

*Driving Seven Western States
from
Salt Lake City to Salt Lake City*



August 2024

Bob and Molly Hillery

Western States Driving Trip, August 2024

Wednesday July 31

We took an Uber to the airport and arrived about two hours before flight time so were able to spend a while in the lounge before boarding for Salt Lake City. The flight was uneventful, and we had a good meal (pizza) on board and landed on time about 9:45pm local time.

We easily retrieved our bags, took a while selecting our rental car (finally selecting a recent model Elantra) and we checked in at the airport Four Points by 10:30. We essentially went straight to bed.

Thursday August 1

I was up about 6:30 so went for a two-mile walk while the temperature was still moderate. We then packed and checked out before going across the street to Perkins for breakfast. We then left for the 3 ½ hour drive via I-80 to Elko. There was significant haze along the valley, but the traffic was light, so we were able to cruise at 80MPH most of the way. We stopped briefly at the Bonneville Salt Flats and again in Wells (Nevada) for a McDonald's lunch.



We arrived at the hotel in Elko about 12:30 (now Pacific Time) but they had a room for us, so we were able to check in right away.

I went for a very hot (approaching 100F) three-mile walk before we both relaxed in the room until it was time to visit Luciano's for dinner. We have visited this restaurant many times over the years and have always enjoyed the meal as well as the somewhat rustic ambiance. We both had good meals again tonight (way too much food) but our waiter gave the impression that he would have preferred to be somewhere else! Nevertheless, a pleasant evening.

Friday August 2

I was up before 6am and went for a two-mile walk before it got too hot. We then packed and checked out and went to the Coffee Mug for a hearty breakfast. We then started our relatively long journey to Reno – not taking the direct route along I-80 but rather heading

south (after just 20 miles west on I-80_ to pick up Route 50 at Eureka. The 90 miles heading south was a two-lane road but very quiet and fast – with some terrific mountain scenery.

In Eureka, we stopped at our “favorite” coffee shop (Coffee Depot) before starting the long journey west along the “Loneliest Road in America”. Again, this two-lane highway is quiet and fast and passes through gorgeous mountain scenery. There are several 6000-7000 feet high passes, a very few small towns (with Austin being the largest for most of the route and sitting at the bottom of a long, winding hill). From there, the next town is Fallon, but before reaching there we passed sand dunes, salty -sand flats, many miles of the old Pony Express route – and numerous mountain peaks.

From Fallon, we continued on US-50 for another 40 miles or so before turning north for a short, steep and very scenic drive to Virginia City. This town made its money in the gold and silver rush of 1859 as the town established to take \$1B of minerals from the famous Comstock Lode. The town itself is interesting – wooden sidewalks, beautiful old buildings and a mountain top vista – but today it was also the site of a vintage car show. The main (virtually the only) street was lined with shining vehicles of every make and model dating, it seemed, from almost 100 years ago to some retro-style and more modern cars of the sixties and seventies. It was a very festive scene and reminded me of a similar happenstance that we had several years ago when we arrived in Sturgis just as the motorcycle festival was in full swing.



From Virginia City it was a short (less than 20 miles) journey to our destination of Reno but was an amazing steep road down with magnificent views across to the ski mountains of Squaw Valley and the town of Reno. We arrived at the hotel just after 4pm after a 7-hour, 360-mile journey which had a little of everything.

I went for a short walk before getting ready for dinner at Ruth's



Chris restaurant about five miles from the hotel. There was a very light shower as we drove to the restaurant (which helped moderate the temperature into the low 80s, vs the 100s of the past two days) but we were able to park in the multi-story parking garage of the casino in which Ruth's Chris has its home. We were seated in a very nice booth and we both enjoyed our meals – neither of which were steaks! We also had a chance to make friends with a lovely nine-months old baby and her parents.

Saturday August 3

We set an alarm for 7am as today was projected to be a long drive, probably pushing eight hours with stops. We checked out and had breakfast at a local Mimi's before heading north from Reno, at first on Interstate 580 but soon switching to US Route 395, which was predominantly two lanes, with the occasional passing lane.

Almost as soon as we were out of the city, we could smell the smoke of fires to the north and west and we hoped that we wouldn't have to make any detours. One of the biggest fires was still ongoing and close to our route. The sky was overcast and smoky and the temperature was in the seventies. The smoke made for a darkened sky, but the infrequent and brief rain showers surely would help.

