach; some owners might find it on the small side. The corner lavatory provides enough room to do the normal washing, etc., but the overhead cabinet gets in the way when trying to lean over the oval sink. The shower, though, is plenty big, especially considering the overall size of the bathroom. Using a plastic toilet, though, is incongruent with the philosophy of building a coach with more bells and whistles. Kudos for the taller sliding glass for the shower stall; it's nice to retain our scalp when entering and leaving the shower.

Out back, the space is reserved for the bedroom. A queen bed is standard, but in this case a king was ordered for the test coach. It's nice to have the extra room, especially if Fido regularly snuggles with the occupants, but it does overwhelm the available space, even with the slide extended. Walking around the king bed takes some finesse and making the bed is challenging at times, but it is



SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY: 7.5 MPG

ACCELERATION:

0-60: 24.6 SEC

40-60: 13.1 SEC

CHASSIS

MODEL: FORD F53

ENGINE: TRITON V-10

SAE HP: 362 @ 4,750 RPM

TORQUE: 457 LB-FT @ 3,250 RPM

TRANSMISSION: 5-SPEED AUTO

AXLE RATIO: 5.38:1

FRONT TIRES: 235/80R 22.5 G

REAR TIRES: 235/80R 22.5 G

WHEELBASE: 220"

BRAKES: 4-WHEEL DISC/ABS

SUSPENSION: FRONT I-BEAM, LEAF SPRINGS;
REAR LEAF SPRINGS

FUEL CAP: 80 GAL

WARRANTY: 36 MO./36,000 MILES BUMPER

TO BUMPER; 60 MO/60,000 MILES POWERTRAIN

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 34' 7"

EXT WIDTH: 8' 5.5"

EXT HEIGHT: 12' 5" WITH A/C

INT WIDTH: 8' .5"

INT HEIGHT: 6' 8"

CONSTRUCTION: SUPERSTRUCTURE STEEL CAB, THERMO-PANEL LAMINATED SIDEWALLS, ALUMINUM BODY FRAMEWORK, BLOCK FOAM INSULATION, FIBERGLASS EXTERIOR/ROOF

FRESHWATER CAP: 79 GAL

BLACK-WATER CAP: 39 GAL

GRAY-WATER CAP: 60 GAL

WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 GAL

LP-GAS CAP: 18 GAL

AIR CONDITIONER (2): 14,800 BTU

FURNACE: 35,000 BTU

REFRIGERATOR: 12 CU FT

INVERTER/CHARGER: 1,000 WATTS/55 AMPS

BATTERY: 12-VOLT CHASSIS, (2) 12-VOLT COACH

AC GENERATOR: 5.5 KW

MSRP: \$131,153

MSRP AS TESTED: \$148,317

WARRANTY: 12 MO/15,000 MILES;

36 MO/36,000 MILES LIMITED STRUCTURE;

10 YEAR LIMITED ROOF

WET WEIGHT

(WATER & HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS FULL;
NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

FRONT AXLE: 6,120 LBS

REAR AXLE: 12,380 LBS

TOTAL: 18,500 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R: 8,000/15,000 LBS

GVWR/GCWR: 22,000/26,000 LBS

ROCCC: 3,500 LBS (DEDUCT WEIGHT OF PASSENGERS FOR NET CARGO CAPACITY)

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING

GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING

GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING

ROCCC: REALISTIC OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY (FULL WATER, NO PASSENGERS)

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comfortable. Within line of sight are the wardrobe and storage cabinet below a counter; an optional 26-inch TV is placed for perfect viewing from the bed.

What makes the 33C floorplan work so well is the open feeling one gets throughout the coach. Strategically placed slide-outs expand the living space beautifully and it's nice to see just about anywhere in the coach from any vantage point. Good lighting and window placement — even though there are not that many windows considering the size of the coach — keep the interior bright and cheery. The aforementioned MCD window shades are a huge improvement from day/night type window coverings because they not only do a good job of regulating and blocking out light, they are easy to use and not plagued by stubborn strings and pleats. The power shade blocking the cockpit windshield is another nice touch that adds value and convenience to the Sightseer.

Comfort wise, heat distribution is fairly even, although the bathroom gets pretty warm when the furnace is running. The test coach was optionally fitted with heat pumps in the roof air conditioners to supplement temperature control. This is a good way to conserve LP-gas use when hooked up to electric, but the fans are on the noisy side.

Outside there's a generous array of storage lockers that can handle just about anything a typical user of this coach will want to take along. The utility compartment retains Winnebago's commitment to centralizing access points (think One Place systems center), offering clearly marked utilities, 3-inch dump valves for the gray water and wastewater and a wash station. There's definitely a quality feel about the compartments even if the doors required a little nudging to get the corner latches to catch.

Controls for the automatic hydraulic leveling jacks can be found in three places, including one switch in the utility compartment. The main control is next to the driver and the other satellite position is at the entry door. While having multiple control points is appreciated, the jack system was not our favorite accessory in the Sightseer. The system is rather temperamental, with the "computer" having a mind of its own.

Driving north on U.S. Highway 101

from our offices in Ventura, Calif., is a make-or-break deal when it comes to forming first impressions about a coach. The road is about as bad as it gets on concrete beleaguered by expansion joints and other common highway maladies. We were expecting the normal bucking and snorting exhibited by the Ford chassis on this section of highway, but it didn't happen. Sure, we could feel the surface being transmitted to the driver's seat, but Ford's improvements over the years helped squelch the bad ride. Much of the credit for the unexpected comfort goes to the coach's exceptional fit and finish. Absent were the common noisemakers created by squeaks and rattles — even the stovetop was quiet. Wind noise from the expansive one-piece windshield and side windows was minimal and the general quiet gave the impression that the coach was smoothly sailing down the highway, in spite of the stiff Ford springs. Helping in this department is Winnebago's SuperStructure steel cage used for the cab area, as well as the solid construction

techniques employed for the coach body.

The driving experience overall is pleasurable. The coach handles roadway maneuvers nicely and the stout Ford engine has plenty of get up and go, even while climbing grades. Cab seats are comfortable for long hauls and the dashboard controls are ergonomic and intuitive.

Winnebago's 33C floorplan is a home run in my opinion, which is supported by my wife's view after spending time in this coach. The layout is conducive to entertaining big groups and the front living area can easily be transformed into a cozy lounge for two people to cuddle for TV time or reading. Versatility is the key; the coach wards off claustrophobia and the décor is aesthetically pleasing and practical. If I needed to find fault, it would be the encroachment on patio real estate because of the slides on the right side of the coach.

While the test coach is a 2013 model, Winnebago will continue to offer the Sightseer 33C as part of its 2014 lineup. Based on what we've seen during the last six years, the coach will likely get even better. ♦

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MEETING ELECTRICAL NEEDS

JTB POWER SOLUTION CAN ADD
20 AMPS TO ANY MOTORHOME

by BILL AND JENN GEHR



The complete JTB kit includes all of the wiring and hardware needed for installation. A helpful, step-by-step instruction manual will direct installers from beginning to end.



Motorhomes are becoming more power thirsty every year. Not long ago, 30-amp circuits were more than enough to power all the electrical needs of many motorhomes. But as coach manufacturers add air conditioners, fireplaces, convection ovens, washers/dryers and larger, home-style refrigerators, the demand for 50-amp power (or greater) increases. Many RV parks are not equipped to keep up with power demands — especially on hot days when everyone is running air conditioners — because their circuits were not designed for power-hungry coaches. JTB Manufacturing has a simple way to add 20 amps to any motorhome, whether equipped with 30- or 50-amp service. In a nutshell, you can create 50 amps with 30-amp park service just by employing the JTB Power

Solution system and the existing 20-amp GFCI at the power post — without tripping a breaker. Over the years, many motorhome owners have inquired whether it's possible to install an additional air conditioner to an existing 30-amp service or convert the motorhome from 30- to a 50-amp service. Because of the high costs of parts and labor, the power service conversion was usually not a feasible option. The JTB Power Solution requires a fraction of the time to install, and is a much more affordable alternative to adding increased power. In the past, Y adapters were marketed to supposedly increase load capability only to disappoint users by tripping the GFCI, which almost all RV parks have installed for safety and to meet code. JTB designed its product to solve this problem within the PC board and to eliminate cross

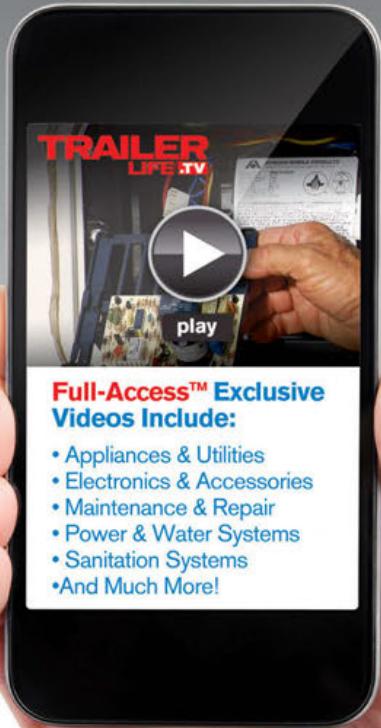


JTB Power Solution labeled both lengths of Romex in the kit, helping take the guesswork out of the connection process inside the main distribution panel of the coach.

Using an existing access hole located under the floor in the bedroom, we were able to run both Romex wires up to the distribution panel.

