

The Pacific Northwest



August 2012

Bob and Molly Hillery

Bob's brother Geoff had wanted to see the northwest United States so we planned a driving trip that would take us through some of the most beautiful and unusual parts of the states of Washington, Oregon and northern California, as well as a small portion of the Canadian Province of British Columbia.

We arranged to meet in Vancouver, British Columbia and spend a few days there and in Victoria before taking the ferry to Seattle where we would pick up our rental car for the rest of the trip. In BC we planned to take tours and public transport.

We met as arranged at the Shangri-La hotel in downtown Vancouver after Molly and I had flown via Salt Lake City and Geoff had taken a direct flight from London. From there we started our journey south, taking the next 20 days to reach San Francisco.

Along the way, we saw not only the cities of Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle and Sacramento but some very beautiful countryside: mountains, lakes and rivers. This whole area is part of the "Ring of Fire" (the volcano and earthquake zone circling the Pacific Ocean) so we experienced the effects of this seismic activity in many different forms.

In all we covered 2300 miles (all but 200 by car) and visited many wonderful places in gorgeous weather, which made for a very pleasant trip.

West Coast Trip, August 2012

Wednesday August 1

We left home at 7pm and had dinner at Morton's downtown. They are currently running a \$45 prix fixe menu which covers the dishes we usually order there so we had an excellent meal at a much more reasonable price than we have paid in the past. We then drove directly to the airport and checked in to the Airport Marriott, where we would be leaving our car for the next three weeks.

Thursday August 2

We were up at 6:30 and caught the 7am shuttle to the airport. Check-in and Security went quickly so we had a good half hour at the gate before our 8:40 flight to Salt Lake City. The flight left on time with a projected early arrival, which was what we had hoped for since there had been a last minute change in our itinerary that gave us a 32 minute connection time in SLC before our onward flight to Vancouver, British Columbia. We had breakfast on this first flight and the weather was generally good so we were anticipating an uneventful – and on time – arrival.

We were meeting Geoffrey in Vancouver to begin our three week driving trip from there to San Francisco. His non-stop flight from London was scheduled to arrive about 90 minutes after us so the plan was to meet up at the Shangri-La hotel where Mark (Geoff's son) had very kindly booked us all in for a three night stay. As we flew across the Plains towards Salt Lake, we were hoping that not only would we make our onward flight but also that his would similarly be on time and uneventful.

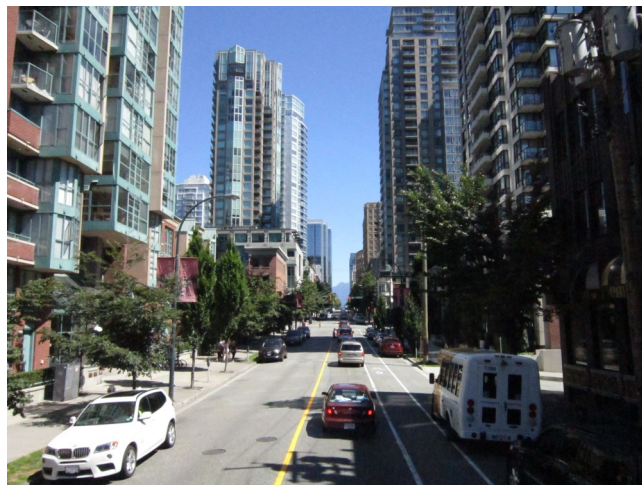
We did indeed arrive about 20 minutes early into SLC and thus had a relatively easy walk (there was no electric cart to greet us as "promised" by Delta) to our next gate and our 11am flight. Although everyone was seated on board before the scheduled departure time, a passenger decided not to continue his journey so we were delayed about 30 minutes while his bags were off-loaded. Despite this, we arrived in Vancouver only a few minutes late and wound our way (literally) through Immigration and Customs before walking just a little way to the metro train into town. This was over ground for part of the way and then became a subway in the center of town. We got off at the Vancouver Center station and had a four (short) block walk to the Shangri-La hotel.

