**Oregon Car Trip**

Back at the end of April 2020 when COVID was happening, daughter Emily decided to invite us to come up to Crater Lake National Park for a visit. She and Victor would come down from Portland to join us. A good time seemed to be the weekend of August 21 to 23 when the COVID situation has subsided. The problem just got worse in Los Angeles, but did not appear to be as bad in Southern Oregon, so we went on the trip anyway. Reservations at the Crater Lake Lodge are very expensive and hard to get. Chris and Louis rented a car from Budget since all our vehicles were built in the last century. We got a Hyundai Santa Fe from Budget, which turned out to be a good choice. On the way up, we spent the night of August 20 with Bob Sugar in Lincoln, CA. His house was the usual complete mess, but the two cats seemed happy and Bob was in relatively good shape. He had survived two knee surgeries and could get up the stairs. After somewhat cleaning up the kitchen, we had a nice steak and corn dinner and spent the night there.

The next day, we headed off to Crater Lake. We drove by Mount Shasta and the weather was quite nice. We got there in time for check-in at 4 PM. We took some nice pictures from the rim of the lake across the lake to the other side. Emily and Victor showed up later after coming down from Portland. Dinner was served in the timber lined dining room at the lodge. I suppose at one time it was a sit-down meal, but now it was a served buffet where you requested what you wanted from a nice selection of salads, entrees, soups, and desserts. The cost was about $50 per person and we had an isolated table in the corner, but we were still cautious about having a meal inside a dining room. With our Southern California origins, that seemed somewhat risky.

The next day we carpooled in our rental car around the lake stopping at many of the viewpoints. The nearby fires, wherever they were, contributed smoke so the other side of the lake was barely visible. Chris, Emily, and Victor headed down the path to the lake and then Chris and Emily went swimming in the clear 60 degreeF (15.5 degreeC for Andy) water at the bottom. She found it tolerably refreshing. Dinner was assorted take-out items from the local store. On Sunday, August 23, we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to the East Rim area where we had identified some interesting hikes. By now, there was no view at all across the lake. Even the islands in the lake were barely visible from the top of the ridge around the lake.

We all left via the North Entrance with our two cars. It looked like that access road was a barricade for a previous fire since all the trees on the North side of the road were dead, and all the trees on the South side of the road (that were in the National Park) were green. We headed North on Highway 57, passing through La Pine, Oregon, where my first cousin Nicki lives. I tried to arrange some sort of meeting with her since we had not seen her in 36 years, but I was unable to arrange the contact. We continued up the road to Bend, Oregon where our friends Jim and Ellie had retired. They had dinner ready, and had some places for all of us to spend the night. They had moved to a very nice wooded development near town and the railroad tracks. Most houses had a small garage that was designed for golf carts. Jim, of course, used that for his bicycles. Bend is very close to the major Mount Bachelor ski area, which closed in March 2020 due to COVID.

We moved onward to Portland where we saw two very large forest fires in the distance around Mount Hood. Mount Hood also is the area were there are several more ski and snow locations. We stayed with Emily, Victor and their four cats for three days. We managed to spend some time spaced out at the local beach on the Columbia River, but most of the attractions in town were COVID closed.

Portland has been in the news recently due to various events in the downtown area, but many of the participants on all sides were from out-of-town. It was not clear who was doing what to whom or why. There were also some peaceful local demonstrators at a road intersection near their house. Emily is managing a sizable garden in their yard with apples, pears, berries, and assorted produce. She also has 3 chickens that produce eggs. Our dinner one night was an astounding collection of sushi rolls from the local Japanese restaurant at very reasonable cost. I wish we could find a place like that somewhere around here. There are many ethnic food choices in the area along with a convenient MAX rail transportation system to the nearby international airport and downtown.

We left Portland down Interstate 5 and stopped in Dunsmuir, California for the night. We had dinner on the porch of a Mediterranean restaurant overlooking the railroad station here. There is even an active turntable there, but the roundhouse had been removed. The station is also the fuel and water point for the (now) Union Pacific railroad, (previously) Southern Pacific railroad, (originally) Central Pacific railroad. This was an original rail construction site from 1887 and the section stop where helpers were added to Northbound trains. The town even used to be called “Pusher”. The original railroad from California to Portland went over Siskiyou Summit and through Medford, Oregon. The current mainline (with better grades and curves) through Klamath Falls and to Eugene and was completed in 1926. We even got to see a Burlington Northern Santa Fe freight train passing through, probably on a detour due to fires along the “Inside Gateway” line from Klamath Falls to the Feather River line at Keddie. The railroad was completed by a shared agreement between the Great Northern and Western Pacific in 1931 to compete with the Southern Pacific line. That train route was the last of the major rail lines built in the United States. There was a Mogul (2-6-0) steam engine in the park and several cabooses around the town. We wanted to see the Castle Crags, but the State Park was closed, and the crags were lost in the smoke. Amtrak passenger trains usually go through this scenic area between midnight and 6 AM.

We then went down Interstate 5 and Highway 99 to Lincoln, where we spent two nights with Bob Sugar. We tried to find an open fruit stand along our route back but it was after cherry, apricot, and plum season in June, or the peach season in July, but before the apple and pear season in the foothills in September. Tomatoes are now bred to all ripen at the same time thanks to research done at UC Davis. That means they can be harvested in one pass and loaded mechanically onto the trucks. There were many trucks with large white bins of ripe red tomatoes. They seemed to all be heading for the large Hunt’s or Heinz tomato plant in Tracy or the two Morning Star plants in Los Banos. San Joaquin County in the delta area is a leading area for tomato production. We stopped in Tracy for a gourmet sandwich and gas stop. The sky was smoky until we reached the area around Taft. We went over the ridge route where the Lake Hughes fire was now under control. We arrived home where everything was in order, turned in the rental car, and appear to have survived without getting COVID or any other disease along way. We felt quite fortunate since there was far more contact with strange people along the way than we usually have had over the last six months. At least, most people really tried to wear masks in indoor locations and when interacting with others.