

"Westward Ho" - Hitting the Oregon Trail - BT Style

Three years ago a group of us made a decision. We were going to take a month out of our normal lives and drive across the continent and back to attend the Border Terrier Specialty in Albany, Oregon. Over those three years we hoarded up vacation time and money and made countless plans. Of course, over time things changed. People who had wanted to come were unable to do so, others had to change plans and fly, and sadly three of our veteran dogs passed on. However, on September 10, 2007, a small but intrepid party set forth.



Easy to see why Montana is called "Big Sky" Country

The logical "starting" place was the home of Chris and Pam Dyer in Ste-Madeleine about 40 minutes southeast of Montreal. First of all they were half of the group. They also had the travel trailer and were basically on the way toward our destination. The "on the way" part definitely worked for the third member, Anna Robaczewski from Halifax, and sort of worked for the fourth, Donna Sapp, in Maryland. Montreal is on the way from Maryland to Oregon isn't it? Anyway after 13 hours of driving for Anna, and 10 for Donna, we were "chez" Dyers. Some serious packing and repacking and we were finally ready to roll with a mini van (2 people and 6 BTs), a crew cab pickup (2 people and 3 BTs), and 27' fifth-wheel trailer (carrying more than you would ever believe).

The first four days were the most grueling of the entire trip. By the fourth day we had traveled 1960 miles, had figured out that four people and nine dogs really could sleep well in a 27' trailer (though the night spent in a K-mart parking lot was marginal), and had drifted into the assigned roles we kept for the whole trip. Chris captained the rig. He, with help, set up camp and broke it down. Five folding crates were put up each night to accommodate canines, act as a "room divider" and provide surfaces on which to "put stuff". Anna was in charge of breakfast and dinner for the group. She is a terrific cook, by the way, simple but delicious ruled. Pam ensured that walkie talkies, cell phones and camera batteries were kept charged and catered to the dogs - they realized that fast and she was adored by them morning and evening. Donna was the "Jill of all trades" in charge of campground scouting, maintaining contact with the outside world via any available WiFi hotspot and filling in wherever help was needed.

Donna probably learned more about hook ups, slide outs and pump outs than she cares to remember. Exercising the dogs was a shared responsibility as this was our quality time with our four-footed travelers aside from rotating freedom in the camper and "bed privileges" for a select foursome.

The views throughout those first four days were truly amazing. More accustomed to limited views involving either lots of trees or lots of water [or both], we found the huge vistas opening up before us startling in their grandeur and beauty. The land was so rich with color and the sky so vast. We'll never forget stormy Lake Superior, or the huge expanses of North Dakota and Montana. We were amazed when less than 2 miles out from Havre, MT, the entire town "disappeared" into a valley. We were that close to a very large bustling town and yet it felt like we were in the middle of nowhere.

On our fifth day out we drove north back into Canada and on to Calgary to meet up with Mel and Marion Miners and their 15 year old Border Medrick. Medrick was going to a Border Terrier specialty for the first time and actually making the longest trip of his life. Mel and Marion very graciously fed us (elk no less) and housed us. Medrick, the gentleman he is, was willing to share his yard with nine dogs who really wanted a chance to run after being cooped in crates for five days.

The next day we all did tourist "must dos" - Banff and Lake Louise where we joined up with the last of our caravan, Tony and Beth Hunt from BC with their Borders, Gizmo and Gremlin. We then headed back into the US by way of Radium Hot Springs - a hard to miss convoy of four vehicles, eight people and twelve Borders. As the last vehicle crossed into Idaho, the border officer had given up asking "what kind of dog?"



Beautiful Bow River near Banff, Alberta

We drove the last two days along the mighty Columbia River Gorge chatting between the cars via walkie talkie, enjoying the gorgeous views, and sharing lots of laughs. In Albany, the Miners, Anna and Donna all had their own rooms while Tony and Beth roughed it in a tent on the hotel grounds and Pam and Chris had their "house" back - though it was the location for several memorable evening get-togethers - this gave the dogs some much needed "down

time" - a chance to stretch their legs, chill out or play the fool according to their needs. Of course the specialty was wonderful just in itself thanks to the hard work of countless volunteers. We met many people and dogs for the first time that we had just heard about before, or had only talked to on the phone or through e-mail. We also got a chance to see old friends that we hadn't seen for quite a while. It was a wonderful time. And, since we had traveled all this way, we made sure to get a view of the Pacific Ocean. The dogs loved the beach.

