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Washington's Mount Rainier National Park is overflowing with activities for RVers and outdoor enthusiasts (see page 26).



Winnebago's new 24-foot Fuse is the company's first model built on the Ford Transit diesel cutaway chassis, and is offered in two floorplans. Pg. 16

4 ON RAMP

When is Too Much, Too Much?

6 P.O. BOX

MotorHome readers share their opinions

13 ESCAPES

Road Foodie, Wheels & Gear, Crossroads

58 QUICK TIPS

Handy time- and money-saving tips from fellow RVers

60 TECH SAVVY

Hands-On, Hot Line, Coach & Powertrain

74 THE ROAD AHEAD

People and places worth the drive

FEATURES

Loving Lake Tahoe.....20

Straddling the California-Nevada border, Lake Tahoe — the largest Alpine lake in North America — is overflowing with recreational opportunities year-round

Sweet Sensations.....26

Beat the crowds to Mount Rainier National Park with a shoulder-season trip to the Pacific Northwest

A Grand Time.....32

The second installment in our yearlong salute to the National Park Service takes us to the most awe-inspiring of all parks — the Grand Canyon

Escape Vehicle.....36

Winnebago's 2016 Sightseer 36Z lets you get away in style with plenty of room, and features, for families of all sizes

Let the Sun Shine.....40

Assembling and installing the ultimate state-of-the-art solar setup for boondocking with the help of AM Solar

DIY TV Swap.....50

A boob tube on the fritz doesn't have to put a kink in your vacation plans. Here's how to replace an old flat-panel TV while on the road

Level With Me.....54

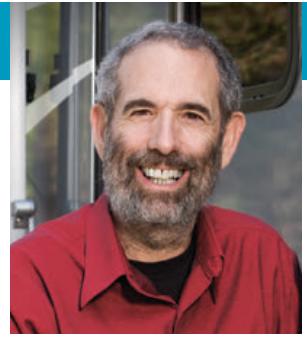
Installing HWH hydraulic leveling jacks makes for easier, faster campsite setup



ON THE COVER

Driving the new Winnebago Sightseer 36Z through the backroads of Southern California near Fillmore. Photo by Scott Hirko.

By Bob Livingston



When is Too Much, Too Much?

Living off the grid has an aura of romanticism that can only be appreciated by those who love adventure and the freedom to be unencumbered from the stronghold of utility companies. And while finding that little piece of utopia, unplugged from society's norm, seems to be faddish these days, motorhome self-containment has led that charge for decades. In the RV world, those who practice self-reliance are called boondockers.

Traveling to beautiful places, free from the crowds and everyday life is not new; campers have been doing this in their tents long before RVs. But the development of the RV created the ability to get away from it all without sacrificing comfort and conveniences. The popularity of motorhome self-containment confirms the fact that spending time outdoors is a lot more fun when you're not sleeping on the ground and taking a sponge bath next to a freezing cold stream.

After reading the letters in this month's P.O. Box (page 6), it's clear that there are two factions when it comes to the necessary level of self-containment and comfort. For many people, there are simply too many superfluous components in today's motorhomes. I'm sure it's easy to make a case that we don't "need" ceilings with mirrors, fancy furniture, luxury flooring, four big-screen TVs, king-size beds and two bathrooms.

On the other hand, the manufacturers are responding to customer demands when they build in all the extra luxuries that are typically found in most motorhomes. You just don't find many bare-bones motorhomes these days, even in the Class B and C lines, which have evolved pretty quickly into well-equipped machines with plenty of creature comforts. And the idea of swapping some of the luxury for better quality, as suggested in a few letters, should not be necessary; I think amenities and quality can be compatible as long as the manufacturers respond positively to consumer demands, which will drive that direction.

I've always been enamored with the concept of self-containment. From the first time I took a motorhome to a remote location, streamside in California's Sierra Nevada, I was hooked on having all the comforts of home in an unhooked environment. Propane

and water could always be rationed, but keeping the batteries charged was more problematic without the use of a generator. We made it work, but always had an eye on solar energy.

I installed my first solar system after meeting Greg Holder at a Life on Wheels Conference in the early 1990s. Holder is an off-the-grid energy expert and at the time was building his business, AM Solar, which has evolved into a primary supplier to the RV market. Holder is just as comfortable sleeping in a hammock in the South American jungle as he is living in his diesel pusher, which has wall-to-wall solar panels on the roof. He's not very fond of shorepower cords.

Holder and I have worked a number of projects over the years and our latest install (see page 40) demonstrated just how far the technology has progressed. Lithium batteries are the hot, albeit expensive, ticket these days and when combined with efficient panels that take up much less real estate and sophisticated electronics, the result is breathtaking.

For me, the independence afforded by a big solar system does not preclude travel to RV parks with full hookups; it gives me additional flexibility to stop at will and enjoy the systems that make motorhomes so livable. **M**

Contributors | February



Kristopher Bunker, the former editor of *Trailer Life* magazine, is an avid camper and has been RVing for more than a decade. He is currently a freelance writer living in the central Texas area



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Alan Rider has been wandering America's backroads for more than four decades, and is passionate about collecting memories of the remarkable people and unforgettable places he encounters.



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Have you noticed improvements in either the quality of the construction of motorhomes or the amenities offered? Which one is more important to you and why?

That's the question we asked in our November 2015 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.



Build-quality Blues

With a Ph.D. in production engineering and as the owner of a 2003 Class C and a 2015 Class A gas motorhome, I fully agree that motorhome manufacturers should invest more in build quality and a little less in glitz.

I just gave the manufacturer the feedback that I would have been more than happy to have invested \$5,000 more into the new unit and not have to worry what's next to fall down or apart.

Generally, both units are a great value for the money and engineered well for their price point. Improving the chassis and construction would quickly cost tens of thousands of dollars and there are always offerings of that sort, if one can afford them. My major hassle is with rivets missing, poor paint or glue jobs, incomplete sealing,

etc., which are frequent annoyances and might cause significant secondary damage. Proper diligence and a few more hours during manufacturing could avoid these faults.

Rolf P. Maisch | Boppelsen, Switzerland

Less is More

Quality, quality, quality! Glitz is great, and I will admit to being as impressed with stuff as anyone; however, after being an owner of a Class A diesel pusher for the past 10 years — one built by a manufacturer known for its quality — I will go for quality over glitz any time.

Most of the RVs available utilize the same components from the same suppliers, which is where most problems come from. Generally speaking, it's not the motorhome itself that breaks down, it's the components

— air conditioner, refrigerator, power awnings, leveling jacks, etc. Of course we can't expect these products to last forever, but what we should be able to expect is that these items can be repaired or replaced by competent service facilities. To me, that seems to be where the largest problem exists, finding qualified service. And I live in Elkhart, Indiana! Fortunately, I can take my coach to the manufacturer for service work, as long as I make an appointment weeks or months in advance. But at least then I feel that I will receive a qualified repair.

Realizing that service is an issue on the components in my coach, I am comforted by the knowledge that I do not have all of the latest and greatest components. Keeping the glitzy items that I do have in good working order

Featured Letter

Random QC Testing

I have been a Good Sam member since 2013 and have owned two motorhomes. Our second one took about nine months before all the bugs were worked out. We had issues with the GPS, power-management system, carbon-monoxide detector, hot-water tank and others. Seems to me that these units should be tested prior to delivery — and at the factory, on a random basis — just to ensure that the equipment installed is working as intended. I realize things go bad, but to have problems right out the front door is a little much. Our GPS unit displayed "looking for GPS signal" on delivery. It took two dealer visits to find out there was no GPS antenna installed!

You can send this to the coachbuilders with my phone number.

Joe Sedlock | Spring Lake, Michigan





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seems to be a big enough challenge. I love my motorhome and I love the travel opportunities this lifestyle offers, but for me, less is more!

Keith W. Berg | Elkhart, Indiana

Build a Simple, Inexpensive and Reliable Product

Clearly there are certain manufacturers (in each RV segment) that year after year produce a consistently high-quality and reliable product. But even they sometimes add a lot of frilly fluff to justify a higher price and profit margin. My advice to them is to leave all that extra stuff off, but have it available to the few who actually want it — and continue to build a good, reliable product at a fair and decent price.

Then there is the rest of the field. Unfortunately, this seems to be the majority of the builders. A lot of people buy several RVs in their lifetime. Manufacturers know this, but

better than our previous coaches; however, the dealer prep and service department have fallen behind. After delivery, we went over the coach front to rear and top to bottom. We returned to the dealership that day with a list of more than 30 items that needed attention before we could take the coach out for a shakedown trip. All but one or two of the items should have been taken care of by the dealer prep, including loose trim and molding, a door that didn't lock, an awning that didn't open, shades that didn't function properly, an inoperative cooktop burner, etc. This coach had been in the dealer's inventory for almost a year and had been taken to several shows.

We have had the motorhome almost a year and it has been in the shop two-thirds of the time we've owned it, the majority for repeat items.

**Jerry and Karla Vasser
Menifee, California**

in the right spot so everyone can see it. We'd rather buy a quality-built unit than pay extra for an outside entertainment center with attached kitchen. We would prefer the storage space instead. Amenities are great, but they don't keep your feet warm at night.

**Bruce and Joyce Brennan
Lansing, Michigan**

Ask Yourself ...

I would rather have a good-quality coach with quality mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems than one with all the glitz furnishings, four TVs, etc. Questions you need to ask yourself: How lazy are we? Do I really need four TVs? Have you looked at your electrical compartment lately? Do I really need my RV to be furnished better than my home? Do I really need to spend time and money on maintaining so many systems and gadgets?

I believe in enjoying my trips with a

“Generally speaking, it's not the motorhome itself that breaks down, it's the components — air conditioner, refrigerator, power awnings, leveling jacks, etc.”

continue to build unreliable RVs that are all “dressed up” to appear to be something they are not. What kind of business model are they using that all but guarantees that a customer will eventually sell their RV and switch to a different make? With the recent surge of RV sales, dealers and manufacturers seem much more focused on profit than on quality and repeat customers.

There will always be a segment of people who want lots of bells and whistles, but for the rest of us, just build a simple, inexpensive, dependable product that doesn't spend half the year in the repair shop.

I think that RVs only have a 1-year warranty because so many dealers believe that is the longest they can go without significant repairs. Unless customers start talking with their wallets, it will be hard to change the mindset of RV manufacturers.

Bob Andrews | Lake Wales, Florida

Dealer Prep Needs Improvement

Our 2014 Itasca Meridian 40U is built

Cold Feet

My wife and I own a 10-year-old Class A motorhome on a Workhorse chassis, and we have been considering a new motorhome. We attended an RV show at the RV/MH Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Indiana, in 2015 and then went to a show in Detroit. Our findings at both shows were a waste of time. The motorhomes we toured had to be their bottom-of-the-line units. We couldn't believe how cheaply made these coaches were, not only in construction, but also in fit and finish, and décor.

From form-fitting plastic dashes to the master bedroom where you have to scoot up the bed to sleep, and all that tile on the floor (climb out of bed on a cold December morn and see how that feels on the tootsies!). And how is it that a Ford V-10 — an engine that has consistently achieved between 7-8 MPG — is in every gas unit out there? I don't think that buying a gas Class A at this point is even worth it.

As far as amenities go, manufacturers still can't manage to get the TV

quality RV that requires less repair and maintenance. I am shopping for a little larger coach, but too much glitz in the new ones is making it hard to do.

Paul Namkoong | Hollister, California

Dealer-Lot Decoration

We purchased a new Four Winds Super C motorhome last May in Oklahoma City and drove it six hours to our home in Missouri. By the time we got home, a wall had cracked from ceiling to floor, a piece of ceiling trim had fallen off, the bathroom door would not stay shut, the vent fan stopped operating, and the freshwater drain line was plugged somewhere inside the coach.

We took it to the dealer and got it back in July because the manufacturer would not ship the wall panels for repair.

We took the motorhome out on a weekend camping trip in September for the first time. All of the external storage compartments leaked water into the storage area during a rain. We opened one compartment and had an

inch of water sitting inside. The floor of the largest storage area had separated from the wall so that anything inside would fall out onto the road during travel. The rubber wheel-well liner on the rear tires wasn't fastened well and came loose so that the tires shredded it to pieces. The motorhome is back at the dealer waiting on Thor Industries to approve repairs.

The question was whether I would like more bells and whistles or better quality. Better quality definitely gets my vote. If it was put together better, I might actually get to use the motorhome for camping instead of decorating the dealer's service lot.

We enjoy reading your magazine. Keep asking good questions.

Randall and Sharon Thompson
Bolivar, Missouri

RVs Need TLC Too

My friend and I each have 32-foot Class A's, about 15 years old. His is gas-powered while mine is diesel. His is from a very popular and very experienced manufacturer while mine is from a less experienced, more high-end company. You would think mine the better motorhome, but for two differences. He is the second owner and bought from the original owner, who is also a good friend. The motorhome has had TLC its entire life; it looks and runs like new after 75,000 miles. Mine was treated badly, vandalized and lived in on a stationary site for a year. It needed an engine overhaul after only 48,000 miles. I feel that good, functional design is more important than bling, but that good care is more important than either.

Tom Muller | Poland Spring, Maine

A Matter of Time

We have noticed a decrease in construction quality of production-line rigs. And from our experience, it is not limited to just one company or one brand. Many production-line companies are having construction quality-control issues.

When the bottom [of the economy] fell out in 2008, many shops closed down or cut back considerably. That put

a lot of experienced and well-qualified workers on the street and forced them to seek employment in other types of professions. When the economy started to pick up in recent years, some of the shops that closed were taken over by other companies that resumed production. Companies that had cut back started to ramp up and hire again. And with lower fuel prices, more rigs are being ordered, and on paper things look great. But the loss of all those experienced workers has most of the current production being performed by workers with less than three years of experience and at worst by workers coming right off the street learning their trade on the job. And, unfortunately, construction quality of production-line rigs has suffered.

Walk into most any dealership, repair facility, even motorhome collision and paint shops, and you will likely see as many new rigs getting warranty work as older rigs being repaired or modified. Some manufac-

turers are pushing new rigs out the door as fast as they can make them, hoping the dealers can fix, repair and resolve any of the quality-control issues. Some dealers have refused delivery of new rigs coming directly from the factory because of construction quality-control issues. It will get better with time and effort, but for now, construction issues are a problem.

Sandy Donovan and Dick Kashdin
Buffalo, New York

Keep it Together

I would gladly give up high-end features if I could be sure that the screws would stay tight and nothing would fall off at the worst possible time! The problem is no manufacturer will offer such a thing because they all claim that they build them correctly in the first place.

It would be an interesting (and risky) marketing strategy to sell a motorhome with the motto, "Ours won't fall apart," when every part of that coach looks spare and simple as opposed to modern



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and luxurious. I, however, would surely be interested in that model.

Robert Freggiaro | Stockton, California

Anonymous Angst

Last January, we purchased what we thought was a quality, higher-end 2015 37-foot Class C diesel motorhome, but we have had so many problems with it! On our first trip, as the sun went down, we realized the headlights had

not been aimed. The following day, the seal around the entry door came loose and later the door jam came loose and rattled and squeaked. My first shower was nothing more than lukewarm water. The water heater was an in-line model that had a maximum temperature of 102 degrees. The water heater is located in the far back of the RV and 20 feet away from the shower and the kitchen sink. We couldn't get

hot enough water to shower or to the sink to wash dishes. Poor engineering to say the least!

Over the next six months we had to replace the sound system/GPS in the dash, the main TV and the converter. In all three cases, the items were obsolete so it took forever for them to find something that would fit the coach. The satellite dish didn't work because the wiring wasn't hooked up behind the TV. The awning vinyl is cracked all the way across.

It is supposed to have a cold-weather package, but our water pump froze numerous times when it got a little below freezing at night. One of the electric window switches in the cab quit working. The hot-water handle in the shower stripped out right away. We had to have the latch on three drawers replaced because they were not installed to line up with the latch. We have had the latches on the closet doors replaced twice and they are broken again.

We have learned a hard lesson with this coach. Having had this brand of RV before, we assumed it would still be a good-quality RV. We were astonished with the lack of quality hiding where it can't be seen and the lack of planning and engineering behind this coach. The manufacturer has certainly cut corners where you least expect to find it. Most of these problems have been covered under warranty, although it takes 60-90 days to be reimbursed.

Since I do not want to jeopardize any future warranty work on the RV, I thought it best not to release our name or the make and model of the RV.

Unhappy Campers

Corrections

In the November 2015 issue, "Plug That Leak" on page 16, erroneously stated that the Stop & Go Tire Plugger was designed for use on motorhome tires. The product only works on automobiles, travel trailers and fifth-wheels.

Also, in the December 2015 issue, the Quick Tips illustration for the "Label Linking" tip is incorrect. The cable marked 1+ and 2- in the illustration should have a break in the middle. This cable is used to connect

COMFORT ZONE | 04

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to the motorhome's 12-volt DC load. The primary purpose of the illustration is to show the labeling sequence; connecting cables in the way depicted in the illustration is incorrect and dangerous. *MotorHome* regrets the errors.

More Mudflap Flap

Regarding "Mudflap Flap" in the October 2015 Coach & Powertrain, there are other issues that should be considered when selecting and using mudflaps. For one, size matters. I have a 2007 Monaco Cayman diesel pusher. The coach has two sets of mudflaps. One short set of mudflaps is located directly behind the rear wheels attached to the wheel well. The other mudflap is a large, heavy, metal, decorative plate suspended near the rear of the coach. These two sets of flaps effectively stop rocks thrown from the tires toward my dinghy.

Placement of the mudflaps is critical. A large mudflap, placed too close to the rear wheels, can be driven over and ripped off when backing up. Too small and rocks will pass underneath.

A large metal-plate-type mudflap stops rocks from the tires. However, when traveling at highway speeds, the metal flap will "sail" to some degree from the air pressure on the forward-facing side. The rear side of the plate is an area of negative pressure, much like a vacuum cleaner. Should the coach traverse an area of loose gravel, as in a construction zone, the gravel will be sucked up at the rear of the metal mudflap. This debris can then be blown into the towed vehicle or, worse yet, it can be sucked up into the engine area by the rear-facing radiator pusher fan. These rock projectiles are far worse than a ding in the dinghy vehicle. Rocks sucked into the fan will be forcefully blown into the rear radiator causing punctures, coolant leaks and possible engine failure. I know, I replaced my radiator as a result of the factory placement of the rear mudflap plate. The area below the fan is now heavily screened.