We checked in and then walked a couple of blocks to Starbucks before returning to the room to await Geoff's arrival. We had observed at the airport that his flight was running about 30 minutes late so we didn't expect him to arrive at the hotel before about 4 pm. In fact it was about 4:45 when we received a call from him saying that he was at the hotel safe and sound after a two hour delay leaving London. Apparently a good deal of the lost time was made up en route so he was less than an hour late arriving in Vancouver.

We made arrangements to meet in the lobby at 7 and walk to an Italian restaurant about 10 minutes away for dinner. It was a very good meal with good service so we had a very pleasant 2 ½ hours of catching up.

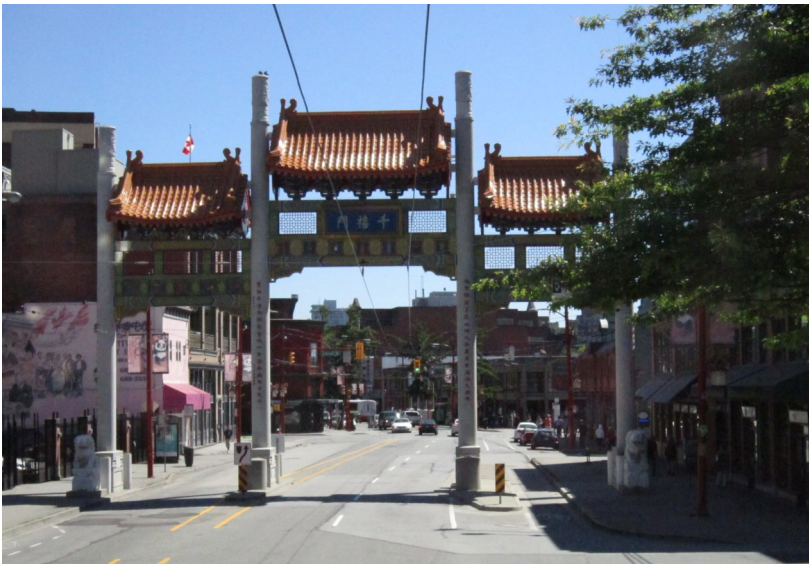
Friday August 3

We met for breakfast at 8:30 and had a leisurely meal before walking a couple of blocks to pick up the Hop on/Hop off bus for our tour of Vancouver. It was a beautiful sunny morning and the temperature was in the mid-seventies so it was perfect for sightseeing.





Downtown Vancouver, including the uniquely designed library



The Entrance to Chinatown (second largest to San Francisco in North America) and (right) the steam-powered clock!



We had decided to take the full two hour complete circuit before choosing stops we might make for a more detailed visit. However, when we reached Chinatown (almost all the way round) we got off for a coffee break and then visited the Dr Sun Yat Sen Chinese garden. This is a very pleasant oasis in the middle of the city and the tour guide made the one hour visit interesting and informative.





By the time this visit was over we were ready to complete the bus circuit and return to the hotel to relax for a while before dinner. It was a good way to get an overview of the city and see many of the beautiful vistas that exist, many of which overlook the water which seems almost to surround the town. Unfortunately, we didn't get much time in Stanley Park (the huge promontory dedicated to recreation, lawns and gardens and is a highlight of Vancouver) but we did see many of the large



areas of green space, landscaping and water features that are a feature of this young but vibrant city. Vancouver is less than 130 years old and has many huge ultra-modern skyscrapers as well as a number of late Victorian churches and residences. These, together with the green space and the almost constant views of the water, make for a very beautiful city.

Tonight we ate at the "Diva at the Met", a rather swish restaurant in the Metropolitan Hotel about four blocks from ours. Molly and I had the five course tasting menu (with about four rounds of "snacks" to precede it) and Geoff had scallops and chicken from the a la carte menu. We all enjoyed the food and service and once again we were in the restaurant for over 2 ½ hours before walking home on a still warm evening.

