

Northwest Driving Trip September 2016



Bob and Molly Hillery

This trip was a truncated version of the one originally planned due to medical issues for Bob that turned out to be negative—but which caused a ten day delay to the start of the trip. As a result, instead of almost four weeks driving through the northern United States and British Columbia, we were obliged to stay south of the border and cover just eight states.

We started and ended in Salt Lake City (as planned) and drove north through Idaho and Montana before heading west to Washington and Oregon and finally south to California. Here we spent a weekend with Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha before two long days of driving back to Salt Lake City to take the flight home.

Despite being cut short, it was a very pleasant and relaxing trip. Obviously we had covered the vast majority of the route in the past (much of it several times) but, as we always find, there is something new to see and experience no matter how many times the road has been travelled.

Since much of the journey was a repeat, we took full advantage of viewing and minimized the recording via camera. Obviously, a few pictures were taken but for the most part we simply enjoyed the experience and took in the magnificent scenery to our memories, rather than “on film”. It was a very enjoyable trip!

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Monday September 19

We left home at 1:30 and stopped for coffee at the Liberty Starbucks before driving directly to the airport for our 5pm flight to Salt Lake City. Check-in (slight problem) and Security seemed slow and the airport was busier than we have seen it in a long time but we still had over an hour to sit before flight time. We had a good meal on board and then slept much of the way, arriving a little early in SLC, We picked up the car (hassle-free) and drove to the City Center Marriott where we checked in around 7:15 local time.

It was very warm (88F) as we drove the 15 minutes to the hotel and the skies were clear so we had great views of the mountains to the east. We had a cup of coffee in the room and then relaxed until we retired for an early (local time) night.

Tuesday September 20

We were up about 7:30 on a beautiful clear morning. After breakfast in the lounge we began a walk around the Temple Square area, just three blocks from the hotel. Despite having been to Salt Lake City many times, the city always seems fresh and we even saw a few things for the first time – or, at least, they had been forgotten.



One place we visited that we recall from our first time here (over 30 years ago) was the small park dedicated to Brigham Young and which had been part of his plot of land in the late



1800s. It contains a number of statues and farm and garden plantings that were essential to the well being of the pioneers.

Brigham Young Park and Temple Square



Utah State Capitol



We, of course, spent time on Temple Square and admired not only the Temple and associated LDS buildings but the immaculate water features and flower gardens. We also went in the Assembly Hall (I believe for the first time), built after the Tabernacle and used as a place of worship and meetings during the construction of the Temple. It is now a LDS Business College.



We attended the noon organ recital in the Tabernacle, which features sacred and secular music as well as showcasing the amazing instrument. It was built originally in 1867 and has been modified a number of times to bring it to the one we saw today with its almost 12,000 pipes.



Following a Starbucks lunch we strolled back to the hotel on what was now a hot and sunny afternoon. Later I went for a three mile walk to shop at a local Walgreens and then return via State Street. It was very hot by now and quite exhausting walking up some of the hills.

Tonight we walked about ½ mile and had a great meal at Ruth's Chris.

Wednesday September 21

We had breakfast in the hotel again and then checked out around nine. We drove north on I-15 as far as Brigham City (about 70 miles) and then headed northeast on Route 89. We stopped for coffee in Logan and then went over the hill (7600 feet) to [Bear Lake](#). At the overlook outside town we met a coach-load of English tourists who were doing a two week driving tour from Denver to Las Vegas, spending time in many of the National Parks. They said it was a different



hotel every night but they certainly were taking in a lot of beautiful country.

North of the lake in Montpelier (now Idaho) we turned west on Route 30. This was a new stretch of road for us (we usually have continued north to Jackson Hole and Yellowstone) but certainly not a new route as we were now on parts of the Oregon and California Trails as we headed back over the ridge to Pocatello. We went over three passes today, the one near Bear Lake and two others, each over 6000 feet in altitude.