John Kaehms | Lafayette, California

Moisture Mayhem

We are full-timers who camp-host in California during the rainy season in order to spend the holidays near family. We develop humidity problems inside the motorhome from taking showers, washing dishes, cooking, etc. Mold starts growing and walls get sweaty. What can be done to avoid this? Perhaps other readers have these issues.

Suzy Cramer | Via email

Question of the Month

What tips/tricks do you have for other RVers to combat mold and mildew buildup in a motorhome? Are there any products you've had success with, or does the "home remedy" route work better?

Send your comments to:

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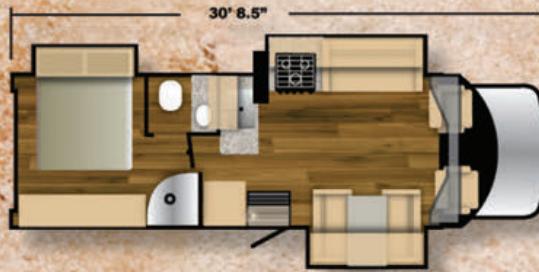
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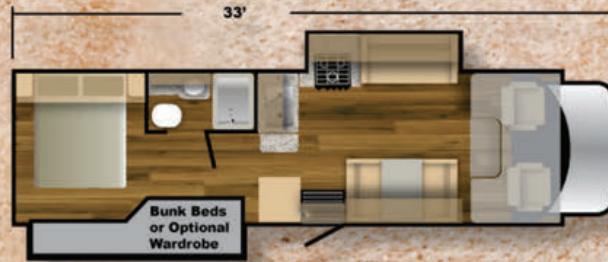
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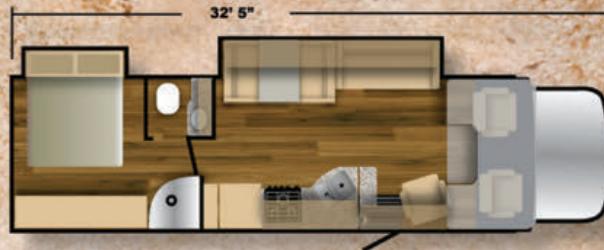
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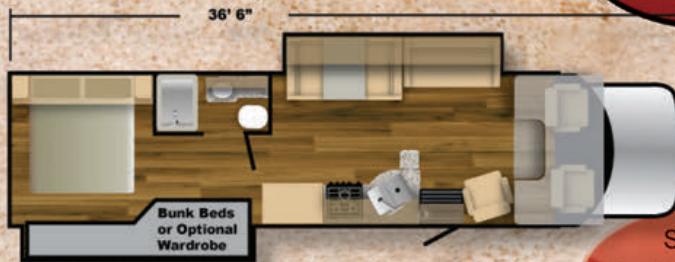
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14 ROAD FOODIE | 16 WHEELS & GEAR | 18 CROSSROADS



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Natchez, Mississippi, boasts more than 30 beautiful antebellum mansions and historic homes

By Morey Edelman

High on a bluff, overlooking the Mississippi River, sits Natchez, one of the premier places to view antebellum homes. Settled by French explorers in 1716, the town became a business and social center supported by cotton plantations in the surrounding countryside in the 1800s. This plantation society ended when the Union took over the town during the Civil War, but fortunately, most of the grand homes were saved from destruction.

Today more than 30 mansions are open for tours, including a number that still retain more than 90 percent of their original furnishings. Longwood, the largest home at 30,000 square feet, was never completed, as the Civil

War interrupted construction. The exterior of the six-story octagonal structure in the Oriental Revival style, topped with a Byzantine dome, today stands as a testament to this era in history. Melrose, in Natchez National Historical Park, is a complete mansion with much of its original furnishings. Other homes of special note include Stanton Hall, Rosalie and Dunleith.

In addition to private RV parks across the river in Louisiana, camping is available at Natchez State Park (10 miles north of Natchez), with 44 water and electric hookup sites, and 6 full-hookup sites.

For more information, call 800-647-6724 or go to <http://visitnatchez.org>.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Potato Lasagna: Easy, Filling and Tasty

The lowly potato, that inexpensive, readily available, and easy-to-store tuber, has gotten a bad rap. Most of us love potatoes, especially turned into silky mashed potatoes, crispy french fries, creamy potato salad, and, for many, potato pancakes eaten during the festival of Hanukkah. But ask almost anyone if potatoes are good for you and they'll say, "Not really and they're fattening."

Neither of those facts is true. Potatoes, which experts estimate have been cultivated and eaten by humans for 100,000 years, contain vitamins and minerals and phytochemicals, plant chemicals with disease-protective properties. In fact, one medium-size potato (skin on) provides 45 percent of the recommended daily value of vitamin C, 18 percent of potassium, 10 percent of vitamin B-6, and trace amounts of thiamin, riboflavin, folate, niacin, magnesium, phosphorus, iron and zinc. And some health experts say the indigestible part of the potato offers protection against colon cancer, improves glucose tolerance and insulin sensitivity, lowers cholesterol and triglycerides, increases satiety and may even reduce fat storage.

As for the fattening myth: A 5-ounce potato contains only 110 calories. It's not the potato that adds calories; it's the fat we fry them in and the butter, sour cream, bacon and other goodies we pile on potatoes that ups the fat and calories.

For RVers, potatoes are inexpensive and store well in a dark, cool cupboard. Pop them in the microwave (or oven) and add your favorite toppings for a hearty meal. Or boil and eat with a little butter or add to salads, scrambles, frittatas, soups and more. And you can visit museums dedicated to the potato in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and in Blackfoot, Idaho.

Here's a recipe for potato lasagna from Canada's Prince Edward Island (PEI). The island is famous for growing several varieties, including russets, and the thinner-skinned round whites, reds, yellows and blues. Adding potatoes allows you to cut the amount of meat (and fat) and gives this dish a satisfying chewiness. Using prepared marinara sauce makes preparation easy. This dish tastes even better the second day.

Got a great potato recipe, story or destination you'd like to share? Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com with "Road Foodie Potato" in the subject line.



From top: There's nothing quite like freshly dug potatoes. Purple or blue potatoes have a blue or purplish flesh that often retains its eye-popping color even after cooking.

Photos: Bobbie Hasselbring

POTATO LASAGNA

Serves 8



Photo courtesy PEI Potatoes

- 1 pound ground beef
- 6 cups potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ¼ cup green pepper, chopped
- 1½ cups mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups pasta sauce
- 1 teaspoon oregano, dried
- ½ cup low-fat Mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated

► Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Brown ground beef with onion, mushrooms, green pepper and garlic.

Add pasta sauce and oregano and cook until heated through. Arrange half the potato slices in a greased 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Spread with half the beef mixture, and sprinkle with half of the Parmesan cheese.

Layer the remaining potato slices and cover with the rest of the beef mixture.

Bake covered, until potatoes are tender, approximately 65 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining cheeses and bake uncovered for 5 more minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Variations: Add grated carrots and/or chopped broccoli florets to sauce.

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Winnebago Fuse

Winnebago's all-new Fuse is the company's first model built on the Ford Transit diesel cutaway chassis and has been designed to offer superior handling, visibility and road manners. Your choice of one of three engines — including a 185-horsepower 3.2-liter diesel engine (23T) — and a 6-speed automatic transmission make for smooth sailing, while the Fuse's relatively compact size promotes easy maneuverability. But don't let its size fool you; the Fuse packs in all the amenities expected in rigs larger than its 24-foot footprint. Laminate countertops and a decorative backsplash with indirect lighting couple with LED lighting to help set the mood in the interior, which can be selected with dual twin beds (23A) or a single queen (23T). Both floorplans feature additional sleeping positions up front. A 32-inch TV is standard in the living area. The lav features a retractable shower screen and fiberglass sink molded into the countertop. Outside, the Fuse has lighted storage compartments and an optional bike rack. MSRP starts at \$95,000.

Winnebago, 641-585-3535, www.winnebagoind.com



Road Trip!

We all have our own ideas on how to entertain the family on long trips, but even the most primitive-leaning RVers recognize the value of the boob tube when it comes to kiddos. To help keep things calm and civilized in the coach, allowing you to concentrate on the driving, Winegard's Road Trip T4 provides 100 percent automatic, easy one-button operation, with full in-motion tracking capability, resulting in true TV on the go. The newly updated design is said to reduce video noise and improve satellite-tracking capabilities. The small unit measures 14.3 inches in diameter, is only 13.5 inches tall and weighs 10 pounds, making it easy to install virtually anywhere on the motorhome's roof. Dual coaxial inputs allow the RT T4 to accommodate two receivers or a single dual-tuner DVR. Available in black or white, the Road Trip T4 is compatible with DISH Network, DirecTV and Bell TV programming. MSRP: \$1,399.

Winegard, 800-288-8094, www.winegard.com

It's a Bird ... It's a Plane ...

It's Super Hybrid Refrigerator, the new 9-cubic-foot fridge from Dometic that features two separate, independently controlled compartments that run on different power options, offering maximum versatility while on the road or in camp. The upper, fresh-food unit stays cool using absorption technology capable of running on either LP-gas or electricity, utilizing an evaporator size three times that of standard RV fridges, according to the company. With five adjustable shelves and enough door space for half-gallon or 2-liter containers, the upper unit is ideal for keeping food cool while on the road. The lower, modular drawer freezer/fridge is run by a variable-speed compressor that operates on 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC power. The bottom drawer can be set to deep-freeze or refrigerate, and can easily be turned off when not needed. Its stainless-steel slides hold an oversize basket capable of handling up to 100 pounds. MSRP: \$2,499.



Dometic, www.dometic.com

Truma Tablets

RVers whose motorhomes have been outfitted with an on-demand water heater know that calcification can be an annoying problem, as mineral-rich hard city water combined with smaller-diameter pipes in these units can lead to a dramatic reduction in performance. To combat the scaly residue in its AquaGo water heaters, Truma has announced the release of AquaGo decalcification tablets. The control panel notifies the user when decalcification is recommended, at which point the owner inserts the tablets into the AquaGo unit's reusable stainless-steel filter cartridge. The panel then guides the user through the entire process using easy-to-understand LED signals. The tablets have undergone extensive testing to ensure positive decalcification results. AquaGo tablets will be available this summer. The MSRP was unavailable at presstime.



Truma, www.truma.net



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No. 1 in specialty RV insurance from 2013 Millward Brown national survey data.



Photo: James Richardson

Townsend, Tennessee

Logging the Smokies

The Little River Railroad and Lumber Company Museum, which contains several original buildings, an engine and caboose, and a water tank, is located in Townsend, Tennessee, one of the gateway towns of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The museum preserves the history of the area's railroad logging company. Townsend was the site of a sawmill that logged huge portions of what is now the national park, from 1901 until 1939.

The Little River Lumber Co. owned more than 76,000 acres of forest land, but in 1925, Col. W.B. Townsend, for whom the town was named, sold all of his holdings to create part of the national park, but continued to harvest lumber within the park until 1938. The company closed in 1939.

Townsend has several RV parks, including Big Meadow Family Campground (865-448-0625, www.bigmeadowcampground.com), which was rated as one of the nation's top RV campgrounds in 2015 by the Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory.

For more information, call 865-661-0170 or go to www.littleriverrailroad.org
— James Richardson

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Get the Scoop on Caterpillar

Caterpillar, the company that helped create the Panama Canal and is now extracting oil from the sands of Canada, is the world's leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment. Its visitor center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, certainly highlights the company's engineering achievements, but is also a fun place to visit and marvel over the impressive equipment. It's also free.

The quirky name came from the origins of the company. It started with farm equipment and when the huge wheels kept getting stuck in mud, Benjamin Holt knew there had to be a better way. He came up with it; he replaced the wheels with a set of tracks. These Holt-type tractors were called "Caterpillars" after the way they moved across the ground. Caterpillar Tractor Co. was formed in 1925 and it's been growing ever since.

There is little that is small scale when it comes to earth digging and moving equipment, but the models are fascinating in their intricate detail. Visitors are greeted by a

replica of a mining site complete with scaled-down models of equipment working on an excavation.

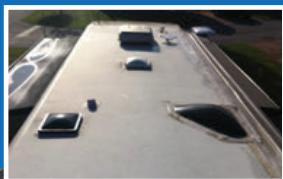
Screens located throughout the center highlight the company's equipment on the job. The shovel simulator is one of the best interactive exhibits — it's complicated and realistic. Similar models are actually used to train operators on these behemoths. Also on display is a model of Big Muskie — the largest single-bucket excavator ever built.

The center is open weekdays, and is located in the Heritage Building at Caterpillar's South Milwaukee campus.

For more information, call 414-768-4001 or visit <https://mining.cat.com/south-milwaukee-visitors-center> — Neala McCarten **M**



Photo: Neala McCarten



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Loving Lake Tahoe

Crystal-clear waters, stunning natural beauty and plenty of recreational opportunities highlight this shared treasure on the Nevada-California border

By Ken Reid

In 1970, my wife, Gayle, our two kids, and German shepherd, gave up tent camping for good and piled into our first RV for a road trip. Fast-forward 45 years and Gayle and I are loading up our third motorhome for another of many hundreds of adventures. We had been to Lake Tahoe before, but it had been at least 25 years since our last visit. The plan this time was to meet up with our daughter and son-in-law, and spend a week at Lake Tahoe, straddling the border between Nevada and California. If you have a bucket list, visiting this amazing resource should at least be close to the top.

More than 6,000 years ago, Lake Tahoe — and some 10,000 square miles of land surrounding the lake — was home to Native Americans known as the Washoe. They protected and revered the land, but with the gold rush in 1848, a large number of nonindigenous people arrived in the area. The Washoe tried to resist encroachment for years. Their last armed conflict was known as the Potato War (of 1857). The end result was that a large number of starving natives were killed just for taking potatoes from an area farm.

During many years of traveling by motorhome, Gayle and I have been able to find something we liked about virtually every place we've visited, but rarely have we encountered a setting that moved us like Lake Tahoe. With 191.6 square miles of beautiful azure water, at an elevation of 6,225 feet, Tahoe is not only the largest Alpine lake in North America, but is the second deepest. This wonder of nature is exciting to behold. It is probably best described as awe-inspiring. For us, that certainly was the case. From our first sighting while descending into the Tahoe Basin, we wondered why it had taken us so long to return.

If you seek quiet and peaceful serenity, there is a wide variety of settings to choose from. But if you're looking for action and recreational opportunities, you certainly won't be disappointed either. One important thing we have learned is that there is just so much to see and do that most people

Getting Here ➔ Lake Tahoe is located on the California/Nevada border. South Lake Tahoe is 103 miles northeast of Sacramento, California (take U.S. Highway 50 east), and 62 miles southwest of Reno, Nevada (take Interstate 580 south to Highway 50 west).



will want to take at least two trips: one to the southern part, and one to the North Shore area; or one during summer and one during winter. Year-round, there are more than enough attractions to sustain the interest of virtually anyone, for a weekend, or even several weeks.

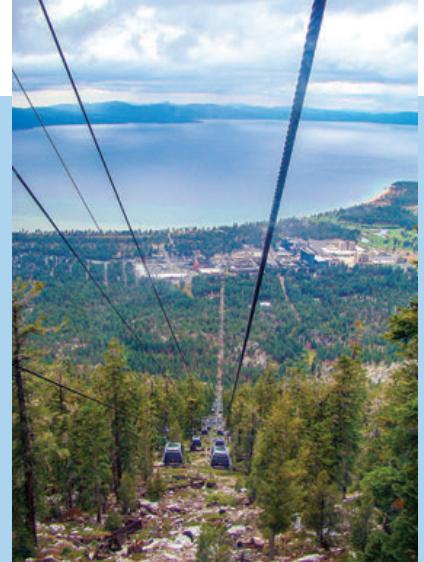
This trip we decided to focus on the southern area, which for our purposes included Emerald Bay on the California side, Zephyr Cove on the Nevada side and all of the area in between. The least complicated way I can think of to explain how to reach that particular part is: Get on Highway 50 somewhere between Sacramento, California, and Fallon, Nevada, then follow it to South Lake Tahoe. We chose to visit during the summer season (which generally runs May through September). However, winter affords at least as many venues, attractions and vistas in that same area of the lake. But most are of a completely different type due to weather conditions.

The first thing we did was to settle on a base camp. Our plan was to do daytrips in our dinghy and on bicycles. We had heard that Tahoe Valley RV Resort and Campground is located within an easy bike ride of the lake. It is also just off U.S. Highway 50, within walking distance of where state Route 89 heads north, around the western shoreline, from what the locals refer to as “the Y.” Furthermore, Tahoe Valley RV Resort is open all year, which isn’t always the case for RV parks at higher altitudes. Nestled in the pines, with areas for walking and biking, and a relatively flat campground, it certainly met our

A view of Lake Tahoe’s South Shore from Heavenly Mountain Resort’s scenic gondola, which runs during the summer.

needs. It has plenty of sites that would accommodate any size rig, so our 35-foot motorhome and dinghy were an easy fit. It is centrally located to all the places we wanted to go, situated about halfway between Emerald Bay and Zephyr Cove. Though we didn’t spend a lot of time hanging out in the park, the expected amenities kept us entertained while there. Included among those were pickleball and tennis courts, volleyball, basketball, horseshoes and more. For the kids, there is a bicycle challenge hill, arcade and nice play area. There is even a heated outdoor pool. Wi-Fi can be accessed throughout the campground. Pets are welcome and there is a dog run. Everything was clean and well-maintained. There is even a trolley to the casinos.