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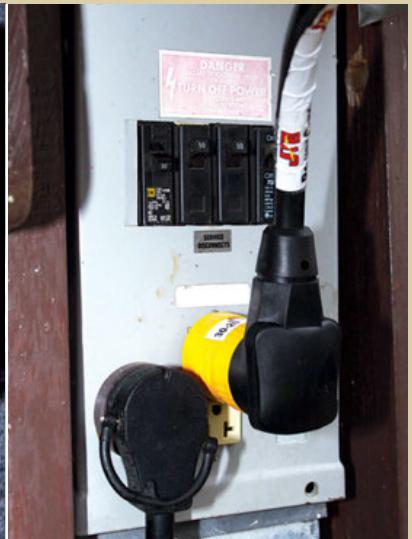
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MEETING ELECTRICAL NEEDS



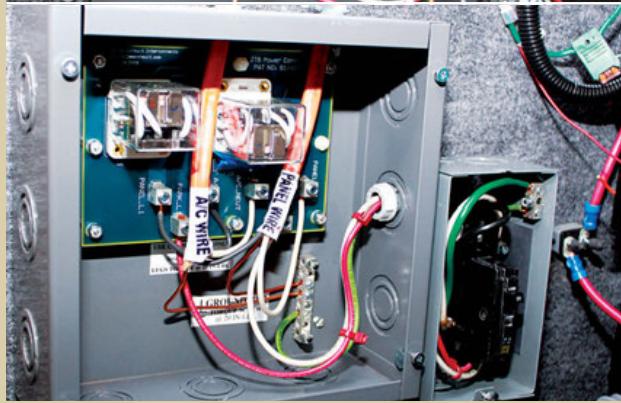
This smaller box houses the 20-amp breaker for the 30-foot power cord. Make sure the cord is securely clamped in place.



The JTB power cord with adapter is plugged into the GFCI, alongside the 30-amp power cord from the RV.



The circuit board is clearly marked for easy installation of the A/C and panel wire. Simply strip the Romex wires, insert into the proper location and tighten the screws to secure into place.



The JTB is mounted to a solid, vertical surface in a location close to the cable hatch exit for the JTB power cord. This gives the maximum amount of footage between the coach and campground power.

phase as well.

JTB uniquely configures available power at the hookup by utilizing the 20-amp GFCI receptacle. Keep in mind that once the JTB cord is plugged in to the GFCI power source, it switches from 30 to 50 amps automatically.

The JTB Power Solution comes complete with a steel box that houses the

circuit board with an attached load center, a 30-foot, 30-amp power cord, a 30-to-20-amp adapter, two rolls of No. 10 Romex, an installation hardware kit and a step-by-step instruction manual. JTB allows you to manage and boost the circuit of your choice: a second air conditioner, the microwave, fireplace or an electric water heater.



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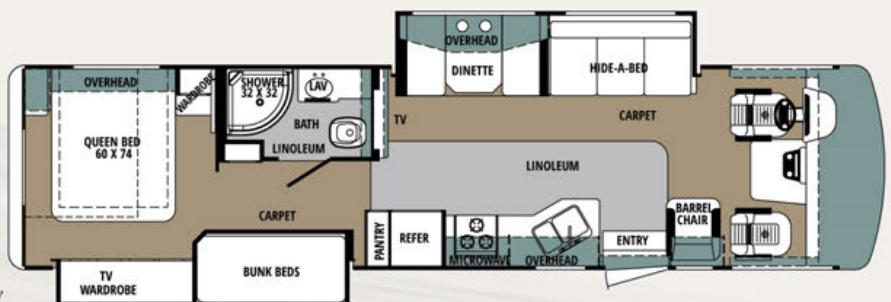


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For the evaluation of the JTB Power Solution we opted to use the second air conditioner as the circuit of choice. The owner of the RV used for the installation often camps in hot weather and has experienced a lack of power on several occasions when using 30-amp service.

Installation time on the JTB system consumed 90 minutes, largely because of the inaccessibility of the main distribution panel. Feeding the pair of 10-gauge

Romex cables to the main panel proved to be a challenge, but, by contrast, installing the JTB unit and the power cord was relatively easy. The directions are clear and easy to understand and follow. An installation video is also available on the company's website.

The interior of the main distribution panel in the test RV was large enough to allow easy connection of the Romex, but a small distribution panel would likely

challenge even the smallest of hands. The Romex cables and the PC board are marked for a "plug and play" installation. The wires are cut to length, stripped and installed at the pre-marked locations.

There are several ways of attaching the JTB 30-amp power cord so that it can exit the RV without leaving an exterior compartment door open. A twist-lock power inlet can be installed next to your existing power cord for convenience and clean looks, or a simple cable hatch can be installed in a baggage door or in a wall next to a compartment. The cable hatch installation with the power cord attached directly to the JTB was the option we chose for this project because it was simple, yet effective.

When calculating the demands of the circuit you want to use for the JTB system there are two simple mathematical equations: watts divided by volts equal amps or amps multiplied by volts equal watts. Most appliances have at least one rating listed on the labeling.

We tested the capabilities of the JTB system at a state park with 30-amp service and a GFCI. With only the refrigerator on, we measured 115 volts AC. We turned on the water heater, both air conditioners, the fireplace and a parabolic dish heater all the while carefully watching a high-quality plug-in digital meter for low voltage. (Refrain from using a cheap voltmeter to monitor the system.) With all of these appliances running, the voltage only dropped to 108. We measured current draw using a Fluke clamp-on meter and noted the total load at the time of the test at 48.8 amps. And, after 30 minutes, did not trip any breaker, verifying the effectiveness of the JTB Power Solution (kit number 2010-100). Camping World's Club Price is \$799 and the JTB system comes with a one-year warranty.

With the increased demand for additional power to run the many modern appliances and accessories in our RVs, the automatic function of the JTB Power Solution allows for worry-free camping. So go ahead and use the hair dryer while heating coffee in the microwave and running both air conditioners, JTB has you covered. ♦

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Two-way communication has been important to all civilizations throughout the history of man. It developed from origins as simple as smoke signals and now includes everything from worldwide phone calls and text messages to emails and video chats. But before we were dependent on emails and texts, one of the best choices for fast and reliable communication was the two-way radio.

Even today, two-way radios remain a popular and reliable option for communication. Advantages include no monthly bill, no worries about location of cell towers, the ability to communicate anywhere in the country or the entire world and no fear of the grid crashing and limiting your ability to get a message out.

Two-way radios are so reliable that police officers, fire fighters, military personnel, emergency workers, commercial pilots and many others use them as their primary method of communication. If you ever wondered how weather professionals get their local on-the-ground information, it is often from storm chasers communicating via two-way radios.

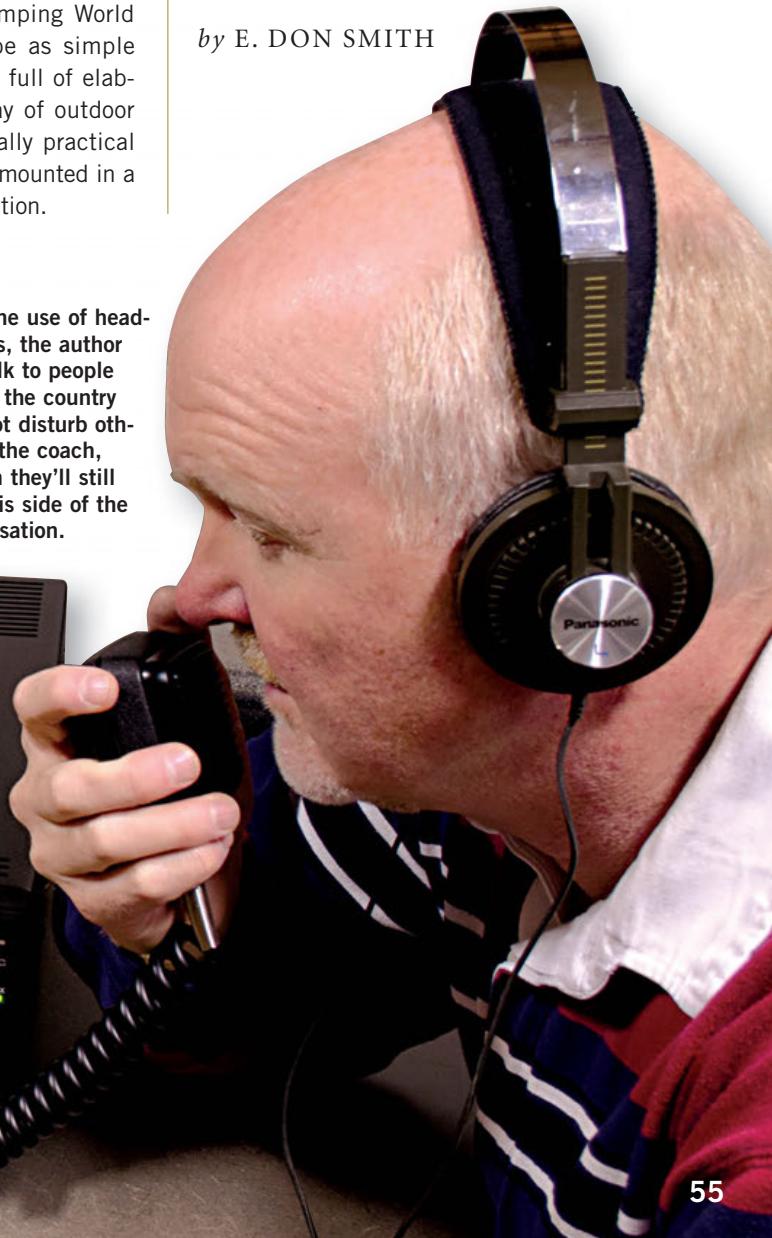
Radio communication can take place on different types of instruments including citizens band (CB), amateur radio (ham) and the popular and low cost General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) radios used by campers and sold at Camping World and many other stores nationwide. These can be as simple as small hand-held units all the way up to a desk full of elaborate radios and tuners connected to a large array of outdoor antennas. Large antennas and radios are not usually practical for the typical motorhome owner, but mobile radios mounted in a coach, as well as hand-held radios, are a simple addition.