The weather was sunny almost all the way as we drove over the hills. The vegetation was sparse in this desert region but where there were trees they were dressed in their fall colors – mostly gold (Aspen?), copper and deep red. This added some beautiful color contrasts to the wheat fields and barren rock which predominated and made for a very pleasant journey.



The LDS Tabernacle in Paris, Idaho—built in 1888

An interesting account of early Mormon pioneers



As we approached the hotel in Pocatello it clouded over and started to rain as we checked in. We were told that we can expect rain for the next two days before the sun comes out again on Saturday! Tonight we drove downtown to eat at The Bridge restaurant in Pocatello. This looked like a converted warehouse near the train tracks but the food and service were good so it fit the bill perfectly.

Thursday September 22

We were up a little later this morning and woke to cloudy skies and a temperature around 50F. We packed and checked out before driving just a few miles for breakfast at iHop. We then got on I-15 North and headed towards our next stop in Helena, MT, about 300 miles away. We crossed into Montana and made a coffee stop around 1pm at Dillon. It was dreary and we had already seen some rain but nevertheless decided on an alternative to simply driving the expressway so headed in a generally northwesterly direction to add about a 60 mile loop to our journey.

Despite low clouds and on-and-off rain (sometimes quite heavy), the drive was interesting as we climbed and descended the almost endless series of peaks in this part of the world. We climbed passes that were

about 7000 feet high and, before the day was done, we had crossed the Continental Divide three times: West to East, East to West and finally back to the East as we approached Helena.

Along the way we saw a number of references to the Lewis and Clark Trail, most notably north of Dillon. It was near Dillon that the main party had rested while waiting for a supply of horses for the trek over the mountains (arranged by their Indian guide Sacajawea). In the meantime, Captain Clark headed along the route we were on in search of the source of the Missouri and, hopefully, the beginning of a westward-running river on which they might continue their journey. He did find the former (and we have visited it on a previous visit) but failed to find a suitably navigable river heading west. Hence, the horrendous winter spent crossing the Lolo Range.



Typical scenery along our route



In the small town of Wisdom we made a right turn and headed generally east to eventually re-join I-15 near Butte. From there it was another hour on the expressway to Helena, where we arrived shortly before 5pm.

It had been a very overcast and wet day but we still enjoyed the varied and spectacular scenery along our route; high mountain peaks (generally cloud-covered), sheer cliff sides, wide river valleys, enormous cattle ranches and heavily forested land. With views like this it is difficult not to enjoy any day – even one where the weather is not too cooperative. Another point of interest was the large number of “Beaverslides” seen in many hay fields in this part of the country. A little research revealed their use!

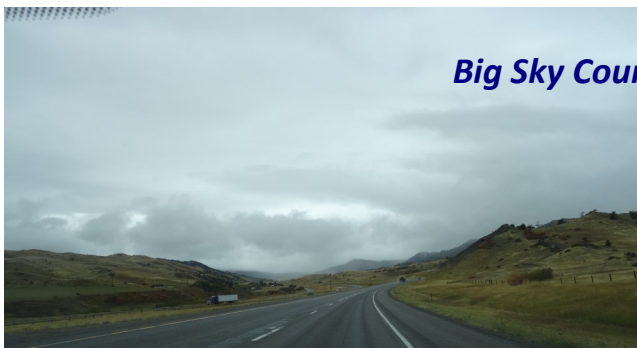
A beaverslide is a device for stacking hay made of wooden poles and planks that builds haystacks of loose, unbaled hay stored outdoors to be used as fodder for livestock. The beaverslide consists of a frame supporting an inclined plane up which a load of hay is pushed to a height of about 30 feet, before dropping through a large gap. The resulting loaf-shaped haystacks can be up to 30 feet high, can weigh up to 20 tons, and can theoretically last up to five or six years. It was invented in the early 1900s and was first called the Beaverhead County Slide Stacker after its place of origin, the Big Hole Valley in Beaverhead County, Montana. The name was quickly shortened to "beaverslide."



