

USA 2017 Road Trip Chicago to Vancouver (Trump That)

Day 1 28th March 2017

Hi Folks

Only one more get up, before we set off on our road trip, bags are packed and it's strange that my camera bag weighs more than my suit case, early start for Mrs. O in the morning as she has drawn the short straw and is taking us to the airport. As we have to be at the airport 3 hours prior to departure we have booked a lounge, so we need to be there as early as possible to make the most of it. Let the travels begin more tomorrow.

Day 1 28th March 2017

Let the Adventure Begin

Well here we go, buckle in and sit back, at 7.30am we depart number 53 and head off for Manchester airport with Mrs. O at the wheel (she drew the early morning short straw). After fighting our way through the rush hour traffic we arrive at the at T3 say farewell to Trish and head off for the BA check in desk and then on through security, once on the other side we set off to find the lounge I have booked (unbeknown to Barb until Sunday when it slipped out) we book into the lounge and settle down to coffee, tea, bacon bap and a cheeky little pain au chocolate for second breakfast, oh and possibly a little beer or two. Before we leave the kitchen has moved up a gear and is now serving lunch, last time this happened we had gone for breakfast at the Bellagio and ended up staying for lunch.

Just prior to our take off time the main guy in the front seat on the left, announces that there is a slight problem as there is a warning light displayed on the instrumentation and that we need to get it checked out before we can take off. He tells us that the technicians are on their way to plug in the diagnostic testing equipment and check out the problem, now in my previous experiences of diagnostic testing equipment and believe me there have been a few. What this actually means is that the technician will plug the equipment in, it will communicate with the onboard systems and then say, no fault found. At which point the technician will reset the system and the light will go off, stay off while he or she carries out all the required tests only to come back on the minute the owner drives off the forecourt. Anyway after an hour it has either fixed, stayed off or they have used the favorite motor trade fix of, removing the offending bulb, eventually we are up in the air and on our way, and I suppose we will find out if there was a real problem when he up front tries to lower the landing gear. So far, we have been up for over 7 hours and have covered approximately 40 miles, it's a bit like being on the M6 at rush hour, well at any time of the day actually.

Is it just me or is eating on a plane a complete pain in the derrière, first you have to try and open the plastic sleeve containing the knife, fork, spoon, salt, pepper and napkin, which has been sealed with the stickiest stuff known to man, when you finally manage to open it, you crunch up the empty plastic bag to save space, only to find that when you let go it doubles in size and engulfs the whole tray of food, you give in and stuff it in the seat pocket but it still tries to escape. Next is a debate over what to eat first as you are faced with a number of sealed containers not knowing what is in each of them and a bread roll and butter that is only just defrosted, so salad first or do you have that with your meal which although you have been told what it consists of still manages to baffle your taste buds, that is after you have managed to open the container and get some into your mouth without dropping it on your lap. I have reverted to eating them like the Chinese eat a bowl of rice, after you have fought your way through the umpteen containers and have tried to stuff the empty packaging into the plastic cup your beverage of choice came in, you give up and end up with plastic wrappers which have a mind of their own, expanding and taking over the whole square

foot of space you have in front of you, it is a blessing when the stewardesses remove the offending tray, not sure why we bother.

I am getting bored now, and we still have over 4 hours of flying time before we get to the Windy City and I am fed up with the "are we there yet" or "are we nearly there" questions, time to don the earphones and watch a movie. The rest of the flight goes without anything interesting happening and soon it is time to land, let's see if the warning light was anything to do with the landing gear, it appears not and after a slightly bumpy meeting with the surface of the earth we are on the ground. The trip from the runway to the arrival gate took ages I thought we were on a tour of O'Hare airport, this is a big old place, next the hike to baggage reclaim and through the what is now a three stage immigration process which is pretty slick I have to say. Two hours late we are eventually in the arrivals hall at about 5pm, we have arranged a limo (don't you know) to pick us up as it was only \$10 more than the shuttle bus, after a phone call and a short wait our SUV arrives and we are on the highway with the rest of the rush hour traffic. An hour later we arrive at the hotel, check in and head to our room on the 17th floor, after a quick freshen up we head out to explore, it appears that the location of the hotel is great and right in the heart of the hustle and bustle of a big city.

Neither of us are sure if we want anything to eat so we pop into a local hostel for a quick libation, decision made food not required so we wander around for a while taking in the sites before returning to the hotel, it's only 9pm local time but our bodies are still on UK time which makes it 3am, it's time for sleep, more from your roving reporters tomorrow.

Day 2 29th March

Now I am not one that usually suffers from jet lag but last night at 9pm I could not stay awake and then at 1am I awoke, eventually managing to get back to sleep until 3am and that's it I am a founder member of the wide-awake club. I stay in the wide-awake club for a couple of hours before finally I join the land of nod. We are out on the streets of Chicago before 9am and we find that the majority of shops do not open until 10am. Time for some breakfast as we have not eaten anything since yesterday afternoon on the plane, bring on operation Barbara restaurant hunt, after we have checked out a number of potential venues we, well Barb makes the final choice of Eatitalian, the coffee and Bacon egg and tomato on focaccia we're very good in fact I indulged on a second cup of coffee.

Then it's off for a walk around, we head off for Lake Michigan and the Navel harbor which is normally a tourist attraction, however the tourist season has not yet started and not everything is open, so apart from us and a few others the place is fairly quiet, even the boats that usually cruise the lake laden with tourists, stand still and empty at their moorings waiting for the weather to improve and the tourists to arrive. Then we head off into the city and to the shops, we need to make a couple of purchases, 1 an American SIM card and 2 because some twit, oh that would be me, has forgotten to pack a plug adaptor, which due to the number of electrical items we have with us is an important item. After a few visits to various retailers we venture into Bloomingdales not because we want to buy anything just to say we have been there, so after a trip up one escalator and down another we are out of there. Next stop is to T-Mobile to purchase a SIM card and in no time at all we are up and running with a sim that covers all calls and txt including UK calls and all the data we can use, simples.

Now it was our intention to go for a ride on the hop on hop off bus, so we stop at one of the ticket selling stalls and after all the sales pitch telling us what we will see, she finally gets to the price \$40 each for a day ticket and a ride that lasts for 2 hours. A tad steep we thought especially considering that if we were at home we could go on as many bus rides around our fantastic home city for free, well providing that we are not twirly (that's "too early" for those that don't understand scouse). We decide that as we are here for another three days we will wake the route to see the places of interest and that I will do the commentary on the way, which as you may guess might be a complete load of twaddle, but I will do some research. We head back to the hotel for a little siesta

to try and kill off the jet lag we are both suffering from, which has got me a tad confused as neither of us usually suffer from it.

It is early evening before we emerge back on the streets of Chicago, which aren't as hilly as the streets of San Francisco, neither of are feeling particularly hungry so we head for O'Toole's drinking establishment for an aperitif. This is the place with wall to wall TV's that we visited yesterday and may possible visit a couple more times while we are here. Seated at the bar we order our drink, tonight nearly every screen has tonight's live ice hockey match on, the Chicago Blackhawks, which was a name I thought that they could have chosen better, until I realized that it was actually Blackhawks, the local team was playing the Pittsburgh Penguins which I didn't think was very fair as penguins usually just waddle around. Hey but not these guys they could skate really skate, now I am not sure if you have watched a ice hockey match but it's very quick and seems to go on forever in fact a regular-season game in the National Hockey League has 60 minutes of playing time broken into three 20-minute period, with a 17-minute intermission between each period. It's that fast it's tiring just watching it never mind playing it, we are getting into the game and the atmosphere so decide to stay and order some bar snacks of ribs and chicken, the chicken was good, but the ribs were greenest.

Much to the delight of the majority of people in the bar the final score was Blackhawks 5 Penguins 1, there is another match on Sunday, and we had contemplated going until we checked the ticket prices and at \$129 each, we are going to give it a miss. Time to settle our tab and depart no doubt we will be back as the Liverpool derby match will be screened on Sunday. We head back to the hotel and to bed, so that's it for this episode, tomorrow will be tourist sightseeing day so you may get some interesting information but hey then again you might not, good night one and all.

Day 3 30th March

Today's plan is to walk some of the hop on hop off bus route and take in the sights and attractions on the route, first stop is breakfast at a cafe a couple of blocks away called Yolk it is supposed to do the best breakfast in the city and a few others for that matter (look out Tavern your crown is at risk), those how live in Liverpool will know of The Tavern, for those that don't it is a restaurant in the pool that holds the title of "The best breakfasts in Liverpool" and if you go at the weekend at any time between 9am to 2.30pm expect to find people queueing in the street. We arrive at Yolk it's busy, but we are shown immediately to a table, not as popular as the Tavern then and not as big. We are given menus (http://eatyolk.com/menu/yolk_menu.pdf) and the coffee begins to flow,

There are obviously this that we can work out but "biscuits with sausage gravy" what's that all about then there is the 5 yes 5 egg omelets containing sausages, bacon and other stuff, I give these a miss and choose something I understand, more coffee arrives and we haven't even ordered yet. There is a family sitting at the next table have ordered before us and their meals arrive it doesn't look like we will be eating anything else after breakfast today, it looks like they have opted for the 5 eggs omelets and they are humongous, they should be on "Man versus Food", more coffee arrives just before our meals, Barb has gone native and opted for poached eggs with biscuits, fruit and sausage gravy on the side, I have poached eggs, bacon and sausage which is served with 4 rounds of French toast, whipped butter and maple syrup, oh and more coffee. Lots of it I have to say, but the Tavern need not worry it will keep its crown, and keep it for some time to come, this place is all about quantity not quality, don't get me wrong it was good but not that good and the amount of unfinished food that ended up in the bin should be a criminal offence.

Crikey that took some time to explain mind you it did take half of the morning, now if you can remember the plan was a walking tour of the city, however, the big guy up there somewhere, has different ideas and the precipitation is persistent and extremely heavy, we wait inside for a while but there is no let up, time to change the plan and head back to the hotel, after a bit of a dash e arrive back at East Ohio Street slightly damp. We kill time for a while until later in the afternoon and decide to venture out, we need to go to the hire car office which is only a block away and change

the booking that Rossy P has made for us, we head outside and it's still raining but not as much as before, so I thought that going to the hire car office would simplify the booking alteration but that is not the case it needs to be changed at the place of booking "Liverpool" is it me or do some businesses make things more difficult that they need to be, anyway after a txt to Ross he will sort it out.

The rain has gone off so off we go on our walking tour, we are heading for the Millennium Park which is across the river, at some point I want to go to the top of the Willis Tower but I don't think that will be happening today due to the low, extremely low cloud you can nearly touch it, on route we pass Trump tower which is mostly hidden by the low cloud, and some may think that is where his head is. We arrive at the park which is a showcase for modern architecture, the open air theatre has an amazing stage, I have put some 360° photographs on Facebook as a picture paints a thousand words, there is also The Cloud Gate sculpture which looks like a giant polished steel jelly bean. Bizarrely while we are looking at the bean a group of approximately 20 young ladies dressed in gold jump suits arrive, set up in front of the bean carry out a dance routine, at the end of the routine a guy in a dinner suit joins them, which I suspect was supposed to be James Bond, and then they leave with no announcement of who or why they were there, a bit strange for a cold damp Thursday afternoon.

We continue our walk taking in the sights and then head back to the hotel joining the hustle and bustle of the city commuters on their way home for work, we arrive back at the hotel, neither of us are hungry so it's going to be a telly, if we can find anything worth watching, and an early night. Let's hope the weather is better tomorrow I want to get to the top of Willis Tower and see the sights not just the tops of the tallest buildings and clouds, so that's all folks, more tomorrow.

Day 4 31st March

Couple of planning things to do today, I need to contact the RV office to confirm a collection time on Monday and I need to check with Ross that he has been able to change the hire car booking and we also we need to extend our stay at the hotel for one extra night. Simple one would think but as we should all know, one should not assume anything. First job call the RV office, after saying hello's the first question the guy asks me is "have you completed online preregistration form" well actually no as there is no mention of it in any of the emails I have received, ok you need to complete it before you can have a collection time, no great shakes I will do it and phone you back. After completing the online form, I ring back to arrange a time, now I have to admit that as the collection address is only 70 miles from our hotel, I did not think there would be any issues getting there in a couple of hours. However during the phone conversation Scott informed me that although Elkhart is only 70 miles away it is in a different time zone, never even crossed my mind, and it that adds an hour to our travel time so we need to leave earlier or have a later collection time. We settle on 3pm as our collection time say farewell see you on Monday, job one eventually completed, took an hour but it's done. Next to Whatsapp Ross and check that the hire car changes are ok, message sent, I am sure it will be ok, and Ross will let me know later.

On the way out we call at reception to extend our stay for the extra night, can't be that difficult, well your wrong they can extend it but at over double the price we had arranged on line, and they have no way of overriding it, I thought this country prided itself on customer service, but it just looks like the computer says NO and that the end of it. Back to the iPad and I attempt to change the booking on booking.com but it does not have the facility to amend the booking dates once you have arrived, frustrated me, no never, I send an email to booking.com and we will have wait for a reply, Doh!

Eventually we head out into the city and continue our walking tour, oh and to buy a road map, should not be too difficult, we haven't eaten since breakfast yesterday and we are still not hungry so no need for breakfast, good job as half the day has gone carrying out administrative duties. The trip to the top Willis tower is still a no go, as the low cloud has not lifted and it's a tad dull out on the

streets. We set off to purchase the road map which although we have a sat nav with us, it's nice to have a map to plan on and to highlight where you have been. We find a large bookshop and make an enquiry the assistant looks at us as if we have just arrived from mars, road map oh no we don't sell them and I am not sure where you will get one, ok thanks. We continue on and on our travels we see a fuel station selling gas at \$2.79 a gallon so about 62p a liter, half the price of the UK and I am sure that when we get out of the city it will be cheaper, as this one is the only one we have seen so it looks like it has a bit of a captive market. We visit another book shop and receive a similar reply, looks like the map buying is going to have wait until we get some transport and find an out of town supermarket. Time for a spot of lunch, we head for the local supermarket to get a sandwich and some salad stuff, it's too cold outside for a picnic but the supermarket has that covered as it has seating and tables at which you can munch through your purchases. Then it's a bit more walking and sightseeing, apparently tomorrow is going to be a better day weather wise so we will be heading to the Willis Tower to visit the 103rd floor of the second highest building in the USA.

We head back to our hotel, (well it's not really ours we are just renting a room for a couple of days) for a little siesta, after our little sleeps we ready ourselves to go out and we head for O'Tooles drinking establishment, some may say Again and well yes again, it's local, lively and fun. It's only 6.30pm and the place is rammed and bouncing we find a seat at the bar and order a little aperitif, after just the one Mrs. Wembley, One oh yea who am I trying to kid, we stay a while longer chatting to the guy next to us who is Australian is working in Chicago and had previously worked in London for 13 years, after telling him about our trip, because he asked, we say our farewells and head off to the Thai restaurant just down the road. The food here was great and very reasonable, we will be coming back again before we leave Chicago and we may be back more than once. Then it's the short stroll back to the hotel for a bit of TV watching and then to bed, more tomorrow folks, bring on the sunshine.

Day 5 1st April

This morning we awake to bright sunshine cascading through the window, let's not get carried away here, the sun is out, the trip to the Willis Tower is on, take me to the top of the world and let the sun shine down. While we have a cappuccino in the hotel snack bar, Barb enquiries about tickets for the Tower at the reception and yes they can do them, so thinking that it may shorten the queueing time when we get there a purchase is made, only it works out that it won't as we will still have to go to the ticket office at the tower and exchange a voucher for tickets, what's all that about you either sell tickets or you don't, they do appear to make an easy job a difficult one.

