

The Northwestern United States

October 2020



Bob and Molly Hillery

This was our fourth trip west in the last three months and, once again, we flew to Salt Lake City and then drove in a circular route. This time we headed in a generally northwest direction as far as the Olympic Peninsula and then worked our way back to Salt Lake via Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Nevada. We drove a total of 3100 miles.

We visited a couple of places that we had already covered this summer but also spent time in areas that we haven't seen in several years and—in the case of the Grand Coulee Dam—had never previously visited. New, or not so new, the scenery was fantastic throughout and we never tire of the western states.

We are already talking about our next trip.....

Northwestern United States, October 2020

Monday October 5

We had stayed at the airport Marriott overnight even though our flight to Salt Lake City wasn't until early afternoon. So, we were able to have breakfast in the hotel and then catch the 10:30 shuttle to the airport.

After a smooth flight, we arrived in Salt Lake at 2:15 (Mountain Time) and were at the Marriott by a little after 3pm.

I went for a 3-mile walk and then we relaxed until dinner at Spencer's. This restaurant had been closed until this weekend, but we have enjoyed meals there in the past – and we did tonight.

Tuesday October 6

We had breakfast in the hotel Starbucks and then drove north on I-15 out of the city. We left the expressway after about 50 miles and then followed US Route 89 through Logan (coffee stop) and over the pass to Bear Lake. This drive up the Wasatch Mountains was beautiful as the fall colors were at or near their best – deep burgundy reds at lower elevations and bright yellow Aspens as we climbed further. I took several photographs, but none could do justice to the tapestry that we drove by for about 100 miles.



We crossed into Idaho and then briefly through a western section of Wyoming before entering Idaho again as we drove alongside the Snake River and a huge reservoir resulting from damming the river.

The final fifty miles or so to Idaho Falls was through huge farms, predominantly wheat (harvested) but some potatoes – also harvested it seemed. It was totally different to the mountains we had followed most of the way from Salt Lake, but equally



beautiful. The whole drive was fantastic.

The hotel here sits on the Snake River and I was able to take a short walk along the river walk. It is a very scenic pathway and has great views of the Falls and the LDS Temple across the river.



Tonight we walked to The Copper Rill for dinner. It was a nice ambi- and good food and service. Interestingly, many patrons did not wear masks – and Idaho is a hot spot!

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Wednesday October 7

After breakfast at Denny's (where the staff were not wearing masks!!) we set off for Missoula. We first went west on Route 20, across the vast plain that is home to the 900 square miles Idaho National Laboratories – and very little else. We made a stop to look at the EBR-1, the 1950's effort to design and build a nuclear-powered airplane. It never got off the ground!



At Arco (the first town to be lighted by electricity generated by a nuclear power plant), we turned north and were on US Route 93 all the



way into Montana and on to Missoula.

The scenery was spectacular all the way with a mountain backdrop to east and west, huge farming areas and amazing rock formations of every color imaginable. Occasionally, the road dropped several hundred feet through a canyon where the river

had found a lower level, millennia ago and now the road followed suit – to another vast plain.

After the town of Salmon, we crossed the Continental Divide (to the east at 8000 feet) and we were now on the Lewis and Clark Trail with the Bitterroot Mountains to our left, forming the almost impenetrable range that the Corps of Discovery had had to cross. As we approached Missoula, there were a number of small



towns – some looking very prosperous, some not, and traffic got very heavy the further north we drove. However, we eventually reached our hotel around 5:30 after a most spectacular day of ever-changing scenery.

Tonight, we drove into Missoula for dinner at the Pearl Café, which we had enjoyed on our last stay here. It was just as good tonight.

Thursday October 8

Today was a “rest day” in Missoula, so, after breakfast at a local iHOP, we drove south on Route 93 and then west on Route 12 to the Traveler’s Rest State Park. This was where the Lewis and Clark Expedition had camped before their difficult trek over the Bitterroots and where they had re-visited the following summer as they were returning to St Louis. It is the place where Lewis and Clark separated with about half the men each so that they could explore different parts of the west before meeting up again where the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers converged.