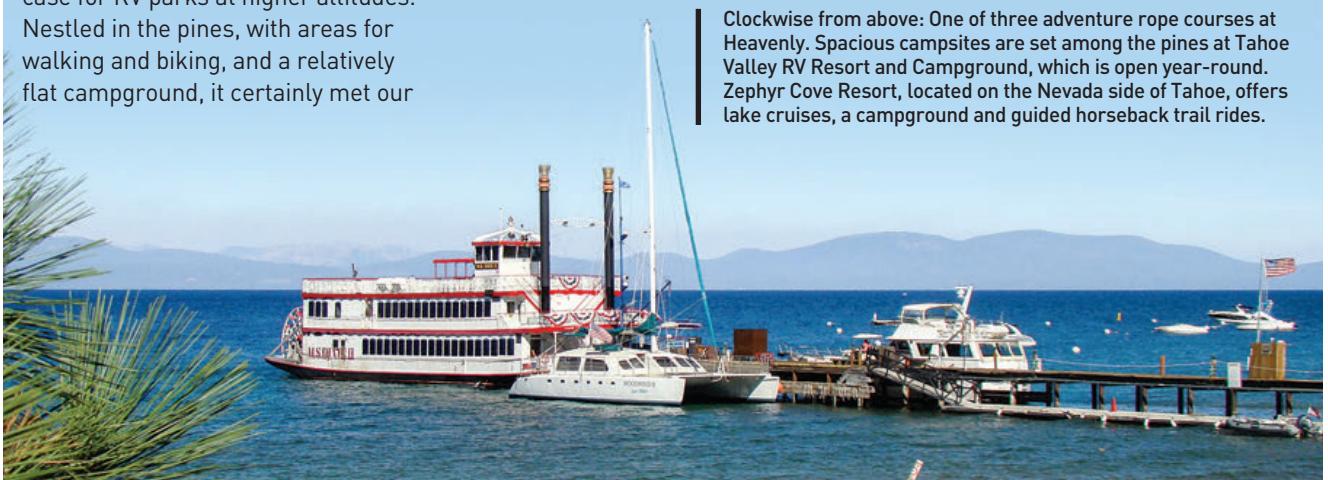
First on our to-do list was a visit to Emerald Bay State Park. This glacier-carved bay includes much more than just crystal-clear water surrounded by beautiful forest. One of the most interesting attractions for many is



known as Vikingsholm. In 1928, Lora Knight purchased the site at the head of Emerald Bay. She and her nephew by marriage, who was a Swedish-born architect, decided to create a splendid home using elements found in Norwegian farmsteads and wooden stave churches. Without disturbing any of the magnificent trees, and using construction methods and materials like those in ancient Scandinavia, they completed the task in 1929. This “home,” with its towers, intricate carvings, hand-hewn timbers, sod roof planted with grasses and flowers, and internal courtyard, looks more like a castle.



Clockwise from above: One of three adventure rope courses at Heavenly. Spacious campsites are set among the pines at Tahoe Valley RV Resort and Campground, which is open year-round. Zephyr Cove Resort, located on the Nevada side of Tahoe, offers lake cruises, a campground and guided horseback trail rides.



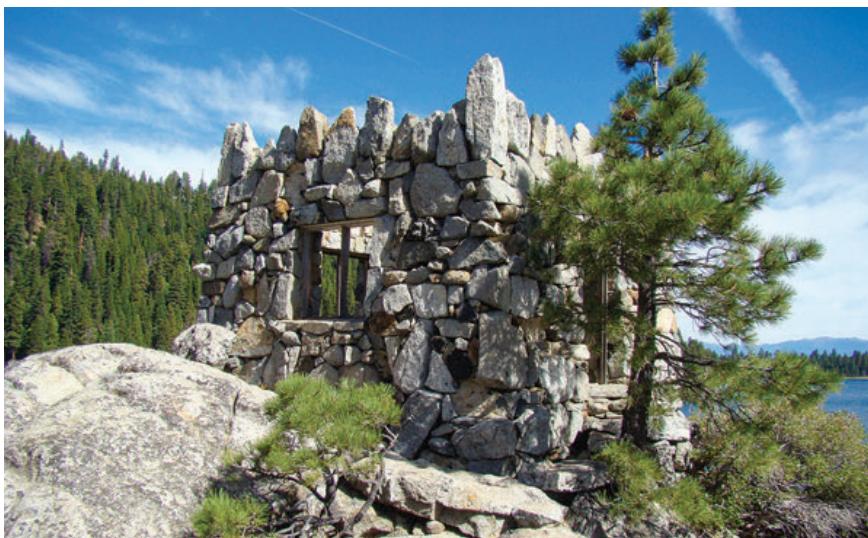
Authentic Norwegian and Swedish furnishings were created in detail, down to the exact measurements, colors and aging of wood. For a nominal fee you can take a tour of the inside.

The state park also includes Fannette Island, which is the only island in the lake. Sparsely covered with timber and brush, this granite hill rises up 150 feet. In 1929, Knight had a stone teahouse built on the top. She and her guests would take a motorboat to have tea. Originally there was a corner fireplace, large oak table and four chairs. Erosion and vandalism have taken a toll; only the stone shell remains, but you can walk to it and see virtually the same vista that those early visitors enjoyed. It is a fairly steep climb to the top after kayaking to the island.

All of Emerald Bay, and along much of the western shoreline to the north of the bay, is an underwater park. The cold, protected waters help preserve six shipwrecks, plus prehistoric sites where bedrock mortars and other artifacts can be seen. Officially opened in 1994, the underwater state park includes marked sites where sunken vessels constructed of massive ponderosa pine can be explored. Lake Tahoe's only boat-in camping, at the historic former location of Kirby's Emerald Bay Resort, provides another option for experiencing this unusual diving opportunity.

A very long time ago we visited Emerald Bay, both by ski boat and a paddle-wheeled vessel named the

Scenic Fannette Island, near the center of Emerald Bay, is the only island in Lake Tahoe and is accessible by boat, kayak or canoe.



Today, only the stone shell remains of the historic rock teahouse atop Fannette Island.

Tahoe Queen. This time we chose to walk from the scenic overlook parking lot on SR 89, down a mile-long trail that descends about 400 feet to the lake level. When driving there from the South Shore, this lot is approximately a mile beyond the Emerald Bay scenic overlook. Watch for a sign that includes the name Vikingsholm. There is a \$10 fee for parking; get there early because it fills up fast. For those with limited mobility, special arrangements can be made for shuttle service down to Vikingsholm.

We figured to take in anything we missed during two previous arrivals via the lake. It came as no surprise that we had missed quite a bit. Views on the way down are impressive — babbling brooks, waterfalls, ponderosa pines, incense cedar, Sierra juniper, quaking aspen, alder and willow provide spectacular cover. Wildflowers include

columbine, leopard lily, bleeding heart, and yellow monkey flower. You can walk in year-round, but seeing the wildflowers, touring Vikingsholm, scuba diving at the underwater park, and some other sightseeing opportunities are limited to summer months. Whatever the season, this place is definitely worth seeing.

In addition to appreciating the beauty of the environment, our next project was to get out on the water. Kayak Tahoe seemed to be our best option. There are five conveniently located beachside stations along the southern shore. We had a wonderful experience. The water is so blue and the views are so impressive, that we could have easily spent all day doing just this one activity! Of course we looked above and below the surface for the elusive Tahoe Tessie (the dragon-dinosaur rumored to lurk in Tahoe's

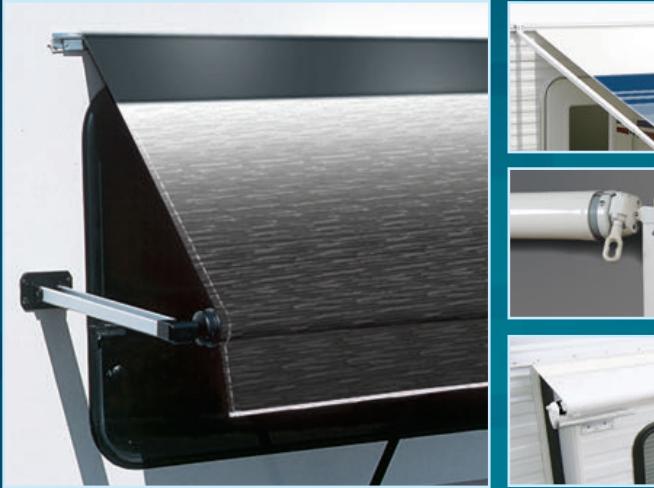


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GETAWAY

LAKE TAHOE

depths), but unfortunately for us, Tessie didn't want to be seen.

Next on the list was biking. South Lake Tahoe has been designated as a "bike-friendly community," so bike paths and rental shops are plentiful. Experienced bikers might want to try the impressive downhill track nicknamed Mr. Toad's Wild Ride (aka Saxon Creek Trail) or the Flume Trail. For hard-core bikers, there's a 71.5-mile loop around the lake, but that is well beyond our skill level. Less-than-superhuman specimens (like us) still have miles of beautiful and easier trails to explore throughout the area.

When it comes to hiking, I am more interested than Gayle, although she often comes along to be a good sport. I just want to see what is on the other side of things. The southern part of Lake Tahoe offers many well-maintained trails, from easy to really difficult. Granite slopes, hidden waterfalls and beautiful alpine meadows are among the attractions. For a real challenge, consider the 165-mile Tahoe Rim Trail.

Next on our list of things to do was the Heavenly Mountain Blue Streak Zip Line. To get there, take the 2.4-mile scenic gondola ride up Heavenly Mountain. Both are a bit pricey, but well worth it. After taking in the spectacular views from the gondola ride, the zip line affords an adrenaline rush while descending toward the lake at up to 50 MPH. Up to 150 feet above the ground, you travel 3,300 feet toward the lake, passing high above rope courses and the Tamarack Lodge, covering that distance in about one minute! We've done other zip lines (including Costa Rica and Labadee), and the Blue Streak ranks right up there with the best, not only offering a fun and exhilarating ride but spectacular scenery as well. It is open year-round. Nearby, you can zip down a 500-foot hill, with a 65-foot vertical drop, on a large inner tube, without snow or water. It is pretty neat, but only available during summer.

Horseback riding was also on our agenda for this trip. Though Camp

Richardson Corral was much closer to our base camp, we chose the Zephyr Cove Stables. They offer many choices, from a one-hour trail ride to package deals — including breakfast, lunch and dinner rides. Located about 4 miles east of the casinos on Highway 50, it is a very laid-back operation. Everyone working there who we encountered was friendly and helpful. We've owned horses in the past, and taken trail rides in plenty of other locations. Compared to those, it seems these folks have their act together better than most, and their stock looked better. We very much enjoyed all of the sights, sounds and smells while riding through the forest. But the outstanding views of the lake from above were even more impressive.

The nightlife at Tahoe's South Shore is also worthy of a visit. Beginning with the often-spellbinding sunsets (from shore and cruises) followed by gourmet dining, through the totally awesome shows in the casinos, this place truly rocks. You might even have to take a vacation from your vacation!

After experiencing the southern part of Lake Tahoe, there are all of the attractions at North Shore to check out too. And if that isn't enough to garner your interest, consider the diverse activities that can be experienced only in winter. Don't pass up Lake Tahoe. It is, for sure, a treasure worth sharing. **M**

➤ FOR MORE INFORMATION

Emerald Bay State Park
530-525-7232, www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=506

Heavenly Lake Tahoe
775-586-7000, www.skiheavenly.com

Kayak Tahoe
530-544-2011, www.kayaktahoe.com

Tahoe Valley RV Resort
530-541-2222, <http://rvonthego.com/california/tahoe-valley-campground>

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SWEET SENSAT

Washington's Mount Rainier National Park rewards visitors with a past, one-of-a-kind vistas and delectable local foods including suc

I have a real penchant for avoiding summer crowds when I set out on an RV trip. I'll go to almost any length to avoid the peak-season pack — and that's precisely what I had in mind when I paid a visit last May to Washington's Mount Rainier National Park.

My plan to explore the park was set in motion when I was invited to join a group on a Holland America Alaska cruise set for the first week in June. A perfect opportunity, I thought, to slip into Rainier — the only major national park in the West that I hadn't visited — during the last week of May with my

Canadian friend Melinda, who's always ready to go RVing, anytime, anywhere.

Admittedly, my research into the feasibility of such an early visit pointed to some limitations, including the probability of overcast skies and rain. Plus, only one of the park's three campgrounds would be open and

roadways through much of the mountainous, snow-packed interior of the 369-square-mile park would be closed until early June. Still, with the southwestern (Nisqually) entrance open to traffic, and with visitor facilities up and running in the popular Longmire and Paradise areas, I decided there would be enough to see and do to make for a worthwhile visit — well ahead of most of the 2 million folks who swarm the park each summer.

No wonder Rainier attracts so many visitors, considering its proximity



VISIONS

glimpse into its historic
culent blackberry pie

to more than 3 million people living within a couple of hours' drive of the park. It's no wonder either what draws people to the park — once you lay eyes on one of the most spectacular mountain peaks in America. Mount Rainier is a massive mountain, soaring 14,410 feet high and standing 8,000 feet above any of its neighboring Cascade peaks. On clear days its snowcapped summit can be seen from Seattle and most of western Washington, and sometimes from as far away as Portland and Victoria, British Columbia.

Rainier is an active volcano — one of the largest in the world — and one of five in Washington's Cascade Range, all located along the western edge of the North American



At the time of the author's visit, the glacier-fed Nisqually River — on the south side of Mount Rainier — was well below normal flow due to drought.

tectonic plate. Mount St. Helens was the last to blow its top, in 1980. Rainier hasn't erupted since the mid-19th century. Geologists don't expect it to do so anytime soon, although warnings of volcanic hazards are posted throughout the park. Hazards include unpredictable mudflows and glacier-generated floods. The big volcano's 25 major glaciers form the largest concentration of permanent ice on any U.S. peak south of Alaska.

Looking back on the park's early history, there is solid evidence of human habitation in the area of the park dating back at least 2,000 years.

Later, Native Americans, primarily members of the Nisqually, Puyallup, Cowlitz and Yakima tribes, visited the area seasonally to hunt and gather roots and berries. Regarding the mountain they called Tahcoma as sacred, and possibly fearing its volcanic potential, they rarely ventured above the snowline and based their villages well outside the present borders of the park.

The first (documented) white man to see the mountain was Royal British Navy Captain George Vancouver in 1792. He named



If You Go

Before heading out, check the road-status page on the park's website (www.nps.gov/mora/planyourvisit/directions.htm) as unexpected closures may occur at any time due to the ever-changing nature of the area.



the mountain, which he described as a “high, round mountain covered with snow,” in honor of his friend, Rear Admiral Peter Rainier. The first Europeans to explore the area of the present park (in 1833) were members of the Hudson’s Bay Company, which had a settlement near Tacoma. The first documented ascent of Rainier, by Hazard Stevens and Philemon Von Trump, occurred in 1870.

Among the area’s early settlers was Indianan James Longmire, who discovered some hot mineral springs in the southwest corner of the present-day park in 1883 and built a rustic resort, which became known as Longmire Springs. The resort attracted climbers and conservationists, among them naturalist John Muir, who vigorously advocated preserving Mount Rainier as a national park. Momentum began to build when, in 1894, the National Geographic Society, the Sierra Club, Appalachian Mountain Club and others petitioned Congress for the establishment of a national park. That happened in 1899, making Mount Rainier the nation’s fifth national park — after Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia and General Grant.

During its early days it was difficult to get to the park. In the first year, Rainier attracted only about 2,000 visitors. But in 1905, the Tacoma-Eastern Railroad built tracks to Ashford, just outside the Nisqually entrance, and soon thereafter built a hotel — the National Park Inn — at

Longmire. Vehicles could now access the park and by 1911, a road had been completed to Longmire and was soon extended 11 miles to Paradise, a mile-high flower-studded valley nestled on the south slope of the glacier-shrouded volcano that would soon become the park’s classic showcase.

Situated on a wooded rise overlooking the valley, the Paradise Inn opened in 1916. Built in the classic National Park Service Rustic style of the day, it was designed to tie in visually with the surrounding landscape by utilizing local materials such as fire-salvaged timbers, river rock and cedar shingles.

During the 1920s and ‘30s, development of the park took a great leap forward, aided by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which expanded the road network, built bridges and added visitor facilities. By the late 1930s, visitor numbers had increased to more than 50,000 a year.

A colorful chapter in the park’s history unfolded at Paradise during that same time period. Paradise gets

A major road system, navigable by all but the very largest of motorhomes, runs from the southwest entrance through the southern and eastern parts of Mount Rainier National Park.

more snow than just about any place in the country — averaging 680 inches a year — and winter sports enthusiasts pushed for development of a ski area. Concessionaires built a rope tow and later added a T-bar lift. In 1935, the U.S. Olympic downhill ski team held their tryouts at Paradise and the Army’s 10th Mountain Division trained there before being deployed to the Italian Alps during World War II. The National Park Service (NPS) eventually removed the lifts, deeming them incompatible with the wilderness nature of the park.

More recently, another major park development misfired when a new visitor center was unveiled at Paradise in 1966. A futuristic concrete behemoth that drew frequent comparisons to a

Right: Hikers tread the 5.5-mile round-trip Skyline Trail at Paradise in Mount Rainier National Park. Narada Falls, located near Paradise and the Henry M. Jackson Visitor Center, is one of the more accessible of the dozens of waterfalls in the park.



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From far left: Built using native timber, the handsome \$21.2 million Henry M. Jackson Visitor Center at Paradise serves as the warm, inviting heart of the Mount Rainier National Park visitor experience. The dining room at the 1916 Paradise Inn includes a restaurant and a small café; both are open May through early October.

flying saucer, it was a radical and controversial departure from the National Park Service Rustic style of other park structures. It also suffered a serious design flaw. The roof couldn't handle the copious amounts of snowfall, requiring up to 500 gallons of diesel fuel a day to heat the building sufficiently to melt the snow. It was torn down and replaced with a smaller, more energy-efficient, and far more appropriately designed visitor center in 2008.

The new \$21.2 million Henry M. Jackson Visitor Center, named in honor of one of Washington's longest serving and most influential U.S. senators, is a handsome multilevel layout, built like other park structures using native timber, and loaded with informative state-of-the-art exhibits. It ably serves as the warm, inviting heart of the Mount Rainier National Park

visitor experience.