TWO-WAY RADIO IN THE RV

AMATEUR — OR HAM — RADIO IS A FUN HOBBY AND **HELPS RVERS STAY CONNECTED**

by E. DON SMITH

With the use of headphones, the author can talk to people across the country and not disturb others in the coach, though they'll still hear his side of the conversation.



PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH

Two-way radios in the form of CB radio have been around since the 1940s, but it wasn't until the 1960s and '70s that they became popular. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) originally required owners to purchase a \$20 license and use an issued call sign (mine was KP6-6871) to operate a CB radio but that requirement went away years ago. The use of CB radio was glamorized by famous movies of the '70s such as "Smokey and the Bandit" and songs such as "Convoy." But even without help

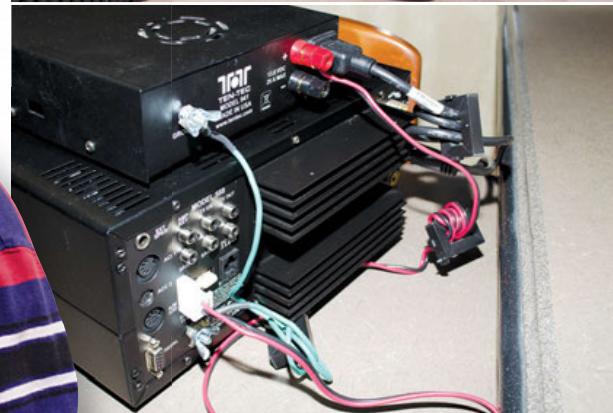
from Hollywood, the lure of communication along the road was obvious.

Because professional truck drivers primarily use CBs to talk to each other, there are always some of them on the air if you're traveling on the major interstates or highways. The range on a CB is only one to three miles and since the FCC no longer regulates the band it sometimes results in a PG-13 rating for language. But, if you want to know where the next fuel stop is or why you are sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic, there is no better way than a good

CB radio. Fortunately many motorhomes come prewired with a CB antenna on the roof so if you choose to install a radio it's a simple matter of mounting the radio, connecting it to 12-volt DC power and mounting your microphone for easy access. If you drive a lot it's an inexpensive tool you should consider.

Another form of two-way communication is amateur radio, sometimes known as ham radio. Ham operators are federally licensed by the FCC and serve an important role even in today's world of

Clockwise from right: Instead of buying a dedicated HF radio for the coach and one for the house, the author uses this Ten-Tec Omni in both locations. Along with a full-featured Yaesu hand-held radio, this provides access to virtually any ham frequency. The Ten-Tec HF radio runs on 12-volt DC power or can be connected to standard 120-volt AC power. After arriving at a new location, it takes about 5 minutes to connect the radio. Mount the radio near the driver's seat and the microphone close by for easy access without being distracted. In most states, texting or talking on hand-held cellphones is illegal but talking on a two-way radio is not. Beginners may not need a full-featured setup such as this high-end HF radio and hand-held VHF radio. Using a hand-held VHF "talkie" is a great way to get local information and talk to other ham operators.



Internet and cellphones. The FCC encourages ham activity to ensure that emergency communication is available even in the face of bad weather or other disasters that may render normal communication useless. The federal government allocates bands or ranges of frequencies specific to amateur radio users depending on the type of license they hold. Each band offers different types of communication such as voice and Morse code along with other digital forms of transmitting data, including phone and video. Depending on

the band and its frequency, transmission range can be a few miles or a few thousand miles.

Learning Morse code was once a licensing requirement to pass the FCC test but that is no longer the case. This is what motivated me to finally take the time to study and pass the Technician and then the General class license test. Having at least a General license allows an operator to access most of the high frequency (HF) bands, which are best for long-range communication. If you're really interested,

go after the Amateur Extra license, which allows access to all frequency bands granted by the FCC to ham radio usage.

The radio hobby still thrives today and offers anyone on the road (or at home) a lot of reasons for getting involved. First, it's fun. There is something cool about sitting in a remote campsite with nothing but a wire or portable antenna thrown up beside the coach and being able to talk to someone across the country or even across the world. Some hobbyists enjoy collecting states or countries by documenting communication to those areas just as motorhome travelers collect states by visiting them. Though there are only 730,000 licensed radio operators in the U.S., it is a hobby that appealed to famous people such as Walter Cronkite, Ronnie Milsap, Joe Walsh, Barry Goldwater and many more.

Amateur radio also offers numerous on-the-air gatherings called nets at regular times and frequencies where some hams discuss specific topics while others simply enjoy "chewing the rag" with anyone they can find to talk with. If you have licensed family members back home, the use of two-way radios can also serve as a way to stay in touch with them.

In addition to long-range HF communication bands, there is also a network of repeaters that operate on different frequencies for more local communications. These bands, known as VHF (very high frequencies), are good for connecting with locals in your camping area to find information or just to talk to someone.

One of the great things about two-way radio is that just like RVing, the hobby is filled with great people who want to help and who will often turn into friends. Using the POI Factory website (www.poi-factory.com), I have downloaded all the VHF repeaters in the U.S. into my Garmin GPS so any time I'm in an area and looking to talk, I can use the GPS to find the repeater frequency and info needed to get on the air in a matter of a few minutes. Any licensed radio operator within transmission range can access these VHF repeaters with a hand-held or vehicle-mounted radio. And the best part is, it's free.

When I'm on the road I almost always take a hand-held VHF radio, my Yaesu VX-7R (www.yaesu.com). It's small, has



HamCation in Orlando, Fla., is a great event to attend if you are interested in the hobby. As seen here, there are some RV owners who are very serious about two-way radios and the size of their antennas is a good example of what is possible on the road. Just don't get the wrong idea. Everyone does not need a 30-foot-tall antenna to have fun on the road with a ham radio.



One safety feature of the VX-7R Yaesu radio is its built-in access to all NOAA weather bands for instant access to weather information.

Left and below: The author uses a portable HF antenna from TransWorld Antennas that is connected to the radio through one run of standard coaxial cable, which he snaked through a basement storage bin. It takes no more than 10 minutes to set up the entire antenna.

Once he's ready to depart, the author folds up the antenna, packs it back in the storage bag and stores it inside one of the basement bins for travel to the next location.

great battery life and is weather resistant. In addition to offering multiple bands, it also has built-in access to the NOAA weather bands, making it ideal for motorhome use. Inside the coach when I take my HF radio, I use a Ten-Tec Omni VII transceiver. The thing I like so much about this radio is how easy it is to use compared to many HF radios, and it's made in the U.S. (www.tentec.com). Though it may look complicated, it is actually quite simple to get on the air, and if you can

pass the FCC General class exam you will have no problem operating this unit.

The perfect antenna for traveling is a handy portable unit from TransWorld Antennas (www.twantennas.com). Not only is it easy to pack and stow in the basement of the motorhome while traveling, I can get it set up and on the air in about 10 minutes. This particular antenna is suited for operation on many of the most popular HF radio bands such as 10, 12, 15, 17 and 20 meters.

One feature of most HF/ham mobile or base units is they natively operate on 12-volt DC, which means you can connect them directly to your battery in the coach as opposed to requiring AC power. If you're boondocking, this allows you to operate the radio for extended time periods without the use of a generator or inverter. This is a key advantage in the event of an emergency as major power outages often come along with tornados, ice storms and heavy snow.

If you are a diehard radio operator and motorhome owner, the only thing better than a vacation is a HamCation. Every year this event is hosted at the Central Florida Fairgrounds in Orlando and is the place to be as a current or future radio operator. HamCations offer three days of interesting events, FCC license testing and lots of vendor exhibits. There is even a whole area dedicated to tailgating/swap shop activity. Next year's event is slated for Feb. 7-9, 2014, so mark your calendar now if you plan to attend.

If you are interested in the hobby and don't want to wait until 2014, there are lots of local ham radio clubs and events — called hamfests — all across the country. There are also numerous websites that help you prepare for your license testing and help you understand the various radios and options available to you as a licensed operator. Most states even issue vehicle tags to FCC-licensed operators to identify them when they are operating at the scene of an emergency or in weather situations that require communication.

Being an FCC-licensed radio operator can be rewarding and fun, so if you have a desire to serve the public in the event of emergencies or are simply interested in radio communication, take a look at this exciting hobby. There are also numerous ways for people to use their skills. Some people love experimenting with antenna design while others like to play "fox hunt," where transmitters are hidden and radio operators use their equipment to locate the signal. Maybe you have a keen interest in space stations and want to talk to an astronaut. Try that with your iPhone. ♦



E. Don Smith is a Tennessee-based freelance writer and photographer who has been a frequent contributor to *MotorHome* magazine since 2006. He is the proud owner of a Tiffin Phaeton coach.