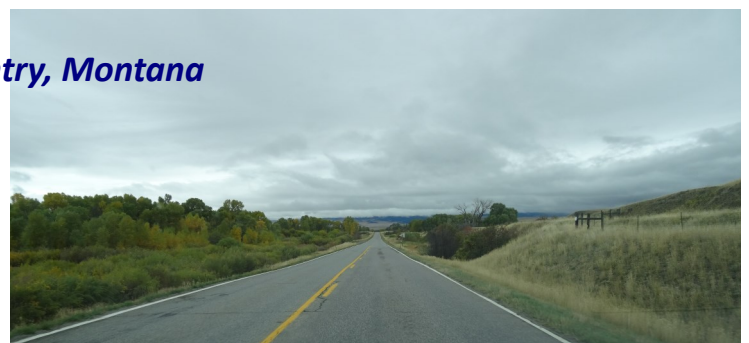
Tonight we drove into Helena and had a very good Italian meal at Lucca right in the central tourist area.

Friday September 23

We drove just a few blocks to McDonald's for breakfast. Today was to be our day to explore Helena but it was quite cool (below 50F) and very overcast with rain forecast for much of the day. As a result we changed our minds and decide to visit the Headwaters State Park where the Jefferson, Madison and Galatin Rivers become the Missouri and where Lewis and Clark reached one of the major goals established for them by President Jefferson. There was still a long and difficult passage ahead for them to reach the Pacific Ocean but they had found what they believed was the beginning of the Missouri River, along which they had been traveling for almost 1 ½ years. We had visited this site three times in the past, twice on the two vacations that we took to follow the entire length of the Lewis and Clark Trail – back in 2006 and 2007.



Big Sky Country, Montana



Rather than simply dash down I-15 to the site, we took a much longer route that went east to a spot on the map called White Sulphur (a few motels and a resort golf course!) and then we headed south to Interstate 90 and had lunch in Bozeman. We went through quite a lot of rain on the outward journey but still were able to get some great views of the magnificent scenery that is Montana; no wonder they call it the Big Sky state. By the time we reached Bozeman it was beginning to dry up and when we reached the Headwaters Park it was clear and we even saw a little sun. There were still clouds on the mountains all around us but at least it was beginning to look as though the worst of the weather was passing.





Headwaters State Park



Where the Madison and Jefferson Rivers meet



Then the Gallatin joins to form the Missouri

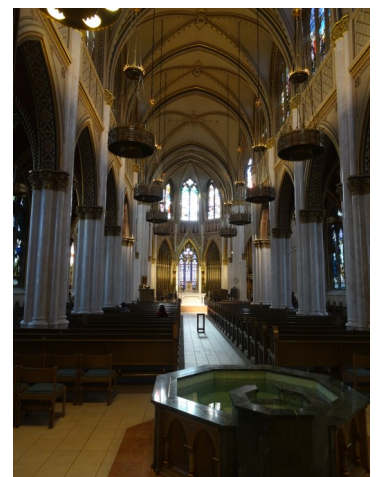
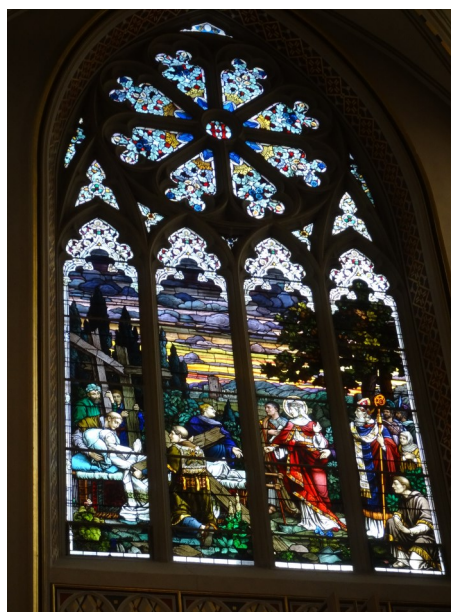
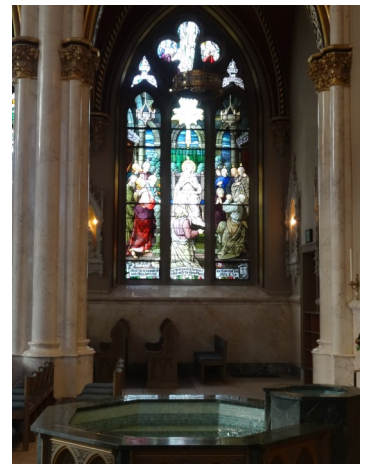
After spending about an hour in the park we drove back to Helena (again avoiding the expressway) and arrived at the hotel before 5pm after a long but very pleasant drive.