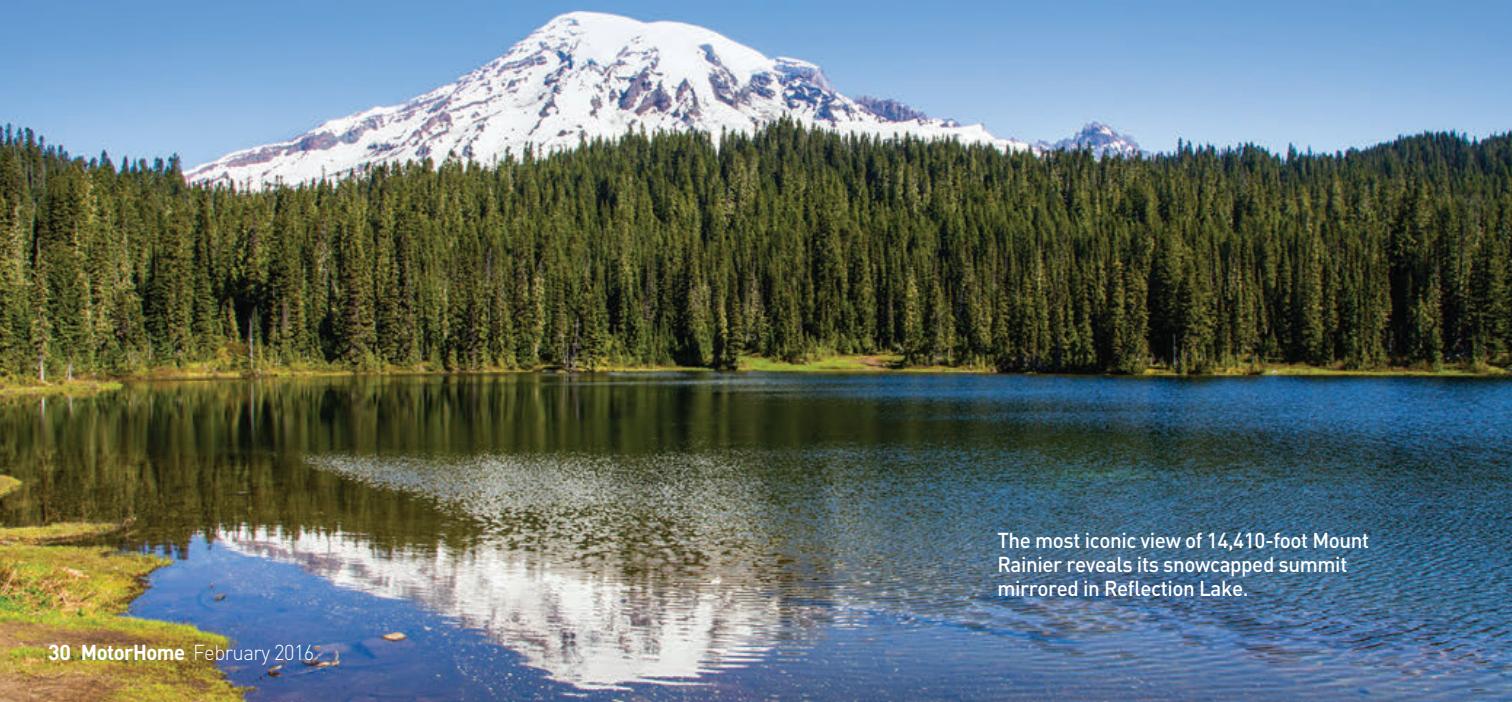
Our visit commenced, under cloudy skies, at the Nisqually Entrance, where my tattered Golden Age Passport sufficed for the \$20 entry fee. Immediately enveloped in a dense old-growth forest of giant Douglas fir, cedar, spruce and hemlock, we drove slowly — somewhat mesmerized as we passed through this veritable tunnel of towering trees — emerging after roughly 7 miles at Longmire.

We had no problem parking the Winnebago at the nearly vacant lot adjacent the National Park Inn, where we settled in for lunch. Dining within the park at this point of the season was limited to the two inns, so we were pleased with the excellent food and service here — Mel selecting a sesame shiitake mushroom wrap, while I downed a spinach salad and a platter of fish and chips. Following

lunch we checked out the Longmire complex — a National Historic District — comprised of a scattering of old log-and-stone buildings including a small museum, a 1920s gas station and the park's original administration building.

Next, we strolled down the 3/4-mile Trail of the Shadows that leads to the mineral springs and the site of James Longmire's resort hotel, which was demolished after the NPS purchased the property in 1919. A cabin built by Longmire's son in 1888 remains but the springs (named "Soda Spring" and "Iron Mike") have long been off-limits to bathers, by edict of the NPS, which apparently didn't want to get involved in providing spa facilities for park visitors.

Back in the motorhome, we drove along the Nisqually River for a couple of miles to Cougar Rock Campground. Before leaving home, I'd attempted to make reservations for our two-night



The most iconic view of 14,410-foot Mount Rainier reveals its snowcapped summit mirrored in Reflection Lake.

stay through the recreation.gov website, but was advised they weren't taking reservations until June 24 and that spaces would be available on a first-come, first-served basis until then. No worries, as only a dozen or so of the 173 sites were occupied.

Although the park's website specifies a maximum length for RVs of 35 feet, we were hard-pressed to find a site large enough to accommodate the 29½-foot Winnebago. The campground is situated in a heavily forested area with sites laid out around a series of oblong loops and the access roads leading into them are so narrow that we couldn't enter them — let alone maneuver into one of the sites. We finally found a space of sufficient depth on the outer perimeter of the loop nearest the entrance and wedged the Winnie into it.

The site was reasonably level and featured a picnic table and fire ring — but beyond that the only other facilities are toilets and a dump station. There are no hookups or showers. This applies to all three of the park campgrounds that accept RVs (the other two are Ohanapecosh and White River) — so in essence RV camping at Rainier is just one step above boondocking. Sites are, however, appropriately priced at just \$20 per night.

Wanting to see as much as we could of the park during our stay, we made the winding and stunningly beautiful 7-mile drive up to Paradise the following morning. We headed first to the Jackson Visitor Center where we watched a film about the park's human and natural history and perused the exhibits for an hour or so. Armed with hot chocolates from the center's cafeteria, we went outside to watch groups of climbers and their guides gearing up to climb Mount Rainier.

Reaching the summit involves an arduous 8- to 12-hour climb, gaining more than 9,000 feet in elevation, and it requires top conditioning and solid mountaineering and glacier (ice) climbing skills. All but the most experienced climbers are advised to sign on with a guided expedition.

We fell in behind one group for a

couple of miles up Skyline Trail, but turned back when the snow began topping our sneakers. The vistas from this trail are outstanding and would be even more so during midsummer when wildflowers carpet the landscape. I'm sorry we missed all the color, but I'll still say it was a small price to pay for outflanking the summer crowds.

Next on the day's agenda was Paradise Inn, where we marveled at

the Great Hall with its massive timber rafters, wraparound mezzanine and big stone fireplaces. The room truly epitomizes the grand old National Park Service Rustic-style architecture. Weary from hiking, we sat for a couple of hours sipping wine — serenaded by the inn's pianist-in-residence William Powell — playing a vintage piano that looked to be whittled out of logs, and is said to have been **(continued on page 67)**

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A GRAND TIME

Experiencing a truly unforgettable visit to Grand Canyon National Park requires more than simply stopping and staring

Last month, we told you that 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the National Park Service. To celebrate, we'll be bringing you a yearlong series of unforgettable experiences — from mild to wild — that are unique to America's national parks. Places where we sincerely hope you'll Find Your Adventure in the months ahead.

It is perhaps America's best-known natural wonder. But few of the 5 million people who visit Grand Canyon National Park each year ever do more than stare down into the canyon's depths from overlooks along the rim. Then it's back in the car and on to the next destination on their vacation itinerary.

Which is a shame when you realize just how many unforgettable experiences there are to be had in this spectacular swath of northern Arizona.

To prove our point, allow us to suggest a few must-do adventures for any motorhome traveler contemplating a multiday visit to this dramatic national park.

On the Rim

Rather than the typical visitor's routine of popping out of the car for a quick look around, the best advice we can offer you is to slow down. Luckily, Grand Canyon National Park's popular South Rim offers several pleasant ways to do just that. Park the motorhome in Lot 1, which has pull-through spaces for RVs.

Walking part of the 13-mile Rim Trail that extends from Yavapai Point east of the main visitor center to Hermits Rest is a good way to start. The section that begins just west of Bright Angel Lodge is especially nice, as it offers a paved surface and shade from the hot desert sun. Shuttle buses here also allow you to catch a ride to a viewpoint farther up the road if you find you're temporarily maxed out on marching.

If wheels are more your speed, Bright Angel Bicycles, located across the plaza from the Grand Canyon Visitor Center, offers both bike rentals and guided tours. It also



South and North Rims

A 277-mile-long canyon separates the park into South and North Rims. Although the average distance across the canyon is only 10 miles, it's a five-hour drive between the park's South Rim Village and the North Rim Village.

Grand Canyon's North Rim.

Right: Half-, full- and multiday raft trips are available on the Colorado River. Nankoweap's prehistoric granaries are perched high above the Colorado River near the park's North Rim.

operates a small café where you can relax and grab a bite to eat before or after your ride.

Walk of Ages

While anyone can see the dozens of rock layers exposed on the canyon's walls, it's hard to comprehend just how long it took the roaring Colorado River to carve through them to create this 277-mile-long gorge.

To get a feel for the enormity of that process, take a stroll on the 2.8-mile Trail of Time, which starts at the Yavapai Point Geology Museum and ends at the Verkamp's Visitor Center. While you're walking in this direction, the trail takes you back through the canyon's lifespan, with every 3 feet equaling 1 million years of geologic history. Rocks brought up from the mile-deep canyon let you see and touch actual samples of the stone layers you're looking out at from the viewpoints along the way.

The South Rim also has plenty of human history on display. High points in Grand Canyon Village include the Bright Angel Lodge, with its stone fireplace that exactly replicates the layers of rock found in the walls of the canyon itself. Then there's the



Photo: Mark Lellouch



Photo: Erin Whittaker

IF YOU THINK THE GRAND CANYON LOOKS IMPRESSIVE FROM THE TOP DOWN, YOU REALLY OWE IT TO YOURSELF TO SEE IT FROM THE BOTTOM UP.

imposing El Tovar Hotel, a structure that has been welcoming guests since 1905, more than a decade before there was such a thing as Grand Canyon National Park.

And while we're on the subject of architecture, be sure to check out the natural stone constructions of park architect Mary Jane Colter, including

the Desert View Watchtower near the park's east entrance and the faux miner's cabin known as Hermits Rest at the western terminus of Hermits Road. Known for her perfectionism, Colter is said to have directed the placement of each stone on the façade of the seven-story tower, and directed her workmen to rub soot around the

The striking turquoise-colored water of Havasu Creek is a result of the water's high mineral content.

NPS photos: Michael Quinn



From far left: The South Rim's main visitor center is a good place to start your visit to the park. Grand Canyon National Park Lodges offers a 4-mile, three-hour mule ride that departs 5 miles east of Grand Canyon Village and follows along a new East Rim Trail built by the Park Service.

NPS photos: Michael Quinn

cabin's hearth and place cobwebs in the corners to give it a lived-in look.

Into the Canyon

If you think the Grand Canyon looks impressive from the top down, you really owe it to yourself to see it from the bottom up.

To get into the canyon you have several options. There are two main hiking trails from the South Rim — the Bright Angel and the South Kaibab — that lead down to the Colorado River more than a mile below. Both are considered strenuous and are not to be attempted lightly.

If the idea of hoofing it down the trail on your own two feet doesn't sound appealing, you might want to try making the trip with the help of the four strong legs of a sure-footed mule. Mules have been a go-to source of transportation for canyon visitors looking to get below the rim for more than a century. Trips from the South Rim, which can sell out months ahead of time, descend to Phantom Ranch, where you can stay the night and return the next day.

Perhaps the easiest way to see the canyon is from the river itself. While traditional multiday whitewater raft trips through the main part of the canyon need to be booked as much as a year in advance, the Hualapai tribe in Peach Springs, Arizona, 140 miles west of the park, offers one-day whitewater trips from what they call Grand Canyon

West. If that sounds a little too hair-raising, Grand Canyon Discovery offers peaceful flat-water floats on the Colorado from the organization's offices in Page, Arizona, 130 miles northeast of Grand Canyon Village.

The Other Grand Canyon

Up to this point we've been talking about the Grand Canyon's more heavily visited South Rim. But there's another distinctly different side to Grand Canyon National Park, namely the North Rim.

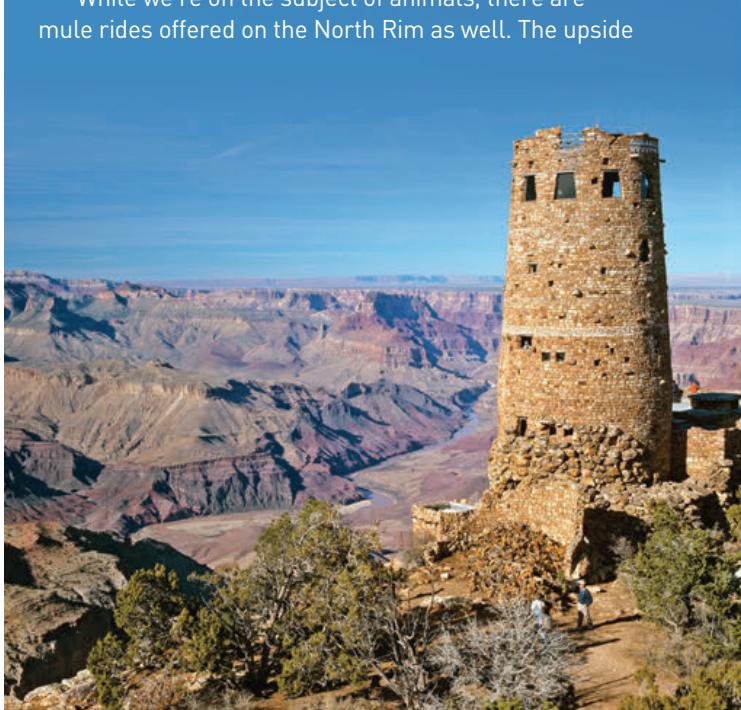
While getting to this opposite side of the canyon requires a bit of driving — it's a very scenic 215 miles from Grand Canyon Village — the payoff is well worth it. And not just because of the 15 different kinds of cookies filling the glass case at the Jacob Lake Inn, located at the intersection of U.S. Highway 89A and state Route 67, where you'll turn to reach the North Rim.

For one thing, this side of the canyon is home to a plethora of wildlife, not the least of which is the tufted-ear Kaibab squirrel, a species so ideally adapted to its environment that it's found nowhere else on the planet. Endangered California condors can be spotted soaring above the cliff faces, while elk, bear, and even the occasional gray wolf can be spotted in the meadows or along the tree line.

While we're on the subject of animals, there are mule rides offered on the North Rim as well. The upside



Above: Constructed in 1914 by Santa Fe Railroad architect Mary Colter to resemble an old miner's cabin, Hermits Rest is several miles to the west of Grand Canyon Village. Right: The Watchtower — a National Historic Landmark that was also designed by Colter — is located at Desert View, the easternmost developed area on the park's South Rim.



here is that, because it's less crowded, you may be able to book some saddle time on relatively short notice. The downside is that rides here don't descend very far into the canyon itself.

The good news is that you can get spectacular views of the canyon from a number of easy-to-reach viewpoints. For starters, walk out to Bright Angel Point, located just behind the impressive Grand Canyon Lodge. You can also drive to Cape Royal and Point Imperial overlooks, the latter of which has the distinction of being the highest viewpoint in the park at 8,800 feet.

Lights Out

Here's one final, simple way to see Grand Canyon National Park in a light that only a small number of visitors will ever know: Take the time to look up after the sun has gone down.

After watching one of the canyon's spectacular sunsets, stick around to watch the stars come out. Be sure to ask at one of the park's visitor centers if there's a ranger-led astronomy program scheduled during your visit. If so, you'll be able to learn more about what you're seeing and even look at astronomical objects through telescopes.

Even if there's not an official astronomy talk, don't let that stop you. Simply find a dark spot, lay back and



GETTING AROUND

Like many popular national parks, Grand Canyon offers a well-thought-out shuttle-bus system that runs from early morning until late at night. Which means the smart way to see the park is to leave your motorhome or dinghy at the Main Visitor Center and hop on and hop off the buses to your heart's content. When you've had your fill of the central Grand Canyon Village and western Hermit's Rest areas the shuttle buses serve, climb back in your rig for the trip along Desert View Drive, which will lead you to the park's east entrance.

watch the cloudlike Milky Way rise in the east in one of the few places where it's dark enough for this arm of our own galaxy to cast shadows on a moonless night.

A Grand Adventure

Ultimately what we're suggesting is an approach we think will help you get the most out of your visit to Grand Canyon National Park. With a little planning and forethought, you can take your time and find your own unique adventures as you explore America's best-known natural wonder. **M**

For More Information

Bright Angel Bicycles

928-638-3055, www.bikegrandcanyon.com

Colorado River Discovery

888-522-6644, www.raftthecanyon.com

Grand Canyon National Park

928-638-7888, www.nps.gov/grca

Hualapai River Runners

888-868-9378, www.grandcanyonwest.com

Jacob Lake Inn

928-643-7232, www.jacoblake.com

CAMPGROUNDS

Desert View Campground

Small campground with 50 sites; RVs up to 30 feet; no hookups; first-come, first-served; open mid-April through mid-October.

Grand Canyon Railway RV Park

Private campground located in the town of Williams adjacent to the Grand Canyon

Railway train depot. Full hookups and 124 extra-wide sites (928-635-4010, www.thetrain.com/lodging/rv-park).

Kaibab Camper Village is a commercial campground located in Jacob Lake with full and partial hookups for RVs up to 40 feet. Open mid-May to mid-October (928-643-7804, www.kaibabcampervillage.com).

Mather Campground

South Rim's largest campground with 300-plus sites; RVs up to 30 feet; no hookups; open year-round (877-444-6777, www.recreation.gov).

North Rim Campground

Located near the Grand Canyon Lodge, this NPS campground is only open May 15 through October 15 (877-444-6777, www.recreation.gov).

Trailer Village RV Park

Concessionaire-operated campground located next to Mather Campground with 84 paved sites; RVs up to 50 feet; full hookups (877-404-4611, www.visitgrandcanyon.com/trailer-village-rv-park).

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Escape Vehicle

When you want to get away in style, the Winnebago Sightseer provides the space and features for families large and small **By Chris Hemer**

Finding a Class A motorhome that speaks to your emotional and practical sides isn't always as easy as it seems. Often, a motorhome that seems large enough for everyone really only accommodates two, and may not even have room for overnight guests. The 2016 Winnebago Sightseer, however, is one of the nicest-looking gas coaches we've ever tested, with its handsome silver/gray Cloud full-body paint scheme. It's also got plenty of room for family, and is an entertainer's dream with abundant seating in the living area, and an amidships bath, in addition to a full bath aft of the bedroom.

We were eager to get behind the wheel of the Sightseer, so we stowed our belongings in the fully finished and lighted storage compartments (the main one allows pass-through storage

for low-profile items like chairs and a table) and soon we were driving to our destination — Gilroy, California.