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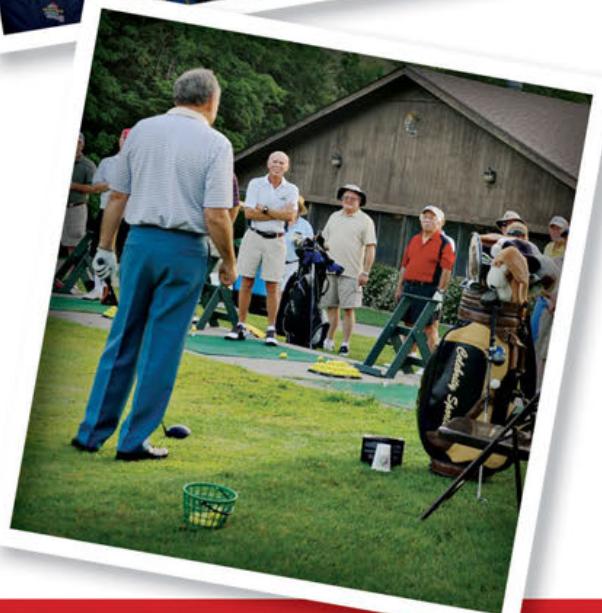
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RV BATTERY GUIDE

TYPE, SIZE, NUMBER AND MAINTENANCE
KEEPS 12-VOLT DC SYSTEMS POWERED

by STUART BOURDON AND CHRIS HEMER

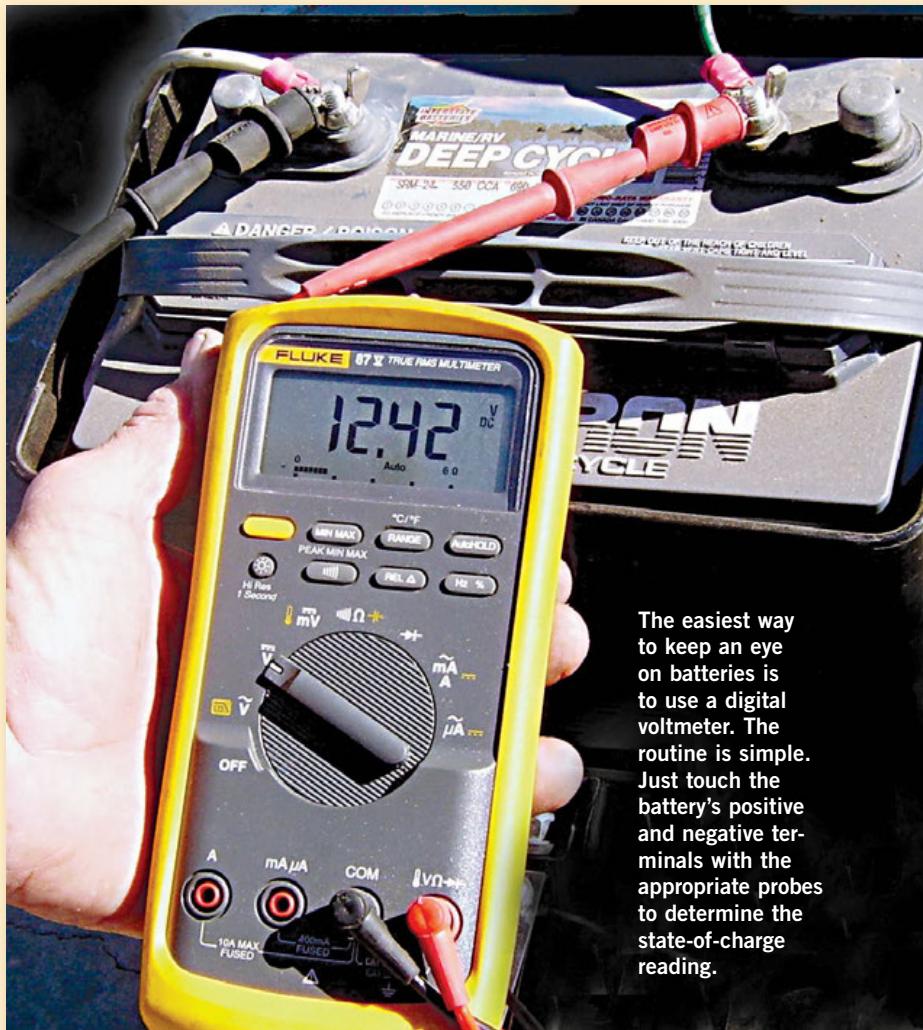
Many motorhome owners pull into a campground or RV resort, plug in to campground power and don't really think much about their batteries. But those batteries are the lifeblood of the 12-volt DC electrical system if you do any boondocking, and if you don't have the right type of batteries, don't have them set up properly or don't adequately care for them, you can be in a dark, cold world in a hurry.

GOING DEEP

All motorhomes have two types of batteries: starting batteries that get us underway, and house batteries that can provide us with modern conveniences when we're far from civilization.

House batteries are known as deep-cycle batteries, and they differ from automotive starting batteries in many ways. First, consider that an automotive battery is made to produce a high current for starting, while a deep-cycle battery is made to allow lower current for a longer period of time. Deep-cycle batteries don't have as many cold cranking amps (CCA) as starting batteries, and therefore would not provide as many starts. Where a starting battery, however, might only survive 20-30 deep discharges, a deep-cycle battery can withstand repetitive discharges to a 50 percent depth of discharge or more and still continue to provide its rated capacity after hundreds of cycles. This characteristic, combined with more reserve capacity, makes deep-cycle batteries ideal for use in a motorhome application.

A deep-cycle battery also differs from a starting battery in its inter-



The easiest way to keep an eye on batteries is to use a digital voltmeter. The routine is simple. Just touch the battery's positive and negative terminals with the appropriate probes to determine the state-of-charge reading.

nal construction. There are typically fewer plates inside a deep-cycle battery than an automotive battery, but they are normally thicker and hold more lead oxide paste, which chemically reacts with the sulfuric acid of the electrolyte. The paste itself is usually a higher density as well.

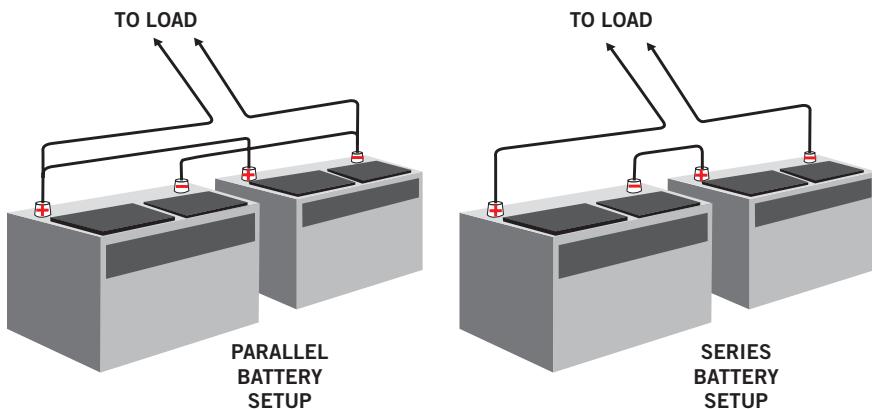
BATTERY TYPES

There are several different types of lead acid batteries on the market today. Flooded-cell batteries, or those that use water as the electro-

lyte, are the most widely used. They are relatively inexpensive, work well in a wide variety of applications and have a good service life (when properly maintained). Lead acid batteries typically begin "gassing" (or boiling) between 14.1 and 14.4 volts when the batteries are at 80 degrees Fahrenheit. This gassing threshold changes as the temperature of the battery changes; i.e. it will be lower in hotter temperatures, higher in lower temperatures. Pushing the batteries beyond their gassing



Banks for big motorhomes can include multiple starting batteries and a number of 4D gel-cell batteries to power coach systems.



When 12-volt batteries are wired in parallel, negative and positive terminals are connected as shown and load cables connected to positive terminal on one battery and negative on the other. Six-volt batteries are wired in series to provide 12-volt power. Here the positive terminal from one battery is connected to the negative on the other. Load cables are connected to remaining positive and negative terminals. Battery types and brands should not be mixed.

threshold will cause them to lose water too quickly; not pushing them close enough to the threshold will leave sulfur on the plates, which diminishes the battery’s capacity. This is why keeping a close eye on flooded-cell batteries is so important.

Note that a “gel-cell” battery is also a flooded-cell battery, but one in which silicates are added to the electrolyte material to make it a gel. These batteries fall into the sealed lead acid (SLA) or maintenance free category, but should not be confused

with absorbent glass mat (AGM) batteries, which are often incorrectly referred to as gel-cell batteries. As their name would imply, an AGM battery utilizes a fiberglass mat material in which the electrolyte has been absorbed. These batteries are therefore “dry” internally, and are more resistant to vibration and shock than their flooded-cell counterparts. They typically hold up better under heavy loads, don’t outgas unless severely overcharged, don’t corrode the terminals and don’t require

water. When you add up these benefits, AGM batteries may well be worth the added cost, which isn’t insignificant.

POWERING UP

In your motorhome, reserve capacity is your primary consideration, and you can get more by going bigger and/or using more batteries. Note we didn’t suggest “adding” batteries; adding new batteries to older ones in a system will severely shorten the life of the new batteries. If you’re going to add battery capacity, always go with all-new batteries.

Most motorhomes have more than one house battery, and if they suit your needs already, you may choose only to go with direct replacements, or upgrade to bigger batteries, if they’ll fit. You’ll want batteries with the highest amp/hour (ah) rating you can find. For example, a 100 ah battery is one that will produce 5 amps for 20 hours at 80 degrees Fahrenheit before it reaches 1.75 volts per cell, or 10.5 volts.

For those with more demanding power needs, using 12-volt batteries and connecting them in parallel will double the amount of time before the batteries are discharged. Of course, you’ll need a place to put the extra batteries — but if you’ve got the room, you might as well opt for 6-volt golf cart batteries, which are connected in series to produce 12 volts. This setup can endure more deep discharges than a 12-volt marine/RV product (sometimes twice as many), which makes it popular with motorhome owners who want the ability to operate their appliances from an inverter on battery power only. Remember: parallel combines amps, not voltage; series combines voltage, not amps. Series/Parallel is when more than one pair of 6-volt batteries is connected in a 12-volt DC system.

PROPER MAINTENANCE

Whether in your motorhome or dinghy vehicle, battery maintenance is key to long-lasting performance, although it’s typically not required as frequently as it once was. Though the vast majority of batteries in use today are still the flooded-cell variety, many of these, even those with removable caps, are considered maintenance free under normal con-

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RV BATTERY BUYER'S GUIDE

EAST PENN-DEKA

Deka batteries come in flooded-cell, AGM and gel types, but the most suitable for RV use may be some from the multitude of sizes ranging from Group 24 and 27 12-volt AGM to Group GC2 6-volt AGM in the Marine/RV Intimidator line. These offer fortified posts, straps and welds to resist damage from vibration, full-frame plates for better performance, and micro-porous glass separators to prevent spills and terminal corrosion.