For dinner tonight we went downtown again, this time to the Mediterranean Grill where we enjoyed a good tapas meal.

Saturday September 24

It was a much brighter morning although still a little cool as we had a light breakfast in the hotel and then set off on our delayed sightseeing in Helena.

Our first stop was at the magnificent cathedral which would not be out of place in many European cities. The exterior is perhaps a little plain but the interior is just like many we have seen in Europe and has some incredible stained glass windows, which were made and installed by a German company. The cathedral is just over 100 years old and was built in large part as a result of a huge donation by an Irish immigrant who made his fortune in the local gold mines.



Cathedral of St Helena

Next we saw the area of the Helena Gold Rush – Last Chance Gulch. This is predominantly a pedestrian area today and has some magnificent turn of the century (1900) buildings, again largely built on “Gold”. Actually, Helena became the financial center for the Montana territory and had several large banks and was said to be the richest town (per capita) in the world. There are a number of stone built buildings that highlight the city’s wealth at that time and include not only banks but department stores to rival those of the eastern states.



Last Chance Gulch

The oldest section of the Gulch is a steep, narrow street lined with quaint brick buildings. This is Reeder’s Alley and the houses were built for the mining community by Louis Reeder who had come from Philadelphia to make his fortune. In his case, however, he made money from the miners as opposed to the mines themselves – a not uncommon and often better way to amass a fortune, as a supplier of goods and services.

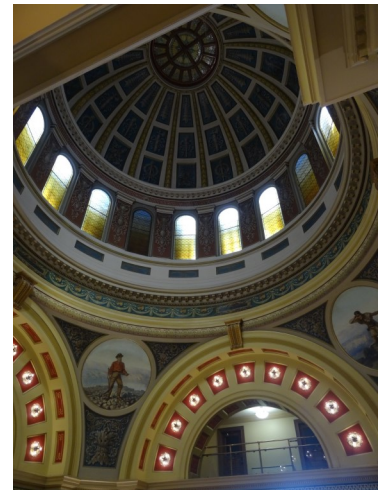
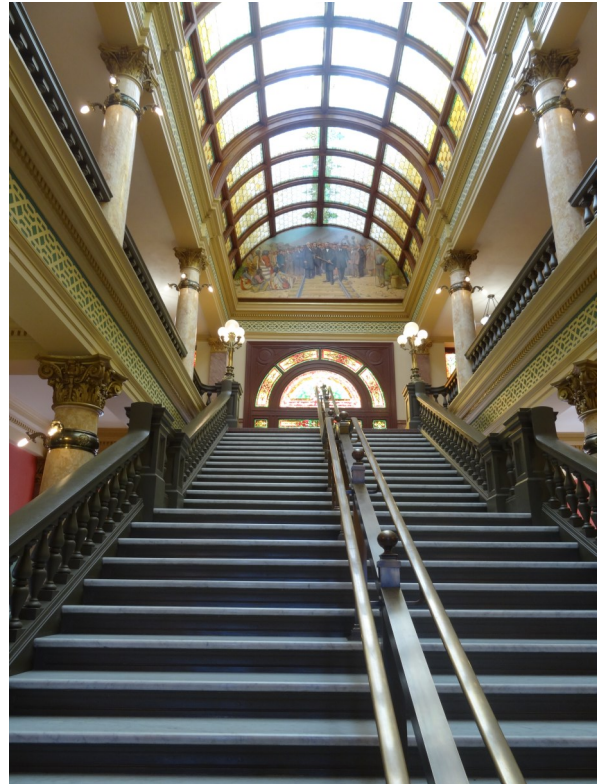