If you read this magazine often, you know that we're not exactly raving fans of the Ford gas chassis. On smooth roads at moderate speeds, it's acceptable, but on rough roads, and especially driving uphill, the noise inside is oppressive. That being said, the Sightseer 36Z was actually among the quieter of the Ford chassis motorhomes we've tested lately and the steering and brakes inexplicably felt better too, but there is still room for improvement.

The cab arrangement is pretty straightforward, with the standard Ford-issue instruments and a touch-screen radio in the center console. This is a popular way to integrate the audio/video/navigation features into one unit,

but we don't think the driver-centric angle works as intended. In a car, it's great, but in a motorhome, you typically don't want to take your eyes off the road to fiddle with the radio controls, so you rely on your co-pilot for assistance. The way this unit is angled, it's very inconvenient for the co-pilot to use. Considering other Winnebago products we've tested make the controls more accessible to both front seat occupants, we can only assume that Winnebago was trying something new here.

To the left of the driver are the controls for the automatic leveling system, electric solar/blackout windshield shades, sideview mirror controls/heating, and headlight/fog light switches. Overall, the area works well, but the seats are on the firm side and could use more support, especially at the seat cushion. An extended cushion would be a welcome addition, or at least a seat extension that could be deployed if desired.

The passenger-side seat is equipped with an optional footrest (\$210), which is a thoughtful touch and would most likely

ABOVE: All three Sightseer floorplans come standard with full-body paint. The test unit was also equipped with an exterior entertainment center.

From top right: Galley features a three-burner cooktop, residential-size convection microwave oven and a residential refrigerator/freezer with icemaker. Main living area offers plenty of seating with the BenchMark dinette and Rest Easy sofa, which has a power recline and converts to a bed. The cockpit arrangement is fairly straightforward and includes a rearview color monitor system with 6-inch touchscreen, iPod/MP3 input and six-way power Ultraleather driver's seat.

be used when the motorhome is parked and the seat turned toward the living area. Also on the passenger side is a workstation that differs from others we have seen in Winnebago coaches. Instead of sliding out, it pulls up and over, then flops into your lap. We prefer the pullout-type workstations we've seen in other Winnebago products.

Then there was the oddity of the passenger-side sight window. It's designed to let you see traffic alongside, which is a nice idea, but it doesn't really work. You can only see out of half of it when no one is seated next to you, and with a passenger alongside, you can't see out of it at all. We did, however, appreciate the power windshield shade and the manually operated side window solar shades. They kept glare to a minimum when driving during the day, and at night they did an admirable job of keeping light out when combined with the side curtains and blackout shades throughout the rest of the coach.

Above the driver are cabinets, one of which houses the DVD player. In the test motorhome, there was also the optional StudioLoft powered bed (\$2,233) above the cab seats, which works well for those who need extra sleeping capacity. Even more sleeping space can be found behind the driver's-side seat in the streetside slide. Winnebago's optional 60-by-75-inch Rest Easy sofa (\$1,533) has a convenient power recline feature; press a button, and you go from the upright to supine position in seconds. Of course it also folds out into a bed, so you can recline it to take a quick nap during the day or deploy the full bed at night.

Aft of the couch on the same side is a 42-by-74-inch BenchMark four-place fixed dinette that is very comfortable, and has a convenient mechanism that allows you to quickly turn the table into a bed without having to hassle



with any wobbly posts. So even if you don't opt for the StudioLoft bed, you can sleep two on the sofa and two more on the converted dinette. There is plenty of overhead storage above both areas, and the cabinetry in the test coach seemed well-built and fit very nicely.

Directly across from the couch in the full-wall slide is an entertainment center with an electric fireplace and a 48-inch HDTV that rises from the surface with the touch of a switch. On

either side of the fireplace are wine racks, which we think are an elegant and useful touch. We didn't spend a lot of time watching TV, but one evening we popped in a DVD and were impressed with the TV's picture and great sound created by the optional home theater system (\$476).

Next to the entertainment center is the kitchen, which is cleverly arranged to form an L-shape when the slide is deployed. The "L" portion is actually fixed, and the slide moves in over it

Rear master bath is well-equipped and has plenty of countertop space, a drawer and cabinet below, an oval sink with metal faucet, and a mirror and towel holders.



Above from left: Optional StudioLoft bed increases sleeping capacity up front. In the back, the master suite includes a roomy king-size bed (optional) and private three-piece bathroom.

when it is closed. It's a smart design, because it always allows access to at least one bowl of the sink, and yields plenty of room to move through the coach during travel — then supplies welcome extra prep space once you reach your destination. The materials here are first rate as well; the countertops are Corian, the sink is a double-bowl model made from stainless steel, and the faucet is made from real metal and features a pullout sprayer. We found that there was plenty of prep space on the countertop's expanse. The stove is a standard-issue three-burner, but above it is a residential-size stainless-steel High Pointe convection microwave. The Sightseer was also equipped with a residential stainless-steel refrigerator with icemaker, supported by four deep-cycle batteries and an inverter. It cooled down very quickly, and had no problems staying cold. Underneath the countertop and stove are seven good-size drawers, and next to the refrigerator is a pantry with four pullout shelves, which we loved.

In the center of the coach on the curbside is the guest bath, which has

enough room for most people. By angling the porcelain toilet toward the door, there is adequate legroom while still allowing plenty of counterspace, three drawers and a cabinet/mirror above the countertop. There's also a towel ring, which is always appreciated, and above the toilet, more cabinet space.

The bedroom likewise makes great use of space. King beds are becoming an increasingly popular option, which is fine, but you've likely read our complaints on several occasions that many manufacturers don't make the slide large enough to accommodate it, resulting in a bed that has effectively been wedged in place. In the Sightseer, there's not a lot of room on either side of the optional king, but there is still enough for a glass of water, keys, wallet, book, etc. The optional king-size Ideal Rest Nouveau mattress (\$1,050) features digital comfort control with dual remotes, so each sleeper can dial in their ideal firmness. We found it to be supremely comfortable, although the pump was noisy and the control seemed to have a mind of its own at times.

At the foot of the bed is a perfectly designed wardrobe with a 32-inch HDTV dead center, and room for hanging clothes on either side, plus large drawers underneath for folded clothes. And, underneath the TV is a cubby for your satellite box/DVD player, etc., with all the appropriate connections. Above the bed is the usual cabinet space, with LED lighting underneath for reading. Our only note here is that the lighting seemed actually too bright for our taste; we would like to see a dimmer of some sort. In fact, that would be a nice addition for the entire bedroom.

Specifications

Chassis

Model	Ford F53
Engine	6.8-liter Triton V-10
SAE Hp	362 @ 4,750 rpm
Torque	457 lb-ft @ 3,250 rpm
Transmission	TorqShift six-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	5.38:1
Front Tires	235/80R22.5
Rear Tires	235/80R22.5
Wheelbase	242"
Brakes	Four-wheel disc, ABS
Suspension F/R	Leaf/leaf
Fuel Capacity	80 gal
Fuel Economy	8.21 mpg
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles bumper-to-bumper

Coach

Exterior Length	37' 2"
Exterior Width	8' 5.5"
Exterior Height	12' 4"
Interior Width	8' 5"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Construction	Steel/aluminum framing, fiberglass walls with polystyrene insulation, fiberglass roof
Freshwater Capacity	83 gal
Black-Water Capacity	33/47 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	41/44 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	10 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	18 gal
Air Conditioner (2)	13,500 Btu
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Refrigerator	16 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	2,000 watts
Battery	(4) Group 31 deep cycle
AC generator	5.5 kW
MSRP	\$166,474
MSRP as tested	\$173,816
Warranty	1 year/15,000 miles basic; 3 years/36,000 miles structure

Wet Weight

(Water and heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle	6,540 lbs
Rear Axle	13,200 lbs
Total	19,740 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR F/R	8,000/15,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	22,000/26,000 lbs
ROCCC	2,260 lbs

GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity Rating

At the rear of the coach is the master bath, which is a good size and well-equipped with plenty of countertop space, a drawer and

WHAT'S HOT

Full-body paint, two bathrooms, room for family and friends

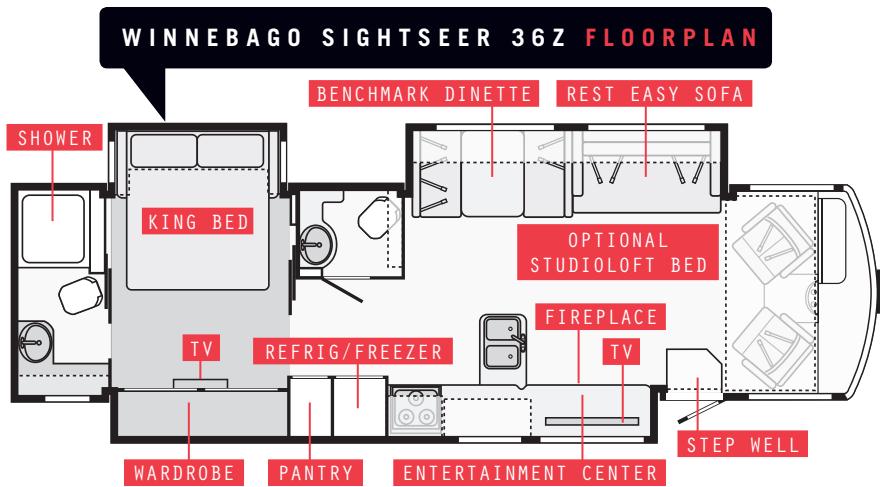
WHAT'S NOT

Uncomfortable cockpit seats, awkward head unit, noisy engine



cabinet below, an oval sink with metal faucet, plus a mirror and towel holder. Above the counter are more cabinets, so there's plenty of room for towels, washcloths, TP and the like in this space. Beneath the sink is another door that looks like a cabinet, but it's actually a removable panel that allows access to the plumbing. It provides convenient access when needed, but we would prefer it if this was an actual door. The shower is a mixed bag; on one hand, it has enough room for most people, and it has a residential-style metal detachable showerhead with on/off valve. But the bifold shower door is clunky and is a little on the flimsy side.

As Sunday came to a close, we began breaking camp for the drive back home. The Sightseer's utility center is clean and logically arranged, made from one piece of formed, white plastic for easy cleaning and efficient water drainage. However, because there are two baths, there are two compartments for dumping tanks, and a separate compartment for the



freshwater connection, exterior shower, etc., which took some getting used to.

Really, the only thing we had an issue with on the test coach was the fuel filler, which is placed on a severe upward angle that simply won't allow a California emission-controlled gas nozzle to fit. Hopefully this problem was limited to our unit, but if not, we

hope Winnebago will rectify this.

Yes, there were a handful of things with this motorhome that could be improved, but all bugaboos aside, the Sightseer is one of the best gas Class A's we've tested in recent memory. **M**

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By Bob Livingston

LET THE SUN SHINE

Assembling and installing the ultimate solar system for independent travel with the help of energy experts, AM Solar

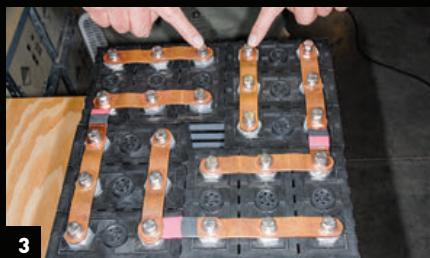
The sun is a gigantic mass in the solar system that everyone expects to come up in the morning and to go down in the evening. It's the Earth's temperature regulator and is worshipped by many who enjoy basking in its warm glow for recreation. For most, the sun's power is generally accepted as just part of daily life, but for RVers who relish getting off the grid, the sun is nature's power generator.

Solar systems that harness the sun's rays and turn its energy into electrical power have been around for a long time, and RVers who appreciate the seclusion and economics of primitive campgrounds have embraced this silent power for many years. New, and continuing, technology has leap-frogged solar power to new levels,

and RVers can now build systems that make living off the grid more practical than ever. We assembled and installed a robust system using the latest equipment available at the time (this technology changes rapidly) with the help of the experts from AM Solar in Springfield, Oregon, that transformed the RV into a mini power station.

While the attributes of a solar system, including electrical independence, are well-established, a primary benefit is to properly condition batteries. Solar power, through a well-designed system (which includes a good charge controller) offsets continual deep discharges because the batteries are constantly being conditioned in response to actual usage. In the end, lead-acid batteries, for example, can last twice as long. At today's prices for batteries, that's a big savings.

Preplanning is crucial to building a good solar system; you just can't



[1] Remote panels for the MagnaSine Hybrid inverter (left) and Blue Sky Energy IPN-ProRemote charge controller (center) were mounted in a cabinet that was clearly visible. Both these panels provide detailed programming to fine tune the system for optimum performance. Users have incredible control over functions, but programming must be initially set by the installer — and users should resist making changes that could damage the lithium batteries. Ring around reset button (arrow) illuminates red when batteries are outside threshold voltage to prevent damage. **[2]** Battery bank is built from individual 3.2-volt cells that are banded together in parallel to make a super cell. **[3]** Four super cells are connected in series using copper straps for the 12.8-volt, 300-amp-hour capacity required for this system. Batteries can be configured in a number of footprints.

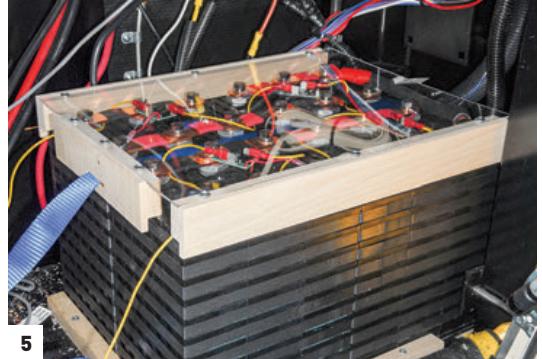
Photos: Bob Livingston

[4] Mini battery management system (BMS) circuit boards are wired between cells. These boards send voltage information to the master control box. Low or high voltage will shut down the system. [5] When complete, yellow wires are used to connect the mini BMS boards to each cell in the battery bank. Red lights on the board flash when the system is working properly. Plexiglas in wood frame is used to protect the top of the battery bank. Clear Plexiglas is used to allow for visibility of the flashing red lights on the mini BMS boards.



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slap a bunch of components together and expect positive results. The first step is to figure out your needs based on how you use the RV. In our case we determined that we wanted enough power to run the microwave, induction cooktop, hair dryer, fireplace flame (for visual ambiance), entertainment systems and all the other 12-volt DC accessories in the rig, and, of course, condition the batteries properly. Our goal was to build a system big enough to allow complete independence from the grid unless we wanted to run the air conditioning. It's not practical to set up a solar system to continuously power the air conditioner(s) and in our case we rely on LP-gas to run the refrigerator. Systems can be designed to handle a residential refrigerator, but the battery bank and number of panels must be increased.



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Our original calculations had us settling on three 160-watt solar panels, two AGM batteries (300 amp hours), a 2,000-watt inverter/charger and a controller with a boost feature. After discussing our needs with Greg Holder at AM Solar, we made a number of changes and upgrades. It kind of reminded me of remodeling a stationary home; changes are inevitable.

which upped the price tag considerably. Then to condition the lithium batteries properly, we upgraded to a Magnum Energy MagnaSine Hybrid inverter/charger.

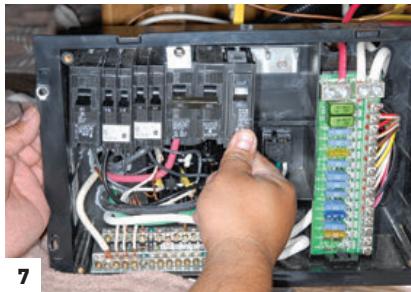
In the end we upgraded to four 160-watt panels after learning that the extra wattage eliminated the need to tilt the panels to follow the sun. That was a big selling point, since we would rather not spend too much time on the roof. The biggest upgrade was to lithium batteries,

When all was said and done we had assembled a very powerful system with all the bells and whistles, banking on optimum performance and long-term reliability. It also satisfied our secret desire to have the ultimate system for our needs.

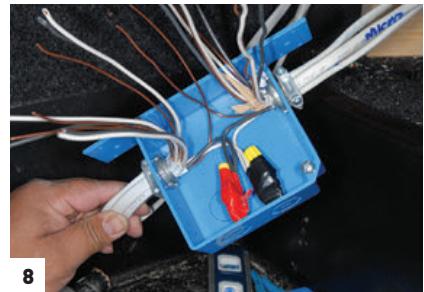
[6] A test light is used to identify 120-volt AC circuits that will be powered by the inverter and how they relate to the breakers in the power distribution center. [7] Never rely on the breaker labels, which can be mismarked, as they were here. [8] Electrical J-boxes were used to make the 120-volt AC connections necessary to insulate the accessories that were targeted for power by the inverter. [9] A secondary power distribution box with circuit breakers was installed in the system. This provides circuit breakers for the appliances and outlets that are wired into the new solar system. [10] Existing terminals that come with the prewired solar panels are cut off and the wire leads lengthened using butt connectors. Ends of butt connectors are heat shrunk [11] around wire, providing a weathertight seal.



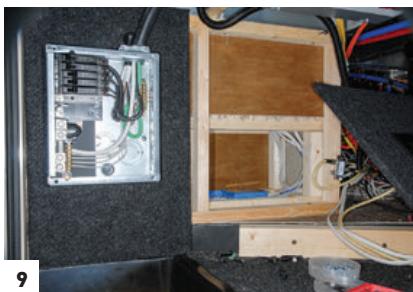
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The Batteries

Lithium batteries are no longer science fiction; use in electric cars has made lithium batteries very popular and for good reason. They last a really long time and can handle many more discharging/charging cycles than their lead-acid/AGM counterparts. These batteries maintain rated performance when taken down to the maximum depth of discharge, which is an amazing 80 percent. Lead-acid and AGM batteries should not be discharged beyond the 50 percent threshold.

To put the performance numbers in perspective, the lithium batteries used in the test system will provide 240 amp hours before recharging versus 150 for the lead-acid or AGM batteries. An even bigger consideration is voltage. As the charge level in lead-acid and AGM batteries decreases, so does voltage, which impacts appliances and accessories. Lithium batteries maintain full voltage until fully discharged, and then voltage drops precipitously.

Because the performance characteristics of lithium batteries are so much different, a battery management system (BMS) is critical to prevent damage from over-discharging or excessive voltage. Mini BMS circuit boards are wired between cells and these boards are tied into a master BMS control box. Red lights on each BMS cell-level board flash when everything is OK. Four mini BMS boards were used on the battery bank built for this system.