Saturday August 4

After breakfast we once again walked just a couple of blocks to pick up the shuttle bus to the Capilano Suspension Bridge Park. This is a large park on two sides of the Capilano River in North Vancouver whose main attraction is a 500 feet long suspension bridge spanning the gorge at a height of about 250 feet. The first bridge was built here in 1889 (the city of Vancouver was only a couple of years old at the time) and it and the subsequent improved bridges have been a major tourist attraction ever since.

Today's bridge is five feet wide and has a wooden plank base as well as a relatively high rail – but it still sways significantly and provides a thrilling walk as well as some



tremendous views of the canyon and the river below and the Douglas firs and other tree species, some of which reach over four hundred feet tall.



Once across the gorge and with nerves steadied, the next attraction is the “Treetop Adventure”. This is a series of walkways – some solid, some swaying bridges – which meander through the dense rain forest at heights that reach as much as ten stories above the forest floor. At times you are walking almost on a level with the forest canopy, at others you can stop at one of the many platforms built around tree trunks and look up a couple of hundred feet to the tops. Explanatory notices along the way provide information on the forest, its eco-system and the flora and fauna of the region.



Treetops Adventure



Leaving the treetop adventure, a walkway continues at ground level amongst the trees and at times descends quite a distance down the canyon walls for better views of the river, which today was actually little more than a rapidly flowing stream after a period of little rain. Again, notices and items of interest such as a bird of prey sanctuary, add to the enjoyment and educational aspect of the experience.

After all the walking and returning across the suspension bridge we were ready for a light lunch which we ate in one of the outdoor cafes of the park. The temperature by this time was well into the eighties but the low humidity and the tree shade (and lack of any insect life) combined to make outdoor eating a very pleasant experience.

The final walk in the park took us on the new **Cliffwalk**, best described by the brochure. "If you have ever wondered where fear lives, welcome to its balcony. At 20 inches wide and some 300 feet above the canyon floor, Cliffwalk is a cantilevered traverse that takes you beyond the granite cliff face to vertigo-inducing viewing platforms that offer a perspective previously enjoyed only by eagles".



Actually, that language may be a little "over the top" and the walk is not as scary as it sounds but it does provide a totally different view and experience and there is no doubt that it is an engineering triumph and a wonderful addition to the Park. Judging by the line for this attraction it will become at least as popular as the suspension bridge itself.

We had spent about five hours in Capilano and had a most enjoyable day in a beautiful setting before we returned by the shuttle to downtown and our hotel. Tonight we decided to dine in the hotel which had very leisurely service but good food and another 2 ½ hours of conversation.

Sunday August 5

We were up a little earlier today and met for breakfast at eight so that we had plenty of time to check out and take the short taxi ride to the bus depot to start our trip to Victoria. We left the hotel at 9:30 because we were a little concerned about the effects on traffic of a big parade (Gay Pride!) scheduled for later in the day but it turned out that it was very quiet on the route and we were at the bus depot about an hour before departure.

At 10:45 the bus left and we headed south almost to the US border to get the noon ferry to Vancouver Island. The bus drove directly on to the ship so we had no problems with carrying luggage so we were able to go straight to the cafeteria on board for a light lunch. After that we sat/stood on deck for the remainder of the 1 ½ hour voyage through the San Juan Islands. There must be dozens (hundreds?) of islands of varying size between the mainland and the large Vancouver Island and many have just a few summer homes as the only sign of habitation. Others appear to have small towns or villages but most are largely uninhabited and form a beautiful backdrop to the intra-coastal waterway – especially on a clear sunny day such as today.



Soon after 1:30 we re-boarded the bus as the ferry docked and then continued another 45 minutes to the Victoria bus depot. It turned out that this was just a five minute walk from our Marriott hotel so we were checking in around 2:30. Only one room was ready at that time so we put all our bags in that room and went for a brief walk around the harbor and downtown Victoria areas.

The town was much more crowded than we had seen on any prior trip here but we assume that most of the crowd was here for a concert later in the day on the harbor as Victoria celebrated British Columbia Day (actually tomorrow, Monday). Apparently this is a countrywide holiday but not all Provinces actually celebrate it and each has its own name for the day itself. Certainly British Columbians were in a celebratory mood and Victoria was packed with people on a warm and a somewhat more humid afternoon.

