

Eastern WA Oct. 12-17, 2023

Left home at 9, stopped at Freddie's for groceries & gas. Comedy of errors at gas pump. No gas credits on our card, but Grant informs me that there may be some on his card. Huh? Turns out he started his own account, which I wasn't happy about (too much potential for losing track of which card has gas credits, and losing them when they expire). So we cancel the transaction so we can try his account. The machine takes too long to clear so we pull forward to another pump. Then I - oops - start to key in the wrong card number. When I try to back up, the machine cancels the transaction. Again it takes too long, so we back up to the first pump. This time it won't accept Grant's credit card, probably due to too many consecutive use attempts. So he has to go to the cashier window. After all that he didn't have any gas credits! On top of this I noticed that he was wearing filthy shop pants, stained with oil & dirt. He said he doesn't have any other pants that fit.

I am super embarrassed to go to Kari's with him looking so ratty. When we finally hit the road at 10 am, we were both feeling a little crabby.

405 north to 522 and Highway 2. Blue sky, light traffic, peak gold color on

maple trees. Golden sunshine too.

I didn't see anyplace you could pull off to ogle mt. Index, and before I knew it we had sailed past.

As we headed down from the pass (Stevens) we saw bright yellow-leaved trees - birch? Grant called them "acid trees" because they were so bright.

Hillsides covered in red huckleberry bushes (the leaves are red, not the berries) - vaccinium. Soon we saw red vine maple lining the road. So beautiful! I think we hit peak fall color.

We stopped at a rest area for lunch and two women came over and said they'd been following us because they wanted to know the name of our windows (they want to replace the rear windows in their Roadtrek). They were chatty & nice, and we ran into them again in Leavenworth.

Paid parking was full in Leavenworth and we almost bailed, but Grant found a free spot in a residential area close to town. We walked along the river trail, called Waterfront Park, and realized there was free parking at both entrances.

There are three Oktoberfest weekends here and one of them starts tomorrow, so I'm glad we're here today.

The river trail was lovely. The river is low. We saw an 18" trout

lying dead in the shallows, all silver. Then we saw a few spawning salmon thrashing. We walked back through town on main street, which was blissfully blocked to cars. The town really is very cute and looks just like some of the towns I just visited in Europe, with pretty authentic-looking Bavarian architecture.

We next visited Ohme Gardens, which I had never been to. It's in Wenatchee, perched on a steep hillside above the Columbia River. \$8 entry fee, managed by Chelan County Parks. It was a multi-year labor of love by the Ohme family, who transformed it from a barren, rocky hillside into an alpine garden, with rock paths, stone benches, ponds, shelters, trees, and all kinds of plants. Some of the paths are steep. They provide sturdy wood walking sticks. Grant went until it got steep, then waited on a bench. I enjoyed wandering the paths. Many great viewpoints, but down below is noisy highways and acres of apple warehouses. Very different from when the family created it in the 30s I'm sure!

Left at 4 and headed north on 97. I drove for an hour or so and Grant took over. Slanting golden afternoon light. Apples of all colors for sale. Red & yellow apples still on trees. Brown hills, green orchards. Arrived at Kerr campground (Forest Service) at 6:20. Almost dark. Just north of Conconully. The last couple miles were

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gravel. Saw deer hunters by the road.

\$5 with senior national Park pass. One other vehicle here.

Egg-cheese-tortilla dinner. No signal. Very dark & quiet here.

It's 9 miles from Conconully to Salmon meadows campground, most of that gravel. Our campground, Kerr, is about halfway. We're at 3100' feet elevation. The campground feels a bit damp & remote. No stream or lake.

Fri Oct 13

As usual on a road day we slept a long time: from 9 to 7! It was dark & quiet. 38° this morning, about 45° in the van, so no heater needed. High clouds with patches of blue.

On the drive down we saw fire damage and one struggling golden larch.

The town of Conconully is scary redneck, with "Let's Go Brandon" signs. It's also tiny, with just a handful of houses and a few services. The lake itself is low. The State Park is stuffed with hunters' camps. Liars Cove "resort" is nothing special, with RV & tent sites (prices unknown).

Gas up on the reservation in Omak (\$4.38), then park at the rodeo/Stampede fairground and get caught up on internet. Walk on the dike road along the Okanagan River, about 20 minutes each

way (we walked ^{south/} west). Pretty river but depressing part of town. Funky trailer park, shuffling woman who looked topless from the back but was wearing a halter top, tattooed meth heads almost coming to blows on the bridge.

In Tonasket we stopped at the Co-op. The town seemed to be doing well, with several business & restaurants along that road. I chatted with the co-op cashier. She got a biology degree from UW & moved over here in 2021 to be a Forest Service seasonal. She said the town has seen a resurgence in the past year but she doesn't know why. There are lots of seasonal Forest Service & fire people. She estimates the town is about 50/50 liberal/conservative. That's amazing for Eastern WA, and it makes me happy! We even saw two black people with dreadlocks! The co-op is quite pricey and we didn't buy anything. I love the vibe and smell of the old school co-ops - herbs and soaps and bulk spices.

We bought canned beans and apples at Grant's grocery store across the street. The checker said they ~~had~~ had a wet spring, a short dry summer with no fires, and a big recent rain, a few days ago.

Highway 7 north to Loomis. This area is called Many Lakes recreation area. The lakes, all manmade (Grant and I call them "flakes," for "fake lakes") are low. At Split Rock Day Use area on Palmer Lake, I walked on the small sandy beach & admired the view of hills &

farms & reflections on the mirror-still lake.

The historic "town" of Nighthawk, now privately-owned, has some great old wooden buildings.