When the BMS recognizes that the high- or low-voltage threshold has been breached, it automatically shuts down the battery bank, well before any damage can occur. When that happens the light around the reset button mounted inside the RV illuminates to inform the user there's an issue with voltage. If any of the mini boards discover a change in the threshold voltage — high or low — in any cell, the entire bank is shut down.

Building a battery bank from lithium cells is not designed for the do-it-yourselfer. There's a lot of science behind assembling the bank and that should be left to the professionals. The batteries are assembled using individual super cells that are rated at 3.2 volts and 100 amp hours. These super cells can be configured to offer greater flexibility when looking for space to house the battery bank, unlike conventional deep-cycle batteries that have established dimensions.



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[12] In typical AM Solar fashion, all wire leads on the solar panels are secured with cable tie mounts that have been fitted with 3M VHB adhesive tape. [13] Mounting brackets are bolted to the frame of each solar panel. They provide enough clearance off the roof to allow for good air circulation. They can also be fitted with hardware for tilting. [14] Cardboard used to pack the solar panels in the shipping boxes is used to configure mounting positions on the roof. This provides a great visual of how the final installation will look — and keeps clear of any roof obstructions. [15] VHB adhesive tape is applied to each bracket foot, which can be adjusted by the knurled knob. The tape provides a very strong bond once the roof is cleaned with alcohol [16] but must also be screwed into the substrate on a rubber membrane [17]. The VHB tape is actually strong enough to hold the panels on a fiberglass roof.

For our system we paralleled three smaller cells into a super cell and then put four super cells into series using copper plates to make a 12.8-volt, 300-amp-hour battery bank. Once the batteries were configured and banded they were initially electrically balanced so the voltage is consistent and at a full charge. This step requires the use of a sophisticated charger that can be controlled accurately.

Normally, lithium batteries are rated for around 2,000 charge/discharge cycles, which in itself is much better than the 500-1,000 cycles expected of a lead-acid or AGM



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[18, 19] Self-leveling sealant is used around the brackets and must cover the screw heads to ensure watertightness. [20] The 4-gauge cables were previously routed near this roof vent and connected to the proper terminals in the connection box before it was screwed to the roof. A generous helping of sealant was applied to the roof, under the box, to make sure the hole needed to route the large cables is watertight. The wire leads from each panel are then connected to the terminals in the connection box.

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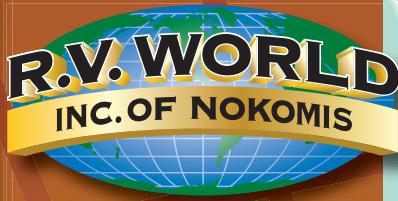
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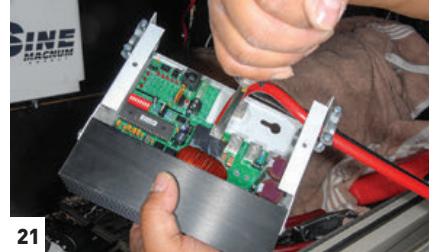
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SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM INSTALLATION

[21] All the cables from the solar panels and breaker boxes are routed to the designated compartment that holds the components of the system. Here, the Blue Sky Energy charge controller is being wired before mounting on the wall. [22] The MagnaSine Hybrid inverter/charger is very heavy and requires precise mounting to keep it from moving when the RV is on the road. There must be 6 inches of clearance around the inverter to allow for proper ventilation, which relates to optimum performance and safety. A 3/16-inch aluminum plate was cut to size, painted and bolted to a metal frame inside the storage compartment to which the inverter was bolted.



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battery. AM Solar tunes its proprietary BMS so that it operates in a narrower window than the maximum and minimum voltages established by the battery manufacturer, which increases the expected charge/discharge cycles to 3,000-5,000. If the user discharges the lithium batteries 80 percent 365 days a year (which almost no one will do), the batteries should last 8-13 years. Given a more practical use of the batteries in normal living circumstances, the batteries should last at least 15 years, which makes the \$2,599 price tag a lot easier to amortize.

Lithium batteries will not discharge much when in storage, and after testing for five months with no external charging support, the voltage barely changed. Another welcome feature is that lithium batteries do not have to be fully charged each time. That means you can charge them to a certain point (if there's little sun or electrical power is not available) without negatively affecting conditioning. Lithium batteries can be charged very quickly.

When compared to batteries of equal capacity, the lithium counterparts are smaller and lighter. Each cell

weighs only 7 pounds, which means the entire battery bank for this system weighed only 84 pounds, less than the weight of one 6-volt AGM battery.

Undoubtedly, bad press that surfaced a while back created some discomfort when considering mounting these batteries inside an RV storage compartment. Fires, created by battery overheating, were once a problem. The batteries under scrutiny were Lithium-Cobalt Oxide formulations and were subject to thermal runaway hazards that led to fires. The newer crop of batteries is Lithium Iron Phosphate, which is basically noncombustible. Combine the latest generation lithium batteries with a solid BMS and the system becomes very safe.

The Panels and Charge Controller

Solar-panel technology has moved very fast in the past few years. AM Solar specializes in the most up-to-date

[23] A weatherproof, 50-amp breaker is used between the solar panel connector box and charge controller. [24] Master cutoff switch is used between the battery bank and the inverter and charge controller. Next to the switch is a solenoid that is triggered by the master BMS control. If any one cell falls below or exceeds the voltage threshold, it cuts off power from the battery bank.



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products and for this installation used its SF160, 36-cell mono-crystalline panels. All the panels custom-built for AM Solar and owner Greg Holder specify at least 36 cells so they are large enough to capture the most energy. The panels operate at 18 volts and are rated to have an 8.8-amp output. They measure 26 3/4 by 58 1/4 by 1 3/8 inches, which is very compact considering the output.

Higher voltage boosts the charging amperage, especially when routed through a Blue Sky Energy Solar Boost 3024iL controller, which is designed to lift the charging amperage to the highest possible level. The controller is a critical component in any solar system. Its main function is to regulate the charging current and prevent overcharging the batteries. The unit used here is rated at 40 amps, so there's a little room for expansion on the system, which will likely not be needed. This is a very sophisticated controller and it features a relatively new feature called Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT). This gives the controller the ability to boost the charging current (amperage) by converting some of the excess voltage coming from the panels — thus the reason for panels that operate at a higher voltage. The biggest boost can be realized when the panels are cold and the battery voltage is low.

The controller was tied into a Blue Sky Energy IPN-ProRemote panel that has a tremendous programming capability. Five levels of information, deciphered by the various algorithms in the controller, can be read on the remote screen. The information is extensive, including the ability to equalize the batteries, which is not needed for the lithium batteries. It's important to allow the installers to set the controller and provide you with the do's and don'ts to keep from getting in trouble with lithium batteries.

Beyond voltage, the information shows how long since the batteries were fully charged, amperage from the solar array, usage in amp hours and much more. If you're a power watcher, you'll be in heaven here.

The Power Inverter/Charger

An integral part of any complete solar system is the power inverter/charger. This component provides the power from the batteries to run the targeted 120-volt AC appliances and accessories and charge the batteries when hooked up to RV park power. We chose the aforementioned MagnaSine for its established reliability in the industry, to provide pure sine-wave power for all of our sensitive electronics and, most importantly, its compatibility for use with lithium batteries.

The model MSH3012 is the only inverter in the Magnum Energy line that has the hybrid feature, which provides a relatively new twist on inverting power by working in concert with 120-volt AC power when connected to some type of shorepower. Without getting too deep into the electronic wizardry, the MagnaSine inverter provides load support when there's not enough current to operate the desired systems. For example, if you find yourself visiting relatives and can only plug into 15- or 20-amp household power, it's not possible to run the microwave and hair dryer at the same time (depending on the demand from other appliances). The hybrid feature will provide the extra called-for current to operate the other appliances up to the rating of the inverter, which in this case is 3,000 watts. This will prevent breaker tripping and an abrupt loss of power.

Normally, other inverters operate only on one source of power to run the appliances and accessories and use a transfer switch, which isolates the inverter when plugged into an external source of 120-volt AC power. The hybrid inverter uses energy from the battery bank and an external 120-volt AC source to power the loads; any surplus power can be used to charge the batteries or handle higher loads than the AC input alone can provide.

Controlling the inverter is done through a remote with an LED display that we installed next to the IPN-ProRemote for the solar panels. The panel is loaded with features, and again, takes some initiation and practice to

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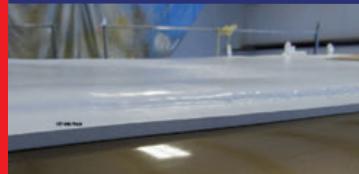
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SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM INSTALLATION

run through the steps. It really allows the user to fine tune the system to take full advantage of the lithium batteries and other power sources like a portable generator while boondocking. The output of the generator can be dialed in using the remote panel, which adds greater flexibility when charging batteries and running appliances. Since the MSH3012 inverter can add up to 25 amps to the output of the portable generator for a period of time, it's possible to run the air conditioner while using a 2,000-watt generator long enough to cool down the interior and remove excess humidity. Once the heavy load is eliminated, the generator will recharge the batteries through the inverter.



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[25] Master BMS control box is wired into the system and attached to the wall. The BMS is necessary to make the lithium batteries function properly and safely. [26] When complete, all the components are neatly in place for accessibility and service. A separate fuse and cutoff switch is used between the inverter and the batteries. [27] A solar meter is used to determine sun strength. By pointing the sensor at the sun at the same angle as the solar panels, the meter will read out the percentage of sunshine reaching the cells in the panels. Here it was early morning and the panels were getting 38 percent of the sun's potential. [28] Panels are neatly arranged on the roof with most of the wiring concealed. The only maintenance is to keep the panels clean. These solar panels are very durable and are expected to last 35 years. They are rated to withstand 125 MPH wind loading, hail up to 1 inch at terminal velocity (52 MPH) and more heat than can be found on Earth.

The Installation

Installing a system of this caliber is not for the faint of heart. I highly recommend leaving it to the experts like AM Solar because of the many intricate pieces that need to be assembled. For example, it took the better part of a day just to locate a suitable runway for the 4-gauge cables used to connect the panels to the charge controller.

It took 4½ days to complete the installation to satisfy all the required codes, ensure that all the components were secured properly and that the wiring was meticulously routed and wrapped.

As one might expect, the cost of such a robust solar system is not inexpensive. The complete package described above with all the ancillary pieces like the circuit breaker, fuse, BMS and cables was just shy of \$12,000.

The Results

Obviously, the results from any solar array will be subject to the time of the year and personal usage. On an average day, we consume about 100 amp hours, which is less than half the capacity of the lithium battery bank, and we usually have our batteries fully charged by noon when in good sun. The fact that the lithium batteries do not require a finish charge provides great versatility on days when the sun is not as strong.

Except to run the air conditioning, there's really no reason to hook up, which gives us exceptional freedom to travel at will. We jokingly tell our neighbors that we can sell energy back to the grid, which always initiates a conversation and tour of our system. **M**

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By E. Don Smith

DIY TV SWAP

Replace your old flat-panel with a Smart, new HDTV while on the road



Have you ever noticed that when things go wrong on a motorhome, they happen at the worst possible time? I think Murphy's Law was in play during our last motorhome trip to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. We arrived at the always-beautiful Hilton Head Island Motorcoach Resort ready for a week of relaxation and lots of great food. While setting up the coach, one of my rituals is to connect the cable TV to the motorhome and then allow the TVs to program the available channels. However, this time, the bedroom TV had other ideas, as you can see in the photo below. The bright stripes of random colors meant it was time to replace our TV.

Amazingly, TV technology has come a long way since the time our 2008 Tiffin Phaeton was built, so it was bittersweet that this one failed during our vacation. Of course it would take some work to replace it, but the good news is that we knew we would end up with a better TV, with many more features and lighter overall weight, in addition to a slightly larger

screen as well. At first we considered having the old TV repaired, but after a quick Internet search, we found that it would be a fairly expensive repair. Plus, it would mean we wouldn't have a TV for the week of our vacation, and even if we could repair it, we would be spending money on an out-of-date, featureless TV, so why even bother?

The 26-inch Panasonic that was factory-installed in our Tiffin Phaeton was an LCD type with a native resolution of 720p, which fell short of the improved 1080p HDTV standard. The TV was wired using HDMI and component cables, which are now virtually a thing of the past since HDMI is the most popular option these days. Your setup may be different depending on the age of the

audio-video setup in your coach. Not only was our old TV very heavy, it also had a huge metal mounting system that weighed almost as much as the TV. Between the TV and the mount, there was well over 45 pounds hanging from the cabinet. The Panasonic also did not have any "Smart TV" features such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, etc.

Depending on the RV resort or campground, these new services — such as Netflix — all constitute "streaming video." Streaming video is a great service, but it is also a major user of bandwidth and you may or may not be allowed to use it in all campgrounds. Even in RV resorts that allow it, you could experience buffering if the usage at that time in the park is high or if you are far away from the Wi-Fi antenna. You should always be judicious of your usage of streaming video when sharing Wi-Fi so that you don't prevent others from performing simple functions such as email.

Another thing that made this swap less painful than expected is that the price of TVs has dropped a lot since 2007. A new 28-inch full-featured LED Smart TV is now in the \$200



Left: Once an LCD TV gets to this point, it's probably not worth the cost to repair, especially since Smart TVs are reasonably priced these days.

price range. We ended up selecting a Vizio 28-inch LED model that fit perfectly in our motorhome, and the entire TV weighs only 8 pounds. This means that not only is the TV lighter, the mount required to hold it to the wall can be a lot lighter as well.

After measuring everything, we headed to the local electronics store where we bought the new TV and a suitable mount for our application. One major difference between a TV mount made for a house and one made for a motorhome is the stability of the mount. Most stationary models only secure the top of the TV and the bottom is left to support itself on bumpers that are supplied with the mount. In a house that works great, because the setup is not subjected to the

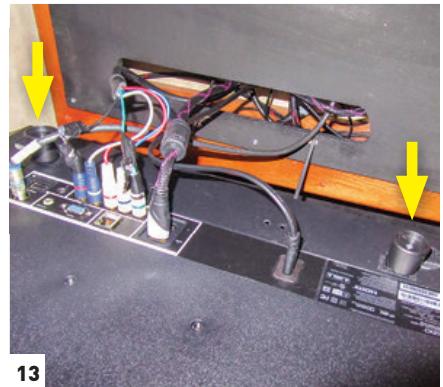
movements of driving down the highway. The mount that we purchased was designed for residential use, so we would have to improvise to find a way to prevent the bottom of the TV from swaying when the coach is in motion. At 8 pounds, this was a very simple task.

When we removed the original TV, we encountered a few issues, but this is typical of life on the road and of course we were not at home where we had access to table saws, electric drills and tool boxes full of tools. But, with the prospect of a dark TV over the course of our vacation, we decided to tackle this one anyway. Following is the process we used to get our bedroom converted to a full-featured mini home-theater system with streaming video.

[1] The first step was to locate the mounting screws so we could remove this old clunker from the mount. The screws on this TV were located along the bottom. [2] After removing all of the screws along the bottom, all that was needed was to lift the TV up and out of the existing mounting system. We had to be extremely careful, as this TV was fairly heavy for such a small 26-inch model. [3] After removing the TV from the wall, the large, full-size metal bracket that was required to hold this heavy TV securely to the cabinet was accessible.



[4] After freeing the TV from the wall mount, disconnect all the cables. This includes the HDMI cables, if any; the component cables, if any; the RCA cables; the power cable; and the coaxial cable. Notice the entire back of this TV was also covered with a large, heavy steel frame that was required due to the weight of the original TV. [5] Next, we unscrewed the entire steel mounting plate off of the cabinet and left the cables in place for the new TV. [6] Here is the Vizio TV we bought for less than \$200. [7] Based on the weight and size of the TV, and our planned mounting, we selected this mount. Though it only has a top hanger, it does feature a lock that helps hold it in place. Plus we already had plans on how to secure the bottom of this lightweight TV to keep it from bouncing as the coach is driven.



[8] Once the original mount was removed, we realized there was a giant hole in the cabinet with nothing to attach the new TV on to. At this point we knew that we had to rethink the process. It was off to the home-improvement store, where we bought a piece of 1/2-inch plywood and had it cut to exactly cover the hole with enough extra to screw it to the cabinet. Later, we painted it black to make sure it stayed invisible behind the TV. [9] After carefully measuring the TV and the new mounting board we then mounted and leveled the new wall mount. Notice it has a built-in level to aid with mounting. [10] The TV mount came with a wide variety of screws and bumpers that allow you to use it with most any TV. [11] Then we mounted the top plate on the TV with the included screws. [12] Since we don't normally travel with a jig saw, we then had to reach out to a local cabinet shop on Hilton Head Island to cut the hole shown here. We had already measured the location of the cables relative to the back of the TV and

marked the board before taking it to the cabinet shop. They charged us \$10 for this and we considered it a bargain. Before reattaching it to the wall, we spray-painted it black to help hide the panel behind the TV. [13] Next we reattached the necessary cables for our setup and installed the bumpers shown on the left and right side arrows. These were included with our mount but we also added a piece of hook-and-loop fastener to the spacer/bumpers since this is not a typical stationary TV mounted in a house. Also in this photo you can see the location we used to attach two heavy-duty cable ties. Since these holes were not in back of the TV, we had to carefully drill them in the plastic, making sure there was nothing behind the area such as a wire or circuit board. These cable ties were used to secure the bottom of the TV since this was a top-only mount system. With a TV this light, the oversize cable ties will be more than enough to prevent the bottom of the TV from swaying away from the wall when traveling.