We walked around for an hour or more (admiring the Empress Hotel and the Parliament Buildings—below), had a coffee and then returned to the hotel to check-in to the other room. We relaxed (with a complimentary bottle of wine) before walking to a local restaurant for dinner.



We chose to eat at the Aura restaurant which is in a hotel right on the point of the inner harbor. It was about a 20 minute walk there, during which we passed the thousands of people sitting on the harbor side and every spare patch of grass to hear the concert which was scheduled for the evening. In fact, the Victoria Symphony Orchestra was just starting as we passed (we paused briefly as “O Canada” was played).

The dinner was once again a very good meal with excellent and relaxed service. We were also treated to a brief but spectacular fireworks display which presumably was the finale to the concert but was staged right above the restaurant so we heard every “explosion” at close range and the colored sprays appeared to be on top of us. Consequently it was almost 10:30 before we started our walk back to the hotel.

Monday August 6

We were up soon after seven and I walked to the Victoria Clipper ticket office to get our boarding passes for tomorrow’s ride to Seattle. In all I had a two mile walk before breakfast in the Concierge Lounge on a bright morning but one that had more clouds than the previous three.

At ten we walked across to the bus depot to pick up the morning portion of our day long tour. The first 1 ½ hours were a city tour of Victoria but it turned out to be much more than what most people consider to be the town. Of course, we saw the parliament buildings (Victoria is the capital of BC), Chinatown, the harbor and the central shopping district but we were also taken through areas that were several miles from the city center.

“Victoria” is actually seven municipalities (each with its own police force, government, etc) that are essentially contiguous but have many different characters. Two in particular stick out – what the guide called the new rich and the old money districts. Both had multi-million dollar homes but whereas the newer area had been built for today’s elite, the older district had multi-acre grounds and huge mansions. Many of the latter had been converted to multi-dwelling units and in a number of cases the grounds had been sold off to house more residential units. Hence, you may see a set of imposing gates that lead nowhere (except to someone’s garden) or others that were the entrance to a rather modest detached home. Similarly, a number of these grand old homes were now “paying the rent” by becoming upscale bed and breakfast establishments.

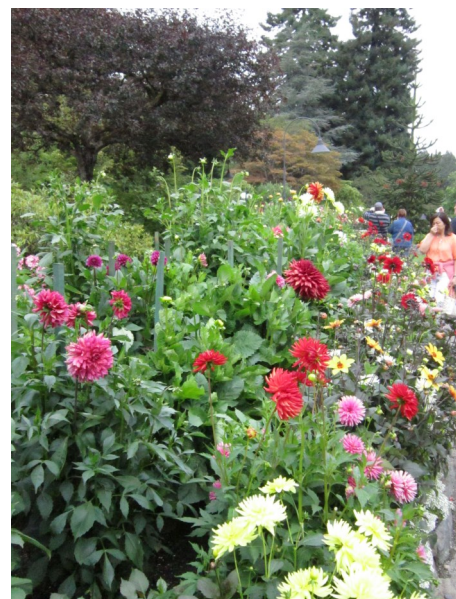
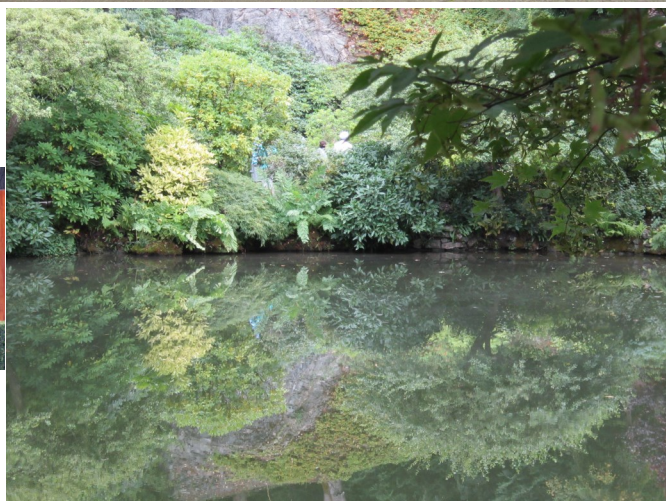
Perhaps the most interesting part of the tour was a stop we made at the top of Mount Tolmie, probably only a few hundred feet high but providing a 360 degree panorama of the entire Greater Victoria area. The tourist center that most would recognize as Victoria was visible as were the other six municipalities, but we could also see the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State (with snow-capped mountains) across the Straits of Juan de Fuca, the edge of the Cascades to the east and the mountains of Vancouver Island itself to the West and North. Molly and I have visited Victoria on several previous occasions but had never experienced this view and appreciated the fact that Victoria is part of a 400,000 population area.