This site is the only one of the many on the entire trip which has been archeologically proven as a place where they camped. Lewis and Clark made exquisite maps of the journey and their camps so most of the sites are well documented and precisely placed but this is the only one where archeological proof (in the form of articles left) has been established. Interestingly, until 2002, the Travelers’ Rest site had been placed about two miles away from the present State Park, but the local L&C Chapter sought to truly establish its correct placement. The archeologists provided the definitive evidence and – upon closer examination of the Expedition’s notes – so did the leaders themselves.



After about an hour in the park, we drove further west about 25 miles to Lolo Hot Springs (a resort area now with little else to see). We turned round here and headed back east a few miles before taking an unpaved road north. The first six or so miles climbed through dense forest on a

gravel road (rutted but not too difficult for driving) before descending to a large open farming area. Here the road was paved and remained so for ten miles to the I-90 expressway west of Missoula. Here we turned east and followed I-90 back to our hotel, stopping at a local Starbucks to have coffee sitting outside on a pleasantly warm afternoon.

I managed to get a four-mile walk before relaxing until dinner time – tonight at Scotty's, downtown. We chose to go Tapas-Style and had an excellent meal and a nice chat with the Serbian waiter.

Friday October 9

We checked out of the hotel, had breakfast at iHop, and then stopped at the airport to change out the car! It had made several loud transmission noises last night so we thought a change was in order; the process was a little slow but didn't delay us more than about 30 minutes.

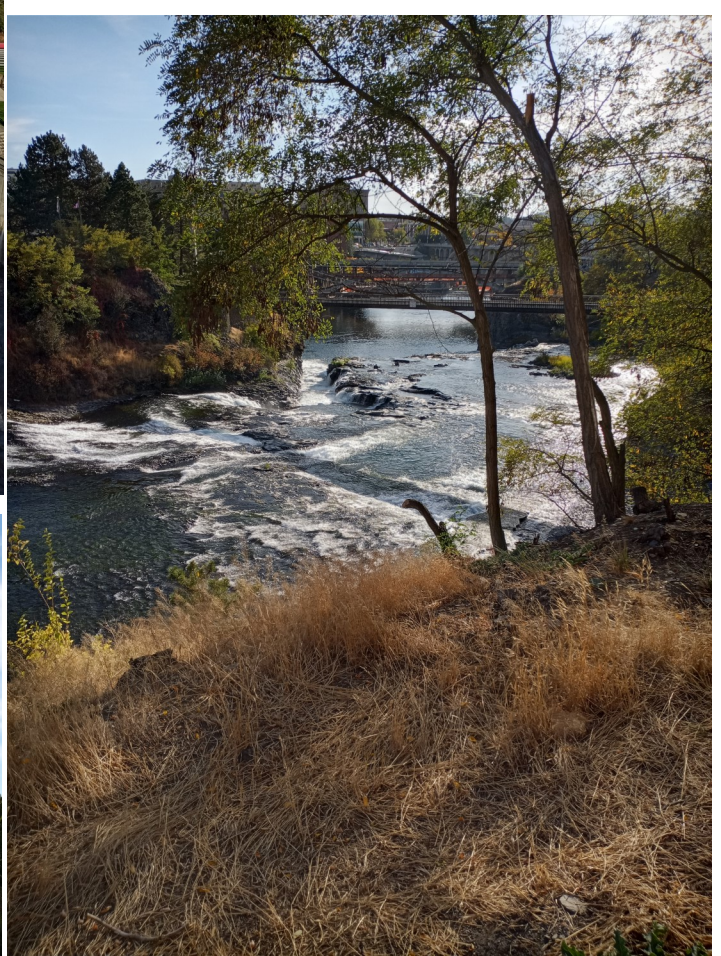
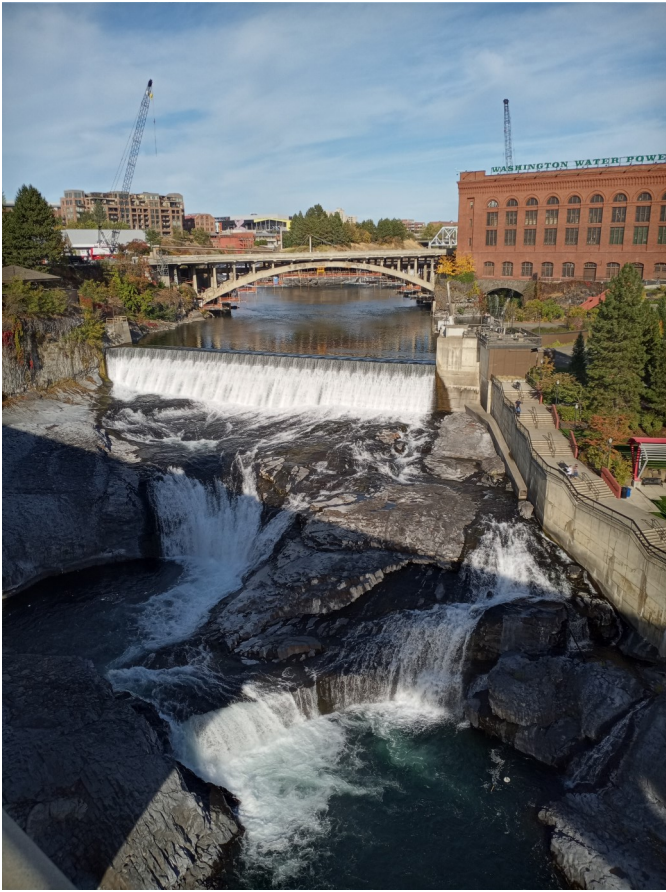
Our first stop after leaving Missoula was at the National Bison Range. We have visited at least twice before and enjoyed the 19 mile loop drive up a steep hillside of long, brown grass. Today, however, the loop was closed (no reason given) so we had to settle for a 7-mile out and back drive along the lower portion of the park. This is where the bison usually roam and we did indeed see several dozen today – some very close to the car.