[14] After hanging the new TV and "locking it" in the top mount you can see it looks as if it came from the factory this way. Though the TV has a slightly larger screen size (28 inches versus 26 inches) it is physically smaller overall, therefore there is an open space above and beside the TV. [15] Here you can see the heavy-duty cable ties passing through the mounting board and into the back of the TV. There is one on each side of the TV and once they were pulled snug, the TV didn't move at all. This tension also helps to secure the bumpers in place as well so the TV hangs perfectly straight. [16] While this installation may not be the same as you would receive at a local RV shop, it is typical of what is required while on the road. The TV travels perfectly and it opens up a whole new world of entertainment. The total cost was less than \$350 including the TV, mounting bracket, wood, paint, screws and the labor at the cabinet shop. **M**

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69111/62522/62573

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21531530

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US*GENERAL

26", 4 DRAWER TOOL CART

LOT 95659 shown
61634/61952

• 580 lb. Capacity

SAVE \$250

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\$999

~~\$1599~~

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PITTSBURGH

CLAW | RIP

LOT 69006 | LOT 47873 shown
60715/60714 | 69005/61262

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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LOT 68121/69727 shown
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18 VOLT CORDLESS 3/8" DRILL/DRIVER WITH KEYLESS CHUCK

drillmaster

LOT 69651
62868/62873
68239 shown

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CENTRALPNEUMATIC 3 GALLON, 100 PSI OILLESS PANCAKE AIR COMPRESSOR

LOT 60637
61615
95275 shown

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\$39.99

comp at \$89

21572164

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

AUTOMATIC BATTERY FLOAT CHARGER

CENTECH

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

LOT 69594
69955
42292 shown

SAVE 82%

\$5.99

comp at \$34.99

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RAPID PUMP® 3 TON LOW PROFILE HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

PITTSBURGH APPROVED

Weights 73 lbs.

LOT 61282 shown
68049/62326
62670/61253

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

ADJUSTABLE SHADE AUTO-DARKENING WELDING HELMET

ELECTRO

LOT 61611
46092 shown

SAVE 49%

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~~\$49.99~~

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

comp at \$79.99

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NEW

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LOT 61256
60813/61889
68142 shown

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HAULMASTER MOVER'S DOLLY

LOT 60487/61899
62399/93860 shown

• 1000 lb. Capacity

SAVE 56%

\$87.6 ~~\$119.99~~

comp at \$19.97

21542811

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LEVEL WITH



Installing HWH hydraulic leveling jacks makes for easier, faster

RVing is supposed to be about fun and relaxation, but manually leveling a motorhome that is not equipped with jacks doesn't qualify as either. While most Class A's are equipped with a leveling system, Class C's are usually not. Grappling with leveling blocks, driving onto them and then sometimes repeating the process until the motorhome is perfectly level can take a lot of time, particularly when the ground is really uneven. And regardless of how proficient you are at this process (and some RVers we've seen are remarkably so), you have to admit that pulling into your spot and pressing a button to level your motorhome would be a little slice of heaven.

electrical harnesses and pre-assembled hydraulic hoses. The job typically takes 10-12 hours, although installation time can vary depending on your motorhome configuration.

So the next time you pull into your spot and begin unloading your leveling blocks, just remember that it doesn't have to be this way anymore.

The good news is you don't have to buy a new motorhome to get the convenience of an automatic leveling system. HWH Corp., one of the most respected names in hydraulic leveling systems, offers a variety of kits that can allow you to install a hydraulic leveling system on the motorhome you already have. From Sprinters to Class C's and beyond, HWH has a kit for nearly every popular application.

We recently visited C&S RV Service Center in Oxnard, California, and observed as master technician Darren Wilson installed an HWH AP49818 fully automatic system on a 2005 Winnebago Minnie Winnie on a Ford E-450 chassis. Make no mistake,

installing a system like this one is for professionals, as it requires welding and fabrication experience — so make sure you choose a reputable shop that has done this sort of work before. C&S performs all kinds of repair, restoration and upgrades to motorhomes, so this installation was no problem for its technicians.

Though it looks imposing, the installation is actually pretty straightforward. The most important part is the old expression, "Measure twice, cut once." The pump/reservoir assembly and jacks have got to be placed correctly and have adequate room to operate. Beyond that, it's simply a matter of running the supplied

[1, 2] The process begins by finding a suitable location for the leveling system controls. After removing a lower panel on the dashboard, a hole saw is used to cut through the metal support beneath, just to the left of the steering column. This hole will allow sufficient room for the wiring harness to pass through, and will put the controls within easy reach of the driver.



The HWH components come in separate boxes and contain several feet of wiring harness, hydraulic lines with fittings and the pump/reservoir assembly.



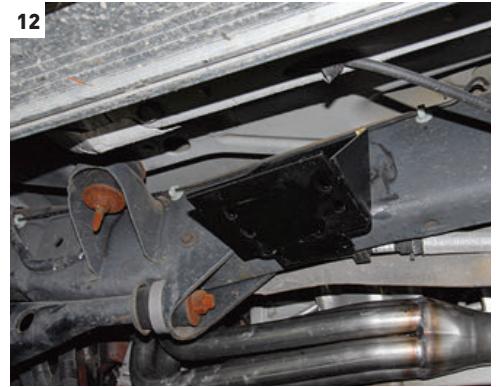


campsite setup

[3] The plastic sill plate at the bottom of the passenger side door is removed, and the thick wiring harness from the control panel is passed through an existing hole in the floor once the rubber drain plug is removed (arrow). [4] After using the mounting bezel as a template, a hole saw and an air jig saw are used to carefully cut an opening in the dash panel. [5, 6] The harness is pulled through the hole in the dash, ready to be connected to the controller. Once installed, the controller looks like factory equipment. [7] Perhaps the biggest challenge with this installation is finding a suitable location for the pump and reservoir assembly. It is large and heavy, so you must find a space that is both large and strong enough to make mounting possible. A spot was located on the outside of the frame rail on the driver's side, just forward of the LP-gas tank. A transmission jack was used to hold it in place prior to welding the supplied bracket to the frame. [8] Here, the bracket has been welded to the frame. But before mounting the pump assembly, a gusset was added for additional strength, then the area painted to prevent rust. The pump assembly fits perfectly.



[9] The leveling system has to have some way of determining when the motorhome is level, so HWH specifies that its level sensor bracket must be mounted near the center, in the middle of the motorhome if possible. Once it was determined that a cross member was in a good location, a bubble level was used to position it, and the bracket was tack-welded into place. [10] Once satisfied with the positioning, Wilson finish-welded the bracket and then completed the assembly. The three adjusters allow the user to calibrate the sensor for level when the motorhome is placed on level ground; this way the motorhome position matches what the computer sees. The sensor's wiring harness is then routed to it and plugged in. It will be secured with cable ties once the installation is complete. [11] The hydraulic jack units must be placed directly across from one another on the motorhome's frame. Wherever the jack brackets are to be installed (driver's side front frame shown), the paint is first ground away to ensure a strong weld. [12] Here, the first bracket has been tack-welded into place. [13] The HWH jack is designed to deploy from a folded position against the frame. The large springs help pull the jacks back into position when they are retracted. [14] Before continuing with the jack installation, measurements are taken to make sure that the jack is positioned high enough so that it can deploy without hitting the ground, but low enough so that it can provide maximum lift.



[15] A large screwdriver is used to hold the jack into place in its deployed position to double check there will be adequate travel. [16, 17] Each jack has a sensor pre-installed that lets the system know when the jack is completely deployed or retracted. On the opposite side of the jack (viewed from underneath the motorhome, looking out at the driver's side) you can see that the jack's harness has been plugged in, and the hydraulic line connected and routed to the main pump/reservoir assembly. 

For More Information

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Overhead Shot

Over the years I have used various storage covers for my Class A motorhome and consistently had a problem with the sharp points protruding in the upper areas making holes in the cover. These holes significantly reduce the life expectancy of the cover. I tried many things during the past 12 years and I finally found the solution: tennis balls.

Make a slit in the ball a little less than the size of the point causing the problem and slip the tennis ball over it. The ball, being of a soft fabric and rounded, prevents holes and is made of a thick rubber that will keep the ball snug around the point, preventing damage. No more holes and a long-lasting cover!

Tom Sharp | Mill Creek, Indiana



Stack the Deck

As full-time RVers, we're always looking for ways to maximize our storage space. Filling a small closet with plastic bins allows us to store more stuff in the closet than just using the shelving and it makes items easier to find. We use larger bins on the floor of our large closet, and larger yet bins are labeled and stacked in our motorhome's storage bays. These plastic bins are available in so many sizes, it's not difficult to utilize all available space.

Carl and Marty Turner | Pensacola, Florida



Put a Sock On It

A friend knitted us a little "sock" to put on the antenna crank handle inside our motorhome. When we crank up the antenna, we move the little sock to the gearshift lever in the cockpit and it stays there until we crank the antenna down. As long as that sock is on the gearshift lever, we will never drive away with the antenna up. My husband says the uglier the sock the better, and he will never miss it ... and he never has.

Wendy Hirsch | Green Valley, Arizona



Hold the Roll

The toilet-paper holder in my motorhome was inside a cabinet door in the bathroom. It was reachable, but it took a little extra effort. I added a hinge to the holder to allow it to swing out. It wasn't a big fix, but it does make it much easier to reach.

William Schmall | Coarsegold, California



Have an Idea? Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your DIY ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings. If your tip is selected for publication, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.

By RVers, for RVers

The Good Sam Club's crowd-sourced RV park reviews are the latest online tool for smart vacation planners

The quality of your accommodations can make or break a vacation, which is why millions of people click through user-generated hotel reviews before making reservations. Good Sam now offers a comparable feature for the campground crowd: RV park reviews written by people who have actually stayed at the parks. This latest addition to the club's website lets the RV community candidly praise or pan the RV parks they visit and rate their experiences from one to five stars.

With thousands of reviews uploaded since this feature launched last fall, the website is on its way to becoming the go-to place for RV park reviews. RVers don't need to be Good Sam members to post or search the reviews, so spread the word.

How to Review an RV Park

1. Go to www.goodsamclub.com/travel/campgroundsandrvparks and use the Find a Campground search tool to locate the RV park you'd like to review.
2. Click on that park's information page.
3. Under RVer Reviews, click on Write a Review and start sharing.



To get the big picture on RV parks throughout North America, check out both the new user-generated reviews and the annual ratings submitted by Good Sam's professional inspectors. These three-number ratings, with a maximum combined score of 30, evaluate the facilities, restrooms and appeal of nearly 7,000 privately owned RV campgrounds using uniform standards.

RV SHOWS

Good Sam members can get up to two half-price tickets at the following RV shows when they provide their membership number online or their membership card at the ticket window.

Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation and Camping Show
February 11 through 14
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Atlantic City RV and Camping Show
February 12 through 14
Atlantic City, New Jersey

Richmond Camping RV Expo
February 12 through 14
Richmond, Virginia

Colorado RV, Sports, Boat and Travel Show
February 25 through 28
Denver, Colorado

Harrisburg RV and Camping Show
February 25 through 28
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Greater Atlanta RV Show
March 4 through 6
Atlanta, Georgia

Rhode Island RV and Camping Show
March 4 through 6
Providence, Rhode Island

Virginia RV Show
March 11 through 13
Hampton, Virginia

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Find out more at www.campingworld.com/goldengiveaway.



PET TALES While camping in the north Georgia mountains, Good Sam members Bob and Kay Gray's golden retriever, Honey, used her nose to open the slide on their Airstream trailer's screen door. Bob scrambled for the camera and was able to get this photo before Honey nearly tore the screen door off trying to get out. pettales@goodsamclub.com



Ceiling Fabric Care

InstaGone and a livestock hypodermic needle can help remove stains and fix sagging material

By Bill and Jenn Gehr



CLEANING

Cost: \$25

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: 2/10

It's common to find ceiling fabric material similar to carpet in motorhomes. The short pile material is a bit more stylish and adds more warmth to the interior than ordinary wood ceiling panels. The fabric is constantly bombarded with cooking fumes and dust and

grime that enter the motorhome through windows, vents and doors. A rainwater leak is even worse, and can lead to hard-to-remove yellowish-brown stains around vents, TV antennas and air-conditioner shrouds. Fortunately, there's a product called InstaGone, a spray-on, multipurpose stain remover that's a must-have item in any motorhome-cleaning arsenal.

InstaGone not only removes ugly rainwater stains, but it neutralizes unsightly nicotine stains, soot, mold and mildew. The product comes in powder form and is simply mixed with warm water in a spray bottle that comes with the kit.

To use, it's best to cover the furniture and flooring and test in an inconspicuous spot first. Once compatibility is confirmed, the affected areas can be sprayed with an even coat, shaking the bottle between applications. There is no need to oversaturate the area, which will lead to dripping. Let the first coat dry for several hours. Apply as many coats necessary until the stain is gone. For those deep dark-brown, almost blackish-gray stains, most likely the InstaGone will not make the entire stain disappear. There's no need for rubbing or scrubbing.

InstaGone is also very effective on day-night shades, curtains, windshield drapes, or vinyl ceiling material. And it can be used to kill mold or mildew in the bathroom cupboard, shower walls or under the galley sink from a

water leak that has gone undetected. InstaGone kit comes with a 22-ounce spray bottle and two packets of powder concentrate; one packet is mixed with warm water to fill the bottle with cleaner. Hypodermic needle sells for around \$5.

Another common problem affecting ceiling fabric is delamination. This occurs when the glue that holds the material to the wood paneling fails, allowing the material to sag in one or more places. Installing new material in sections can be difficult to match and the process is not inexpensive. In many cases, spot repairing may be a good option.

We have found that using a large-bore hypodermic needle to inject liquid contact cement behind the material is a good way to make these repairs. The needles and syringes that work best are the extra-large type recommended for horses or pigs and can be found at most feed and tack stores.

To use, simply fill the syringe with liquid contact cement; make sure that you purchase clear-color cement! The needle is then poked through several spots of the ceiling fabric taking care not to inject too much glue in one spot. Apply pressure to the fabric until the material holds on its own. Finding contact cement that has a low enough viscosity to inject through the needle may be challenging, so marine epoxy is another viable option.

Unseen problems with ceiling fabric can be frustrating, but InstaGone and a little creativity can make a big difference in handling repairs that may have seemed futile in the past. InstaGone is available online and retails for \$16.99, which includes a 22-ounce spray bottle and two packets. **M**

InstaGone, 888-425-0125, www.instagone.com

[A] Large-bore hypodermic needle, available at feed and tack stores, is used to inject contact cement under sagging ceiling fabric. **[B]** Large stain in ceiling, caused by water intrusion, is ugly and normally hard to clean. **[C]** After spraying InstaGone onto the affected surface, the stain disappeared. Cleaner is sprayed on and allowed to work without scrubbing or blotting.



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Banks for the Refund



Finding it difficult to get his plea for a refund recognized, a reader turned to Hot Line to see if there was anything we could do. He wrote:

“ Last year, we took our 10-year-old Damon Intruder motorhome to Cummins Bridgeway in Michigan to have two cracked exhaust manifolds replaced. The coach is built on a Workhorse chassis and no parts are available. A Banks PowerPack 49560 System was installed in place of the manifolds, and then the motorhome was stored for the winter. In spring, while on our way to Pennsylvania, we heard a lot of noise and smelled fumes. The Banks System had a long crack in one of the header pipes. We drove home with the windows open to let out the fumes. Cummins got a replacement header system for the cracked part under warranty, but Banks would not pay for the \$375 labor. Can Hot Line please help?

Truman Schmalzriedt | Farmington Hills, Michigan

Schmalzriedt's case was forwarded to Gale Banks Engineering for its consideration. We received a follow-up note from Schmalzriedt that filled us in on his final resolution. It read:

“ After several letters from Hot Line on our behalf, Gale Banks Engineering reconsidered and we received a check for \$375 to cover the full labor bill. Thanks to Gale Banks and especially Hot Line. Your persistence saved the day for us!
TS

Flaking Fabric

Trying to get a manufacturer to cover repair work on a product after its warranty has expired is often an iffy proposition. However, there are instances in which out-of-warranty coverage might possibly be secured. One is when the product failure

originally happened and was fixed under warranty, and has recurred after the warranty lapsed. The other, as reflected in the following letter, is when an original failure happens within a short time of the warranty expiring.

“ We would like Hot Line's help concerning the cockpit chairs in our 2013 Georgetown 329DS Class A motorhome. We purchased the unit new in March 2013 and just after the 1-year warranty expired we noticed that the Soft Touch fabric on the passenger seat was flaking off, exposing the cloth backing.

In October 2014, we contacted our dealer and the manufacturer (Forest River) and both told us that because the warranty had expired, they couldn't do anything for us. The problem also manifested itself on the driver's seat. We had to cover the seats so that we didn't ruin our clothing.

We researched the cost of new seats as well as the cost of reupholstering our old seats, and both are very expensive. It is unthinkable that we should be required to absorb this expense on a coach that is only 2 years old.

Thank you in advance for Hot Line's assistance.

**Bill and Carolyn Ashby
Inverness, Florida**

Hot Line sent a letter of inquiry to Forest River to see if it could help the Ashbys. Soon thereafter, the Ashbys sent the following update:

“ Bryan Knight, service and warranty representative for Georgetown, was finally able to get in contact with us the latter part of September 2015. We sent him photos of the flaking seats, and after his review, he agreed to send us new seat covers as a goodwill gesture at no cost to us. When we receive the seat covers, we will go to Camping World in Summerfield, Florida, for the installation.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. We feel that we would not have received these results without Hot Line's help.

B&CA M

Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

Hot Line assists in mediating conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources, send typed letters to *MotorHome* Hot Line, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 and enclose copies of appropriate bills and correspondence, plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

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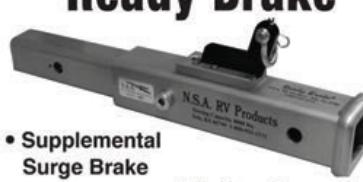


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SWEET SENSATIONS

(continued from page 31)

played by President Harry Truman during a visit in 1945.

Clouds continued to shroud the big mountain until our last morning in the park — so with the dawning of a clear, sunny day we scurried out to make some photos. Based on brochure photos and post cards, we determined the best and most accessible spot for pictures would be at Reflection Lakes, about 15 minutes east of the campground. We arrived in time to catch the iconic shot of Rainier mirrored in one of the small lakes right beside the main road — relieved to come away with at least a few photos revealing the beauty and grandeur of Mount Rainier.

Exiting the park that afternoon, we made our way to Mounthaven Resort, an RV/cabin campground just a half-mile west of the Nisqually Entrance. We'd looked it over on the way into the park, thinking it might serve as a good alternative to the Rainier campgrounds — especially for those desiring hookups and other amenities. That proved to be the case after owner Zandy Ball assigned us a full-service site nestled in a stand of towering cedars — and tipped us off to her favorite restaurant, Copper Creek Restaurant, just up the road in the village of Ashford.