At the northern apex of the "Loomis Loop," a bit east of Nighthawk, is Similkameen BLM campground. It's right on the Similkameen River, it's free, and there are only two other sites in use, one a tent and the other a huge 5th wheel. There are no outhouses, tables, defined spots, or other amenities. We're sitting by the river in the bright warm sun, with the van door facing the river. The road is close but has very few cars. No one else in sight.

I walked along the river and found another camping area just to the west, but with no entrance sign. Fresh green grass sprouting everywhere after the recent rain. Pine trees and sagebrush. We love the sound of the river.

Potatoes & eggs for dinner. Grant's greasy spoon name idea: Fried and Joy. 64° at 6:30. Sun dropped below the ridge at 4:30.

Sat. Oct. 14

We were in the forest our first night, but this camp is open sky. No moon but I saw stars. We slept from 8 to 6! A much warmer night, lower elevation here than Conconully. 65° in the van this morning.

High clouds, patches of blue.

Walked along the river and saw snow on the peaks to the west. Leave camp at 8:15. Passed another CG to the east called Miner's Flat, but it doesn't look as nice.

Beautiful winding canyon road along the river to Oroville. Sections of guardrail lying on the ground because the posts completely burned up!

In Oroville we bumped into the farmer's market. Half a dozen vendors selling tomatoes, peppers, pumpkins, apples. An older guy selling nice hardwood items he'd made. We bought some yellow cherry tomatoes and a sage smudge from an old hippie lady selling pickled eggs. Four young sax players entertained. Let's just say they weren't Kenny G.

Drove a short distance north to Deep Bay Park on Lake Osoyoos. Lots of houses around the lake. Small park. Drove a mile back up the Similkameen road to Upper Similkameen Trailhead (aka Tauber). The trail is lovely, next to an orchard, above the river, lots of red sunac, bird noises. Unfortunately the trail is closed at the pedestrian bridge, so you can't walk up the canyon to the dam. Grant drove down to Oroville and I walked that section of trail and met him at the trailhead. It's a lovely 1.5 miles of flat gravel along the river. Recommended for future trip. A local woman told me the tall plants with yellow leaves and white fibers are milkweed. She said they were covered with butterflies in the spring.

Picnic lunch at trailhead at noon. South on highway 7 to Klein NWR. Lots of apple harvesting happening, and trucks filled with apples going by in town. We decided to drive to Grand Coulee Dam instead. The wildlife refuge has trails & ponds - another time.

Highway 155 Coulee Corridor Scenic Byway is beautiful. About an hour from Omak to the dam. Up and over 3252' Disautel Pass, through pine, larch, and aspen forest. The aspen were brilliant neon gold, the larch more muted but still beautiful. Moose ponds with cattails and beaver lodges (didn't see any moose). Conifer joke: people who love ice cream cones are coniferous.

This whole area is Colville Reservation. Gassed up in Nespelem for \$4.29.

Coulee Dam was great. I hadn't been here in ages. Cute little town with big trees, park areas around the enormous dam, interpretive signs on the bridge (we didn't walk over it), interesting interpretive center.

Back over the pass to Omak. Cloudy & grey but still lovely views. Nice view as you descend into Omak. The drive looked completely different on the return trip.

Boondocking in the 12 Tribes Casino parking lot. Some cars zooming around, but looks like it will be a quiet night. They also have a pay RV lot with hookups.

Rice & beans for dinner. I'm a bit crabby.

I think it's TMT (too much togetherness). I also have a sore throat (reflux).

Sun Oct. 15

Despite it being Saturday night, and presumably a busy casino night, we never heard a thing. Awoke at 7 am to blue sky and 48°.

Stopped at Smallwood Farms on Highway 20 in Okanagan to look at apples. Prices weren't great. Cute place, with a cafe deck overlooking the farm. The usual preserves and local products, but prices too high.

Drove to Twisp on highway 20 over Loup Loup Pass (4020'). So many larch trees! (Western larch, different from alpine larch.) Peak gold color, stunning against the blue sky. We went for a short walk.

In Twisp we drove to Twisp Ponds Discovery Trail, a short distance from town up the Twisp River Road. The hiking brochure said it was 5 miles, but after driving 6 we turned around. Grant spotted it on the way back. About a half mile of trails and ponds. Nice place to walk.

I visited the Interpretive Center, part of the Twisp Works craft studios complex (closed on Sundays). The center is focused on the native Methow people, and the natural history of the area. I enjoyed talking to the volunteer working there, a retired Forest Service botanist who did mine site restoration. She said Western Larches

love Loup Loup Pass because the volcanic soil retains moisture.

Arrived at Kari & Galen Page's at 1:30. They live high on a ridge above Winthrop. Her mom bought 40 acres 50 years ago and built a pine log cabin. Kari & Galen bought it from her mom, remodeled it, and live here full time. It's so beautiful up here! Kari and I went for a long walk. You can see the whole valley from up here, and look down on Pearrygin Lake.

Lasagna, caesar salad, delicious bread from the Mazama bakery, and a peach-blueberry pie for dinner! Light rain after our walk.

Mon. Oct. 16

Cloudy & 41°. Clouds fill the valley down below. Beautiful! Lovely long chat with Kari & Galen in their comfy chairs looking out on the valley. On the road at 11:30. Stop at the bakery in Mazama but decided not to buy any of the yummy looking bread or pastries. Mecca for mountain biking, climbing, hiking.

Rain as we crossed the mountains, so no views. Took 530 highway via Darrington & Arlington. Rain stopped around Darrington but still cloudy. Then onto I-5, traffic not bad. Home 4:45.