Deka Batteries, 610-682-4231, www.dekabatteries.com



EAST PENN-DEKA

The line of Deka Pro Master flooded-cell 6-volt batteries is meant for golf carts but is adaptable for RV use. It offers an integrated twist-and-release vent cap/quick fill system, heavier grids and plates, thicker plate straps, through-partition connectors and can be ordered with three different terminal configurations to fit virtually any application.

Deka Batteries, 610-682-4231, www.dekabatteries.com



EXIDE

The Edge Flat-Plate AGM 12-volt batteries from Exide offer the company's SureLife Graphite Technology, an advanced graphite additive that is said to maximize energy capacity and protect against failure. And the company claims the lead, calcium, tin and silver alloy plates will deliver greater life under extreme operating conditions. A continuous cast grid helps provide excellent conductivity. The Exide Edge Marine/RV Battery delivers 775 cold cranking amps, 145 minutes reserve capacity, 75 amp hours and offers a 24-month free replacement.

Exide Technologies, 800-782-7848, www.exide.com



EXIDE

Heavy-duty sheet separators with anti-mimony suppression help prevent water loss throughout the battery life; thick, 5 percent antimony grid plates improve cycle time; high-density oxidepaste create better cycling and extended battery life; and stainless steel terminals provide outstanding corrosion resistance. The Exide 6-volt Golf Cart/Electric Vehicle Batteries are an excellent choice for RV enthusiasts who like to pair them to bump up amp hours. Each of these Exide Xtra Golf Cart Batteries can provide up to 525 minutes of reserve capacity, 245 amp hours and offers a 12-month free replacement.

Exide Technologies, 800-782-7848, www.exide.com



INTERSTATE

A new commercial battery has been introduced by Interstate that is ideal for use in RV applications. The company claims the 31-AGM7 12-volt Extreme AGM battery offers deeper cycling performance, faster recharging and stronger starting than conventional lead-alloy AGM technology batteries. The pure lead with no impurities and an increased surface area of thinner plates results in a battery with higher performance level in engine cranking and long-term accessory power capabilities.

Interstate Batteries, 888-772-3600, www.interstatebatteries.com



TROJAN

Among the Traveler line of Golf and Utility Vehicle batteries from Trojan Battery Co. are a number of 6-volt batteries easily adaptable in pairs for motorhome use. Trojan's proprietary Maxguard T2 separator features a multi-rib geometry to keep acid channels open longer to enhance electrochemical processing. And its Alpha Plus Paste high-density formula, along with the T2 metal agent introduced into the paste, helps deliver sustained performance over a longer period of time and total overall amp hours providing more operating power for RV applications.

Trojan Battery Co., 800-423-6569, www.trojanbattery.com



LIFELINE

Lifeline offers AGM 12-volt and 6-volt deep-cycle batteries, and AGM 12-volt starting batteries, and the company claims that when its batteries are discharged to the BCI recommended 50 percent level, they can provide nearly 1,000 life cycles, while other flooded and gel batteries fall between 300 and 450 life cycles at 50 percent discharges. The company also offers a five-year prorated warranty and one-year free replacement on its batteries.

Lifeline Batteries, 626-969-6886, www.lifelinebatteries.com



OPTIMA

Optima delivers three types of 12-volt batteries to the marine/RV market, building its products in a proprietary SPIRALCELL design that's a series of individual spiral-wound cells made up of two pure (99.99 percent) lead plates with a precise coating of lead oxide. The Redtop is a high-power engine cranking battery, the Yellowtop is a deep cycling plus cranking power battery and the Bluetop is a deep cycling and cranking power battery specifically designed for marine/RV applications. The Blue model comes in two case colors: light and dark gray; and the light gray model is best suited for motorhomes with electronics and creature comforts that tend to drain batteries quickly.

Optima Batteries, 888-867-8462, www.optimabatteries.com

ditions. However, it is still a good practice to have the battery visually inspected and tested every few months.

If your battery does require water, it is preferable to replenish it with distilled water. Also, make sure the electrolyte (water) covers the plates inside by a minimum of a half-inch. If air contacts those plates for any length of time, it hardens the chemical paste material on the plates and causes them to sulfate. Once that happens, there is a good chance that part of the plate is not going to be chemically usable anymore. In other words, you may have lost a percentage of battery performance that you're not going to get back.

Keeping your batteries charged is obviously important, but what may not be so obvious is how to keep them charged. Leaving a motorhome plugged in when not in use isn't necessarily a good idea, as an overzealous charger can cook batteries dry. A simple procedure is to plug the motorhome in for about a week, and check it frequently, noting voltage while charging and inspecting for abnormal water usage. If the battery gets hot or loses water, it's being over charged and shouldn't be left plugged in. Otherwise, you can leave it plugged in for a couple of weeks at a time. A more reliable solution is to charge the batteries for a day or so once a month. This will keep them topped off without the danger of overcharging.

Whether you choose to leave the batteries in your motorhome or pull them out for safe storage and maintenance charging, it's important that you use a battery charger that's compatible with the battery. It is best to recharge your batteries at a current (amp) level of battery amp hours divided by five for fast charging, 10 for slower charging. Example: A 100 ah battery divided by five equals a 20-amp charger. Many battery chargers have adjustable amp settings, which is handy for different battery types.

The best choice is to use a multi-stage charger, which conditions batteries through three stages: bulk, absorption and float. These chargers automatically apply the proper charge rate based on condition. Many multistage chargers are very sophisticated and are the preferred method for charging batteries instead of relying on the conventional converters provided in the majority of motorhomes. Most con-

OPEN-CIRCUIT VOLTAGE	
VOLTAGE	STATE OF CHARGE (%)
12.7-12.8	100
12.4	75
12.2	50
12.0	25
11.7	0
SPECIFIC GRAVITY VALUES	
CHARGE LEVEL (%)	SPECIFIC GRAVITY
100	1.265
75	1.225
50	1.19
25	1.155
Discharged	1.12

State of charge can be determined by reading voltage with a multimeter (top). Specific gravity readings using a hydrometer can be compared to percentage of charge in open-cell batteries. Always use a temperature-correcting hydrometer.

verters don't fully charge the batteries, as they are designed to provide 12 volts DC to the motorhome when it is plugged into 120 volts AC in a campground.

"Battery maintainers" are also a popular choice for keeping batteries topped off, but here again, make sure the one you choose is compatible with your battery or batteries. Prior to using the maintainer for an extended period of time, make sure the unit is actually maintaining the proper voltage, or if it's making the battery lose water. After a few days, disconnect the maintainer for a couple of hours and then use a voltmeter or hydrometer to check the level of charge. A voltmeter should be around 12.7-12.8 volts, while a hydrometer should show a specific gravity number of 1.265-1.275, meaning the battery is at or near 100 percent charged.

After the batteries have sat for several months without charging, or on a maintenance charge, they may require equalization. While this is a subject that could be a story unto itself, suffice it to say "equalization" is a term meaning to de-sulfate or equalize individual cells of a battery. This is done through the use of a charger or converter that has the ability to charge at a high voltage (typically 15.6-16.2 volts) at a low current level in an attempt to break the sulfate crystals off the inner cell paste material. Equalization stages are typically found on higher-end inverter/chargers or in motorhomes

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A FEW MORE TIPS

-  **Do not charge a frozen battery, and avoid charging batteries in ambient air temperatures higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.**
-  **If batteries are removed, store them in a cool, dry place; avoid direct exposure to heat. Be sure to completely charge the batteries before storing them and check charge levels approximately every six weeks, as they will gradually self-discharge during storage.**
-  **Stored batteries should be given a boost charge when they are at about 70 percent state of charge. Recharge batteries immediately after removing them from storage.**
-  **When measuring specific gravity, use rubber gloves and wear safety glasses or goggles. Keep baking soda and water close by in case of a spill and clean it up immediately. Open one cell and then use the hydrometer to remove just enough electrolyte to cause the measuring object to float in the tube. Then record the reading and determine the state of charge.**
-  **Place batteries as close to each other as possible, preferably in the same compartment. This makes it easier to maintain or repair the system if necessary.**
-  **Keep the length of the connecting cables between multiple batteries as short as possible to reduce resistance. Consult a qualified electrician or motorhome technician to ensure you are safely wiring the batteries in your motorhome.**
-  **When connecting batteries to the inverter, follow the manufacturer's recommendations as to cable size and mount the inverter as close to the batteries as possible to limit the length of the connecting cables. Also take care where the inverter is mounted, as it can act as an ignition source when your batteries outgas.**
-  **Finally, install a fuse or circuit breaker in the DC wiring system to make sure that if something does short out, your valuable electronics and equipment are protected. Most importantly, if there is any doubt in your mind, call in a professional, have the job done right the first time and enjoy the RVing lifestyle.**

that have sophisticated solar systems. Standard type converters usually will not have an equalization feature; aftermarket multistage chargers can be added to remedy this situation.

Some manufacturers recommend equalization after 30-50 charge/discharge cycles, while others don't recommend equalization at all; check with the battery manufacturer to be sure. Note: Battery equalization is for flooded-cell batteries only. Don't attempt to equalize gel-cell or AGM batteries.