After declining the offer of a taxi from the doorman we head off on the 2 mile walk across town to the Willis Tower, we are expecting it to be busy as it is Saturday, the kids are on holiday and the weather over the last couple of days has not been good for skyscraper viewing do to the low cloud. We get there at 10.30 and the line is already outside and halfway down the block, when we get inside the line meanders through the ground floor and then you go down one floor and the line meanders around this floor before getting to the airport type security with bag and body scanners. Next stop the ticket desk, which as people are queueing down the street, is to say the least is a bit of a joke, there is only one person working at the desk, I am not sure if this is a deliberate ploy to slow things down and keep the line moving at a constant speed to the lift area. While in the queue I revert to the great past time of people watching, now I am not being sexist, but this happens every time I am in a supermarket queue, go with me on this and see if I am right. About twenty people in front of us in the queue is a female member of the population with a big handbag, now we have all known that we have pay for the tickets, and for the last hour if not before, how much they are going to be, I am sure you now know where I am going with this. Anyway if you don't here we go, the lady with the big handbag takes her turn at the ticket desk and asks for two tickets, the ticket seller pushes the buttons and the tickets appear, then the customer undoes the first clip on her handbag, then the first zip and then the second, next both hands disappear into the bag to retrieve the biggest purse known to man, the purse is opened and shopping receipts dating back to before the

last millennium are strewn all over the desk followed by every store and rewards card available, but no credit card, then it's back into the bag and the start of emptying Mary Poppins's handbag begins, stuff comes out that has not seen the light of day since the dark ages, notes and coins that are no longer legal tender and some stuff that should carry a government health warning, eventually after twenty minutes a credit card emerges from the depths, payment is made and then everything has to go back into the bag, which although it all came out, doesn't want to go back in, while the rest of us loose the will to live, am I right?

We get our tickets and go through to the theatre to watch a video about the Tower, don't ask me about it, I had a sleep, getting closer now but there is another line to get in the lift, once in the lift it only takes 60 seconds to get to the 103rd floor, once there the view is spectacular and the ground is a serious distance away, 1,353 feet away to be exact. The Tower was completed in 1973 and was at that time the tallest building in the world, a record it held until 1998 and is still the second tallest building in the USA. It is a stunning building which does not look its age, however two 60 second lift rides and a 15 minute walk around the sky deck took 3 hours of our lives that we will never get back, but as we were here it had to be done.

After a bite to eat we return to the hotel for a little bit of a rest, I have two jobs to do when we get back there, have our passports and driving licenses photocopied for the RV company and get our room keys reprogrammed for the extra day that we are staying. I have forgotten to tell you that I had received an email from [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) saying that they had been in contact with the hotel and had arranged the extra night at the original booking price, many thanks to [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) for their help or so I thought. I pop down to reception and the receptionist photo copies the documents no problems no payment, then I explain that we are staying an extra night and need to have our room keys reprogrammed. He looks at the computer and the computer says no, there is no extension to the booking, ffs, I show him the confirmation email from [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) but the computer still says no, he then says he will go a speak to the booking team, after a while he returns gives me some bull about the booking being updated on [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) but not on their booking system, chill Paul chill, anyway they agree to extend the booking at the original price without any fuss, but it's a good job I checked today and not tomorrow, they may have customer service in the USA but it's hard work at times.

Time to be serious, and I don't want anyone to worry about us, as these shocking events have happened out of town at the south shore district which is known as Chicago's heroin highway about an hour's drive away from our location and we won't be visiting there any time soon. They are mostly drug, gang and retaliation related, on Thursday 7 young people including a pregnant woman were fatally injured in three separate shootings, on Friday and Saturday there have been another 9 shootings leaving 6 injured and 3 dead. Trump and his merry men need to stop wasting time trying to build a wall, he needs to start focusing on issues closer to home some of which are not that far from Trump Tower, however that is easier said than done and that is why politicians skim over the problems, do things that score them brownie points rather than dealing with the real issues. Why in what is supposed to be an intelligent society do they not realize that the first step, a step that should have been taken a long time ago, is to change the gun laws and change it immediately, this lark of a "right to bear arms" is a complete load of rubbish. As a president of the USA you are responsible for the population of your country, President Obama tried to get the law changed but was blocked by congress and he eventually said that the law would not be changed during his term of office, he was right, and I recon you would have a safe bet on it not getting changed in Trump's term either. The problem unfortunately is the same as usual, congress and the houses are run by the rich and influential, and if they don't want it to happen, usually because of financial implications, it won't happen, even a President that wants things to happen will fail no matter how hard they try. Some may argue that changing the gun laws now is too late and will not make a difference but you have got to start somewhere, and I would put money on it that the people that say it's too late for change are the ones who benefit financially from wars and the sales of guns, ok that's it rant over I am done now.

Although we have only walked just under 5 miles today, it has been a tiring one, neither of us are hungry so it's going to be a TV watching evening and an early night, other than boring you with what's of the TV like CSI, Law and Order etc. that's about it for today, not sure how exciting tomorrow will be as it's a packing up and planning day, as we need to leave first thing on Monday morning to pick up the RV and get out of the city and into the country, yippee, that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 6 2nd April (Happy Birthday JENNIE)

Today's blog is going to be a very long one as tomorrow is transfer day and that means that today is a boring one as we have got to sort out where we are going what time we need to leave, oh and pack. We start by going for a walk and to get a coffee at the local supermarket and to sit down and discuss tomorrow's timings. After an hour or so walk around it's back to the hotel to pack, the room is being cleaned so we have a seat in the reception area and chill for a while. Before we start the task of packing our bags, we pop round to the supermarket to get a sandwich and salad for lunch. Then it's back to the room to start packing up, how is it that when you pack at home it all eventually fits in the case, but when you are away and moving a couple of times there is no chance because as you want to keep the clothes you not yet worn separate from the ones you have, so you end up with a bag of washing to carry. I know that there is a couple of solutions, take a bigger case or take less stuff, we haven't actually brought that much stuff with us (Barb's bag only weighed 12kg) but we did only bring small cases as they are easier to lug around when swapping locations, cars, RV's, trains, boats and planes.

Not sure what we have been doing all day, but it is time to go out for dinner, we are heading back to the Thai we went to the other day and this time we are going there without going to O'Toole's for an aperitif first. The meal was very good and so was the service, that was until I had paid the bill, if you haven't been to the US for a while I will take a moment to explain the payment rigmarole, first you get your bill and at the bottom they give you a selection of suggested tips, usually starting with 18% of the bill going up to 25% with corresponding monetary amount next to each percentage. I personally do not like putting the tip on my card and prefer to leave cash providing there is just reason to do so. Then mostly you go to pay at the counter, and this is a bit weird you use chip and pin then they print off the bill which has the option for you to add the tip in pen and then add that to your bill and then write the total amount and then sign, it's a right faff. Anyway I went through the process of going to the counter, chip and pin, and signed the receipt without leaving a tip, I went back to the table to finish my drink and had put the cash for the tip on the table, next minute the waitress arrives at the tables telling me I haven't left a tip, I look at her and point to the money I have left under a glass on the table, she apologizes profusely and beats a hasty retreat, as do the dollar bills from under the glass, cheeky bugger, at this point we leave. Then it's time for a quick after dinner drink at O'Toole's, it was just the one as we had to be up early and I would be driving, when the bill came I paid up but wasn't in the mood for tipping here either as all he has done was his job and poured me a drink.

We return to the hotel with me still muttering under my breath, after watching more episodes of law and bloody order it's time for bed, transfer day tomorrow I wonder how that will, all will be revealed tomorrow, that's all folks' goodnight more tomorrow.

Day 6 3rd April

I didn't sleep much last night was the anticipation of collecting our hire car and then the RV or was it the Thai waitress giving me the Thai voodoo, I think it was more the transfer going milling through my mind. We are awake early and after a shower and a coffee I leave Barb to finish packing and checking the room while I go to reception, check out and then take the quick walk up East Ohio Street to the Enterprise office to collect the hire car. We have ordered an economical compact car with a 10am collection, I arrive at about quarter to nine so a little early but that's not a problem, after we go through the paperwork the guy asks would I mind driving something bigger, no that's ok with me, ok he says walk this way and shows me to a monster truck, well it's actually not a

monster truck but it is a White Dodge Ram 5.7 V8 Hemi 4 wheel drive Crew cab pickup truck, it's bloody huge, oh ok yes this will be ok, damn right it will ok, this looks great and sound even better. It's not until I am driving out of the car park that I think oh heck Barbs going to have to drive this later, it's a gig old thing to drive round the city no wonder the local office wanted to get shut, no one would hire this to drive in the city, it's a proper one way get shut hire car. I park outside the hotel, Barb looks out of the window with that, what the heck is that look on her face. We load our luggage into the back seats as the rear deck has not got a cover on it, it's the full ye ha. We set off for Middlebury Elkhart the home of the RV, Sylvia II is having a problem getting us out of the city, mainly because she can't find out where we are, I suspect it is because we are surrounded by high rise buildings, eventually she locks on to some satellites and gives us directions out of the city, this Dodge Ram is a big bopper in the city but once out on the open road it's fantastic the power is immense the only thing it won't pass is a petrol station the fuel gauge is going down in tandem with the speedo going up, it is greeeeeat fun with a growl. With regret we arrive at the Enterprise office to return the beast, as we drive onto the forecourt there is a car parked at. The middle of the lot which jumps backwards just as we approach it, initially I think the driver has stalled the vehicle with the shock of seeing the monster truck pull in behind it, then I realize that there is no one in the car and that another car has reversed into it, that hire did not last long before it had an accident. I go into the office and there are two unhappy customers having a little chat, so that Barb didn't have to drive the beast I had phoned the office prior to our arrival to arrange a lift to the RV site, which they said would be ok, after the lady checks over the monster truck she tells me that we need to go to their other office as that is the one that covers the Middlebury area. As it gave me the opportunity to have another go in the Dodge, we head off to the other office, we have to wait for about 20 minutes for a lift as all of the drivers are out, one of the drivers arrives back and we are off to the RV site.

It is nearly a thirty minute drive to our destination during which we have an interesting conversation with the driver about Lotus, Cobra's and a few other sports cars, he is made up to talk to someone who actually knew what a 1967 Lotus Elan was, we arrive at the park and say our farewells to our new found friend. After completing all the paperwork, we are shown to our RV and before we are given the keys, we are given a full explanation of the RV's equipment. We have arranged to stay at the site tonight as it's now late and in the afternoon and otherwise we would not get far before we needed to stop and find a site. Before we can park up we need to get some supplies, it turns out that the local supermarket is about 20 miles away, we set off and the driving experience between the RV and the beast are immense I will explain more after driving the RV a bit longer, eventually we get there and stock up with vitels, then head to a local restaurant for a bite to eat then it's back to the RV park. There is another RV parked in the pitch we have been allocated so we park up in a vacant pitch, plugged the bus into the electric supply and decant the contents of our luggage into the storage units in the RV. It has been a frantic and tiring day and after acclimatising ourselves with the yet un-named RV it is time for bed, that's all folks, more tomorrow.

Day 7 4th April

We awake after a great first night sleep in our new abode, over breakfast we discuss names for our RV, before we disclose the name we have chosen, here are a few details about the bus, it is a Thor Motor Coach based on a Ford Chassis cab with a 5 litre V8 350 petrol engine with an automatic gearbox, is 25 feet long, 13 foot 6 inches tall and weighs in at 5.7 imperial Tons. So how did we come up with a name, well we had a few things to work with, made by Thor, has got Four Winds written on the side, Ford powered, and the hire companies name is El Monte. So, we came up with a couple of names "Maria" to go with the four winds, "Thora" Thor motor home and "Monty or Montgomery" as in El Monte. We ended up with Monty and also Montgomery for when he is on the naughty step.

We have decided to aim to get to a town called Madison in Wisconsin for no particular reason other than it's a good distance to cover in a day as there is not much to see on the way, other than Chicago and we have been there. I put the address of a campsite in Madison into Sylvia II

(motorhome satnav) and she informs us that the trip is 270 miles and should take about five and half hours, but as avid readers will know that is not usually the full story as we find places to stop along the way. Before we leave Middlebury Indiana we go for a drive around, this place is known as the RV capital of the world and as you drive around you can see why, there are hundreds of motorhomes of every size and also hundreds of 5th wheel hitch caravans which go from sensible sizes, to well simply monstrous things that can be over 42 foot long, that's artic size and it's even more ridiculous that you can drive one with a standard driving license. Everywhere you go there are fields full of the things and also there are fields full of chassis' and other fields full of Ford chassis cabs waiting for conversion, god knows where they all go, let alone what the value of this lot is. This is all before you drive past the enormous factories that make these monsters, these factories make warehouses in the U.K look like lockups. Middlebury is also an Amish community and there are lots of Amish people driving around in horse pulled buggies, they even have a separate lane for the buggies on the road system, it's is strange to see these one horse power buggies traveling around alongside these huge motorhomes. We had planned on going to an Amish market this morning and head off to the location, however when we get there, we find that markets don't start until May, we are not going to wait until then and ask Sylvia II to start her directions to Madison. As we leave the RV capital, we pass more fields full of the things, we also pass restaurants with neon signs offering temping morsels such as "Mush and Gravy" for \$3.60 sounds delightful but we give it a miss.

Madison here we come, Sylvia II has given us two route options, with or without tolls, for what we think is ease of driving Monty around we have chosen the with tolls route, my only concern is how to pay at the tolls we suspect that there will be booths that except cash which also presents another problem as along with Monty's substantial width he has even wider mirrors the arms of which are longer than my arm, this should be fun. After a while we arrive at the first toll and gingerly approach the booth getting as close as possible without hitting it with the mirror which is not retractable, we get to the window and rather than being issued with a got on here ticket we are asked for \$2.40 that seems very reasonable we pay up and are free to proceed. We are still discussing the value of the toll when we arrive at another toll area and hand over another \$2.40 this practice continues for further four toll areas covering various distances, why on Earth they don't just give you a got on here ticket at the first booth and you pay once when you get off based on the distance traveled is beyond me, they do seem to complicate things.

Free of the toll road we continue on and after a few more hours of driving and a stop for lunch we arrive at the Madison campsite after booking in we head off to find a supermarket so that we can stock up with things we need for us to be self sufficient in our new abode. When we get back to the campsite the sun has shown his face, so we sit outside and have a well deserved beer, this sitting outside lark does not last long and we are soon back inside Monty to warm up. We have purchase a pizza for tonight's dinner which one would think is not going to be a difficult operation to cook, first problem although the gas hob has piezo ignition this facility is lacking in the oven and we do not have any matches, not a great problem just light a piece of the cardboard wrapping on the hob and light the oven, easy oh yes the oven is fired up but so is the smoke alarm. Pizza in for 17 minutes, I check after 15 and it's done to a crisp, well actually the base is burnt to a crisp, no soggy bottoms to worry about here. We eat the edible part and wash it down with a beer and a glass or two of prosecco. Monty is equipped with a 32 inch TV which after tuning in we are able to catch up on another couple of episodes of Law and Order. It's not long before sleep is calling so it's time for bed, I will save the description of Monty's driving characteristics until tomorrow, I bet you can't wait, more tomorrow folk's goodnight one and all.