At noon we were given a break to get a bite to eat (which we did in the cafeteria of the BC Museum – regarded as second only to the Smithsonian by some) and we also were able to spend just a few minutes in the Empress Hotel, which is the centerpiece of the waterfront area and dates from the era when the railroads brought tourists here a hundred years ago.



The view from Mt Tolmie and the Victoria

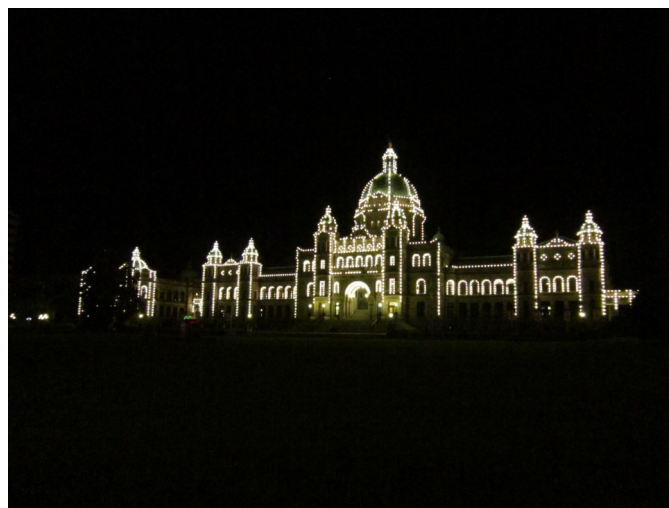
The afternoon portion of the tour was a visit to Butchart Gardens, about 20 miles north of the city. These gardens are a National Historic Site of Canada and have a world-wide reputation which drew 1.5 million visitors last year. They cover 55 acres and began from an idea Jennie Butchart had to beautify the worked-out limestone quarry which had supplied her husband's nearby Portland cement plant. The Gardens are still owned by the Butchart family and today comprise five main gardens. Perhaps the most impressive is the sunken garden in the original quarry but the rose garden, with its hundreds of species, runs a close second. The Japanese, Italian and Mediterranean Gardens have their own beauty and charm and the whole is immaculately manicured and complemented by broad areas of lawn and several ponds and fountains.



We were in the Gardens for almost three hours but anyone with a keen interest in gardening and plant species from around the world could easily spend days or weeks in the grounds – and still find something new at every turn in the miles of pathways.

It was a little after 5:30 by the time we were back at the hotel so we made a slightly later dinner reservation than usual, enjoyed a glass of wine and then relaxed until 7:30.

At that time we walked to the Harbour House restaurant, about 15 minutes from the hotel. This is a restaurant that Molly and I had eaten in several times in the past and had always enjoyed the food and service. Tonight the ambience seemed a little less attractive (but that might be memory playing tricks) and the place was noisier than we had remembered. The food was good, however, and the service was certainly adequate and friendly so we enjoyed the meal. In fact Geoff thought his was the best so far on this trip; Molly and I were perhaps a little less enthusiastic. Nevertheless it was a pleasant evening and a nice way to complete this trip to Victoria by adding a little “continuity” to what must be our sixth or seventh time here.