We traveled north in high desert terrain with some spectacular views of jagged mountains to the west. Dry land occasionally gave way to some green farmland, but the major change came when we started heading west and were in the heavily forested region around Mount Shasta and the Lassen National Park. The road was surrounded by tall pine trees and, with a good road (still two lane) the drive to Redding was very pleasant.

As we crossed Interstate 5 in Redding, we made three futile attempts to find a coffee shop, finally giving up and relying on our water and trail mix for nourishment. The good news was that the scenery just kept getting better as we drove close to the Trinity River at the base of a narrow, steep gorge. The river had several whitewater segments (where we saw many boats and rafts) interspersed with much calmer waters which made for an idyllic setting. We climbed from the river several times to elevations up to 3000 feet and eventually lost sight of it (except for a few crossings) as we climbed and descended more times on the way to the coast.

The temperature had reached 102F after we had left Redding and the day turned bright and sunny. This moderated significantly as we entered the marine layer of the coast and reached US 101 about 15 miles north of Eureka. From here it was a short drive to our hotel on the south side of town – a town that looks increasingly "old" with each visit.

I was able to take a 2 ½ mile walk in a very light drizzle before we got ready for our dinner at the Humboldt Bay Bistro near the waterfront in town. The restaurant was very busy when we arrived but we were seated immediately by the window with views of the waterfront – which at this point is actually a narrow stretch "inland" of a more distant outer bank. The room was a little more rustic than we had anticipated, and they didn't have a full license, but we soon had a bottle of wine and soup, before tackling the large main courses. The service was leisurely, and we were the last to leave!

Sunday August 4

We were up and checked out and at the Village Pantry for breakfast before 8:30. Following that, we drove through a part of town to see some of the many murals and a few of the houses that had been built by the "wood barons".



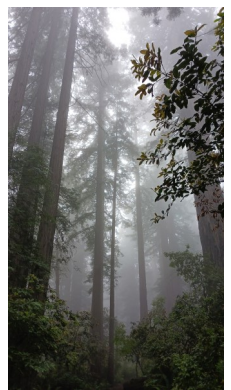
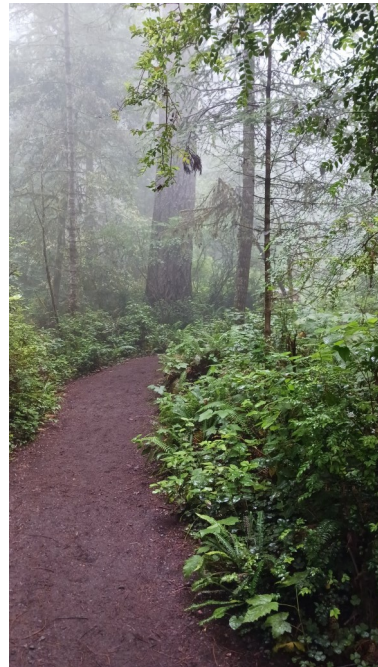
Eureka





We then started our drive north towards Redwoods National Park on an overcast and misty morning with temperatures in the mid-fifties.

Our first stop was at the Lady Bird Johnson Grove where we both took a walk along the pathways that wind through the magnificent – and very tall -Redwoods. Molly walked about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and I did the full $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile circuit. It was still cool and damp but quite pleasant for walking.



Redwoods National Park

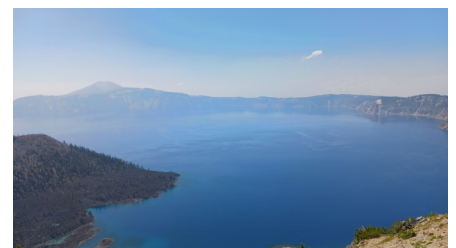
We then left Highway 101 and took the Drury Scenic Parkway which allows close-up views of the trees without leaving the car. I did take a 1.5 mile walk from one of the trailheads – a hike that was quite challenging. We re-joined Highway 101 and entered the Jedediah Smith Park, for even more driving time along the Redwood groves.

The road north from the Park to Grants Pass was another stunning drive, much of it following the Smith River in another narrow gorge. In Grants Pass, we found a McDonald's for coffee and a temperature of 106F – 50 degrees higher than when we had woken up in Eureka!

From Grants Pass it was a short (35 minutes) drive south on I-5 to our Courtyard hotel in Medford. We searched for restaurants that were open on Sunday and found one in Jacksonville, about six miles from the hotel. It turned out to be a great find and we had a very good meal. Both our meals were excellent, and the service was European-style leisurely. The co-owner (with the chef) is from Italy and that background came through in the ambiance, the service and in her pleasantly talkative style. It was a great evening.