Last but not least, always make sure the battery is properly secured, the terminals are clean and the connections are tight. An improperly secured battery

can bang around on its tray, causing internal damage. Loose or dirty connections can cause starting/charging problems. If the terminals look like they're growing their own culture, it's time for a thorough cleaning. Disconnect the battery, then mix about one part baking soda in four parts water and pour it over the terminals. When the foaming subsides, rinse well with water and you'll be amazed to find clean, gray terminals again. Mix another batch and dip the connections, one at a time. When you're done, thoroughly dry everything, reconnect the terminals and apply a small amount of grease, or a commercial product, to the connections to help retard oxidation. ♦

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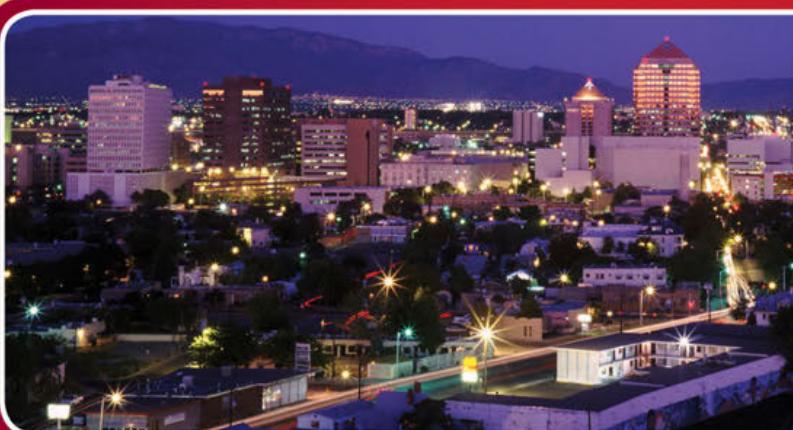
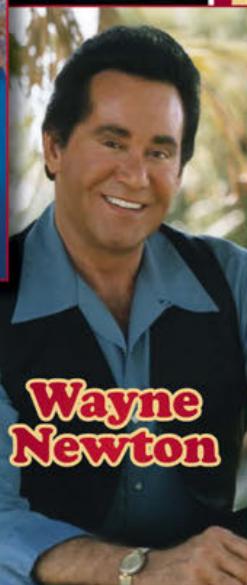


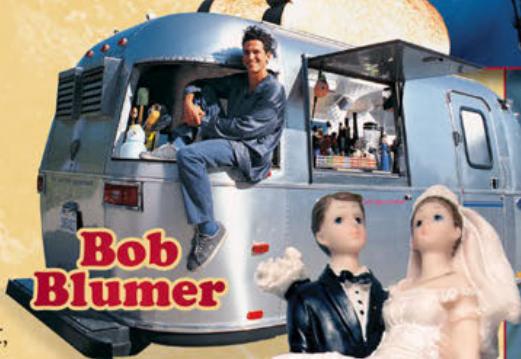
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OVERHEAD ▲ CAT CARRIER

I built a cat enclosure over the cab in our Class C motorhome so our three pets could travel with us when we went on long trips. When we are at a site, the door is left open so they can run free, but they are confined to the enclosure while traveling. The entire enclosure is removable and folds into a flat unit for easy storage. The enclosure is made of pine strips, hinges and netting easily purchased at a local hardware store.

WAYNE INGERSOLL | CHOCOWINITY, N.C.

NO-TIP TRASH CAN

After trying a collapsible garbage can and another that tipped over easily in the wind, I came up with an easy solution. Two inexpensive quick clamps and an elastic drawstring garbage bag make a fly-free trash bag that is easy to access, stands up to wind and rain, and deters curious dogs and other campsite critters. It's not the prettiest, but it works the best.

JERRY PULDA | VERONA, WIS.



▼ RATTLE REDUCER



I came up with a solution to the rattling of the rotating glass turntable in my microwave while on the road. I bought a toilet tissue roller from a

dollar store. Then I drilled a hole in the end of a 7/8-inch diameter dowel to accept the bearing surface of the roller. A short length on top and a longer length of dowel on the bottom drilled and cut to fit in the microwave when the toilet tissue roller is compressed approximately two-thirds. I used epoxy to attach the dowels to the roller and affixed a small piece of non-skid shelf liner to the ends with double-sided tape.

JAMES W. GODDETTE | VERGENNES, VT.

▼ EASIER CABLE CONNECTION



Here's a solution for the common complaint of hooking up to park cable TV. The thin coaxial cable nuts always seem uncooperative, and then add in outdoor conditions like cold, wind or rain and it makes for a tedious experience. After I got home from our last trip, I made a "cable tool." I cut about 6 inches from the end of an extra coaxial TV cable to make a pigtail. I used a 7/16-inch-deep well socket from an old socket set, and found in my garage a

spare coax connector and male/male fitting to connect the pigtail to my RV cable. Some rescue tape wrapped around the socket provides grip and a soft feel. The pigtail acts as a "keeper" for the socket. The socket is always available to connect or disconnect to park cable as needed simply by sliding it along the cable and over the nut.

LEN BENKOSKY | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ. ♦

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Quick Tips, *MotorHome's* monthly column of handy, 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, or email letters@motorhome.com. Be sure to include photos, illustrations or drawings, if necessary. If your tip is selected for publication, you'll receive \$35.

ILLUSTRATIONS: BILL TIPTON

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KEEPING TABS ON POWER



Measuring current and other values is made simple using Craftsman's clamp-on AC/DC meter

Straying off the grid once in a while and relying on the self-containment afforded by a motorhome can be interesting and fun. Struggling with batteries and charging systems, however, can be challenging. Critical systems are dependent on good, uninterrupted 12-volt DC power, which means a healthy battery bank is mandatory. Many owners use a decent multimeter to keep tabs on their battery power but forgo testing for current — for example, amp draw and battery charge rates — because of the cost of the tool. Recognized brand clamp-on ammeters have traditionally been in the \$225-\$300 range, making most owners think twice about adding this type of device to their toolboxes. Sears sells a Craftsman Digital Clap-On Ammeter (model 82369) that retails for \$59.99 and is frequently on sale for around \$54, so the idea of having such a tool on board is much more affordable.

Being a tool snob, the idea of pushing aside my expensive clamp-on ammeter for the Craftsman met with trepidation until I got the green light from a close friend who specializes in solar energy and battery technology. The Craftsman ammeter is a full-fledged multimeter with the clamp-on feature and other functions to make any battery aficionado happy.

Taking current measurements can't get any easier. Simply set the dial to the appropriate function, zero out

the display screen, open the jaws of the clamp, wrap around the wire and wait a few seconds for the reading to show up.

There are a number of places to measure current, including amperage from the campground hookup, amp load when operating off batteries, charge rate provided by the converter or inverter, the draw from any individual appliance or accessory, and to help pinpoint parasitic drains while the coach is in storage, just to name a few.

AC and DC voltage can be measured by using the probes that are provided with the meter. The black and red test leads are plugged into the respective positive and negative receptacles in the bottom portion of the meter and used to probe wires, batteries, connections, terminals, wall receptacles, or virtually any place there is a need to measure voltage.

Just like most multimeters, the Craftsman device can read resistance across a circuit and check for continuity of a circuit or wire, a feature I find valuable when diagnosing electrical problems in a coach. It can also check diode integrity, capacitance and frequency in a 120-volt AC circuit (measured in hertz). Frequency is something you need to check if your clocks are running fast or slow and/or the microwave cooking times are off. It's especially useful when calibrating generators.

Interestingly, the Craftsman meter can also measure temperature using the provided thermocouple. I consider this feature a bonus and one that will likely come in handy for a number of projects around the motorhome, including diagnosing refrigerator/freezer temperature issues.

The Craftsman Digital Clamp-On Ammeter is accurate and ergonomic. Most of the functions are relatively intuitive, but it's a good idea to read the owner's manual before using the meter, since there are certain risks associated with electrical troubleshooting — including, but not limited to AC voltage. Two AAA batteries power the meter and a low-battery icon lets the user know when replacement is necessary.

Having an affordable, powerful diagnostic tool in the palm of your hand is fun and educational, and will minimize electrical surprises. ♦

Available at Sears retail stores or at www.sears.com.





Tow Trouble

WHEN A PROMISED REFUND SEEMED LIKE IT WAS NEVER GOING TO ARRIVE, A READER ASKED HOT LINE TO HELP SPEED UP THE PROCESS. HE WROTE:

On May 8, 2012, I needed a tow truck and Bryce Canyon ACC and Towing in Bryce Canyon City, Utah, provided me that service. I paid the invoice in the amount of \$295, as they required, at that time. Before the end of the month, I submitted the proper paperwork for reimbursement of the invoice to my roadside assistance provider, Coach-Net.

After waiting a long time for the reimbursement, I contacted the company by phone on Oct. 31. The Coach-Net representative I talked to looked for a record of my request and could not find it. She told me to resubmit it and they would then expedite my reimbursement. I resubmitted it that day.

Then, nearly three months later, I received a letter from Coach-Net denying the claim because it was too old. The fact is, I submitted the claim within a couple weeks of the incident and it either got lost in the mail, or Coach-Net lost it. The company only recognizes the Oct. 31 submittal; therefore it is denying my claim.

I would appreciate it if Hot Line could assist me in obtaining the reimbursement.

VIRGIL DUTTON
FORT MCDOWELL, ARIZ.

Hot Line contacted Coach-Net to draw some attention to Dutton's case. Soon after, we heard back from the company and Dutton as follows:

Thank you for sharing the feedback you received from Mr. Dutton. We focus on providing our members with the exceptional service they expect from Coach-Net and we appreciate the

opportunity to address the situation and resolve the issue.

Typically, Coach-Net does not provide reimbursement for roadside assistance services that our members contract for themselves. However, we realize there are extenuating circumstances and members may need to submit claims for reimbursement; those requests must be received within 90 days of the incident.