Day 8 5th April

We depart the RV park at about 10.30 but before we can rejoin the Highway Monty needs his Gogo tank refilling there is a petrol station next to the site however we spotted another station yesterday which is a mile down the road and 30 cents a gallon cheaper so that's our next stop, we pull onto the petrol station and start the filling process, luckily the fuel pump nozzle has a lock filling

position so you don't have to hold the handle as it doesn't click out until Monty has swallowed 42 Gallons yes gallons not litres of gogo juice, that equates to 8 miles to the gallon, eeeek. We join the highway and set off on the next leg of the journey, which to be honest was a tad boring with not much to see other than lots of trees turning into forests which although spring is not too far away don't look like they will come back to life even with the warmth of the coming sun. They are scary looking dead, scorched, gnarled and blackened by fire or possibly the extreme cold that the area suffers from in the winter. The forests look spooky and a place that a wicked witch would live with her hobgoblins waiting to pounce on unsuspecting visitors especially after dark and snatch their children in snares. Ok I am getting a bit carried away but there is not much else to report, time for the low down on Montgomery's driving characteristics, now as I have used his full name you may of guessed that he is on the naughty step, lets recall his statistics and then how they work out on the road, weighing in at 5.7 imperial Tons, Ford truck chassis cab powered by now there is a question there is nothing in Monty that tells you what size his engine is but looking at the Thor brochure it's either a 5.0 litre V8 or a 6.9 litre V10 either way it's big, I will find out in the daylight which lump Monty has fitted and let you know, the engine delivers the power through an automatic 4 speed transmission. None of the technology is new, baring a few visual facelifts this Ford chassis cab has been around forever as can be seen in the hazard warning light switch which looks the same as we had in the 80's on a Ford Sierra. The first thing you notice when you push the accelerator pedal is the engine noise, well I don't think it's the engine I think that it's the fan blade pushing or pulling air into the radiator, boy it's noisy it sounds like a jumbo jet engine on full reverse thrust. As you drive away you feel every change through the auto transmission, the German manufacturers would laugh their heads off at this transmission which is light years behind their 8 and 10 speed transmissions which you just don't feel change unless you have your foot planted to the floor. He has the handling of a large boat with half of its rudder missing also the play in the steering is reminiscent of an old Transit van with a steering box and drag links. As you can imagine he has the aerodynamics of, well a large brick wall, and it is surprising that given his vast weight he is susceptible to the merest breath of side wind which has you continuously correcting the steering. It reminds me of those old movies when the driver and passenger are superimposed into a speeding car and the driver is moving the steering wheel with exaggerated movements. As you may have guessed I am not that impressed with his mechanical attributes but you have to remember it's American and I am not sure why but their automobiles lack the European refinements we are used to, all that criticism and I still like him but would I part with nearly \$80,000 I don't think so.

We stop for lunch and while checking our route on the map we realize we have made a detour, well it's not actually a detour it's more like we have gone the wrong bloody way, Doh! We ask Sylvia II for new directions and after a couple of tut's and I told you so, she issues her instructions to get us back on track, after a good few miles on country roads we get back onto the highway. It's getting to late afternoon and we are starting to look for a place to stay for the night, the speed limit on the highway is 70 mph and we are at Monty's happy cruising speed of around 60 mph, even at this speed it is a bit of a fight to keep him in a straight line in the moderate breeze. I have spotted the local sheriffs car following behind us and sure enough his lights start flashing, I did think about making a run for it but then thought again, we pull over to the hard shoulder and the police officer walks up to the passenger's window. He asks if everything is ok as we seemed to be wandering in the road, I bite my lip and refrain from asking him if he as ever driven one of these things, instead I explain that Monty is susceptible to side winds. Oh ok can I have a look at your driving license and papers, yes of course, papers where the heck are they, oh he says I haven't seen one of these before, lip biting again as I wanted to say that's because you have never left the state you were born in, instead I replied oh no I suppose you don't get that many of them here. He goes back to his motor vehicle to check us out, then he returns to the passenger window and says that everything is ok, oh what a shock, he then asks if we have any questions for him, I nearly wet my pants as I am dying to ask him, what is the capital of Peru, but thankfully what comes out of my mouth is, no that's fine officer thank you for your time, he tells us to have a good day and returns to his car, it's official we have been pulled by the fuzz.

We set off to find a campsite and Sylvia II has given us directions to a site, unfortunately when we get to the address there is no campsite, great let's try again, we are getting a little fed up, what with our detour, being pulled by the fuzz and there not being a campsite where it should have been we are well behind schedule. We get to the next campsite and as they don't have the water turned on yet due to the weather, we negotiate a reduced rate for the night. We are soon plugged in to the 30 amp supply, yes fellow campers a 30 amp supply not piddling little 7,10 or 13 amp supply like we have at home, you will have a problem tripping the electrics here, in fact they also have a 50amp supply that big RV's run on, needless to say the supply cable has a tad larger diameter than the ones we have in the UK. After a well deserved beer and some food it's time for some blog writing a bit of TV and then to bed, so that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 9 6th April

We awake to a beautiful sunny morning it's still darn cold out there but at least the sun has come out to play with not a cloud in the beautiful blue sky, we leave the campsite and after three various stops, fuel, a quilting shop, and a loo stop we eventually join Highway I90. Barb loved the quilting shop, Monty gobbled up another 33 gallons of gogo juice and this time he has managed to get to the dizzy heights of double figures and accomplished 10 miles to the gallon. I am going to miss out any explanation about the loo stop, but I do need to apologies to Monty and to Ford Motor Company, other car manufacturers are available. Monty is actually fitted with a 6.8 litre V10 engine and a 6 speed auto transmission, that's where the apology ends as there is no need for a 6.8 litre V10 engine when a 3.0 TDI engine would deliver the same power have more of that torquey stuff and be more economical and as for the transmission finding another 2 gears, well it's still crap compared to its European counterparts.

Right so back to Highway I90 which runs across America from east to west or vice versa depending on which way you're heading for hundreds of miles, our trip today is only a couple of hundred miles and you would think I would have some interesting information to tell you about the landscape, well you would be wrong I haven't. The land is flat to the horizon in all directions with not a mountain or the merest suggestion of a hill in sight. The land is all farmland, hundreds of miles of it on both sides of the I90 for as far as the eye can see, the fields still have the stubble from the last harvest as the ground is still too cold for the farmers to do anything with. It looks like it's going to be a couple more weeks before the tractors and ploughs will be out to ready the land for this year's crops. After a lunch stop we continue on towards Sioux Falls arriving just after 3pm, we go to the KOA campsite, when we arrive Barb goes to the reception and comes back to Monty with the news that they don't usually open until May 1st, we can stay but there is no water supply, now that gives us a bit of a problem as, Monty has been winterised to prevent his pipes freezing up and you don't want any trouble with your water pipes, as readers of previous blogs (hawkeye the noo tour of Scotland) will know that if you have any trouble with your pipework you have to go to Inverness and that's a long way from here. This means that we don't have any onboard water for a shower or washing and as the site we stayed at last night didn't have any water either, we could do with a site with water and facilities. A quick insight into the sites and RV parks in the USA, the majority of them are locally individually owned and KOA has sites nationally and seems to be a bite like the Camping and Caravan club in the U.K. They individually owned but part of a national organisation and all have to meet KOA standards. You can also park your RV for free in various companies such as Wallmark car parks however you just need to be careful in which area you park in, if there is no one else parked there it's usually a good idea to find an alternative location, you can also park on the highway rest areas.

The lady at the KOA reception has told Barb that none of the sites will have the water turned on yet, but we need to go and try and find one, we head off and Sylvia II directs us to the nearest site, it's called Yogi Bears Jellystone park, oh god I hope I hope they have got water as I just want to stay with Yogi and Boo Boo. Barb goes to enquiry and yes the water is on and the facilities are fully

open, it is a fair bit more expensive than the KOA site but all that's basically a pitch in a field, so we are staying with Yogi and Boo Boo, don't you just love it, on our last trip we stayed at the Fred Flintstone site and that was yabadabadoo, mad as you like. Before parking Monty we have our photograph taken with Yogi not sure where Boo Boo is, but he will be around somewhere, then Barb takes our washing to the onsite laundry as we are running low on clean clothes. Then we head off to see the Sioux Falls water Falls which are in the center of the town, the Big Sioux river flows through the town and is one reason the town is here, as in the summer water is in scarce supply in this area. The flow of the river has been altered by man at some point in time, to power a water wheel which is no longer here but the remains still scar the water falls. I imagine that a couple hundred years ago the Falls looked dramatic, now with the flow of the Big Sioux slowed down and controlled it still looks good but not as good as it should. Next stop Aldi for yet more shopping, after a trip round Aldi with no trolley as the washing and drying machines swallowed all our change, then it's time to return to see Yogi, we are soon parked up and plugged into Yogi's 30amp electricity supply and it's time to flip the top off a cold one. It's time for a bite to eat, some blog creation and spot of TV, we give Supermarket Sweep a wide berth and hey Law and Order is on or you could watch Doc Martin, omg. It's soon time for some sleep so that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 10 7th April

Today's blog really is going to be a short one as we have decide to have rest day and stay with Yogi and Boo Boo for one more night and have a completely lazy day doing nowt apart from a spot of route planning, well not so much route planning as we stay on Highway I 90 for the foreseeable future. So it's more like planning detours to visit points of interest.

I have been to the reception to extend our stay and while there I was given a brochure about things to do in South Dakota, I return to Barb like a hunter gather with newly found information that could benefit our trip. The first thing that it confirms is that there is next to buggar all for the next 300 miles. It then gives us information about the National Parks that are on our route, after we have co reed the next 300 miles, so our plan for tomorrow is to get them out of the way and find some interesting scenery. It is a good job that we have stayed here for the day as it is blowing a gale and even in a static position Monty is rocking all over the place, I shudder to think what he would be like on the open road, but I guess that we would not have got far if we were traveling. The rest of the day is spent chilling out, reading, a bit more planning some food a little drinket and some TV more Law and Order, well it was the best option out of a very bad bunch. I told you it was going to be a short one and it is, that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 11 8th April

We wind has died down and the sun is out, I am up early and before heading to the showers I walk down the RV park to have a closer look at the RV that had me green with envy when it pulled in last night. It doesn't fail to impress and as I approach my RV envy grows, it's enormous and sparkling in the morning sun. It's a 43' twin rear axle 1000hp Winnebago Tour with four slide outs, pulling a massive 4 Wheel Drive Jeep on an A frame. I marvel at the sheer size of the thing and then add the Jeep behind, it must over 65' long and it will have cost a fortune, as I stand amazed, I wonder what it would be like to drive, as you can drive it on a standard UK driving license and I also wonder what it does to the gallon and then I think if you have got to ask that question you can't afford it.

We ready Monty for departure and say farewell to Yogi and Boo Boo, before we rejoin Interstate 90 we need to replenish Monty's gogo tank, yes again, Montgomery is on the naughty step as on the last leg he only managed 8.5 to the gallon, I have had a word with him and he has said that he will try harder. I turn Sylvia II on, it wasn't hard just needed to push her button and as we join the I90 she tells up to continue and turn right in 279 miles. Off we go along the seamlessly never ending highway the landscape is much the same miles and miles of arable farmland as far as the eye can

see in every direction. It's not until we have covered about 200 miles that we stop for lunch by the side of the Missouri River near a town called Chamberlain, when we leave the town, we cross the river and it's a big fast flowing rascal. Immediately the landscape changes and the I90 starts to climb eventually plateauing at about 2300 feet, initially we are surrounded by undulating hills, don't get carried away there not big hills that you would climb they are more like small hillocks that would be used for cattle grazing land during the warmer months, when there is something for them to graze on, at the moment it's a bit like scrubland. It doesn't take long for the land to flatten out again and the fields return to arable farm land, about 30 minutes before we arrive at our destination there is a viewing site and if you have seen the 360° pictures on Facebook or on the internet you will have an idea how flat it is.

Then we turn off the highway towards Badlands National Park and after a couple of miles we are at the entrance gate and we need to purchase an entrance ticket, now here is a bit of a tourist trip, if you are planning an American road trip and intend to visit a number of National parks rather than buy individual passes for each park you can buy an annual pass for \$80 this is for the vehicle and four people it covers every National park, and you visit all of them as many times as you like in a 12 month period, however it's not transferable well unless you have got an identical twin. We drive into the park and immediately the landscape changes into small but stunning Rocky Mountains, we stop at the first viewing area and have a walk to look at the amazing rock structures. There is a circular walk that takes over an hour but we will have to leave that until tomorrow as it's getting a bit too late to start the walk, next it's time to find somewhere to park up for the night, there are campsites in the park but they don't open until May. We stop at the information center and Barb goes into enquire about RV parking, the Ranger tells her that as it's out of season we can just park up in the camping area and that there is an honesty box to pay at. When we get to the campsite the gate is closed there are two caravans parked in the site but to be honest they look like pikies that have been here for a while, big gas containers and a washing line, ok I may be being slightly judgmental but hey sue me if I am wrong. There is a German couple in another RV that we met at an earlier stop and they are at the gate and not too sure what to do, I suggest that we just open it and drive in but he is a tad reluctant, so Barb opens the gate and we drive in, to be honest we are not too sure and pop back to the information center, to say they are lacking in organisation in an understatement, as when I ask about camping in an RV the response was you should be ok in there. What sort of response is that anyway it's good enough for us and we return to the site, we tell our German friend what the response was, and I comment that it would be more organised in Germany.

We pick our spot and turn Monty off and that's it we are parked up and staying, and to cement the idea it's time for a little G&T, my hopes for some night sky shots are put on hold as it clouds over and then the big boss up above puts a full stop to my ideas as it starts to pour down with wet rainy stuff, time to put the camera away for another day. That's about it for today it's fair to say that it's dark outside very dark indeed, don't think I will be venturing out until Mr. Sun shows his face in the morning, that's all folks, goodnight one and all. I have just remembered that I need to tell you about the billboards that are all along the highway, but I will save that for tomorrow.

Day 12 9th April

I was a little disappointed last night as I was hopeful of getting some starry starry night photographs but unfortunately even though the rain stopped it had clouded over and even though I awoke a couple of times in the night you could not see a star in the sky. I had hoped that may clear up and awoke just before dawn to see if I could catch the sunrise, Mr. Sun has risen but is hiding behind the clouds so unfortunately to sunrise pictures to share with you, we will have to wait for another day.

As I am up early I will tell you the billboard story I mentioned yesterday, if you have travelled by road in the good old USofA you will know what I mean, for the uninitiated I will explain, unlike the UK where it is illegal to have advertising hoardings at the side of the motorway, well that is unless

it's mobile and that's why we have rotting trailers parked in fields with tatty banners on them. Well in America it's not illegal and they are everywhere, they are like bums, everyone's got them, we have been watching one, advertisement that is not bum, for over 700 miles at regular intervals. Anyway I digress, the one that caught our eye and had us laughing our heads off, it was for the Firehouse brewery and was a series of small billboards which when read one after the other made a little story, it went roughly like this bearing in mind it's from memory and we past it at Monty's light speed, well 60mph. 1st board, She only drinks beer at the Firehouse Brewery, 2nd Because when she drinks liquor, she loses her knickers, 3rd If you would like to meet her call in at the Firehouse Brewery Junction 109, laugh we nearly cried. While on the subject, of billboards that is, I have just remembered another one that we had seen earlier, this one was advertising a Gentlemen's club and in the bottom corner it also offered free RV parking, I did mention it to Barb and I will let you come up with her reply.