Copper Creek has been serving up its old-fashioned, home-style cooking since 1946. It's an institution, favored by foodies far and wide. So we're just the latest to say that our meal — fresh, flaky grilled trout fillets, topped off with blackberry pie — was sensational. The blackberry pie, baked daily on the premises, merits special mention. It's been written up in major newspapers and magazines, and it really is soooo good — a sweet summation to our Mount Rainier visit. **M**

For More Information

Mount Rainier National Park
360-569-2211, www.nps.gov/mora

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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

RS #	ADVERTISER	PAGE #
123	Avion Vans.....	72
101	American Coach.....	57
102	Aqua-Hot.....	10
103	Aqua-Hot.....	11
125	AquaGo by Truma Corp.....	39
105	Brazel's RV Performance.....	69
106	Cal-Am Properties.....	76
	Camping World.....	47-49
107	Carefree of Colorado.....	23
	Classifieds.....	65-67
108	Custom Glass Solutions.....	15
130	DISH Network.....	61
109	Dave & LJ RV Interiors.....	69
	Docere Clinics.....	5
110	Foretravel.....	2
111	Geico.....	29
	Good Sam RV Loans.....	73
	Good Sam Roadside Assistance.....	71
	Good Sam Visa.....	63
	Harbor Freight Tools.....	53
112	Holland Motor Homes.....	35
104	Key Largo.....	9
113	Newell Coach Corporation.....	77
114	Newmar Corporation.....	7
115	Nexus RV.....	12
116	Progressive Insurance.....	17
118	RV Armor, Inc.....	18
	RV Buyer's Guide.....	70
	RV Marketplace.....	64
119	RV Roofing Solutions.....	24
128	RV World of Nokomis.....	43
120	RVRoof.com.....	45
129	Riverside Resort & Casino.....	75
117	Roadmaster, Inc.....	31
122	SMI Manufacturing.....	5
121	Safe-T-Plus.....	46
124	Thor Industries.....	25
126	Vogt RV Center.....	44
127	Winnebago Industries.....	19

While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

By Ken Freund

Bugged Out

Q We are getting ready to purchase our first motorhome and don't want critter problems. About 15 years ago I took my first and only trip in a motorhome. We woke up one morning with ants from front to back, and yes, in our bed. How do owners protect themselves and their motorhomes from ants, snakes and rodents?

Shirley Caruso | Phoenix, Arizona

A Sometimes ants seem to swarm an area for no explicable reason; other times their scouts find a source of food and the rest come after them to feast on it. Ants are so small it's almost impossible to keep them out of a motorhome, since there are so many small openings. Therefore your best bet is to avoid parking in an area infested with ants, and keep all foodstuffs and trash sealed. To get in, ants have to climb up hoses, wires or tires, so consider spraying these areas with insect spray. If you are not in a windy area, sprinkling powdered cleanser or talcum powder all the way around the tires can help too.

It's not unusual for ants to enter a motorhome in storage but that kind of infestation during an overnight stay is highly unusual. When stored, in an extreme situation, we've heard of owners parking a coach with

its tires centered on a large, metal pan with the tire raised on a wood or plastic block. A small amount of motor oil creates a "moat" in the pan across which the ants can't travel. If the motorhome is plugged in, wiping a thin layer of axle grease on a few inches of the cable will likewise create a barrier that helps keep ants from crawling up.

Rodents are another big problem. Often, mice, rats or squirrels will store their food or make nests in engine or storage compartments, under beds and couches, etc. They can gnaw on wiring and fabric and do a lot of damage. They also chew through food containers, so it's helpful to store food items in metal canisters. If you have a cat, let it hang around in and around the motorhome and leave its scent. Try rodent traps and baits and leave mothballs in storage areas.

Snakes aren't usually a problem, unless you are in certain areas infested with them. Make sure the underside of your motorhome has no openings large enough for these critters to get in. Close off openings with metal screening mesh stapled in place. If you have a pet mongoose, let it loose inside your motorhome once in a while. (Just kidding!)

Motorhome Mobility Modifications

Q We own a 2011 Monaco Monarch 35SFD. The only problem we have is that there are quite a few steps, outside and inside, and my wife and I are getting older and having problems getting up and down the stairs. I am trying to find a company that makes a power lift that could be installed so we can use it to get in and out. As of now, we do not need one for a wheelchair, but we will soon. Have you heard of such a thing?

Leonard Abel | Apache Junction, Arizona

A There are a number of companies that build and install mobility-enhancing products in RVs. There's a list at www.woodalls.com/

[articledetails.aspx?articleID=153397](#). Accessible Design & Consulting (310-215-3332) in California also designs and installs these types of devices. A Google search for "mobility modifications for RVs" will bring up many more companies that are in this field.

ABS Malfunction

Q I own a 1994 Jamboree Searcher motorhome. The ABS light stays on while I drive. Is that bad? Is it an expensive fix?

Blanca De Anda | Via email

A The antilock brake system (ABS) consists of a number of components, including wheel-speed sensors, the ABS control unit,

associated wiring and the link to the computer. The ABS self-diagnostic routinely checks the components every time the engine is started and after the vehicle is driven several feet and if the wheel-speed sensors all test normal, the light is supposed to go out. If it doesn't, it indicates that a problem was detected and that the ABS system has been shut off due to the fault. However, it does not show you exactly what is wrong. To determine what specifically is wrong, a scan tool must be connected and trouble codes read and interpreted. Then a technician needs to check the parts to verify what exactly is faulty. The most common problems are wheel-speed sensors, which aren't too costly. However, if the control unit is faulty, it can get expensive. The

only way to tell is to have the system checked out by someone qualified to work on these systems. Meanwhile, you are driving without the safety benefits of ABS brakes.

City Water/Freshwater Tank Problem

Q We own a 2015 Forest River FR3 30DS motorhome. When I hook up to city water at a campground the water enters the freshwater tank and fills to the point that it runs out the overflow. The owner's manual states there are one or more check valves to prevent this. But it does not say where they are. The dealer said the water pump has the check valve and must be replaced. How can I check for debris in the pump or must I replace the entire pump?

Doug Sordi | Madera, California

A Yes, you can check for debris in the pump. You can also connect to city water and carefully listen for the flow of water and then determine if water is back flowing through the pump. However, your problem should be covered under warranty. Have you contacted your dealer?

Note: I later heard back from Sordi, and the dealer replaced the pump under warranty, which solved the problem.

Noisy Sunova

Q We have a 2005 Itasca Sunova on a Ford F53 chassis with a V-10 gas engine. It runs quietly until it hits a rise in the road or a load is placed on the drivetrain. It then emits a high-pitched whine that sounds like it is coming from the transmission or drivetrain. Is this normal for this vehicle? Is there a way to eliminate this noise, or damp it with sound-damping material?

Harold Thatcher | Brandon, Florida

A Without hearing the noise, it's impossible to say for sure what it is. But I can tell you how to figure out what it is, and perhaps mitigate it. The two most likely culprits are the cooling fan going on high, or the transmission

downshifting. If the engine RPM increase at the same moment that the noise increases, the noise is being caused by a transmission downshift, resulting in higher engine sound levels. You can verify the source by removing the engine "doghouse" cover and driving while an observer in the passenger seat listens for where the increased noise is coming from. To reduce the frequency of downshifting under slight increases in load, you'd have to modify the transmission controls with after-market programmers. It is possible to add insulation to reduce the transmission of sound into the cabin. Products such as Dynamat can be installed on the floor, firewall and doghouse areas inside and under the carpets. These products are readily available online or through car-stereo shops, which also install them.

Cruise Control and Speedometer Quit — Tip

I had a problem similar to that of John Randazzo in the November 2015 issue ("Cruise Control and Speedometer Quit"). While driving with the cruise control set, the speedometer, odometer and cruise control would disengage if I went over a good-size bump or pothole. Not always, but often enough to make it very scary while driving down the interstate. I can't comment on going faster than 65 MPH, because that is as fast as I drove at the time.

My problem turned out to be the VSS sensor on the upper portion of the rear-axle differential, as you indicated. Electrically, it tested the same (resistance) as the replacement. For the cost of the replacement, it may be worth trying for Randazzo. As you know, it is quite easy to change.

Evan Rischpater | Naples, New York

Measuring the resistance of the VSS isn't the only way to test it; ideally, its output should be checked with an oscilloscope. However, a bench test or even while the motorhome is raised on a hoist with the wheels spinning wouldn't necessarily show a fault, which only

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occurs when you hit a bump and the axle is jarred violently. Therefore, a replacement may be the most expedient way to attempt to solve the problem.

Skid Rollers Tip

In the November 2015 issue, Mike Churchill was looking for skid rollers. We had a problem with our 2013 Itasca Meridian frame dragging on steep approaches and departures. I found a company called Ultra-Fab (www.ultra-fab.com), that makes a large selection of skid rollers. The best retailer I found was Rural King (www.ruralking.com). I had four of them welded on the frame and that eliminated the grinding noise. For the Winnebago product I had to make another minor change. I hope this helps some other owners.

Frank Kelly | Prospect, Connecticut

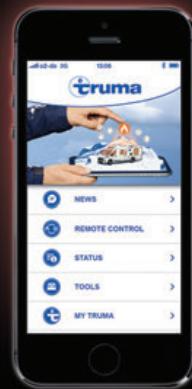
Thanks for sharing this source with us. Ultra-Fab offers several different types and sizes for various motorhome

Truma iNet Remote Control Heating System

The Truma iNet System enables a Combi furnace to be remotely controlled via a smartphone or tablet — anywhere, anytime. The system allows users to control the Combi furnace via the Truma app and to regulate the current device and vehicle status. The heart of the system is the Truma iNet Box, a control unit that enables communication between the Truma app on the smartphone or tablet and the Combi device. While in close proximity, this takes place via Bluetooth; once outside Bluetooth range, the iNet Box automatically switches to communication by text message. Depending on the settings made in the app, a text message is automatically generated, followed by a response message from the iNet box that confirms the settings.

The app can be used to remotely control all functions of the Truma Combi furnace, i.e., temperature, fan level and water settings. In the case of Combi Plus versions, it is also possible to select energy type: LP-gas, combination gas/electric or just electric. In addition, the status of the device can be determined via the app. The iNet Box reports current temperature, water temperature of the Combi, and onboard voltage if the RV is connected to shorepower. Additionally, RVers can set an alarm function that will inform them via text message if the temperature or onboard voltage in the vehicle drops below a certain level. Starting this year, all Truma Combi furnaces will be equipped with the new control panel CP plus — iNet-ready and 2015 Combi models can be easily upgraded.

Truma, www.truma.net



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designs, along with mounting hardware. Rural King has 80 stores in 10 states and can be reached at 800-561-1752.

Dead Outlets, No Owner's Manuals

Q We own a 2001 Harney Riata Class A coach. We cannot locate the user manuals. Also, we lost power to three power outlets. Troubleshooting

without schematics is a nightmare. Nobody can identify the cause of the problem. It is equipped with an inverter. Do you have any suggestions?
Mark Hitesman | Kuna, Idaho

A As you probably know, Harney went out of business shortly after your motorhome was built. Typically, schematics are only available from the manufacturer upon special request;

they are not generally provided at time of sale. Owner's manuals for individual appliances are often available on the websites of their manufacturers for free. Your best bet for getting any specific owner's manual for your motorhome is to ask an owner you might find at a campground to photocopy it. Another way might be to contact sellers; a Google search of your model for sale should bring up several. Offer them a fee for their help and see what happens.

As for the lack of power, I assume you mean 120-volt AC outlets. If you have power at other outlets when you are running off the inverter only, it indicates the inverter is OK. Several outlets are often controlled by one GFCI outlet, which if tripped will shut off power to the others. If resetting it doesn't help, you may need to replace the outlet; they don't cost much and do go bad from time to time. If it turns out to be a bad GFCI outlet, be sure to remove the bad unit or at least pull it from its box before you go shopping for a new one. Many RV outlets are very thin, as the walls aren't as thick as those in a residence, and if you choose a new one that's too deep it may not fit back in its mounting box.

Dashboard Repair

Q Can you help me find a dash pad for my 1999 Dynamax Isata 23-foot Touring Sedan on a GM chassis?
Donald Krohn | Peoria, Arizona

A That part is no longer available. However, there's a company that does excellent dash and interior repairs, as I've seen their work. Contact them for a quote, and you can ship the old part to them for restoration. Just Dashes, 800-247-3274, www.justdashes.com. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

Email tech@motorhomemagazine.com or write to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 (please include your name, city and state). Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

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Have a Good Time!

With Mardi Gras right around the corner, a visit to Fred's Lounge will teach you the meaning of *laissez les bon temps rouler*

By Alan Rider

There are some things in this world I can't rationally explain. Like my yearning for the open road in general and the passion I feel for motorhome travel in particular. Equally mysterious is the love I have for southern Louisiana. Having grown up a thousand miles away in the heart of the Rust Belt, there's just no making sense of the hold this swampy corner of the country has on my heart.

Forced to try and account for this attachment, I can only tell you that, while I dig the food and the music, it's the people who keep me coming back. Meet them once and I guarantee you'll be hard-pressed to find a friendlier group anywhere.

A big part of what makes the residents of the territory they call Acadiana so special is the irrepressible *joie de vivre* that pervades everything they do. Or in plain English, these folks really know how to *laissez les bon temps rouler* (let the good times roll).

Consider the crowd that turns up every week at Fred's Lounge in the small town of Mamou (420 Sixth Street; 337-468-5411), the self-professed Cajun Music Capital of the World. These Saturday morning shindigs are part live-radio broadcast (tune in to KVPI-AM 1050), part lively Cajun dance party.

What few people realize, however, is that beneath the live music and the festive atmosphere, this small drinking establishment has played a big role in preventing the extinction of

Cajun music, language and culture for more than a half-century.

Of course, the folks who come here from across the country and around the world probably don't know about all that as they spill out Fred's front door onto the sidewalk (arrive early if you hope to get a seat). They come here to drink — yes, the bar opens at 7:30 a.m. — and dance as if it were Saturday night.

And dance they do, with couples crowding the makeshift dance floor in spite of the hand-lettered sign that proclaims, "This is not a dance hall." To get some idea of the exuberance of the crowd, another sign, written in dearly departed Fred's childlike scrawl, says, "Please do not stand on the tables, chairs, cigarette machine,

booths or jukebox."

While things rarely get that rowdy anymore, there's a definite surge of excitement when Fred's widow, the grandmotherly hostess everyone just calls Tante (Aunt) Sue, steps out from behind the bar and takes to the microphone.

After she welcomes everyone to her Saturday *soirée*, the crowd will inevitably coax silver-haired Sue into singing a number with the band. She raises the pint bottle of Hot Damn! cinnamon schnapps she keeps in her well-worn leather belt holster in a toast, takes a healthy swig and launches into a plaintive song whose Cajun French lyrics you just know must be about the heartbreak of star-crossed lovers, the pain of spurned affections, or maybe both.

After Sue finishes and heads back to slinging liquid refreshments, the band picks up the pace with the infectious rhythms that are the hallmark of Cajun music. Even if you've never heard these tunes before, even if you loudly proclaim you don't dance, it's a safe bet you'll find it hard to just stand still.

Ultimately, Fred's Lounge has become such a cultural icon for one simple reason: It's a place that's all about having a good time. Which, when it comes right down to it, is what we're all looking for out here along The Road Ahead. **M**

“... what makes the residents ... so special is [their] irrepressible *joie de vivre* ... ”

Cajun Country ➔

From right: The tiny south-central Louisiana town of Mamou is the home of world-famous Fred's Lounge. Everyone's favorite hostess, Tante Sue, sings one with the band.



Photos: Alan Rider

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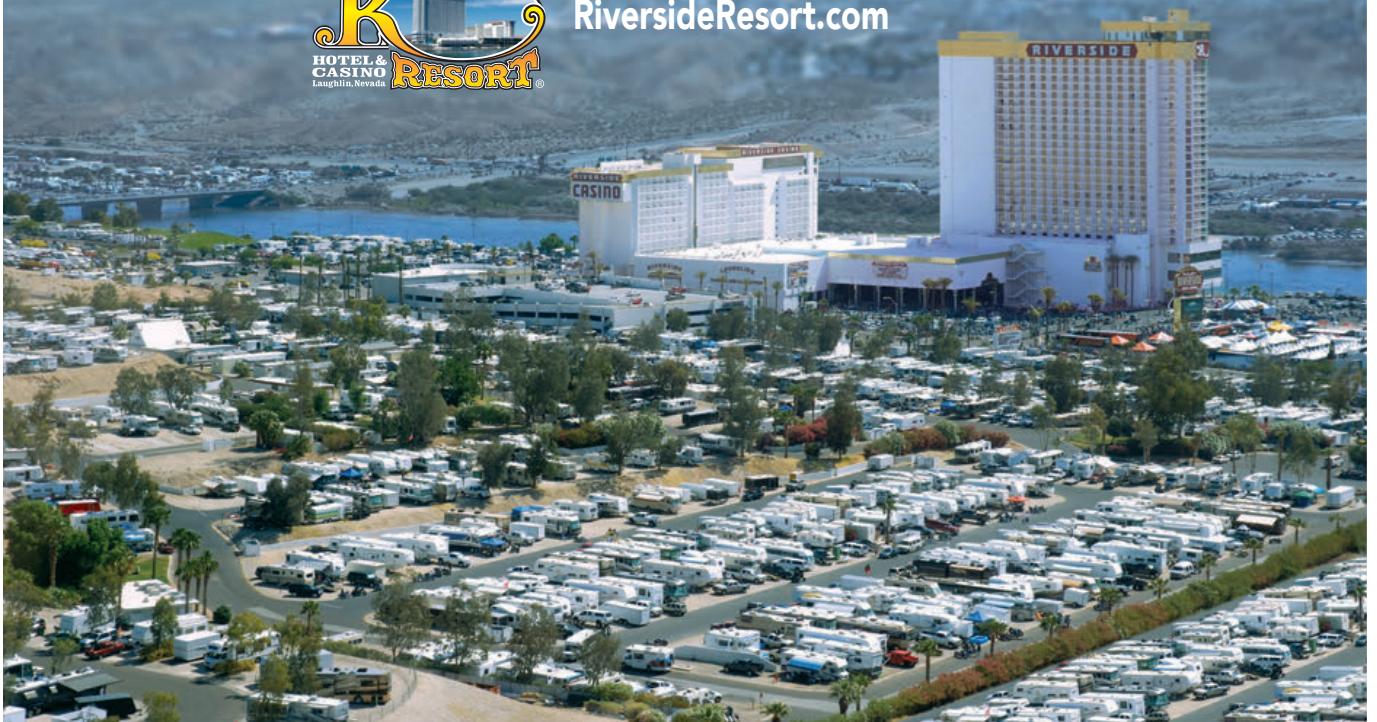
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