The incident in question occurred on May 8, 2012, and we have no record of receiving a claim from Dutton prior to Oct., 31, 2012. Our records reflect that we received a call from Dutton on May 14, 2012, when we advised him to submit his claim. Therefore, we certainly take Dutton at his word that he submitted the paperwork within the required 90-day time-frame and that it may have been lost in the mail.

We have spoken to Dutton and advised him that he will be reimbursed for the \$295 that he paid to the roadside service provider. It is our understanding that he is satisfied with this outcome and we are happy we were able to address his concerns.

LISA DAVIS
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
NATIONAL MOTOR COACH/
COACH-NET
IRVING, TEXAS

Thank you very much for helping me. I have received my reimbursement check from Coach-Net. Without Hot Line's help that would not have happened.

VIRGIL DUTTON

GENSET UPSET

Needing assistance in working with a factory-direct RV manufacturer on equipping their new motorhome, two readers sought Hot Line's help. They wrote:

Last year we traded in our 2011 Nexus Viper for a new 2013 Nexus 27V Class B

motorhome. Part of the deal was that we were to receive a 4.0 kW Generac generator, which was to come as standard equipment. I told Claude Donati, president of Nexus RV, that we couldn't find a service center in our area for Generac. His response was, "I'll give you whatever you want. I'll give you an Onan instead." At that time, he made no mention of an additional cost for the substitution of an Onan for a Generac. Had he told us there would be an additional cost for the Onan product, we would have stuck with the Generac.

When we reviewed our buyer's agreement, we noticed \$1,499 had been added for the 4.0 kW Onan generator.

If the Generac 4 kW generator is still available, we would like to substitute it for the 4.0 kW Onan generator and get a refund for the \$1,499.

We value our relationship with Nexus RV, as the manufacturer and seller of our motorhome, and therefore hope that we can amicably settle our differences.

REUVEN AND SHEILA LEV-TOV
SILVER SPRING, MD.

Hot Line contacted Nexus RV on behalf of the Lev-Tovs. Within a week, we received the following reply from the president of Nexus RV. It read:

We have been in communication with Reuven and Sheila Lev-Tov throughout the entire process of dealing with this issue. At this point, it is my understanding that the Lev-Tovs have been satisfied, as both parties agreed to self-mediate. A settlement of \$499 to the Lev-Tovs was mutually agreed upon by both parties for any misunderstanding. The Lev-Tovs agreed and have since cashed the check, finalizing this issue. Thank you for Hot Line's assistance and concern for our customer. Nexus RV strives to offer 100 percent customer satisfaction.

CLAUDE DONATI
PRESIDENT, NEXUS RV
ELKHART, IND. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 10.

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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Speedometer Repair

I own a 2006 Monaco Windsor with a 400-HP Cummins diesel engine and an Allison transmission. The coach is equipped with a speedometer/odometer combination gauge. The odometer LED reads ERROR 1. The mileage won't appear and the trip button won't change the error code, nor will the trip mileage show. The speedometer works fine.

I called Monaco technical support and was told the combination gauge has to be replaced and the mileage would need to be programmed into the odometer by a speedometer company. Monaco's parts department told me it no longer stocks the gauge, but did provide me with the gauge manufacturer name — Beede Instruments. Beede Instruments told me it no longer stocks the gauge and it no longer has Monaco specifications to manufacture the gauge or to repair it. What can I do?

FRED SHELDON | MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.

There are a number of companies that should be able to repair it. Search online for "speedometer repair" to find a company. Be sure to call first to confirm they can repair it, and get an estimate before sending the unit to the company of your choice. Here are two suggestions: Speedometer Repair Guy, www.speedometerrepairguy.com, rebuilds electronic digital clusters and other components. So Cal Speedometer Repair, www.socalsspeedometer.com, repairs most 1992 to 2013 digital speedometer clusters and has hundreds of units in stock to use for parts.

TOWING PERFORMANCE

I have a 2004 Monaco Camelot PDQ 40-foot motorhome with a Cummins 400-HP diesel engine. It weighs 33,000 pounds and is rated at 10,000 pounds towing. I currently tow a 2000 Lexus RX300 on a dolly. I like this dolly setup, as it is fairly easy and quick to load and unload the car, the RX is light (3,500 pounds) and fairly short in length. I can hardly tell when I'm towing versus when I'm not.

Now I am considering a flat-tow configuration and would like to tow a 6,000-pound 4x4 GM truck. My question is about the weight difference. Will the heavier vehicle make a significant difference in the performance of my motorhome? People have told me the Cummins engine and Allison transmission are equivalent to what commercial truck haulers use and they pull trailers more than 30,000 pounds. How do you think doubling my towing weight will affect this coach?

GARY ARMSTRONG | HOUSTON, TEXAS

Many heavy trucks are powered by similar engines, but usually with manual transmissions with more gears. Still, you are within the manufacturer's tow rating and should be fine.

CUMMINS FAN NOISE

I recently purchased a 2008 Gulf Stream TourMaster 42-foot coach that has a 425-HP ISL Cummins engine on a Freightliner chassis. The motorhome

only had 17,000 miles on it and everything appears to be like new. I have added about 2,000 miles since.

When the engine is started cold, the radiator fan seems to cycle every 5-10 seconds between maximum and low speed. When in high mode, the airflow is noisy and can be heard inside the coach from the driver's seat, and I can feel a shudder when the fan cycles. After the engine is up to normal operating temperature, the fan speed seems to modulate and the noise is not noticeable. The engine temperature stays stable in the middle of the gauge range. Is this normal, or a breakdown in the making?

**ALAN STRIHAFKA
ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GA.**

The fan is hydraulically powered and controlled by a thermostatic valve, so that's where I would start looking for a cold-cycling problem. A shop that works on Cummins should be able to help you. Cummins owners with technical questions can contact Cummins' tech line at 800-DIESELS, or by email at powermaster@cummins.com. You'll need the eight-digit engine number, which is on a data plate near the driver's seat, and on valve covers or near the oil cooler connections.

ABS PROBLEMS

I have a 2004 Gulf Stream Super C motorhome and have a problem with the rear brake ABS sensors. The sensors have been replaced twice. When a sensor fails an alarm rings inside the coach, which is quite unpleasant. The sensors seem to be a special-order part. This is a gasoline-engine coach without air brakes, but the alarm sounds like a low-air alarm in a diesel-pusher. Any advice would be appreciated.

CURT PRYTUPA | HUDSON, FLA.

You didn't mention it, but I assume your motorhome is on a Chevrolet Kodiak 5500 chassis. If the wheel speed sensor fails there should be a diagnostic trouble code (DTC) of C0550 set. Take

CONTINUE ON PAGE 79

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MONACO TRAILING ARMS RECALL

Some time ago, *MotorHome* ran an article about replacing the trailing arms that had the name of another manufacturer, other than Navistar/Monaco. I am looking for the name of the company or a copy of the article. Any help would be fantastic.

WILLIAM ELSTER | HOT SPRINGS, ARK.

The Monaco recall in 2005 essentially includes any R4R or RR4R Monaco Roadmaster chassis produced after the 2002 model year, including Beaver models. The recall covers rear suspension trailing arms only on the R4R and RR4R chassis with "Monaco Gold" or "R-Way" suspension. If the trailing arm is 3-inch square tubing it is R-Way, which is part of the recall. It does not include suspension systems made by Neway or Reyco.

Many of the parts that were recalled in 2005 and replaced at that time are also failing because they were built too light. When Monaco went out of business, its liability for the recall ended. Therefore, owners are stuck with the bill. The new supplier of redesigned, beefed-up parts is Source Manufacturing in Portland, Ore., 541-935-0308, www.rv-chassis.com. The price is \$1,800 plus freight and they come with a lifetime warranty. Source is also planning to add an installation shop adjoining its manufacturing facility.

TREE SAP TIP

Regarding K. E. Peterson's letter "Tree Sap or Pitch Removal" in the March column, I discovered by trial and error a product that does a fantastic job on tree sap or pitch spots. Germ-X Hand Sanitizer removes pine sap. Dab a little Germ-X on the sap spot and let sit for a few minutes; wipe away using terry cloth. This product works so well you would think it was developed specifically for this use. I'm not a chemist, but I believe it is the high ethyl alcohol content (62 percent) that helps dissolve the sap, combined with the glycerin and soap action of the product that helps lift the sap spot from the vehicle surface.

Even sap spots that have been left on a vehicle for a couple of weeks lift off

quite easily. I always carried Germ-X for hand washing after handling the dump valves, and hoses, etc. Now I carry it just as much for sap removal duty. Germ-X is a common product that I normally buy at Walmart, but you can find it at just about any grocery store or pharmacy.

MARC JACQUES | ROCHESTER, N.H.

Thanks for writing, Marc. A lot of motorhome owners have this problem from time to time. This is a welcome tip.

EXERCISING THE REFRIGERATOR?

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I've stored my 2006 Trek (by Monaco/Safari) with Dometic refrigerator since mid-October 2012. I have driven the motorhome around occasionally to exercise the tires, chassis, engine, etc., and have regularly exercised the genset. I have no access to shorepower, but I have solar panels, so the batteries are all up to snuff. However, I haven't exercised the refrigerator by running it on LP-gas. A friend told me to run the refrigerator on LP-gas on the lowest setting from time to time; possibly every four to six weeks for 24-48 hours. The reason is to maintain and ensure long-term proper operation of the refrigerator.

Do I need to run the refrigerator occasionally in order to keep it in normal operating condition?

TOM MOSHER | MESA, ARIZ.

I have not heard of any recommendation to exercise an absorption refrigerator during storage and don't think it is necessary. However, insects seem to be attracted to the odorant that is added to LP-gas and sometimes spider mites, other spiders, wasps and so on will build a nest in the burner. To prevent mud daubers and wasps from building nests in and around your gas appliances, cover the vents. Carefully inspect the burner unit before returning the unit to service, and be sure to remove any vent covers.