After breakfast we had planned to go back to do the loop walk but the weather is not to good and it has started to rain, could be worse the forecast is snow for tomorrow, we fire up Monty and head off through the Park on the way we take in the sweeping vistas of the dramatic desert like landscape, it is an endless panorama of vividly coloured buttes, pinnacles, spires and canyons covering 244,000 acres. The signature strips through the rock formations are the result of erosion revealing multicoloured layers of shale, sand, gravel, iron oxides and volcanic ash, I know all that because it read it. On the way we are also see an array of wildlife including Deer, Bighorn sheep, Prairie dogs and a Bison named Billy as he was on his own. After 25 miles we head out of the Park towards the town of Wall, in which is the (apparently) famous Wall Drug Store which was originally opened in 1931, this is the place that has been continually advertising on billboards all the way along the Interstate 90, our expectations of this place have built mile after mile and we are expecting something huge and really special like the Trading Post we visited on our way to Vegas on our last trip. We arrive at the Wall Drug Store park Monty in the car park, the empty car park and eagerly make our way into the store, well it is actually a series of small shops selling, well complete tat, far from being impressed it can go down alongside the misspelled anagram of "antiques and collectibles" a complete load of shit, who says the power of billboard advertising doesn't work. We are out of there pronto and after topping up Monty's gogo tank, yes again, we are on our way back along the I90 towards Rapid City. On route the sky turns black and the weather worsens it starts to rain, this is proper serious rain and in the distance forks, big forks of lightening shoot to earth like bolts from Thor's hammer striking an anvil high in the clouds above. I am getting a bit carried away with myself and by the time we arrive at Rapid City it's all but stopped, we have found a cheap and cheerful RV park just off the highway and are met by a tall guy in a cowboy hat how asks if we have booked but not to worry if we haven't, anyway we haven't but he makes us very welcome, shows us to a pitch explains the electric hook up, which is no different to any of the others, asks where are from and when I tell him he shakes my hand and says welcome home, a tad bizarre, he tells me to come and find him if there is anything we need, this is proper "good old boys" territory, after relieving me of twenty bucks he jumps into his pickup truck and buggers off.

That's us set up for the night, tomorrow we will be heading for Mount Rushmore which is under 40 miles away from us, so we should have some more sightseeing news to report to you all, until then it will be a little drink, oh I nearly forgot while we were in Wall we went to a shop to get some milk and while in there Barb found a bottle of Liberty Creek Chardonnay, a 2 litre bottle for eight bucks, boy I bet this is going to be good stuff. More tomorrow providing I can see after partaking in a glass of the Liberty Creek, I bet the second glass will taste better than the first, until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 13 10th April

The site that we stopped at last night was basic to say the least, electricity that's, last night we had to turn the heating up as it got a touch chilly during the night, this morning we found the black hills of Dakota were actually white as they were covered in snow and so was Monty, no wonder it was cold last night. As there are no facilities at the site we are leaving early, after chiseling the frozen

snow from Monty's windscreen we set off for our first port of call the local thrift shop to purchase a glass as I have broken one and if possible a frying pan, the mission was only 50% successful, one glass purchased, but no frying pan. Next stop is Walmart which is only a couple of blocks away. Once inside we realize how big the place is, it's massive and sells everything from a toothbrush and guns of varying sizes. The visit to Walmart lasted most of the morning and when we complete our shopping mission, we purchase a couple of coffee's and muffins for a healthy breakfast, next we head for an RV park which is on the route to Mount Rushmore, apparently this site is open all year, we arrive at the site to find this office closed and a note on the door saying that they will be open at 3pm. We head off for Mount Rushmore and on the route a forty foot plus RV goes past us and this guy is covering all basis when it comes to transportation on the back of his massive RV is a Harley Davidson and then there is a Jeep on an A frame, the on the back of the Jeep is a bike rack with two bikes on board and just in case, there are two canoes on the roof of the Jeep, the only thing that's missing is a microlight.

We arrive at Mount Rushmore and the RV entrance is closed and there is only one of the vehicle entrances are open, the guy in the gatehouse waves us towards him, now Monty is not the biggest RV going but this gap isn't the biggest entrance in the world, gingerly we pull up to the window and pay the \$10 entrance fee, Joshua today's gate person assures us that the fat end of Monty will fit through the gap, that's easy for him to say, and he gives us directions to the under 30 foot RV parking area, Monty's fat bit did fit through the entrance and we park him in the designated area. It's cold but the sky is reasonably clear and we have a great view of the sculpture of the four Presidents that the sculptor Gutzon Borglum with the help of 400 workers completed in 1941, it's very impressive and you need to stand in silence to take in the full magnificence of the sculpture. It took 14 years to complete, I won't go into the full story about Mount Rushmore here but if you have time it's worth reading the full story on the interweb thingy, by the time we have come out of the information hall, the weather has changed and the statues are shrouded in mist, giving them an eerie feeling. We have a stroll around and obviously the visit is concluded with the Disney experience, a shop, and then we head back to Monty.

On our return journey we pass a number of RV parks but they are all closed for the season as are most of the other tourist attractions, we arrive back at the Happy Holiday Resort RV park and the reception office is open and Barb handles the booking in procedure, we are shown to our pitch by Bill in his golf buggy, he explains how to connect Monty to the mains supply which is the same procedure as everywhere else. We are soon plugged in and set up, I have a walk around to see if there is anything on the site to enlighten my van envy, there isn't but there are a couple of interesting ones. A 35 foot coach that is parked close to us which isn't that impressive but it's towing a trailer that's about the length, it's just a plain silly total length. Another one that catches my eye is a small pickup truck with a camper on the back, small and a bit uninteresting that is until you see that it has got Swiss number plates on it, now that's a long way from home.

Next is the usually next day planning meeting, food preparation, eating, blog creating, TV and a little just the one Mrs. Wembley, then to bed so that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 14 11th April

Well folks it's day 14 and it's about the time that most of us would be packing up for the return trip home, well not us we have got another three and a bit weeks before we return to Blighty, it also means that you lucky readers have got about another 24 days of this to put up with, well that is if you read it, if you do I hope that you enjoy my ramblings. Any this morning we are off to Custer State Park to hunting sorry looking for Bison and other wildlife we may encounter on the way, before we depart it's time for a shower and on the return journey, I meet the couple with the Swiss camper van. It turns out that they had the camper shipped over from Hamburg to Halifax Nova Scotia, they are heading for Alaska and then they will head down to Patagonia, wow I exclaim what a trip how long are you away for, 4 years was the response, sorry I thought you said 4 years that's not a road trip that's emigrating, but it does sound like a fantastic voyage of discovery. They tell me

that they are also going to Custer park and that it will be the 58 State or National park they have visited, I say, that will be more Parks than most Americans visit in a lifetime and that they will have visited more States than most Americans have visited, mind you I suspect that we have visited more States than most Americans, then we say farewell and wish each other safe travels.

We carry out our pre fight checks and fire up Monty it takes about 45 minutes to get to the Park and on the way we stop off at Custer, not General Custer but the town, Barb visits the Visitors center which on this occasion was very helpful, she returns with yet more information pamphlets, if we get any more of the darn things and could afford the excess baggage to bring them home, we would be able to open our own American Tourist Information Centre back in Liverpool. We arrive at the Park entrance and there is a \$20 fee to pay by means of an honesty box, Barb fills in our details and those of Monty, and yes we do put the money in the envelope, place the sticker on Monty's windscreen and we are off into the Park. Our first stop is by a lake for a spot of early lunch, it's actually more like second breakfast but there are not many stopping places on the loop road, so it makes sense. Then we continue on, it's not long before we spot our first Deer, but at the moment the Bison seem to be gold star members of the hide and seek club. As we continue along the wildlife loop road which meanders its way through the undulating black hills, we take in the sights that the amazing vistas have to offer, I shudder to think what these hills are doing to Monty's fuel consumption but hey what the heck. Before white men arrived here there were millions of Bison roaming across North America and the Native Americans used to hunt them in small numbers not only for food but using ever part of the animal for all their needs, we not us the royal we arrive and as usual we abuse our world, in 1889 their numbers fell to as few as 1,000 and if we had been allowed to continue they would have become extinct, fortunately they have survived and we are able to see them in their natural habitat. After a few more miles we spot our first Bison and this one has a few mates with him, we must have found their favorite spot as there are lots of them over the next few miles, apparently there are between 850 and 1450 of the beasts wandering around, what's up with them can't they count around here. In the 1940's their numbers grew to 2,500 but this was too many for the land to sustain and they got rid of some, don't ask how you might not want to know. We see some more Deer and some Long Horn Rams, but much to Barbs displeasure no Prairie Dogs, I am sure we will see some of the little rascals somewhere else. We arrive at the end of the loop road at midafternoon and soon after there is a campsite, the sun is shining, and the location of the site is idyllic with a pair of eagles soaring high above us in the deep blue sky. Rather than continuing on we decide to stay here for the night for a spot of wild camping, well it's not real wild camping there is a 30amp electric supply, toilets and hot showers so it's more like being at a Caravan Club site but in the middle of nowhere.

After parking and plugging Monty into the mains supply, we head off for a walk in the sunshine, there is hotel not too far away which according to the blurb was originally the first Presidential retreat going back to nearly day one, now it's a hotel and it's closed for the season, so no drinket for us and no more information about it for you, unless you want to look it up on the interweb, it's called Game Lodge in Custer State park. Not much more to report for this evening other than, yippee no TV single, food a little drinket and sleep, oh I had an idea of taking some night sky photographs as there would be no light pollution, however the sky has clouded over again so not a star to be seen, that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 15 12h April

The sky may have clouded over last night but this morning Mr. Sun has found a gap in the clouds and is shining down on us, right through the skylight above our bed that has for some ridiculous reason has no interior shade fitted, I need a bin bag and some blue tack to rectify the problem. We are becoming Americanised as Barb wants pancakes in the woods for breakfast, well they don't have to be in the woods anywhere will do. What Barby wants Barby gets so pancakes it is, and very good they were even if I do say so myself, well I cooked them. After breakfast and the other necessities we head off on the thirty mile drive to get us out of the Park after a couple of miles we round a bend and we can see something moving in the road ahead, I slow down and as we

approach we see that it is a Prairie dog, doing whatever Prairie dogs do in the middle of the road, we stop and after a moment or two he gets up and scarpers off back into the woods. We are heading for Yellowstone, which is 500 miles away, we won't get here today but unless we find anything on the route worth staying at, we will try and get as close to Yellowstone as possible. We stop at Gillette the home of the first safety razor that was patented in 1901, other than that there is not much else here, after filling Monty's gogo tank Barb makes us a sandwich and then we go to the local Walmart store as Barb wants to return two apples that I purchased yesterday not realising that they cost \$4.97, for two apples are they having a laugh, after getting a full refund we go to the local camping equipment store, it's huge and makes Go Out Doors look like a corner shop, the other difference between the two is that this one sells guns and lots of them it also has isles and isles of bullets and shot gun cartridges, and they wonder why there is a gun problem in this country. If you can't get a gun permit and still want to kill things there are plenty of bows, arrows and cross bows available to buy with arrowheads that obviously aren't for target practice. They don't have a Bear Grylls machete, but they do have machetes that make Bears look like a tooth pick, I don't fancy trying to explain that in my luggage on the way home.

Then we are off back onto the I9, there is not a great deal to report about the journey as it's pretty boring although it does rise and fall over the hillsides there is nothing much to see, until that is we see the snow covered Big Horn mountain range in the distance. It looks amazing and if we had arrived a bit later in the year we could have explored them, but all the scenic route roads through the mountains are closed until May, due to this we have to travel further along the I90 and then drop down to the only road open to Yellowstone. We travel to the town of Billing 350 miles from our starting point this morning and find a KOA campsite which is open, but the office is closed, after a phone call we arrange to find a pitch and pay in the morning. We sit out in the evening sun with a well deserved cold one, then it's food, TV, blog and then bedtime, tomorrow we will be in Yellowstone National Park and I can't wait, that's all folks more tomorrow. Oh by the way the bit about the safety razor being patented in Gillette is a load of baloney, it was actually patented by the American inventor King Camp Gillette.

Day 16 13th April

Praise where praise is due Last night's site was a great site, according the signage this was the first KOA site in the country the owners have obviously made a good living from the business and unlike other sites, they have continually reinvested some of their profits into the business, the site is immaculate and I know we don't want to talk about loos and that type of stuff, however the facilities here deserve a special mention. They would put the best Caravan Club site and some hotels to shame, you enter through a communal entrance and then enter your own individual huge en-suite bathroom with everything required including a fully tiled walk in shower room, very impressive indeed and when we get some interweb thingy we will give them the positive feedback they justly deserve. Right enough of this praise lark, we set off back along the I90 towards Yellowstone one hundred and seventy seven miles away, and we need to cover them as soon as possible as there is only one campsite open in Yellowstone and it only has 85 pitches that are on a first come first served basis, it's time to put the hammer down and blow the fuel economy consequences.

The i90 weaves its way through the undulating hills and valleys but the scenery is not very interesting on this part of the trip, as there is nothing interesting to relay to you about the scenery I have time to bring you up to speed on a couple of aspects regarding transportation. As we have ventured further from the major cities, the big trucks have got bigger, the large tractor units with enormous bonnets protruding from the windscreen, and then behind the drivers cab is a double sleeping compartment, this monster is pulling a 53' long trailer, only now they have another 30' trailer added behind, these rascals must be approaching a hundred foot in length and they still thunder past you even when you are exceeding 70mph. Out here the railway runs parallel to the I90, the trains that run along these tracks are mainly carrying coal and they are massive, with two diesel powered locomotives pulling hundreds of trucks followed by another diesel powered

locomotive pushing from behind, we passed one of these monsters while it was stationary and Monty's odometer measured it at 1.4 miles, if this bugger arrived at Lime Street Station and you were at the back, you would have to get off at Edge Hill, if you're not a scouser ask and I will explain.

Ok back to the trip after 120 plus miles we arrive at the town of Gardner which is the last town well the last anything before you travel down the culder-sack to Yellowstone National Park, which at 57 miles each way makes going to Barrow-in-Furness look like a trip down a side street, the only longer one we have been down was in New Zealand and we stayed overnight half way down it, at Knobs Flats. Monty needs gogo juice and due to the hills yesterday and the excessive use of my right foot the mpg results are not good, we also need to top up the LPG tank which is running low and we don't want to run out while we are in the park, no heating, no cooking, no fridge two out of three I can deal with but who wants to drink warm beer. At home we just fill up with LPG at petrol stations but not here in America you have to go to a specialist gas supplier. Barb asks about LPG at the petrol, sorry gas station and they give her directions, we follow the directions down a dirt track and find "American Gas" and guess what they are closed for lunch, when I had a business if we had closed for lunch there would have been a customer rebellion. We decide to wait the 40 minutes until opening time well we didn't really have an option, luckily a lady arrives and says although it is lunch time, she will fill the tank and get us on our way. She disappears into the office and then returns wearing overalls, a hard hat with a visor and gauntlets she asks if the refrigerator is turned off and tells Barb that she must exit the vehicle and that we must both stand well clear, after a couple of minutes the gas tank is full and after the lady removes her armored clothing and me of \$24 we are on our way. After traveling Fifty Seven miles down a very windy single lane carriageway we arrive at the entrance to Yellowstone, when we went to Badlands we purchased an annual pass for all of the National Parks, we hand over our pass and proof of our identity and we are in the camp site is only 20 minutes away and after a very scenic drive we are there and there are sites available, after picking a spot, a camping spot, Barb completes the required paperwork and for the princely sum of \$40 the pitch is ours for two nights. We head off to Mammoth Hot Springs, to go to the information center and also to go for a walk around the boardwalks that surround the springs, as we walk around there is an overpowering smell of Sulphur from the hot springs as the bubbling boiling water emerges from the depths of the earth below, it reminds me of my trip to Iceland, the country not the supermarket. Then we return to the campsite to relax and chill out under the warming rays of a golden sun. It goes dark and cloudy no stars to be seen, thankfully no TV signal so no Law and Order then after a bit to eat it's time for bed and I am more concerned about the Bears biting than the bugs, that's all folks more tomorrow when we head for a 5 mile walk around beavers creek, nice beaver goodnight all.