National Bison Range

We then drove essentially non-stop to Spokane, first through hilly but open land much like the Park but soon into heavily forested hills. We drove alongside a lovely river, over two passes (5000 and 3000 feet) and through some magnificent mountain scenery, especially in western Montana and across the relatively narrow (70 miles) stretch of the Idaho panhandle.

We arrived at the Davenport Hotel in Spokane about 2:30 (now Pacific Time) so I took a short walk across the river near the falls.



Spokane Falls and River Walk

Tonight we went to Italia Trattoria for dinner; we had enjoyed it last year and did again tonight.

Saturday October 10

It was raining as we ate breakfast in the hotel and rain was forecast for much of the day. So, after breakfast, we decided on a circular drive, going east into Idaho, north as far as Usk (back in Washington) and then south and west back to the hotel. It rained the whole way and the clouds were low so we didn't seem too far from the roadway. However, it was a nice way to see a little more of the countryside and allowed us to get out for a few hours.

I managed to get in a short walk later in the afternoon and we had a good steak dinner at Churchill's, just two blocks from the hotel.

Sunday October 11

We had breakfast in the hotel again and then checked out. We drove west on US Route 2, through what seemed like an endless wheat field. Then, suddenly, we descended through a narrow gorge for several miles as we made our way to the Grand Coulee Dam. We had never seen this dam before and didn't realize that it is now the largest in the US, following the addition of a third power plant in 1980. (The original was built between 1933 and 1950).



Grand Coulee Dam and the Columbia River

From the dam, we drove south alongside the Columbia River and the scenery was fabulous – not unlike the more famous Columbia River Gorge along the Washington-Oregon border. Then we left the river for a while and were back in the vast wheat fields that seem ubiquitous in this part of Washington State. Once again, however, this "field" was interrupted by another gorge, this time at the base of a long dried up

waterfall. At one point, the falls here had been the largest in the world but have receded and dried to the point where a huge basin is left in otherwise relatively flat countryside.

Dry Falls



From here it was a short drive to Wenatchee, where we had a coffee before heading further south. We were now in fruit orchard country and had the peaks of the Cascades as a backdrop. Unfortunately, as we started up the Cascades it started to rain, and the views were very restricted. The rain got heavier and heavier and the traffic picked up on I-90 so it was a long two-hour period of concentration all the way to Tacoma.