FUEL STABILIZER ADVICE

My question is about maintaining the quality of the gasoline in my motorhome. I try to keep the tank full all the time, as I think that a partial tank of gasoline condenses, adding unwanted water. The coach is kept at home and is ready to go

any time. What is your advice on adding Sta-Bil or some other fuel stabilizer to the main fuel tank?

BOB WALTON | PLEASANT HILL, CALIF.

The gasoline does not condense. Water vapor contained in the air above the fuel can condense into liquid water when the air cools to a critical point, called the dew point. This water then drops to the bottom of the tank and can cause all sorts of problems. The best away to avoid this is to keep the tank full of fuel.

Sta-Bil and other fuel stabilizers are mainly intended to keep the fuel from becoming stale due to deterioration over time, although they may have additives to help reabsorb water, too. You can also use a fuel de-icer or the products sold as fuel system antifreeze as these contain alcohol that blends with the water and allows it to be burned through the fuel system like straight gas. I recommend using a fuel stabilizer when the coach won't be driven for several months. Follow the instructions on the container and use the amount recommended by the manufacturer.

CHARGING METHODS

I had trouble with my converter while dry camping at Martinsville Speedway last year. To charge my coach battery I ran the diesel engine in my Forest River Solera on a Sprinter chassis. This seemed to be a workable solution, and much quieter than my neighbors' noisy gensets. I did a rough estimate after refueling and didn't seem to use much extra fuel for the hours I used the engine/alternator combo. I'd like your opinion about this. Does it hurt my motorhome to idle for 40-50 minutes at a time? My 1995 Cummins diesel coach manual states not to idle more than a short time. Do you have any way of knowing the amp output of an alternator (such as the one in my Sprinter diesel) at idle speeds?

KEVIN SMITH | TUCSON, ARIZ.

I don't recommend idling the engine for long periods, and in some places there are laws against excessive idling of diesel engines. Always make sure that the wind is not blowing the exhaust into a neighbor's rig. I don't have a chart that shows alternator output versus engine RPM. However, you could hold an



PREVENT WATER SPOTS

Motorhomes look best after a good washing, but water spots can ruin that shiny finish. Using a soap such as Shurhold's Brite Wash, can help prevent water spots. Brite Wash is formulated to clean fiberglass, clear coat, metal, rubber and painted surfaces. The company said it cleans dirt, grease, salt and more without dulling finishes or stripping wax or polish. After washing, quickly dry the motorhome. Shurhold's 12-inch SHUR-Dry Flexible Water Blade is made of rubber so it molds to curved surfaces and helps eliminate water spotting. The SHUR-Dry PVA Towel can be used to wipe away any remaining wetness. According to Shurhold, it absorbs 50 percent more water than natural chamois.

Shurhold Industries, 800-962-6241, www.shurhold.com/rv

inductive ammeter against the battery cable when the engine is idling to determine the approximate charging rate. It should be OK for occasional use, but not as a permanent solution.

DETONATION PROBLEM

I have a 32-foot motorhome on a Ford E-450 chassis with a 6.8-liter Triton V-10 with a 4.88 rear axle. I tow a trailer with a small car on it and my gross combination weight rating (GCWR) is 18,800 pounds.

I have previously traveled the mountains of Colorado (7 percent grades to 11,145 feet) without a problem. The Tow/Haul setting on the transmission was used, it downshifted to first gear and the engine RPM stayed around 3,200. I was able to maintain 25 MPH. Last summer I was crossing Colorado on Interstate 70 when the engine pinged and knocked so hard I thought it was going to blow up. The transmission was in first gear but I could not get the engine to rev up to 3,200 RPM. I could barely maintain 10 MPH. When I

got to lower altitude, everything was fine.

I talked with other RVers and some recommended using premium 91-octane gasoline, while others recommended disconnecting and reconnecting the battery cables when approaching a mountain to get the engine's electronics to recalibrate for the higher altitude. I thought the new electronically controlled fuel-injected engines have a sensor that detects detonation and adjusts the timing to eliminate knocking.

ROBERT BORCHELT | KEARNY, MO.

You didn't mention whether there was a check engine light, or not. You should have had the engine checked with a scan tool for stored and pending trouble codes. After a while, these are deleted. Your engine is equipped with a knock sensor system, which should have retarded the timing to reduce or eliminate detonation. I checked with Ford's motorhome chassis division and it said there were no TSBs related to this occurrence as you described it. Therefore, since the problem hasn't reoccurred, I'm thinking it may have been due to a tank of bad gasoline. I suggest you do a trial run the next time you have a hot day to see if the problem recurs. If it does, take it right to a dealer for scanning and a check of current TSBs.

WINDOW SHADE REPAIR

I just bought a used motorhome with day/night pleated window shades. One of them is flopping down and I'm not able to raise it. I can't find the tension lines on either side to adjust the slides. Is there a way to repair it? It looks like there are only two screws at the lower inside of the valance and it looks like the top is screwed in place from the inside of the cabinet above, which has a bottom shelf affixed solidly above the base of the cabinet. I'm reluctant to tear into the shelf. Do you have any suggestions?

BILL PECK | PLACERVILLE, CALIF.

Sometimes mounting screws are well hidden, but you should be able to find them. This website shows the procedures involved: www.dirtyblindman.com/Help.htm#how. I hope this helps. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & POWERTRAIN, refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 10.

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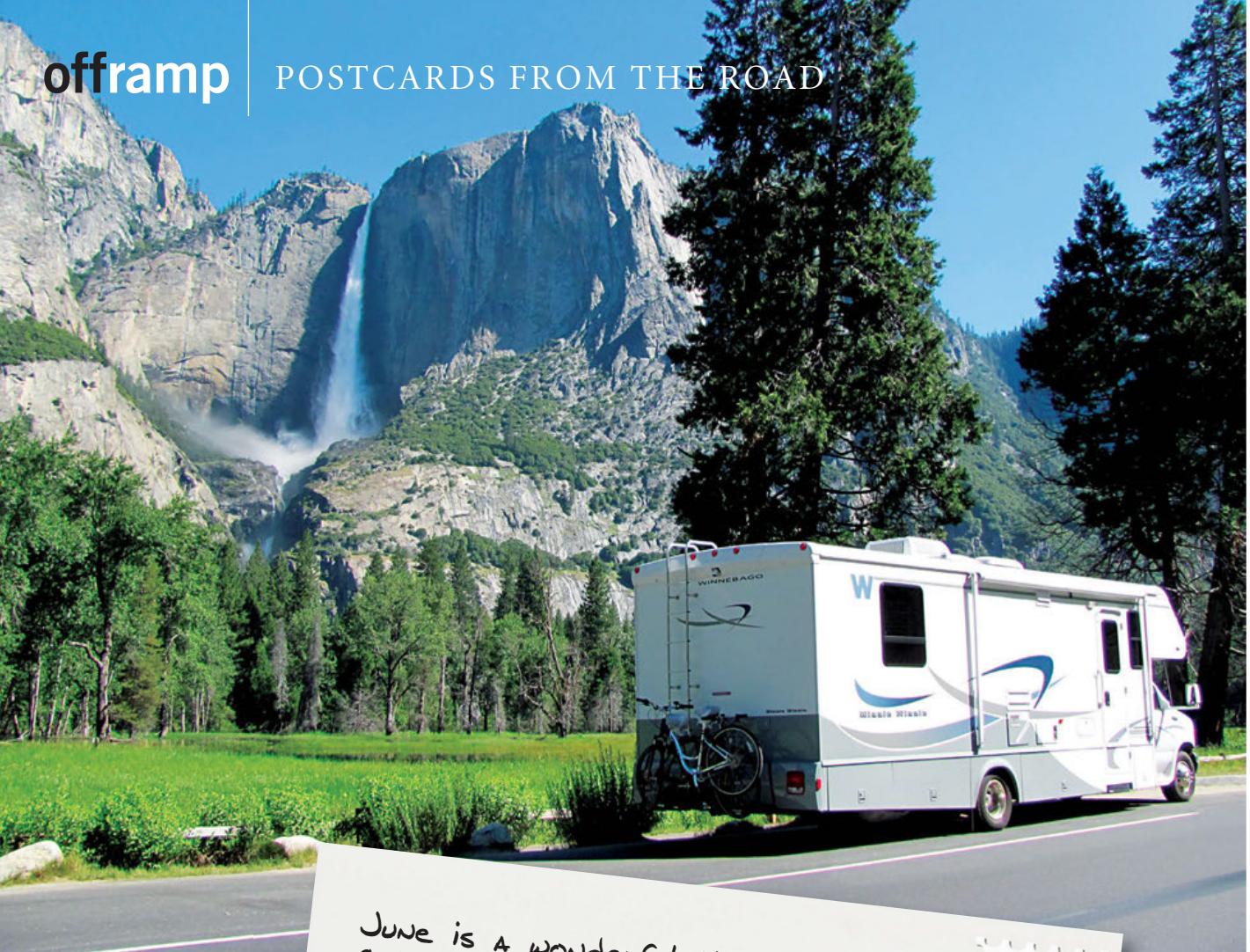


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June is a wonderful time to visit California's Yosemite National Park during any year, but 2011 was a record year for water flow in the park. With the huge winter snow pack, the waterfalls were just spectacular. This is our 2004 Mini Winnie in front of the 2,425-foot Yosemite Falls.

Joe and Anita Vande Kieft
Eagle Point, Oregon



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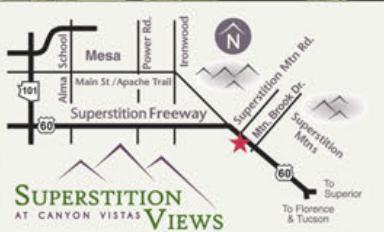
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