*Reeder's Alley
and the
Oldest House in Helena*



From the Gulch we drove just a few blocks to the Capitol. This fine building, again built around 1900, is set in large grounds in what is essentially a residential area. There are no associated office buildings (seen near many capitols) but this might be partly a result of the fact that the legislature sits for three months once every two years – so there is plenty of space inside the capitol itself. We spent about 45 minutes inside the building on a self-guided tour and were once again impressed with how imposing and beautifully decorated these state capitol buildings are.





Montana State Capitol, Helena

We left Helena after a Starbucks lunch and set off for our next stop in Great Falls. Rather than take the 100 mile expressway hop we chose to head east and then north on roads that gave us a better look at the fantastic scenery of Montana. This meant that we went through White Sulphur Springs again but today we traveled the road under much brighter skies with some high cloud, rather than the rains of yesterday.

The views along our route seemed to change every few miles and covered almost every type of topography: high mountains, wide valleys, narrow mountain passes (the highest at 7400 feet), immense farming lands and heavily forested regions. The weather was good all the way although it was cool (mid-forties) at the higher elevations and we went through a few rain drops as we approached Great Falls. We arrived at our hotel around 4pm after a wonderful 200 mile drive with spectacular landscapes.



Montana Landscapes

Tonight we ate at Dante's Creative Creations, an upscale-looking Italian restaurant about 2 miles from the hotel. For unknown reasons it was almost empty at 8 on a Saturday evening, although we must admit that the food and service did not match the overall ambiance. The starters and salad were good but the main course (walleye) was a little dry and there was just too much on the plate.

Sunday September 25

We had breakfast at a local Perkins and then spent the day doing all things Lewis and Clark. First we spent about 2 hours in the fabulous Interpretive Center alongside the Missouri River. The Center covers the entire journey of the Expedition and has lots of good maps and diary entries made by the leaders. It also has a very good replication of the beginning of the portage taken around the great falls which shows one of the cottonwood boats being dragged and pushed up a very steep hill from the creek. The creek itself took the Corps from the Missouri about a mile before they had to load everything up for the 18 mile land trip to bypass five sets of waterfalls.





On leaving the center we walked along one of several trails that went down the steep bank to the river side and which had various information boards along the route. Our trail took us to the Great Spring State Park where a warm water spring (below) feeds a very short river (200 feet!) into the Missouri. From there we climbed back up the hill and through another small park to the Interpretive Center.

In the afternoon (following a Starbucks lunch) we went to both end of the portage route to see for ourselves just how difficult this non-river route was. At the northern end (the start) we were able to see the creek from which the team had dragged their possessions up a very steep hill to a staging ground three miles from the river. From here they made four trips across the plain which looks to be



Belt Creek (Portage Creek) leading from the Missouri.

From here the trail went up the ridge and we suspect the road and bridge weren't yet built.

relatively flat but which contained prickly pear cactus and other hindrances to their progress. Nevertheless they made the 18 miles in one day – on four separate occasions!

At the southern end there is also a small outdoor interpretive center but which today was closed off to pedestrian (and vehicular) entry. We were just able to see the River at Bear Island where they re-entered but were not able to read the details of the final days of the portage. We do know, however, that an iron boat (designed for the trip and brought as pieces for a frame) was a bust (it sank) so they spent time making two additional canoes. In all, the portage cost them a month delay and ultimately made their journey across the Bitterroot Mountains so much more difficult.