We checked into the airport Marriott about 5:30 and, with the change in the weather and the difficulty in getting to and from the hotel, we immediately started discussing leaving tomorrow (we had two nights booked) and heading around part of the Olympic Peninsula and then driving to Astoria a day earlier than planned.

We had dinner in the hotel and concluded that we would indeed leave a day earlier.

Monday October 12

We had breakfast in the hotel and then checked out. Our plan for the day was to drive up the eastern edge of the Olympic Peninsula – perhaps as far as Port Townsend – and then head southwesterly to our destination in Astoria, Oregon. It was an overcast morning but there were patches of blue sky as we headed to Tacoma and then onto the peninsula.

We did indeed get as far as Port Townsend (about two hours) and the weather improved to the point of clear blue skies and a temperature just above 60F. The drive took us via Bremerton and a number of smaller towns and, although we were never far from Puget Sound, we didn't see too much water. The drive was scenic, however, through forested regions and alongside lakes and rivers.

Port Townsend is a Victorian town with some very nice, grand old buildings in the downtown area and some very pleasant residential areas on the hills overlooking the water. We found a coffee shop for a light lunch and drove along the waterfront (tourist, marina and – at one end – a large paper mill) and then started our drive south.

Our route was almost exclusively on US Route 101 and took us through parts of the Olympic National Forest (with some significant climbs along the edge of the Olympic Range), alongside many stretches of water and, ultimately, along the Pacific Ocean.

We crossed the Columbia River at its mouth and entered Astoria. Our hotel was less than a mile from the very long bridge across the water. Tonight we ate the Silver Salmon Grill in town and had a pleasant evening.

Tuesday October 13

We had breakfast at a pancake house near the hotel and then drove to Fort Clatsop, where Lewis and Clark had wintered before their return to St Louis. Apparently, the weather had been miserable (rain everyday but a dozen) but they had built a small fort (now reconstructed) and had also made salt for the return journey. This latter location was close to the sea in present-day Seaside and we drove there, just as we had 12 years ago at the end of our Lewis and Clark adventure.



Fort Clatsop and the Salt Making Facility

On the way to the next Lewis and Clark location, the check-engine light came on in the rental car, so we returned to the hotel and started the process of getting Hertz assistance! It took about two hours to get a “real person” at emergency roadside assistance (!) but once I spoke with that person, things moved pretty well. She contacted Hertz in Portland and arranged to have another car sent out (about 100 miles) and tow the old one in. I went for a walk during the waiting period (which also happened to be the brightest time of the day, with no rain) and the cars were exchanged about 5:30.

Tonight, we had dinner at the Bridgewater Restaurant on the marina, about 1 mile from the hotel, and had a very enjoyable meal with very good service.

Wednesday October 14

We checked out of the BestWestern, had breakfast at the Pig and Pancake again and then set off for Hood River. We decided to cross the Columbia and drive on the Washington side of the river. There were stretches where the road left the river and we had about 25 miles on I-5, but once east of the Portland area, it was a lovely drive with fantastic scenery.

We crossed into Oregon on the toll bridge right next to our hotel in Hood River and checked in about 3pm.

I went for a walk into town before we drove into Hood River for dinner at the Celilo restaurant. We had an excellent tapas-style meal and also had a nice chat with a British ex-pat who now lives in Santa Fe. A pleasant evening.



Thursday October 15

We had breakfast in the hotel and then took a drive to Mount Hood. It was a beautiful morning, with exceptionally clear skies, although the temperature was still in the forties when we left. We drove south along the “back road”, about 12 miles of which was unpaved. There were some deep potholes but generally it was quite navigable. We had superb views of Mount Hood from many angles before reaching Route 26 for the final ten miles to the entrance to the Timberline Lodge.



We spent about an hour there while I took an almost two-mile walk, mostly in snow, and all at 6000 feet plus. Not easy, but a beautiful walk in fresh snow.

We drove back to Hood River on the main road (Route 35) and got back about 3pm. I walked along the river front and then we relaxed until dinner time.