Monday August 5

We checked out and drove first to a local independent café for breakfast (very good) before starting our trip to Crater Lake. It was another warm and sunny morning and a very nice drive via the west gate to the crater rim. We turned to the west rim drive and stopped at a pull-off so that I could take a walk to the Watchman Peak – an old



fire observation building at the top of a ¼ mile climb. Coming down was significantly easier!



A Tough walk to Watchman's Peak

We then sat at another pull-off for a while before driving north to Bend. Nearby fires were obvious but didn't affect the traffic movement and we were at our hotel by 3:30pm.

At 6:30 Dave and Kathy picked us up and we drove to the Hook and Plow restaurant for a good meal and some great conversation – which lasted over 2 hours!

Tuesday August 6

After checking out, we drove about 2 miles to Shari's for a very hearty breakfast. We then started north towards Hood River and made our first and only stop at the Timberline Lodge at the 6000 feet level of Mt Hood. The parking lot was packed and there were skiers on some of the slopes on a beautiful morning. I went for a two-mile walk on the Pacific Rim Trail and found the going reasonable despite the altitude. Unfortunately, the pictures I took were completely unsatisfactory!



Mt Hood

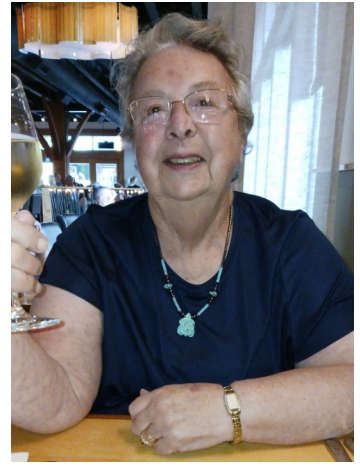
When we arrived at Hood River, we went first to Starbucks for a late lunch and then we both went for walks on the Columbia River walkway in front of the hotel. An American River cruise sternwheeler was docked here so we should see her steaming up (or down) the river once she sails.

Tonight, we ate at Celilo's where we have eaten several times on previous visits to Hood River. We were seated at the same

table we had 15 months ago (!) and studied the menu. It was as eclectic as before, but I thought that it was somewhat less extensive. However, we both found dishes to enjoy, and we had a lovely evening.

Wednesday August 7

We had breakfast sitting outside the hotel restaurant on a bright, sunny morning that was not yet too warm. After the meal, we drove to Ravenna Crest Overlook on the Columbia River Gorge where we both took walks. Molly stayed on the flat ground at the overlook, and I took the McCall Trail uphill. I had made this hike a few times but this time it seemed even more difficult than I remembered. It was billed as 1.5 miles each way, but it actually measured almost exactly two miles when I made the summit. The last $\frac{3}{4}$ mile I seemed to stop every few yards and I considered quitting before reaching the top. I made it, however, with no-one else on the trail, and the return journey was substantially easier. I will admit to being very tired when I got back to the car and thought that this might well be my last attempt on this climb. We will see.



We drove back to Hood River, had a Starbucks lunch, and rested for a while. I took another walk on flat ground near the hotel before getting ready for dinner. Tonight, we ate at the 3 Rivers Grill, sitting outside on the deck on a beautiful evening. The meal, service and ambience were excellent – so much so that we booked to dine here tomorrow evening.



Thursday August 8

We had breakfast on the deck at the hotel restaurant again. Today, it was much hazier (smoke?) and it was projected to get hot in the afternoon. I left Molly to do her walking along the riverwalk while I drove a few miles to the town of Mosier where I parked to walk the Mosier Plateau Trail. The word "Plateau" is somewhat misleading as the relatively flat meadow is reached only after a one-mile, steep climb which zigzags up the hill. Even the "flat" area has a one-mile loop road that descends significantly towards US30 – which makes the start of the downhill walk a fairly steep uphill stretch!



I made it, however, and sat in the car with the air-conditioning on full to cool down some before driving back to the hotel. We walked across the parking lot for a Starbucks lunch and then relaxed for the rest of the afternoon – although I took a very short walk before getting ready for dinner.