We returned to the hotel around 4pm after a very pleasant day on which the temperature once again got above 70F (for the first time in four days) and we enjoyed sunny skies throughout. Tonight we ate at Jakers which our journals tell us we enjoyed on our two previous visits to Great Falls in 2006 and 2007. Tonight was no exception.

Monday September 26

Today we had a 350 mile drive to Spokane so it was essentially a day on the road after having breakfast at McDonald's in Great Falls.

The first 160 miles to Missoula were on non-expressway routes but the roads were very quiet and fast so we made good time through spectacular scenery once more. On this stretch we saw a lot of heavily forested area as well as more open mountains and, about 50 miles east of Missoula, we got a glimpse of our first mountains with snow on the summit.



More spectacular Montana scenery

In Missoula we stopped for a coffee break and then drove around the central business district streets past many of the fine buildings that we remembered from walking tours we have done on previous visits. Then it was back on the road – this time on Interstate 90. We had about another 100 miles to cover in Montana (again through beautiful scenery) and then we crossed the Idaho pan handle to Coeur d’Alene.

Just outside the city we started a scenic drive down the east side of Coeur d’Alene Lake but soon realized that it would add at least two hours to an already long drive so we re-traced our steps and drove through the central business district of the city and along part of the north shore of the lake. Although parts of the city were quite pretty, there didn’t seem to be an awful lot of activity so we were glad that we had chosen to change our reservation from here to Spokane.

We arrived in Spokane around 4pm (now Pacific Time) and found the huge and impressive Davenport Hotel. It has a magnificent lobby and very large rooms and probably has a lot of history if we have time to take it in. This is our first visit to Spokane (as we remember) so we are breaking some new ground on this trip! Tonight we had reservations at the Palm Court Grill in the hotel so it was a relaxing time with no additional driving. The dining room was very quiet tonight so we were seated in the main lobby area of the hotel next to a (fake) log fire; it was a very pleasant area and we had a good meal.

Tuesday September 27

We had a Continental breakfast in the hotel restaurant and then we took two walking tours; one of the magnificent hotel and the other of a small area of downtown Spokane, which we found to be a gem.

The hotel was built about 100 years ago but was closed for fifteen years at the end of the 20th century before being fully restored and made a little larger in the early 2000s. The restoration faithfully reflects what was one of the most famous and luxurious hotels in the West and each room is based on a different European architecture and style. It really is a magnificent building inside and out and we were pleased that we had decided to splurge and stay here.





Just a few of the splendid rooms in the Davenport Hotel



The area of downtown that we walked was also a pleasure to see – despite road construction on every street, it seemed. We walked a few blocks to the Spokane River and were amazed to see three or four significant falls. We had great views from the riverfront park and especially from the bridges that span the river. We confirmed that we had never been here before but were so taken with the area and the superb buildings that we feel a need to return for a longer stay.