Day 17 14th April

Well they say it's cold in them there hills and they weren't kidding, it was a tad chili out here in Yellowstone in fact there was a small amount of snow on the ground early this morning, it's a good job that we filled the LPG tank yesterday so we could have Monty's heating system fired up. Sorry to say that even though I awoke during the night to see if the stars had come out, they hadn't and only Mr. Moon was visible through the clouds, we will have to see what happens tonight.

Yesterday's drive saw us visit another State, making it the 18th State we have visited, probably more than a lot of Americans but I think that Nick Edmonds may have visited a few more I will have to check when I get to talk to him. Today we had planned to drive to the Tower and do a loop walk of about 5 miles, but the weather looks like it's against us as it has started snowing, it's only very light snow but as the weather here can change dramatically it would not be sensible to go hiking with the limited equipment we have with us, a hat and a coat. We decide to drive to the Tower have a look around and see what the weather is like over there as it is 20 miles from the campsite. The road snakes its way through the mountains of the park rising to just over 6,000 feet, on route we see more Bison, Deer and a Coyote but no Bears, the scenery is stunning the snow comes and goes and says does the visibility, we get to 2.5 miles from the Tower and the pesky Rangers have closed the road due to the weather, that's it turn round and head back to Mammoth Hot Springs.

There is another walk at Mammoth which we had planned on doing which was the Beaver Ponds Loop, I had really fancied this walk as Beaver could be seen in their natural habitat, but I ain't going walking in this weather even if it is to see Native Beaver. We turn Monty's heater up and head out of the park to the town of Gardiner to have a look around this is where we filled Monty's LPG tank, but we had not had a look around. This is a proper ye ha good old boy territory and as we walk around it looks like everyone here knows each other, either that or they are related. There is not a lot to look at and the one shop that Barb had shown any interest in as it had one of those little solar powered things that you have on the dashboard this one was a bear that rocks from side to side and waves its arms, luckily the shop was shut. We have a bite to eat in a local eatery, the food is served in a basket, very 1970's and then we return to the campsite to do some route planning for the remainder of the trip, so far we have covered just under 2,000 miles so it looks like we will be over our mileage allowance depending on how many detours we take, it isn't a great problem as the extra miles only cost \$29 per 100 miles. We have changed our pitch at the campsite to reception one on the higher level which affords us a better view of the mountains and we watch as the weather changes from sunshine to snow showers which you see coming towards us over the mountains. There are a number of people camping in tents, I hope they have decent sleeping bags, I did see some in the camping shop that were rated to -35°, I have to say that I would be at home with the heating on. That's about it for today other than I have been having a recap on the information I have imparted to you and I have forgotten to inform you of another of Montgomery's amazing American ergonomic design failings, sorry but this one is in the bathroom area, although he has a reasonable sized shower and bathroom area which incorporates a proper fixed ceramic toilet, this is where the designer failed and failed badly, if you place a toilet roll on the fixed toilet roll holder, you can't lift the loo seat, how stupid is that. Well that's all folks hopefully we get some interweb connection tomorrow so that I can share this with you, goodnight all.

Day 18 15th April

We awake to a glorious sunny morning but it's cold very cold and the wind makes it feel even colder, after breakfast we ready Monty for departure and set off just before we leave Yellowstone for this visit, we arrive at the 45th Parallel which puts us half way between the Equator and the North Pole now that's some trip, I must have missed that bit, next we head down the second longest cul-de-sac I have driven down and after arriving at Livingstone (I Presume) we turn left and rejoin the I90 for the umpteenth time. Mind you could get on and off the I90 as its long very, Google have it at 3,099 miles and Wikipedia has it at 3,022 or 3,101 either way it's long by anyone's standards and it makes our wonderful M6 look like a side street at a mere 230 miles. The I90 stretches from Seattle in the west and Boston in the east or visa versa depending on which on which side of the road you are on, construction started in 1956 and has been ongoing ever since, if you are desperate to know more about it check out https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstate_90. We stop off at Bozeman for a look around it's a fairly big place but still no T-mobile signal so we pop into McDonald's for a \$1 coffee and to make use of the wifi, then it's back onto you know where, as soon as we leave Bozeman the I90 starts to climb and climb high into the mountains, they call Montana "Big Sky", and up here you can see why, the scenery just takes your breath away it is stunning, at the horizon in all directions are the snow covered mountain ranges, in between are the rolling hills and above a beautiful blue sky with a scattering of brilliant white fluffy clouds, the light is clear, pure and unaffected by any form of pollution it is amazing.

We have two options in mind for tonight's stop over, and we continue on to our first option the town of Dear Lodge we stop for a look around, this is small town that looks like it could do with a bit of a makeover well in fact a lot of one. This place is not for us, so we top up Monty's gogo tank and head off to the next option the town of Missoula eighty miles away. Barb phones ahead and books us into the site as I don't think we will arrive before they close at 5pm. The I90 is kind to us and I do press the loud pedal a bit closure to the floor, and we arrive with 5 minutes to spare before they close, as Barb had completed the booking on the phone we are soon at our pitch and plugged in.

We head off for a walk around and to find somewhere to eat, we find a suitable establishment not too far away, the food was good as was the local beer that accompanied it and the staff were friendly and helpful. After our meal we head back to the site and to Monty, we do a spot of trip planning and watch some TV then it's time for bed, so that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 19 16th April

After breakfast we have a couple of stops to make before we leave Missoula, first port of call is Walmart, no visit to this place can be quick as they sell everything from lettuce to shotguns and you have to have a good look around in case you miss anything. We eventually leave and then we head off to a shop that Barb wants to visit, when we get there it's closed as it's Easter Sunday, next stop is to the local RV Dealer to have a look at around at the RV's and 5th wheel hitches they have and to see how much van envy can be generated. The place is huge and there looks to be some fantastic coaches to view, we park Monty and as we get to the entrance my hopes are dashed as they don't open until 1pm. We don't want to wait around, so we will have to save the excitement of RV viewing for another day, it won't be a problem as there are dealers everywhere you go. It's not long before we are back on the you know what and heading for our next destination.

On route the landscape keeps giving and the I90 crosses magnificent rivers with vivid green waters meander and at times rage through the countryside, there are obvious signs that there has been lots of snow here, that's obvious as it's piled high at the side of the road where the ploughs and snow moving equipment left it. As per previous sections of the I90 this section is littered with billboards advertising various shops, restaurants, hotels and attractions. One such attraction is a shop saying that it has \$50,000 worth of silver dollars on display, this place advertises every couple of miles and even though we have been down this route before, you may remember the "Wall Drug Store" anyway we keep seeing the billboards and we have just got to stop hopefully to prove our preconceptions wrong. We pull up in the car park and stroll over to the entrance and go inside, guess what, our preconceptions are bang on the button, the place is full of stuff like arrows claiming to be genuine native Indian items. There are hand carved wooden bowls which look great until you look on the base and it says made in China, as is the majority of the tat for sale in this place, how they sell any of it's beyond me. We continue on and our next stop is Couer d'Alene which is the largest city in Idaho, oh yes we have entered another State and somewhere along our route we will also enter another time zone. Couer d'Alene is at the side of a beautiful lake of the same name this place looks like it could be a play zone for the rich, with lots of expensive boats waiting to be played with during the summer. As this is not a very RV friendly gaff we rejoin our original route and arrive at the RV park an hour earlier than we expected thanks to entering another time zone and yes another state ticket off, as we are now in Spokane Washington State. We arrive at the RV park and Barb books us in and directs me to our pitch, Monty is soon parked up and plugged into the electricity supply, we have some laundry that needs doing which Barb takes care of while I prepare our evening meal. There is another relocation vehicle parked near us and we have a chat he is Dutch but speaks English very well, we discuss the trip and the places we have visited, they are a couple of days ahead of us and will be returning the RV this Friday. We are not venturing out tonight so after dinner it's back to the planning department as not only do we need to get Monty to his end destination we then need to get to Vancouver and we also need to find a hotel to stay at. Then it's the usual attempt to find something on the TV to watch which is difficult unless you fancy *Call the Midwife*, and that's about it so until tomorrow, that's all folks.

Day 20 17th April

My plans of going to the RV dealer that is just down the road to us, have been thwarted as it started raining last night and hasn't stopped and as much as we want to go and look at them, we ain't doing it in the rain or looking at RV's. Our plan today is to head for Ellensburg which is about 170 miles away, after breakfast we ready Monty for intergalactic travel well I unplug him and Barb fastens down any loose objects, then we head back to the I90. The next section of the I90 is just scrub land and is uninteresting to say the least, this is not helped by the fact that it is raining and

exceedingly dull. We continue on but we need a fuel stop and also to have a spot of lunch, we turn of the I90 to the town of Ritzville, first stop is the gas station and as we are out in the sticks I have to go and prepay for the fuel as the stupid card machine at the pump needs a Zip code and won't accept a UK credit card. After Monty is satisfied and full, we head off to find somewhere to eat, now there was a Subway at the gas station and that is where we should have stayed, this place is like the world that time forgot, it is on the Historic highway 10 which was bypassed when the I90 was built and by the looks of it the town has been dying ever since, but has just managed to survive as a fuel stop. It is dismal and when we look at the only cafe on offer, Barb shakes her head, we park up make a sandwich and depart.

Back on the I90 the sky brightens, and the vista improves, we are now back in farming territory still no crops planted but it looks as if the farmers are readying the land to sow the seeds for this year's harvest. After a few more miles we'll a good few more miles we arrive at Moses Lake, the lake is huge and looks great, we wonder if there are any lakeside camping grounds and pull of the I90 to have a look, we find one site and it's a bit of a dump and then we find a second and it's not a great deal better. We have checked with Sylvia II and she doesn't come up with any other alternatives, slightly dejected we rejoin the I90, then we spot what looks like a site by the lake but it's on the other side of the highway. We come off at the next exit and set about finding the site, there is no signage, but we eventually find the side road that leads to the site. This looks like a good place to chill out so, booked in we are and very soon plugged into the magic that is electricity. We go for a walk to the lake and for a look around to see what's going on and if there are any RV's to excite my van envy. The site is very nice although dated and would benefit from a bit of a makeover. There is a games room with a pool table, we play a couple of games and then go to check out another game at the back of the room, the makers plaque says "Shuffle Board" it's big about 28 feet in length and 2 foot wide, basically it's a wooden plank surrounded by a trough on which you play curling without ice, there is very fine sand on the board and solid metal pucks which you send from end to end and aim to get them in scoring zones, it's great fun and I bet it would be fantastic with a group of people and possibly an alcoholic beverage to gee things up. I return to Monty and while I am connecting the cable TV, the guy on the next pitch with a big motor coach, says hello, we get chatting and after he has asked where we are from, I ask him about his trip. Now if you have been reading the blog or items on book that is face you will remember that I met a Swiss couple who were on a four year travel, well their record has been obliterated, this guy is from Alberta Canada and has been on the road for, wait for it Eight years, after a bit of a cough a splutter and the usual sorry I thought that you said 8 years, I ask where they have been well it's easier to say where they haven't been. Eight years you have got to be having a laugh, I ask him if he has shares in Mobile and Exxon he says no but he does get Christmas cards from them, I will have to find out more tomorrow.

After that I need a beer and it's not long before we need to prepare our evening meal which looks fairly basic when compared to the large chunk of pig that our neighbor is preparing on his BBQ. We have no TV signal and no cable connection as some twit has broken the end of the cable, don't ask, I will fix it tomorrow but for tonight we will make do with some music from my iPad played through Monty's stereo system. It looks like we may stay here for another night and chill down, so no route planning required tonight, so it's chatting, playing on tinternet and the compiling of the blog for you avid readers, so that all folks more tomorrow.

Day 21 18th April

Eeeek day 21 that's three weeks into the trip, don't be getting too excited about today's blog as today has officially designated a chill out day, we have decided to stay at Moses Lake for another day and do, absolutely nowt, well we might do something. My phone had binged a couple of times at the early hours of the morning and over a coffee I read the fantastic news that Katie has given birth to their second baby daughter Daisy Elizabeth, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Richie and Katie and welcome the new addition to their family, we are sure that Penelope will love having a baby sister. We have had some pictures of the baby from Sharon and

we phone to congratulate Mick and Sharon on becoming grandparents again and it won't long before the next member of the Armitage clan arrives on the scene, after chatting to them we have a leisurely morning with a late breakfast, a while later I phone Richie to congratulate them both, we will have to wait until our return before we can meet the new little Armo.

After a lot more of doing nowt we disconnect Monty from the mains and fire up his engine to head off for a visit to Walmart for some provisions, it's about a twenty minute drive to the Asda of the USA when we arrived I park Monty like a twit using two bays lengthways but in between the lines width ways. Now no visit to Walmart is going to be quick as they are massive and sell, well every darn thing you can think of and every time you visit you find more stuff, when I was walking round there was a guy with a loaf of bread in his trolley, and as I was passing he was talking to an assistant arranging his next purchase, a fourteen foot long canoe, can't see that happening in Asda on Smithdown Road, I didn't hang around to see if he added a 12 bore Winchester Pump Shotgun to his shopping list, it's just bizarre and I never tire of it. Next stop is a Quilting shop that Barb has found on tinternet, I give Sylvia II the address and she issues route instructions telling us we will be there in twenty minutes, she changes her mind a couple of times during the route, eventually we arrive at the destination, which is about 3 minutes where we started from, not too sure what Sylvia II has been smoking but she is back on the naughty step. Barb returns from her visit to the quilt,,,, shop without any purchases mind you she had purchased yards of stuff in Walmart.

Next stop McDonald's for a couple of their 1 bucky buckaroo coffees to have with our lunch in the highly desirable location of their car park. Then we instruct Sylvia II to take us back to the RV park, she issues some ridiculous instructions that include a forty minute drive, she has defiantly been on the wacky backy as the site is only fifteen minutes away, ignoring her and her stupid instructions we arrive back at the site. Earlier when I went to the reception to inform that we intended to stay for another night the lady asked of our intended route when we depart, I explained our route and she suggested that we visit Mount Vernon as it was the tulip growing capital of America and it was tulip festival time, I could hardly hide my enthusiasm but I knew I would have to tell Barb and that Mount Vernon would end up on the itinerary. Back at Monty we do a bit of forward planning, leave here tomorrow and head for Seattle with a stop for lunch at Ellensburg, three nights in Seattle, then on to guess where, correct who could have guessed it, Mount Vernon for two nights and then a quick dash on Monday morning to Ferndale to return Monty to his rightful owners. Then it will be onto Vancouver, not sure how yet but we will figure that one out over the next couple of days, one thing for certain we won't be walking there.