The Empress Hotel at sunset and the Illuminated Parliament Buildings

Tuesday August 7



We were at breakfast by 8:30 and checked out by 9:30 so that we could take our time walking to the ferry terminal for our Victoria Clipper catamaran ride to Seattle. We checked our bags and had time for a last few minutes sitting overlooking the harbor before we started the boarding process. The US Immigration took place here in Canada and Geoff needed to fill out an I-94 form for entry to the US, which slowed us down a little. However we were still able to get three seats together on the upper deck of the ship and we departed on time at 11:20.

Once out of Victoria Harbor the ship accelerated to its cruising speed of 30 knots for the crossing of the Straits of San Juan de Fuca. The seas were quite calm but it wasn't long before we were in thick fog so our window seats didn't amount to much.

The fog horn onboard was sounded frequently for a good deal of the crossing and we appeared to slow considerably at one point, presumably due to the fog.

Otherwise the crossing was uneventful and we arrived in Seattle at 2:20, about 20 minutes later than scheduled. Once through US Customs we had only a very short walk to the Waterfront Marriott.

By this time the fog had lifted considerably and after check-in we enjoyed a coffee sitting outdoors before Geoff and I took a walk along the waterfront. We then returned to the hotel, had a glass of wine and then relaxed until dinner at 8pm. Tonight we ate at Anthony's Pier 66, literally across the street from the hotel. We had a waterfront window table and so were able to watch the activities across the water as well as enjoy another good meal.

Wednesday August 8

We had breakfast in the Concierge Lounge (a little crowded) and then made reservations for a tour of the Boeing Plant in Everett. This left at 10:30 from the hotel and we were at the huge facility in plenty of time for our noon guided tour.

We were escorted to what is billed as the largest building (by volume) anywhere in the world and it houses the assembly lines for the 747, the 767, the 777 and the new 787 Dreamliner. In most cases the planes are actually put together on a (slowly) moving assembly line but the Dreamliner is assembled in one spot and all the fully completed major components (fuselage, wings, wheels, engines, etc) are brought from the multi-national partner locations around the world and joined. We actually witnessed the arrival of two major wing sections during our visit. It was claimed that a plane could be assembled in this manner in just three days.



No cameras allowed in the manufacturing area—but we were allowed to take photos in the Visitor Center.

That's a GE90 engine!!

Altogether the plant is an amazing place to visit. All services (water, gas, electricity, etc) are carried in miles of underground tunnels which also serve as walkways for employees as well as tourists. The manufacturing floor is spotless and, although 40,000 people are employed here, there doesn't appear to be a huge number on the actual floor. Perhaps the sheer size of the building dwarfs all inside it – including the planes themselves to some degree.

On returning to downtown we spent an hour in Pike's Place Market before walking back to the hotel. We made a reservation tonight at Ivar's on the waterfront and began our slow half mile walk there at 7:30. We had a good meal – not as good as Anthony's in my opinion – and then a very casual stroll back to the hotel around 10:30.

Thursday August 10

After breakfast we picked up our rental car (right from the hotel lobby!) and set off to the Olympic peninsula. We took the car ferry to Bainbridge Island (35 minutes) and then drove another 1 ½ hours to Port Angeles on the north coast – almost directly opposite Victoria on Vancouver Island. The weather was clear and mild such that we could see right across the Straits and, from a little higher elevation we were able to pick out a cruise ship docked in Victoria.

A cloudy start as we left Seattle by ferry.

We had lunch in Port Angeles before entering the Olympic National Park and taking the 17 mile drive to Hurricane Ridge



at an elevation of a little over 5000 feet. There were both cloudy skies and blue patches as we climbed but we had some superb views across the Straits to Vancouver Island and of Mt Baker some fifty miles east in Washington State.

Once at the Ridge, the skies were very clear and we were able to see many snow-capped peaks of the Olympic Range, with only the very top of Mt Olympus itself (8000 feet) being in the clouds. The views were fantastic and the weather was perfect as we took in the surroundings and followed a short Alpine path at the summit. The wild flowers of blue, orange and yellow were gorgeous and we even saw a deer family up close.