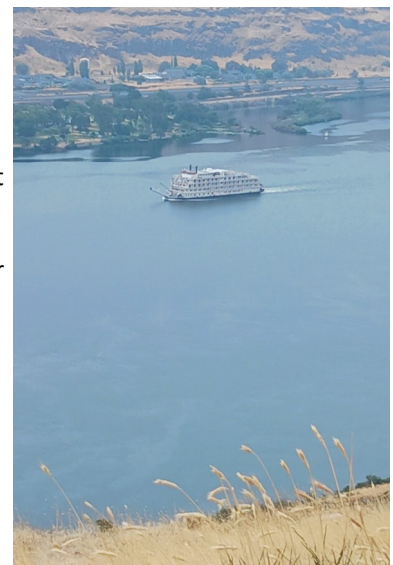
We had another very good meal sitting outside on the terrace of the 3 Rivers Grille. A great way to end our trip to Hood River – can't wait for the next time.

Friday August 9

We had breakfast in the hotel and then checked out to start our drive to Spokane. We immediately crossed the Columbia River into Washington State and followed Route 14 on the north side for about 100 miles. After about 30 miles of driving, we spotted one of the American River Cruise ships that had been docked in Hood River overnight and was now headed upstream to take the Snake River as far as Clarkston. We have started talking about taking one of these trips!

At Kennewick, we turned north to follow Route 395 all the way to Spokane. We stopped for coffee in Pasco and didn't make any additional stops until we found a rest area about 50 miles from Spokane. I felt dizzy when I got out of the car (it was about 95F again) but I thought that I walked it off. However, once we started driving again, I began to have "dizziness" much like the episodes several months ago that caused me to see several doctors – without a specific diagnosis.

The remaining 50 miles took about 2 hours, with several stops on the expressway shoulder

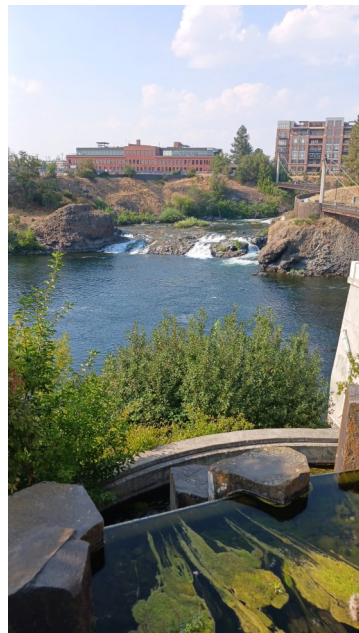


and more taken at exits. Finally, about 8 miles from our destination, we found an alternative route to the freeway, and we were able to make it to the hotel at a slower pace but under somewhat better conditions. I have never been so happy to pull into the parking lot of a Courtyard!

I “recovered” sufficiently to allow us to go to dinner (using Uber) and we had a very good meal at Anthony’s overlooking the Spokane River and the Falls.

Saturday August 10

We drove to iHop about 10 minutes from the hotel and then returned for a very lazy day. I felt much better (more relaxed) but decided to take it easy and spent much of the day in the room. I managed three short walks (one with Molly) along the very attractive walkways that skirt the river.



Tonight, we took Uber again to another restaurant overlooking the river – this time it was Clinkerdagger which we had not tried previously. The restaurant is very close to Anthony’s and boasts views of the falls but, apparently, only a few tables have such views – and ours wasn’t one of them! However, the building is an old flour mill and has many of the original walls (and furnishings?) have been

maintained so the ambiance was very pleasant. The food and service were also very good, so we had another pleasant evening.

Sunday August 11

We checked out of the Courtyard around 9am and drove a couple of miles to Frankie’s Doodles for breakfast. The place was almost empty (quite surprising on a Sunday morning) but we had a good breakfast before starting our drive to Missoula. We got gas in Couer d’ Alene and stopped just inside Montana at a tourist trap café/gift shop/bar/casino. It was interesting to walk around the shop and a good chance to break the journey.

We arrived in Missoula about 3pm (back on Mountain Time) and I went for a very short walk before we relaxed until dinner time. Tonight, we ate at The Keep, which sits on a golf course high above the city. We have enjoyed meals there a couple of times in the past and tonight was no exception. The food and service were very good and the views at sunset added to the pleasant evening.

Monday August 12 (Elizabeth’s Birthday)

We had breakfast at a local iHop and then went on a 50-minute drive to the National Bison Range, now re-named since it has been given back to the two tribes on whose land it had been founded over 100 years ago. We did the 19-mile loop drive on a packed gravel road that took us almost to 5000 feet and saw several deer along the way. But, as usual, it was the last five or

six miles along the river valley that provided us with the most spectacular view of bison. We saw over one hundred across a huge meadow and probably a couple of dozen within a few feet of the roadway. Unfortunately, my camera was acting up again and several “excellent” shots were lost – but we did manage to capture a few. We have our memories, however, and spent quite a long time just sitting in the car and watching their antics.