It's late afternoon and the sun has come back out to play, there had been a threat of a storm earlier with darkened skies with claps of thunder to be heard in the distance but this has passed, the sky is a deep blue dotted with white fluffy cotton clouds, we sit out enjoying the sunshine with just the one Mrs. Wembley in hand. I have purchased a replacement coaxial cable for the TV and connect to the cable tv supply to be watched later, I chat to our neighbors, the one on the eight year road trip ffs. The light is failing and there is a chill in the air so it's time to retreat into Monty and watch some cable TV or so we think, we go through the retuning process and what do we get, well when the tuning process has completed its cycle the indication is that we have 28 channels, our hopes are dashed when we try and watch them as all we get is a grainy snowy image of Mash, great programme in its time but totally unwatchable on this tv, the radio is pants as well so we listen to some great music from my iPad, I know some may say there's no such thing but out of 7,000 plus songs you have got to get some good tracks and for you doubters out there, we did. The evening progresses and soon bobo time looms, so that's all folks more tomorrow, Seattle here we come, bring on the Pikes Place Experience and Fish philosophy, if you have ever been in a work environment that involved a Positive mental attitude experience you may have heard of it, if not I will enlighten you after our visit to pier whatever number it is, in Seattle, bet you can't wait, well you will have to, or you could Google "fish philosophy" and tell me about it.

Day 22 19th April

Ok let week four commence, where have the last 21 days gone, I was part of them but they have gone in what feels like the blink of an eye or possibly two, last night my iPad played some great tunes late into the evening and not a duff track to be heard, trust me would I lie to you, who me, after breakfast we carry out Monty's preflight checks and after a seriously good spanking Sylvia II is ready to direct us to our destinations, hopefully without any more of her silly detours. Time to depart I engage hyper drive well D on the cumbersome column gear change and release the foot handbrake with an almighty bang, subtle this machine is. In a couple of minutes we are back on our old friend Interstate 90. The landscape on the first part of the journey is fairly boring, mainly scrubland dotted with vegetation that when it dies off will become tumbleweed and be blown along the carriage ways or the land spreading its seeds as it goes. A while later the I90 starts to climb through the mountains, we feel the temperature drop and there is still plenty of deep snow around although it looks like the ski slopes are closed, the white stuff is still piled high against the houses and on occasions it is up to the eaves of the properties. The i90 continues to weave its way up through the mountain range, we reach the roads summit which plateaued momentarily before it starting its descent towards Ellensburg our stop off destination.

As we pull off the I90 there is a RV sales center and we head the car park so that we can have a look around to see if anything they have on offer will excite my RV envy, they don't have any big boy RV's but they do have plenty of trailers and 5th wheel hitch trailers. On the way in a guy asks how they can help and rather than giving him the full tyre kicker leg wetting, I explain that we are on holiday from England and that although we have no intention of making a purchase we would like to have a look at some of the vans if that would be ok. He says that its fine and that all the vans are open, and we are welcome to have a look around at any of the vans they have. As we are looking round a salesperson says hello, his name is Cameron and we start chatting I explain that we don't want to waste his time but he says it's fine as there is not much going on and he is interested in our trip, Barb goes to have a look at the vans while we continue chatting, this chat goes on for some time and by the time we finish Barb has looked at the vans and is sitting back in Monty. I thank Cameron for his time and after looking inside the 5th wheelers it's massive and well equipped the kitchen even has an island, considering the size of these things, I won't say that they are cheap but compared to UK prices they are good value for money, then it's time to go and we set off on the rest of the journey to Seattle. Barb looks at the KOA site, but its reviews are awful, so she finds another and calls them while we are on route, they only have one spot left and Barb books the spot and instructs Sylvia II of our new destination. We travel through another mountain range the weather is not good it's raining heavily and the visibility is poor eventually we pass through the mountains and then we are into the city traffic, it's early afternoon but the traffic is heavy don't think I would like to be on this six lane highway later in the day.

We arrive at the RV park and Barb finalises the booking in procedure and head for our pitch which is a drive through suitable for a 90 foot rig, so there is space for a couple of Monty's it's late afternoon and raining so we are staying put, and we start looking for hotels in Vancouver, we soon lose the will to live and give that job up for another day. The site is full and there are some serious bits of kit parted up and van envy is running high, I will put up some pictures for you to have a look at. Then it's time for some food, blog creation and we have some TV channels so we watch some TV and yes Law and Order is on, tomorrow we will venture into Seattle and to Pikes Place but you will have to wait until tomorrow for more, so until then that's all folks.

Day 23 20th April

Before we start with today's action, I want to say happy birthday to my mate Richard and I hope he has had a great birthday and we will celebrate when we get home, before I continue with today's events I need some time to recap on our journey along the I90, as our route from here on does not include this long and sometimes winding road. Before we arrived in Seattle the road took us through the Cascade mountain range and far below to our right is Lake Kachess with its emerald green waters, then as we descend we pass the frozen waters of what was once the Pacific Ocean before it made its journey inland and became one of the many tributaries that surround Seattle's

coastline. We have travelled along Interstate 90 for 16 days and over 2,000 miles but yesterday we said farewell to it for this trip, there is still about 1,000 left for us to cover on another trip, until then farewell I90, we will miss you.

This morning we ready ourselves for our day in Seattle, on our way out of the RV park we stop at the office and ask about public transport into Seattle, you would think I had asked for his first born child, the response was a piece of paper with information on the local bus company App, he was happier than this when we were paying for the site. I express my thanks and we head for the main road, I had already checked the route out on the tinternet and the app confirmed that we needed to get two buses, one local for about two miles and then the number 522 Seattle express. We board the first bus and soon arrive at the required stop, shortly after we board the bendy bus express into the city, the journey takes about 30 minutes for the princely sum of five bucks fifty cents for both of us. We get off the bendy bus a mere 2 blocks away from Pikes place market, on our way to the market we stop for a coffee at Starbucks a local tourist attraction then we walk around the outer part of the market with shops selling all sorts of stuff most of which probably originated in China. Then we make our way inside there are lots of stall selling fish of all varieties, massive and I do mean massive shrimp, that make what we call prawns look like winkles and they are surrounded by even bigger crabs, they look fantastic. Then we make our way to the "Famous Pikes Place Market" which is actually a market stall within the market, this is where in 1997 Fish Philosophy was born or I should say expanded to what is now a worldwide training programme and an expensive training programme at that, and has been used by many companies including Sainsbury's, Enterprise and Ford Motor Co.

In 1997 John Christensen of ChartHouse Learning, spotted the actions of the fish sellers on the market stall, they were engaging with the customers, playing and enjoying their work selling while having fun. I will try and keep the history brief, in 1965 John Yokoyama purchased the market stall, after years of declining sales, unhappy staff because they were paid on a commission and no sales equals no commission, in 1986 he was nearing bankruptcy and after a meeting with a business coach he and his staff decided to become famous. From then on they were different to any other fish stall, they had fun, they engaged with customers, they hurl fish across the stall and they make a show of selling fish. People loved the show and more and more people came to the market and they sold more and more fish, then in 1990 a news crew working in the market spotted the fish stall and soon after the fish market appeared on "Good Morning America" and their fame grew, in 1991 CNN named the stall as one of the three most fun places to work in America and their fame continued to grow, they have appeared in Frasier, Free Willy and others. Then in 1997 John Christensen grew their fame further and Fish Philosophy was born, having seen the training videos I don't recognise any of the original staff working on the stall today, however the show goes on and the new staff still perform and engage with the people watching the fish flying through the air.

Next we walk around the city and head towards the Space Needle on route we stop off for Pizza and very good it was, while we are in the restaurant we book our tickets for the trip to the top of the Space Needle. We are booked on the 2.30pm lift into the sky as our tickets or on my phone we do not have to stand in line and are soon in the elevator and shortly after we are at the observation platform 520ft above the Earth. When we are out on the platform we can see a number of helicopters hovering above the city downtown area, we look down and we can see a lot of police activity, people are talking about what is happening below us. It turns out that there had been a robbery at a 7-11 store that ended up in a gunfight with 3 police officers being shot another injured with a bottle and one of the suspects dead, all for sake of 28 dollar's worth of drinks and snacks. When will they realize that they have got to change the gun laws in this country, oh that will be when the people making the laws don't benefit from the sales of weapons, so that will be never.

It is a beautiful day and the view from the Needle is fantastic however most people are looking downtown at the mass of flashing police lights, then we head for the lift and for our return to Earth, when back on terra firma we head back towards the fish market. We pop into a local Irish Bar for a quick libation and then it's time to find a bus stop at which we can catch the bus out and of the city, we arrive at the stop with about 5 minutes to spare and when it arrives we get on board with the

evening commuters, the bus is packed and is standing room only for most of the journey however when we get to our stop, there are only three of us plus the driver left on the bus. Then we wait for our next bus which eventually arrives and twenty minutes later we are back at the RV park, neither of us are hungry but we are tired as it has been a long day during which my phone tells me we have walked eight and half miles, there is just time for some blog creation and then some TV before it's time for bed, that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 24 21st April

We are moving on today and heading for Mount Vernon, Sylvia II has informed us that it's just over an hour away but we need fuel and just along the road is a there is a small shopping village made up of local suppliers selling individual products. Monty is readied for travel and we head out of the RV park and across the road to the petrol station and after filling Monty's gogo tank for what will be the last time, he will need more before he is returned but that will just be a few gallons as we are not that far from his new home address. Then it's down to the country village, we find a parking space that accommodates Monty's size and Barb heads for a material shop. While I go to check out the local barber shop as I am in need of a haircut, it may be greying well grey but it grows like wildfire, I did have a look while in Seattle but the prices ranged from 25 to 40 bucks for a straight forward trim, there was no way I was paying that as Barb would never let me live it down. This barbers is advertising haircuts for a mere 7 bucks, the building itself has seen better days and it saw those better days many years ago, as I approach it looks like it's closed and part of me hopes that it is, I turn the handle and the door opens, I walk in and it's like I have taken a step back in time and a large step at that. Anyway I am here now so man up it's only a haircut, I have a look around and it is like being in a time warp, it doesn't look like this place have changed since Adam was a lad, I am invited to take a seat by a lady hairdresser who past retirement age many years ago, now I have never been to a hairdressers before when the chair is facing in the opposite direction to the mirror, do you think I should I be worried, should I leave. We discuss what needs doing and after some work with the electric clippers and then some scissor work the lady announces that the job is done and shows me results in the smallest hand mirror in the world, I haven't got a clue what it looks like but there is a lot of it on the floor, I pay the requested five bucks special Friday rate, I didn't ask just paid and went to find Barb for an opinion on the result, she tells me it's ok, anyway the difference between a good haircut and a bad one is only about a week. I still have to check it out in Monty's enormous door mirrors and surprisingly it's ok.

We set off heading North along the I5 it's early afternoon and the traffic is horrendous, 6 lanes of nose to tail traffic heading in one direction, I hope this lot are not all heading for Mount Vernon, after about thirty minutes the traffic lessens and soon after we arrive at the RV park, Barb had phoned them before and reserve a spot and it's a good job she did as they are full. I think I mentioned earlier that the reason we are here is that they have a Tulip festival here every year which has scored me some brownie points and when Barb returns from booking us in at the office, she has the news that this weekend is also a street festival with lots of stalls and live music, extra points scored then. We park Monty in his allocated space and plug him in, after a chat to the owner, a walk around and a visit to Walmart which is just over the road we settle down for some serious planning as we have to return Monty on Monday which is only three nights away and we have nowhere to stay. We decide that we don't want to be in a major city for nine days even if it is Vancouver, we find the town of Bellingham which is about half way between where we are and Vancouver, we pick a hotel that looks like it will be ok to stay and chill out at for a few days, indoor and outdoor (haha) pools, hot tub, sauna and stuff and as it's out of the major city it's a lot more reasonable so we have got more for our buck. We also find a hotel in Vancouver and booked that as well, so we are sorted for the rest of the trip, all this planning and decision takes forever, it's time for some food a little drinket and some really bad TV before bed, so until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 25 22nd April

The other day while in Walmart I had spotted an item from my childhood a tube of Pillsbury Dough croissants, as we are in no rush this morning it is being opened and they are going in the oven. After 12 minutes in the oven they are ready, now they do say that you should leave some things as memories and these should have definitely remained a memory and just in case the French were worried they need not be, not too sure if it was the item itself or Monty's oven but they weren't good and the Pillsbury dough man will be left as a childhood memory never to be purchased again. We head over to the bus stop to catch the 207 bus into town, we board the bus pay our fare of one buck each, it's a bit of a magical mystery tour into town but twenty minutes after getting on, we are at our destination. We walk the couple of blocks to Main Street which has stalls running from one end to the other, there are lots of them and the stalls are mainly individual sellers selling items they have made, you know the stuff jewellery, paintings, photographs, wood carvings, ect and as usual there are lots of people commenting on how lovely the items are, but no one actually purchasing anything mind you at \$85 for a leather belt I am not surprised. The biggest queues sorry lines, are at the food stalls, Chinese, Indian, burgers, hot dogs, popcorn and corn dogs, now these corn dogs are doing down a storm and look delicious, not, if you're not sure what they are here is the recipe, one 9" hot dog, choice of beef, polish, curry etc, stick a wooden skewer into the hot dog then dip it in a sweet corn batter and deep fry, now I am a great believer in "don't knock it until you have tried it" but I am giving these a wide berth.

We walk down one side of the street looking at the stalls and the items on sale and then back along the other side doing the same, some complete tat and some good stuff, one great very talented guy selling 3D wooden maps they looked fantastic, difficult and time consuming to make with a price tag to match, then we are back at the beginning of the street and that's about it done. Got to be time for a rest and a visit to the bar of a local brewery to taste their brews, 17 different local beers on tap this could be dangerous we choose two different brews so that we can check them out, with both being very good, there is a temptation to stay but that could be dangerous so we venture outside to find where the bands are playing, it turns out there is only one stage and stage may be a bit of an exaggeration, the band playing is the Chris Eger Band and they are playing music which is a cross between rock and country, they are very good and Chris Eger is an exceptional guitarist and is not too shabby on the vocal department, I am sure that they usually play to bigger audiences than the thirty or so people standing around listening and they do deserve a far bigger audience. We listen to a few songs which are good but with the lack of a crowd on a cold windy afternoon the ambience is missing, the Matthew Street Music Festival this is certainly not, which is a shame as I would like to see and hear more of this band. We head off to get some food from one of the street vendors, lamb kebab, salad, tzatziki sauce served wrapped in a nan bread and pretty good it was but TAX on street food what's that all about. Time to visit another watering hole this one is not as good as the first, having less choice in beers and nowhere near the same ambience so it is only a short visit then we head off to catch the last bus out of Dallas sorry town. Due to the town center being closed the bus route has changed and we walk to the rail station which includes the bus terminal on the way we cross the railway line which runs alongside the road through the town, massive trains pulling a hundred plus carriages carrying freight run slowly along the tracks, it brings images to our minds of people running well walking fast alongside and jumping on board, being taken to who knows where.

We arrive at the bus terminal and the bus arrives soon after, we board the bus and it is the same driver that brought us into town, she asked if we had enjoyed the town's wonderful street festival, oh yes I said it was very good, wonderful street festival who is she kidding obviously not been out of the State. The route back is much more direct and only takes 10 minutes, God knows how you get home if you live on the route that we came in by, we say "thank you driver nice ride driver" and walk back to Monty who had obviously been missing us, don't be daft he hadn't. The rest of the day is spent chilling out mixed with some planning for next week as we still have nowhere to live after 11am on Monday when Monty is due at his new home, in fact the planning is taking over from blog creation, but we only have two more sleeps until we are evicted from Monty. More tomorrow until then, that's all folks.