At 3:45 we started our return trip via the same route but unfortunately our GPS was acting up so we had to rely on paper map navigation – not the easiest task with the scale of map we had and the many minor roads. However, we arrived at the Bainbridge Island terminal in time to get the 6:30 ferry back to Seattle during which we had great views of the city and of Mt Rainier. We made it back to the hotel with sufficient time for a quick clean up before driving to Salty's restaurant on the south end of the city, from where we had wonderful view of the skyline as dusk changed to nighttime. It was also a good meal with very good service so gave us a nice way to complete our three days in the Emerald City.



Mt Rainier and the Seattle skyline

Friday August 10

We were up for an 8:30 breakfast despite having been awoken at 5am by what turned out to be a false alarm. Nevertheless we had to evacuate the building briefly before word -of-mouth said that it had been a false alarm. I found it somewhat disturbing that the Marriott staff didn't give a formal "All Clear" but simply turned off the evacuation messages when the alarm was over.

We left the hotel about 10 and drove directly south on Interstate 5 to the entrance to the ***Mt St Helens*** Visitor Center. We made one coffee stop on the drive south but other than that we simply enjoyed the scenery - particularly the spectacular views of Mt Rainier on a very clear and sunny day.

We spent about 1 ½ hours at the Visitor Center and saw a movie of the events leading up to and the eruption itself and heard an excellent talk by one of the park rangers.

We also strolled by the very good exhibits that not only covered the 1980 activity here but also put it in comparison with other major volcanoes. For example, it produced only about one ninth of the ash that Vesuvius had created and only a tiny fraction of the explosion that created Crater Lake that we will see in a few days' time as we head further south in Oregon.

The visit to the Center was very informative and re-created very graphically the devastation that this one event had caused. As the ranger put it: "Not all geological events take thousands of years". Virtually all the change to the landscape and to people's lives occurred in a matter of minutes or hours when Mt St Helens literally blew itself open.

We then continued south (with one more coffee stop) until we reached the Columbia River near Portland, Oregon. However, we stayed on the north (Washington State) side of this most beautiful river to our destination. Along this stretch we not only got great views of the river and the cliffs on the south side but also saw wind surfers enjoying what by now was a very mild but windy day. There were dozens of surfers in one relatively small area and it was fun to see them negotiate the current and the winds – as well as their fellow surfers. We also got some very clear views of Mt Hood standing at 11,000 feet just to the south of the Columbia.



At the small town of White Salmon we crossed the bridge into Oregon and were immediately at our hotel in Hood River. Here we had adjacent rooms which overlooked the river, only about 30 feet from our windows. We ate outdoors in the hotel restaurant, once again overlooking the Columbia as it went from dusk to night.



Outside dining on the Columbia River

"Is that my wine you are drinking?"

Saturday August 11

After breakfast we set off to Mt Hood. Instead of taking the direct (about 1 ¼ hour) route we decided to follow what we thought would be a more scenic and meandering route a little to the west. A short section of the route was marked as unpaved but we thought that it would be manageable in the mini-van. Indeed the route was scenic and was meandering and it took us the best part of three hours to reach our destination.

Most of the roads were single track Forest Service roads but our GPS (now working again) "knew" each of them and provided a pretty clear guidance. However, in a couple of instances we thought we knew better than the GPS and consequently did two five mile (each way) detours. With that and the slow unpaved section (very rocky in places so we were glad of the relatively good clearance of the van) the drive added up to the three hours.



On the way we passed through dense forests, stretches of open land and alongside some deep ravines – plus we had some magnificent and ever-changing views of Mt Hood. Once on the main roads it was only a short stretch before the six mile drive that goes from 3000 to 6000 feet, at which point is Timberline Lodge.



The lodge was built in 1937 and is typical of those of the era and of many National Parks: huge wooden beams and supports and an enormous stone fireplace. Everything inside the building (except the fireplace) seems to be built in very hefty timber, even to the chairs and tables in the lobby and restaurants.