Soon it was over and we had to head home. While Tony and Beth headed south to the Redwoods before going home (through some atrocious weather), we headed east, Mel and Marion to Crater Lake and the rest of us to Pendleton. We had more time now, so we were tourists, not just travelers. It had been a bit frustrating planning the route because it seemed that for every place we chose to go, there were two more just as good places that we had to skip. The one thing that we had all agreed on was to see South Dakota. The other thing we realized was that staying in one place two or more nights once in a while made the whole trip a lot easier as sightseeing with a decent-sized trailer in tow can be problematic and frustrating.

We met up with Mel, Marion and Medrick again at Craters of the Moon in Idaho. Unimposing when we drove by in the evening, it turned out to be amazing in daylight and well worth visiting. We did two days in Yellowstone but had to skip the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone itself was deserving of more time. We decided to enjoy an extra evening with the three Ms and changed our planned route from Yellowstone to Cody - this put us north of Donna's carefully chosen RV friendly pass through the Rockies and Big Horn range. Let's just say that taking a 27' fifth wheel over Dead Indian Pass and Gillette Pass is not for the faint of heart.

We responded to the challenges of terrain with adjustments in travel style, while we stayed in convoy much of the time, when appropriate the nimble mini-van would scoot off the highway to pick up groceries and zip on ahead to check out the campground, find a level pull through and register for the night so little time was lost when the "home on wheels" rolled in.

South Dakota was all that we expected it to be and much more. We loved Jewel Cave, Mt Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Monument. We watched the last day of the annual Buffalo Roundup at Custer State Park, drove through the Badlands at sunset, and enjoyed the lighthearted commercialism of Wall Drugs. While some of the dogs whiled away the trip sleeping, others were enthralled by the bison (Hazel wanted to take them on), deer, antelope, elk, turkey, goats, jack rabbit, red fox and of course prairie dogs that enlivened the already stunning terrain.

For the most part, we found the people throughout the states and provinces we traveled to be very friendly. In Arco, Idaho we had the local "graduation year" cliff explained to us while they removed a nail and patched a tire on the mini-van after it had gone flat overnight (the only automotive hitch during the entire trip). Elsewhere, a young man told us about finding a niche and establishing himself

in a new town. A family with three boys told us of their lives. Many wanted to know about the dogs. Many had different perspectives that were interesting to hear. Seeing one another first thing in the morning and last thing at night in shower buildings of varying adequacy is a good way to break down barriers and the "distance" that comes with the privacy of motel rooms.

Our last day in South Dakota was the most traumatic. We were staying at a beautiful state park (had it pretty much to ourselves) then half way through our early morning routine we were told that they were going to move some of the cabins to their winter berths. They were closing the road out of the park. We had to either leave then, or wait for four hours until the road was clear again. We left **then**. Pam didn't get her shower - though the dogs did get fed. Anna didn't get her coffee - really bad news. Chris and Donna abandoned the normal orderly pack up routine for "we'll sort it out later". We were not happy campers. Luckily a full sit down breakfast at a truck stop, with coffee, later in the day made the start a little more bearable. That this minor disruption, plus the flat tire and a couple of Borders with soft stools were the worst mishaps that befell us speaks volumes for planning, preparedness and sheer good fortune.

Once out of South Dakota we traveled through Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The farther east we got, the more "normal" the views became. Finally in Ohio, Donna broke off from the others and headed southeast to get to the earthdog trial in NJ on the day after the Montgomery Kennel Club show. The crew cab was reconfigured to carry three people and six dogs and pulled out for Toronto, Montreal and Ste-Madeleine where Anna would recuperate for a day or so before tackling the last long drive home to Halifax

Four people and nine dogs traveled 6300 miles, through 13 States and 4 Provinces together and quite a bit apart as well. Would we do it again? - Yes! Would we do some things differently? - Yes! Was it worth it? - YES!!



"We made it - our intrepid RV wrangler and his buddy "
Until the next time (Texas anyone?) this is "BAaD Dog" (Borders Anna and Donna), BBC (Border Base Camp - Chris & Pam), "Sticky Tape" (3 M's - Mel, Marion and Medrick) and "Tiger" (Tony and Beth) signing off with a big 10-4.