Day 26 23rd April

Today we are off to see the tulip fields, we had originally planned to use public transport however there isn't a bus that goes from the town out to the tulip fields even though it is only a couple of miles out of town. So we have to get Monty ready for the short journey and this is where a caravan has its benefits and is also why nearly everyone with an RV has a second mode of transport, be it a massive pickup truck, a Harley or something more modest. With things tidied away and Monty disconnected from the mains, we are ready to head off to tip toe through the tulips. The journey could be even shorter if there was another bridge across the river, but as there isn't we have to head into town battle with the festival traffic and come out the other side towards the fields. The traffic is busy going into town and we also need to cross the railway, we arrive at the crossing just as the lights start flashing and the barriers drop down to stop our progress. The massive loco pulling 115 trucks and one point three miles long moves slowly across our route and gives us time to take in the size of the monster, we could do with "Trailers for sale or rent" by Dino playing on the radiogram. We head out of town and out into the countryside, we are on narrow country roads raised from the fields, it is not long before we head into more traffic this time they are heading to the same place as us, as there are no traffic lights at the junctions there is a police officer on duty directing the traffic, soon it is our turn to cross the junction and we are on our way again to the fields. When we arrive at the first and biggest of the tulip growers we are directed to the RV parking area which is only occupied by one other RV which is also a hire vehicle, we gather our stuff together and head off to join the line waiting to gain entrance. As we get closer to the entrance the line is split and as we are paying cash we can join the shorter line and soon we are dancing through the tulips, it's a bit like being in Holland, well apart from the mountain ranges and the snow covered Mount Baker in the distance and there are not as many tulips. Going by the name of the company that own these fields are Dutch or certainly of Dutch descendants and they have put on a good display, not as good as the tulip festival of the Netherlands, but better than expected. After an hour or so we tip toe off back to Monty to have a look at the other fields, these are not the same as the first and are really just fields of tulips not a display and there is not any suitable parking for Monty at these other fields.

Then it is on to the next part of today's tour, vineyard hunting for some wine tasting as this is also vineyard territory, or at least it's supposed to be but unlike other wine growing regions in the world we have visited there are not many of them offering tasting and most of them are closed. We find one that is open, it's not very busy and they also want you to pay five bucks to taste five wines but they do waive the charge if you make a purchase. It is owned by a family and the female side of the family that is serving the wine, there is no swallow or spit option here just swallow, so as I am driving I am not partaking in the process, as Barb samples the wines the husband joins us in conversation, it turns out that he and his business partner have recently purchased a place in County Wexford Ireland and intend to open a brewery and also send their wines over there, he asks about our trip and loves the idea of renting a Monty for a Bucky buckaroo a day, we continue chatting as Barb continues sampling the wines as I watch enviously. When it is time to depart with a purchase in hand obviously, they give us their contact details and ask us to get in touch and they will let us know when their Ireland venture is up and running, so we could go and visit in Gloria.

Then we set off to try and find another vineyard but without success, now we have two options, turn up at the end of the street festival or return to the RV park, as you can guess the RV park wins, with Monty plugged back into the power we have a couple of jobs to do, get Monty ready for return tomorrow which includes emptying his waste tanks (I suppose that will be my job), pack and find alternative accommodation. Emptying the tanks is not that big a deal as the pitch that we are on has full facilities so it is a just a case of attaching one end of the three inch waste pipe to Monty, stick the other end down the waste pipe and then pull the two levers, one for the black and then the grey, I slip on my borrowed rubber gloves and carry out the operation without any embarrassment. Then it's packing time, during the past weeks we have collected a few more items than we arrived with and it is getting difficult to fit these into the bags that came with us, in fact it doesn't happen and we have a few more bags to carry. Next accommodation planning, we have decide that we are

going to split the next part into two stop overs on obviously being Vancouver and the other somewhere between here and there, best be getting izy wizzy let's get busy, so until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 27 24th April

Early start this morning as we need to have Monty back by 11am or we will be on the naughty step, Sylvia II has told us that it about an hour to Monty's home address but we are not sure what the traffic will be like. We finalised our accommodation planning last night and have booked a hotel in the Bellingham area which is about twenty minute's drive from where Monty is going and just under two hours from Vancouver. So that we don't have to lug our bags from Monty's home address to the hotel, we have a plan that we will go to the hotel in Monty and that Barb will stay at the hotel with the bags (as it will be far too early to check in) and I will return Monty and then get the bus back. We arrive at the hotel and decant our luggage into the reception area, as suspected we are too early to check in but the manager is very helpful and says that he will get a room ready for us asap. Barb says farewell to Monty and I set off for the Del Monte office with one stop on the way to top up Monty's gogo tank at what has to be the most expensive gas station in the State, luckily it was just a top up well if you can call ten gallons a top up. As we have found before the office is shall we say out of the way, I suspect because they need a large site to accommodate a load of RV's and out of town sites are cheaper than prime locations. Monty is checked over and he gets the all clear and we complete the required paperwork and the payments, we owe for some excess miles and they owe us for some fuel, I am just about to ask for directions to the nearest bus route when the guy I am dealing with offers me a lift, now there's a result and after saying farewell to Monty I get into the company's minibus. I have the idea of telling Barb that the journey back to the hotel was horrendous, that I had to walk for miles and then got the wrong bus and any more embellishments I could come up with on the journey, my plan is completely blown as Barb is sitting in the hotel reception and sees me getting out of the minibus.

By the time our room is ready we are both looking forward to a shower, separately of course, a change of clothes and to unpack, although Monty was not small it is nice to have a large bedroom with two double beds and a separate bathroom. The rest of the day is spent chilling out and booking our coach tickets to take us from here to Vancouver, it turns out that the coach terminal is only a fifteen minute's walk from the hotel so that will be handy on Saturday when we transfer to Canada. We go out to the local Italian for our evening meal and then we return to our room for some TV and then to get some sleep in a full size bed so until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 28 25th April

After breakfast and a leisurely morning we head off to catch the bus into town, we arrive at the bus terminal and soon after the bus we need arrives and after paying our one dollar fare we are on our way into town, the journey takes about twenty minutes and then we are in the center of Bellingham. We have a walk around the town but to be honest it's a bit uninteresting so we catch another bus to the historic town of Ferndale, this place has a lot more character and is much more interesting, it is also a port, from which a ferry goes to Alaska. We walk around the town looking at the varied shops selling individual items of art, photographs, glass art and oh jewellery as you can imagine this took some time. It's time for a late lunch at a quirky restaurant which is below a shop selling draft flavoured olive oils and balsamic vinegars.

While having lunch we discuss the ferry journey to Alaska and we decide to look into it further as we do fancy a bit of Deadliest Catch, however when we do some further research we find that it's not going to be feasible as the journey takes three days each way and costs a fortune, oh well it would have been fun. We continue to look around and then catch the bus back to Bellingham and then we need to get the second bus back to the hotel, when we arrive at Bellingham we find that the bus that we are on morphs into the next bus number we need, that was handy.

As we have had lunch neither of us are hungry so the evening is spent watching some bad TV, 100 channels and we still end up watching Law and Order while sipping a little glass of vino and then to sleepsville, until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 29,30 & 31 26th, 27th & 28th April

Now it has been said in the past that when we arrive in a town or a city that I do miss a few days of the blog possibly due to going out at nighttime and partaking in one or two little drinkets and possibly in the past this may have been true on occasion. This time this has not been the case as we have not been out to any drinking establishments, we have just been chilling out and relaxing which is ok for us but not make very interesting reading for you. As there has not been much to report I have combined Wednesday, Thursday & Friday into this issue of the blog.

We had considered hiring a car and going out of the area to explore but we have decided to just chill in the local area, on Wednesday we walked over to the local shopping mall, walking anywhere in America is a bit of a no, and it's no different here and it reminds me of walking down the strip in Vegas and then it taking you twenty minutes to get to the doors of the Bellagio, other hotels/casinos are available, the mall looks small from the outside however when you walk through Macy's and come out the other side into the mall it is like opening a door and stepping into the Tardis it's massive, huge and of gigantic proportions. The place is full of shops but much to my disappointment there is not a gizmo gadget shop anywhere to be found, Barb has more success and manages to find and purchase a pair of jeans, mind you it has taken most of the day. We return to the hotel and as there is a smallwave in our room we have our doggie bagged meal which we brought home from the Italian washed down with a refreshing glass of chilled Chardonnay, then TV and then to sleepsville it is.

Thursday well that is spent doing a whole lot of nothing really apart from checking out things to do while we are in Vancouver, which you will be pleased to know will be pretty action packed providing everything goes to plan and will keep you on the edge of your seat waiting to see what we will be doing next, anyway weather permitting it's a fairly packed agenda. I am going to save the details for now and share them with you on a day to day basis. When we are going out in the evening we discuss places to eat with the night porter who suggests a Thai restaurant not too far up the road, sounds good so off we trot and find the place in a couple of minutes, enter and take a seat, we are on our own with not another person in the place and the menus look like they have been there since Adam was a lad, Barb is not too impressed so we say thanks but no thanks and leave. We end up back at the Italian from the other night, we are offered a wine taster and then we are told that we can sample a further three wines from their wine list in a hope that you may make a purchase. After our meal we return to the hotel and then it's the usual TV before bobo time.

On Friday we have a wander further up the road to yet some more shops, this time there is a gizmo gadget shop called Best Buys it's a bit like Comet and Barb leaves me in there while she goes to explore T.J Max yes T.J. On route we have had to cross the main road, a fast moving six lane carriageways, if you have walked anywhere in the USA you were probably on your own as no one walks further than from their car to the door. You could lose the will to live while waiting for the lights to change and at one set we watch the lights change three times without giving us to option to cross. In the end we wait for the main lights to turn red and then we go for it and we make it, well obviously we make it. Then we need to get back to the hotel and pack again, this time we need to condense everything into as few bags as possible, hopefully two bags each which is a bit of a struggle but it has got to be done and will definitely have to be done next Wednesday for the return flight. Anyway we are on another transfer day tomorrow so preparation is required and eventually we have managed well nearly, there may be one small extra bag. Early night tonight so that we are ready for tomorrow's trip, so bring on Vancouver and Canada but until then goodnight that's all folks.

Day 32 29th April

Today is another transfer day and we will be taking the coach across the border to Canada at lunch time and should arrive in Vancouver by 2pm (oh great another coach trip) after breakfast we finish packing, Barb has managed to squeeze the 150 yards of material she has acquired from different establishments on our travels into her luggage but it looks like Peter the pan is going to have to stay put in the USA but as he only cost two bucks and fifty cents it's no great loss and I don't think that we will be needing him in Canada. We have seen a hotel shuttle bus in the car park although we have not seen it move while we have been here, Barb has inquired at the reception desk if we can get a lift to the coach station and this has caused total confusion as number one they didn't know there was a coach station ten minutes away and two it was ok for the bus to go to the airport which was miles away but they weren't sure whether it could drop us off ten minutes away, they do seem to make an easy job difficult, the manager says leave it with him and he will see what he can do. We head back to the room to ready ourselves for the trip and then head down to reception to check out and see about a lift, check out was easy peasy, but the lift proved more difficult the boss man had disappeared and the receptionist was even more confused than before, turns out that the driver quit the job on Wednesday and they don't have a replacement, after a couple of phone calls that are obviously not getting anywhere, I tell her that we will walk, much to Barb's displeasure. Off we go and the first obstacle is the six lane main road that we have to cross, luckily a short time after pressing the can we cross button we are given the ok to go, it's not really a great distance to the station it's just the ton and a half of material that slows our progress but we arrive with plenty and I do mean plenty of time to spare, before the coach arrives.

Right on time the coach arrives and after showing our E-ticket to the driver and stowing our bags we are told to sit anywhere we like we find suitable seats that meet with Barb's expectations and ready ourselves for the journey on my least favorite mode of transport. The coach had started its journey in Portland Oregon so some passengers had got off at our stop to stretch their legs, it's not long before they start to get back on board and judging by the conversation that is going on in Chinese we have occupied someone's seats, oh well sometimes stuff happens anyway we are comfortable and ain't moving. The coach is full, mind you I am not surprised as at fourteen bucks and fifty cents a ticket it is great value for money. It's a good day to travel when someone else is driving as it is persistently raining, about 40 minutes we are at the Canadian border and we all have to get off the coach gather all our bags and go through immigration and passport control then it's back on the bus and we grab our seats pronto just in case. The rest of the journey takes just under an hour and is fairly uninteresting so there is not a great deal to report. We arrive at the train station / bus terminal in Vancouver and had planned to get a bus to the hotel but as it's raining heavily a ride in a taxi it is, this is definitely not Lime Street station as there is not a taxi in sight, while we are waiting we chat to a couple of guys in the taxi queue sorry line and they are given in to a hotel not far from us so we share the next cab with them. Twenty minutes later we are at the hotel and we are soon checked in, now we don't usually go mad about hotels, well when we are paying that is, all they have to be is clean as all you do is sleep in them. However this time we have pushed the boat out a bit, the hotel has 29 floors our room is on the 28th and benefits from being dual aspect with a balcony overlooking English Bay and then out to the Strait of Georgia, the room is great and the view is wonderful but Barb is not too sure about being out on the balcony 28 floors above the ground. We are soon unpacked and head outside to explore, unfortunately it's still pouring down so our exploring only lasts long enough for us to find out that the hotel has a central location, we find a watering hole for a little drinket and then we find the local 7-11 so that we can purchase a bottle of tonic water so that we can have a little g&t with ice and a slice in the Waterford crystal glasses we have brought with us. We return to our room and open the patio doors onto the balcony so that we can soak in the view of the city on our first night accompanied by a little g&t, of course we obeyed just the one Mrs. Wembley rules and regulations and Barb did not venture to close edge of the balcony. Then we choose a double bed each while we watch some TV, there are 100 free channels and also some that you pay for but we won't talk about it them, out of the 100

free channels there must be three that are worth watching then it's time to visit the land of nod in our massive, wonderfully comfy bed so until tomorrow, that's all folks.

Day 33 30th April

We have woken to a beautiful sunny morning and the view from the balcony is fantastic Today we are going to visit the Capilano suspension bridge, which Barb is really looking forward to, first stop breakfast and then we wait outside the hotel for the complimentary shuttle bus to take us to the bridge. On the journey (great another coach trip) we cross the Lions Gate Bridge which was built by the Guinness family, well it actually wasn't built by them as they are not builders they brew some stuff called Guinness, but they did pay to have it built. As you can imagine they didn't build the bridge for the benefit of their health, they owned thousands of acres of land on the other side of the river but people couldn't get there from the city. They had the bridge built at the cost of exactly \$5,837,827.17 so that people could get across the river with ease and lo and behold the price of their land increased, they also charged a toll on the bridge to recoup their initial outlay and once they had recouped their money they sold it to the province and it's a good job they did as the last refurbishment of the bridge cost the province over two hundred million dollars, not daft that Guinness lot. It's not long before we arrive at the stop for the bridge, then we join a line to purchase our tickets and before long we are in, we join a group to listen to the history of the Capilano bridge and we learn a lot about it from the very knowledgeable guide, but he does not know the answer to my "what is the capital of Peru" question. The bridge was built in 1889 by George Grant Mackay, a Scottish civil engineer and land developer and has been open to the public ever since, it is 140 meters long and hangs 70 meters above the river below. It is a beautiful day and it is also Sunday so the place is very busy, Barb is not too keen on crossing the bridge but when there is a gap in the pedestrian traffic, she takes a deep breath and goes for it, while I follow on, to say that this bridge moves a bit is an understatement a very large understatement, it's like trying to walk across the deck of a small boat in a force ten gale, it moves from side to side and up and down and when you take a step and go to put your foot down on the deck it's not there it's moved and then it comes back, it is slightly unnerving.