Mount Hood (above) and Mount St Helens

Tonight, we had a reservation at the Cliff House in the Historic Columbia Gorge Hotel. We had enjoyed dinner there on our last trip here in July. We arrived about 10 minutes early for

our 7:30 reservation and were told our table “wasn’t quite ready”. At 7:45, we were told it would be five more minutes. At 8 we were seated but I had already started a call to Celilo and they could accommodate us. So, we drove back into Hood River and enjoyed another great meal at Celilo, where we were greeted like old friends and sat at the same table as last night – and had the same waiter!

Friday October 16

After breakfast we did a short drive on the Washington side of the river as far as The Dalles. Here we got coffee and drove up to the highest point on the eastern portion of the Historic Route 30 Columbia River Gorge route. We enjoyed the view of the river and of Mt Hood and our drinks and a short nap (!) before returning to the hotel in the early afternoon.



I went for a four-mile walk and got back just as it started to rain.

Tonight, we had dinner reservations at the Three Rivers Grill. We had a very nice dinner sitting outside (near a heater) on the patio.

Saturday October 17

It was warm enough to sit on the deck for breakfast before checking out and starting to drive east. We went on I-84 for about 80 miles, admiring the magnificent Columbia River. Where the expressway turned away from the river, we left the Interstate and cut across country towards Baker City, following the Blue Mountain Scenic Byway the whole distance.

The first 1 ½ hours, we drove in a narrow valley between rolling hills with farmland squeezed alongside one side or the other: occasionally both. We were surprised to see some newly planted fields and sprinklers going as though it were July. The road then started to climb to about 5000 feet and we were in the Umatilla National Forest until we descended to the small town of Ukiah. We had a quick rest stop before climbing again through the very dense Walla-Walla-Whitman National Forest and once again reached 5300 feet before the descent towards Baker City. Between and above the trees we could see high jagged mountain peaks to the south and east.

The weather was beautiful the whole day and the scenery was magnificent all the way to our destination at the Geiser Grand Hotel in Baker City. Although the hotel has undergone significant renovation, it and the town have clearly seen better days. I took a 3-mile walk along the city streets and it is in real need of work and many of the stores were closed on the almost deserted streets. Obviously, the days of the late 1800s gold rush are long gone.

Dinner (and breakfast the next morning) in the hotel were OK – about on a par with the town as a whole!





*The Geiser Grand Hotel and other
fine buildings of Baker City*



Sunday October 18

Today we had a six-hour drive from Baker City to Elko, Nevada. The first 120 miles were on I-80, traveling in a southeasterly direction across the state line into Idaho and past Boise. At Mountain Home, we left the expressway and turned south to follow the same road (changing numbers at the border) across southern Idaho and into Nevada.

On the expressway we could see the Idaho mountain ranges to the north, approximately where we had been heading west

almost two weeks ago. Once we turned south, we were first in some very lush farmland which seemed to stretch as far as we could see across huge valleys. Eventually, however, the road started to climb to the high desert of more barren land with only sagebrush and the occasional ranch along the route. Once in Nevada, we could see the many mountain ranges to the east, west and south and were a little surprised that none of the peaks were snow covered.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the drive was along the Owyhee River, as it flowed against our direction when we climbed through a winding and very narrow gorge. At the summit (over 6000 feet), the Wild Horse dam formed a huge lake which extended for several miles in all directions and was not only a reservoir but also a popular recreation area.

Finally, we descended a thousand feet or so into Elko and our hotel for the night. I went for a three-mile walk and then we went to a Mexican restaurant in town. Our favorite Italian restaurant here – and several others – were closed Sundays! Nevertheless, we had a good meal and a pleasant chat with the waitress – and we closed the place!

Monday October 19

We checked out of the hotel, had breakfast at the Coffee Mug in Elko and then drove directly to Salt Lake City via Interstate 80. It was an easy 3 ½ hour drive and we checked into the Salt Lake City Marriott shortly after 1:30.

I went for a walk around town and we had our “final” dinner for this trip at Ruth’s Chris.

Tuesday October 20

Our flight to Cincinnati left on time and we arrived home about 4pm after another great scenic trip.