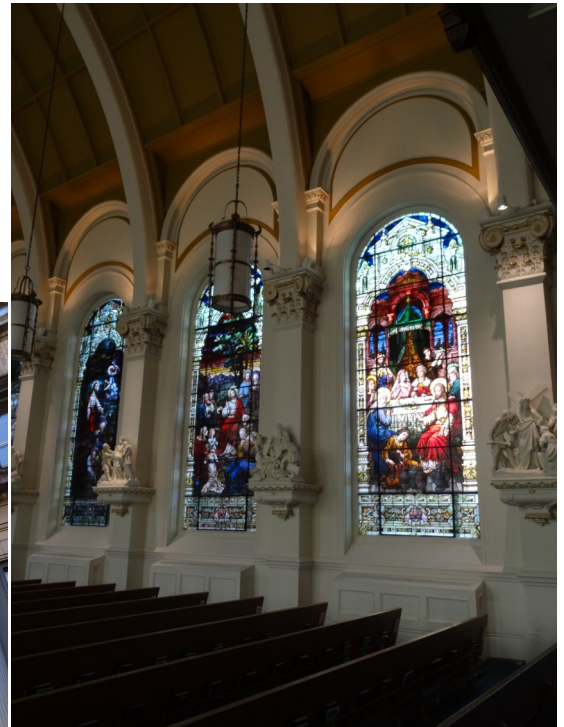


**Spokane
Falls**



**Spokane
County
Courthouse**





***Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral
and other fine buildings of Spokane***



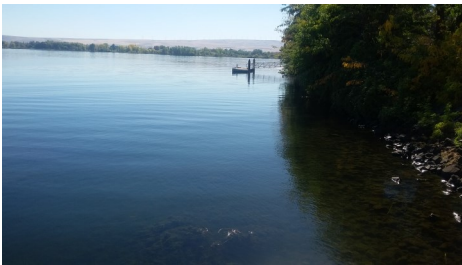
Spokane Newspaper Offices



Our Hotel!

Around noon we left Spokane and headed southwest towards the Columbia River and our next stop in Oregon. The drive as far as Pasco in southern Washington was predominantly across a high plain with lots of golden hay fields and, further south, some vineyards and fruit orchards. From Pasco we took a 50+ mile detour to visit the Sacajawea State Park at the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers.

This is where the Lewis and Clark Corps stayed for a few days and were well-treated by large numbers of



Native Americans. They were excited to have finally reached the last river before the Pacific Ocean but had no idea just how difficult this final stretch to the coast would be and how many falls and rapids they would encounter. The Columbia now is a very wide and relatively calm stream as a result of many dams built between here and the coast – in fact, dams have been built for water control and electricity generation along the entire length of this great river.



Distant Mt Hood

We followed the Columbia into Oregon and then it was a fast drive along I-84 which parallels the water virtually all the way to Hood River where we were staying for the next two nights. The scenery along the way is stunning and, although we have made this journey many times, it never fails to amaze.

Similarly, the views from the hotel (also visited several times over the years) are fantastic and meals on the deck are always a pleasure. Tonight we enjoyed dinner outside overlooking the river, the train tracks and the bridges, as well as the beautiful terrain on the Oregon and Washington sides of the Columbia.

Wednesday September 28

We had breakfast on the hotel deck overlooking the Columbia River on a beautiful sunny morning as temperatures were expected to reach the high 80s. After breakfast we drove to The Dalles (about 20 miles east) and went first to the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, a small but information-packed museum covering all aspects of this area.



There were excellent movies about the formation of the Gorge and the many changes that have occurred over the millennia, including massive flooding resulting from the breakup of the ice dam on Lake Missoula. We had previously thought that this event (or, more accurately, series of events as floods came over 100 times) was the reason the gorge was formed but now realize that the River has been here “forever” and the steep cliffs on either side were a result of tectonic shifts. Additional “slides” caused changes to the river’s size and course and molten lava flows resulted in more shifts. The floods “merely” covered the gorge and undoubtedly accounted for a lot of additional “debris” but the gorge itself preceded these events.

Other exhibits in the Center covered the various explorations and migrations that passed through this region (notably Lewis and Clark and the Oregon Pioneers) and their impact on the local Indian tribes and the ups and downs of commerce and industry. Of course, a major change in the region came in the second half of the 20th century when dams were built all along this stretch of the Columbia. The area (indeed the whole country) benefitted from the water control and power generation afforded by these dams but the impact on traditional Indian life was devastating, particularly in salmon fishing. Certainly the museum gave a different look at “progress” and presented some interesting photographs and accounts of the changes that have occurred.

After over two hours in the Center we drove into the center of The Dalles and had a coffee before doing a short walking tour of the Historic District. The town has some fine buildings from its more prosperous days in the late 1800s, first as a supply point for the