On returning to Missoula, we had a Starbucks lunch and then I drove to the river (Clarks Fork) for a 3-mile walk on the trail that hugs the river and gives views of the city and the university.

Tonight, we drove into town for dinner at the 1889 Steakhouse that we had visited three years ago (according to Google!) Indeed, we did recognize the restaurant and enjoyed a good meal – sharing steak and desserts. We toasted Elizabeth’s birthday!



Tuesday August 13

We had breakfast at iHop again and then left for Helena. We drove along Montana Route 200 most of the way rather than staying on I-90 and it was a very easy and pleasant drive on quiet roads. About 15 miles prior to arriving in Helena we stopped at an amazing overlook on the Continental Divide – the first time we had crossed (by road) on this trip.

We arrived at the hotel shortly after noon but were able to get a room right away, so I took a 3-mile walk as far as the Capitol before relaxing for the afternoon.

Tonight, we ate at Ristorante Bella Roma where (unlike our memory of last time) we had a good meal and excellent service. We chatted with our waitress, Mariia, who is studying in Helena after her university in Ukraine was bombed about 18 months ago. She has recently got engaged to a local boy and plans to stay here for 5-10 years and perhaps move then to Europe. We wish her well!

Wednesday August 14

We had breakfast at Steve’s Café a few blocks from the hotel and then we strolled along Last Chance Gulch and saw Reeder’s Alley where the gold rush started “on the last chance”. We had a cooling drink and then visited the



Helena



Montana State Capitol and the Cathedral of St Helena

magnificent cathedral which sits proudly above the city. We returned to the hotel, but I drove to Mt Ascension Park where I took two short walks totaling 2 miles.

Tonight, we ate at the Mediterranean Grill, where we have enjoyed several meals in the past. Tonight was no exception as we sampled four appetizers, a bottle of wine and dessert!

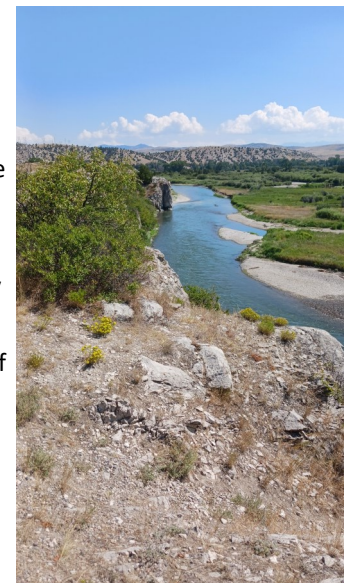
Thursday August 15

We had breakfast again at Steve's Café and then started our drive south. It was less than 90 minutes to our first stop at the Headwaters State Park. Since our first visit in 2006, we have visited



the point where the Madison, Jefferson and Gallatin Rivers join to form the Missouri many times and it never fails to admire the journey of Lewis and Clark and our own travels along the same route.

We took short walks in the park and then





The Headwaters of the Missouri 2006 and 2024

picked up US 287 again that took us through some magnificent scenery to the west of Yellowstone and the Tetons and into Idaho. From the Continental Divide (crossing to the east despite traveling west!) it was an easy and fast drive on US 20 all the way to Idaho Falls. We arrived at our hotel just as the skies turned very dark and my attempt at a walk was halted by a dust storm just as I was leaving the hotel, so I decided to call it quits for today.

Tonight, we ate at the Copper Rill, about ¼ mile from the hotel. Apart from a little difficulty getting a proper Manhattan, the meal and service were very good- as it has been on previous visits.

Friday August 16

We checked out and had breakfast at Smitty's (just around the corner) before our 3-hour drive to Salt Lake City. We decided to stick to the Interstate, and it turned out to be an easy drive through some great scenery. We made a couple of stops and were in Salt Lake City by 1:30pm. I returned the rental car to the city Hertz office and walked back to the hotel, where we had a late Starbucks lunch before relaxing until dinner time.

We ate tonight at Spencer's in the Hilton hotel a couple of blocks from the Marriott. We have eaten there a number of times over the years and have generally had a good experience. Tonight, we enjoyed our meal, but the service was less than stellar. However, it was a nice way to end this trip.

Saturday August 17

We had an uneventful journey back from Salt Lake City – Uber to the airport, breakfast in the lounge, lunch on board and Uber home, arriving about 5pm after an excellent trip and some beautiful scenery.