Once across we listen to another guide who gives us information about the trees, vegetation and animals that live in the grounds, but stumbles with the Peru question. Next it's time to venture higher into the treetops adventure, a series of suspension bridges attached to eight, 250 year old Douglas-firs, each bridge takes you higher into the trees and ends nearing the canopy 110 feet above the forest floor. Being shorter these bridges do not move anything like the main bridge which we will have cross again, but that's after some squirrel and people watching while wondering what the badger's balls taste like that are being advertised at one of the cafes. It turns out that they have never actually been attached to a badger, they are small round doughnut like items with varying sauces poured over them, at eight bucks a portion they should be good but to be honest they don't look that appetizing. Right let's brave this bridge again, it has got busier while we have been in the trees and there is now an endless stream of people crossing the bridge, that is when they can get past the Japanese tourists who in groups of six or more, are either jumping up and down while having a couple of hundred photographs taken or standing posing with their hand on their hip having a similar number of shots taken. Barb spots a lull in the traffic takes another deep breath and heads off across to the other side and the hope of terra firma, before we venture out on to the cliff walk. After a short stop for a look around the gift shop we head over to the cliff walk, only to find that it closed the guide says that he is not too sure for how long but it should be open soon and suggested that we do the suspension bridge and the treetop adventure first, been there done that. We have a bit more of a walk around and then a sit down, I return to the entrance to see if the walk has been reopened, but no the gate is still closed so I ask the guide if they have got a time that it will be reopened. This time I get a different story and I am told that the RCMP are doing a training exercise, now I can usually smell bullshit at fifty paces and this is bullshit, who is he trying to kid, I ask why would anyone in their right mind do a training exercise in the middle of a sunny afternoon on the busiest day of the week, no answer was the reply just a shrug of the shoulders. It is apparent that this part of the attraction is not going to be open anytime soon if at all today. We

decide to head back into town, on the way out Barb goes to the customer service desk to complain and is immediately offered a partial refund, while we are receiving our refund there is an announcement that the cliff walk will not be reopening today, now there's a shock, obviously there is a problem that they cannot rectify quickly. Luckily we get to the coach stop before the crowds of people how had been waiting, get their refunds and leave as we have done, there is already a line waiting for the coach but it's not that long, so we are able to get on the first one that arrives.

Back in the city we take the opportunity to get off a different stop and to have a look around the city while it is not raining, we start of at the waterfront, unfortunately Vancouver's waterfront is not the prettiest, it's not playing the same game as New York, Sydney or Liverpool. Going up from the water Vancouver has 27 protected view corridors which limit the construction of tall buildings which interfere with the line of sight to the North Shore Mountains, the downtown skyline, and the waters of English Bay and the Strait of Georgia. As you venture uphill away from the water front the buildings start to grow and actually the city has more high-rise buildings per capita than most North American metropolitan centers with populations exceeding 1,000,000, as usual the tallest, fanciest, best addressed buildings belong to the parasites of the bum of life, Banks, Insurance Companies and Accountancy firms. I will stop my rant before I get carried away, then the flash hotels join in and the likes of The Four Seasons, The Shangri-La and Trump Towers which was completed last year all have pretty impressive buildings. The city is built on the grid system so is fairly easy to navigate, well for Barb that is not me, it is fairly compact and has a population of circa 631,000, with Greater Vancouver area having a population of just under 2.5 million, with around 30% of the population being Chinese the city has a leaning towards Asian food and a fair few tat shops. Judging by the cars there is obviously lots of money around, Mercedes AMG 6.3 G Wagons are in plentiful supply you will lose count of how many you see and I don't think I have ever seen as many Lamborghini's in one day, even at a motor show. After covering about six miles on foot, we arrive back at the 28th floor of the Blue Horizon for a bit of a rest and freshen up before we venture out for the evening.

After a little pre dinner g&t on the balcony we head down to a local Chinese restaurant in search of food, to be honest it looks a bit how shall I put it, well basic would be an apt description, however it is full of Chinese peps so that's usually a good sign. Menus arrive and after a long time perusing the extensive menu choices are made which exclude the chicken's feet, pigs' feet and pigs' knees which may be to some tastes but not ours. The food arrives and is very good although there is far too much of it, the remains are placed into trays and bagged for us to take with us and as we have had no alcoholic drinks, in fact just water, the bill is very reasonable, in fact it's cheaper than a cheap thing can be. We pop into a local hostel for a quick libation and then we return to the hotel to make the most of the room oh and the g&t with ice and a slice that is waiting in the fridge. We have to be up early in the morning as we are going on a full day coach (yippee) trip to Whistler tomorrow and it is an early start, so that's all folks more tomorrow.

Day 34 1st May

Another day and another month arrives, early start this morning in fact that early I had to set the alarm and that has not happened for a good while, what a difference a day makes, yesterday sun shining in a beautiful blue sky today well it's pissing down. We ready ourselves with walking boots, coats, umbrellas, camera gear and then head off on the what should have been short walk to the designated pick up point. First stop is the local bakery to collect breakfast and snacks for the trip and then with plenty of time in hand we head off on the short walk to the coach, well it would have been a short walk if I hadn't

decided for some reason that the pickup point was in an a different location than it actually was, look I am up early and have not had a coffee yet, after covering about a mile more than we needed to, we arrive at the correct address with me explaining to Barb that the extra mile was good for her, I will not tell you her response. Eventually the coach arrives and we pick the front seat, we'll not actually the front seat as that's where the driver sits, but the two directly behind him which has a great view of the road ahead, well it would have if it wasn't pouring down. Everyone gets on board, when I say everyone I actually mean all eleven passengers to occupy the 52 available seats, the driver/guide who is Chinese (this is relevant later) introduces himself and welcomes us on board and tells us that this new excursion for this season and also a new coach and we are the first people on both, so after losing my bus pass virginity in Liverpool not so long ago I am about to lose my coach trip to Whistler virginity, now I wasn't expecting that when I got up this morning. After given us an idea of today's agenda Bart yes that is his name fires up the coach and we are on our way out into f the city, as we drive through the city Bart shares his knowledge of the city, population circa 631,000, 30% Chinese, yes we know that already, he then explains that he is Chinese by birth but was born in Canada and that Chinese people born in Canada are known as Bananas, Yellow on the outside White on the inside, this is why I mentioned his race at the beginning, we though that this was a slightly derogatory name but he was ok with it and said that no one had a problem with it. We travel out of the city and join highway 1, the sea to sky highway, the views from this two lane highway are beautiful even in the pouring rain and they must be breathtaking on a sunny day, to our left we have the sea dotted with large and small islands and to our right the mountains climb steeply from the side of the road. At times parts of the mountains have been blasted away so as not to impede the flow of traffic and you now drive through rather than around the edge of the mountains. Our first stop is at a waterfall which is only a short walk from the car park, on the way we have to cross a railway line on which will travel the monster trains pulling hundreds of trucks on route to Alaska, I suggest that Barb lies on the track while I take her photograph but she is having none of it. We get to the waterfall it's pretty impressive but not gob smacking, it has a drop of about 70 meters and is fairly noisy, although there is not a great deal of water at the bottom of it, as we head back to the coach and cross the tracks I mention the photographic opportunity again but it's still a no go area. Back on the coach the next stop which is about an hour away is the sea to sky gondola a cable car ride that takes you from sea level to the top of the mountains, well one of them. It is a shame that the weather is not good or I could have shared lots of wow moments as the sights took our breath away, but as it's still pouring down and the cloud is low we can see next to bugger all and just have to imagine how good it looks bathed in sunshine, so you will have to do the same.

We arrive at the sea to sky gondola and Bart pops off to get our tickets, not sure how high this mountain is as we can't see the top of it, in fact we can see very little of it due to the low cloud that is currently hovering about 35 feet above us. Bart issues us our tickets and after a short stroll we climb aboard one of the gondola's it's not long before we are in the clouds and can see, nothing at all, the cloud is patchy so we do get an idea of what the view would be like on a nice day, once at the top there are walks of varying lengths to be had , but not today thank you, there is also a suspension bridge which Barb declines my offer to accompany me across and heads off to get a cup of tea. I brave the elements and head off across the bridge which being shorter than yesterday's bridge is far more stable it is also secured in more places so with only one person aboard the movement is minimal after a short stay at the other side I make the return trip a head for the coffee shop for a warm drink and to dry off. After coffee and the cake which we purchased from the bakery

this morning, it is time for the trip down in the gondola, the weather has cleared slightly and the views are amazing it's just a shame that the weather is not as good as it was yesterday but they are still good. We wait for the rest of the passengers, all nine of them, to get back on board and then we set off for Whistler village, this takes about an hour and during the trip Bart gives us more information, there is a lady sitting next to us and she is writing down all the information we are given, whereas I on the other hand don't and can't remember any of it. Bart asks us all a question well two actually, "what was Whistler mountain originally called and why is it called Whistler mountain" there is stunned silence on the coach and it appears that no one knows the answer, well apart from me that is, I pipe up with the first answer "London Mountain" correct says Bart and why is it now Whistler mountain, not wishing to appear a smart arse I give my fellow passengers the opportunity to answer, but no answer was the stern reply, so I take the opportunity to show my knowledge and answer, "the name was changed from London Mountain in 1965 as the associations with London's bad weather were deemed to be bad for advertising purposes and the name Whistler came from the whistling calls from the marmots known as whistlers that live on the mountains" well done ten out of ten, give that man a coconut and a round of applause. Now it's not that I actually knew more than my fellow passengers however I did have the power of Google and Wikipedia, please don't think that I tried to fool them in to believing I actually knew the answers, I did come clean, or did I.

We arrive in Whistler just after 1pm and Bart tells us we have plenty of free time to explore the village supplies us with a map and says that although the weather has brightened up considerably the ski lifts are still closed due to the low cloud on the mountains. Oh well that's a pity but never mind, we set off to explore the village and check out the snow boarders who are still using the lower runs to get as much boarding in as they can before the remaining snow completely disappears, the snow machines are dumping as much snow as possible on the runs open. Whistler mountain is now closed for the season but Boulder mountain is still open or at least it would be if it wasn't for the low cloud. We watch the boarders for a while and then head into the village to explore, it is mid-season in Whistler as the skiing and boarding season is all but over and the mountain biking season does not start until the begins of June, as such the village is not at its busiest. I imagine that in season the place is rammed as it has in the region of 1.5 million visitors in the winter and over 3 million in the summer, now that's a lot of peeps for a small village, the majority of the shops are open but with no customers, we pop into one of the many outdoor stuff shops and one of the assistants spots my camera bag and enquires which camera I have, it turns out that he is also a Canon type so we have a long chat about photography and Camera's. After an hour or so it's time to find a place to eat, now there are plenty of expensive restaurants in the village but we are looking for cheap and cheerful and Barb finds just the place, it's a pub and today to entice people in they are doing all meals for \$4.95, that will do for us and they also do decent beer at a decent price, proper result that I bet won't be happening in the high season. As you can imagine this is the busiest bar in town today and we have to wait for a seat, obviously the special offer is working, the food is good and so is the beer so we have to stay for a second. Then it's a bit more exploring, it's a shame that the lifts are still closed as a trip to the top of the mountain would have been great but it's not to be, after watching the last boarders and skiers leave the mountain and the guys on snowmobiles check that there is no one left on the mountain it is time for us to head back to the coach for our return trip to Vancouver. The sun is shining and its early evening glow is casting its golden rays over the mountains the sea and the islands as we travel along the sea to sky highway. We are given the chance to see the natural beauty of the landscape that was hidden from us this morning, it

is absolutely beautiful and at times it takes your breath away, we could have regrets about the weather this morning during our trip on the gondola this morning, but thanks to the sun's golden rays reflecting on the ocean and the highway in front of us, we haven't.

We arrive back in the city and say farewell to Bart, after a bit more of a walk we are back at the hotel, we arrive at our room tired and a bit footsore and after I checked my iPhone we find that we have walked eight miles today, oh that will by I have got sore feet then, neither of us are hungry but we are tired so after some tv it's time for some sleep, until tomorrow that's all folks.

Day 35 2nd May

Our penultimate whatever that means day in Vancouver and of our holiday, where have the last five and bit weeks gone, well in a blink of an eye that's where, and it's unbelievable to us that our journey that started when we arrived at O'hare airport in Chicago will come to an end tomorrow when will start our journey home. We had a few choices for today's activities whale watching, high speed boat ride or a ride in a sea plane but as the weather over the last few days have been changeable to say least, we have not booked anything. So we are going to utilise the hop on hop ferry that runs up and down the river and make the most of the sights of Vancouver. We walk down to the harbor to catch our first ferry, I will have you know that this is an expensive day out, sixteen Canadian dollars each for our tickets that lasts all day for as many journeys as you like and in an effort to save the planet I have saved the ticket on my phone rather than printing it. We arrive just as Boaty McBoatface bobs up to the dock, it's only a little boat that will hold about 10 peeps plus the captain, we set off across the river towards our first port of call and during the journey the captain collects the fares now it has been said "don't pay the ferryman till he gets you to the other side", and when I show the captain the ticket on my phone, It was as if I had shown him the sign of the devil, he was obviously not fully conversant with technology as without a piece of paper as a ticket he was totally confused. After a lot of sighing, sharp intakes of breath and me enlarging the size of the ticket on my phone to a size that would be visible from space, the captain allows us to stay on board rather than casting us overboard, which I don't think he could have done even if we had not of paid.

Our first stop is Granville island just on the other side, the dark side, Luke let the force be with you, and just before it is with us, we get off Boaty McBoatface and head for the local market which is the highlight of the island. This is a large indoor market offering fresh meats, fish and vegetables which look fantastic and have our taste buds salivating, unfortunately it also houses a fair amount of tat from China. Right that's the market done back to the harbour to catch the next Boaty McBoatface which from now on is called the ferry as I think I have all of the humor available from BMBF. We get on board BMBF sorry the ferry and head to the boat museum again our ticket baffles the captain and has him muttering that he had never seen one of those before, wonderful thing this technology lark. We arrive at the stop for the boat museum and say farewell to the captain, after a stroll along the waterfront we arrive at the boat museum which is a glass building and not very big and when we look through the window the museum consists of precisely one boat and when we go inside they want \$25 entrance fee, to be honest I have seen older boats afloat in the Albert dock, although it might be submerged in the Albert dock now. As you can imagine we give this a miss and after watching some seriously bad dog training, a woman had let her dog off the lead and it had f'd off and although she called its name using various vocal tones it stayed f'd off, it was quite amusing listening to her while watching the

dog, obviously all those weeks of training had paid off, then we head back to the dock to catch the next BMBF, I have changed my mind and we are going to use BMBF rather than ferry, look you will smile or smirk at some point, just let it happen, you know you want to.

The next stop BMBF is going to take us to is Yaletown and Chinatown, we wait at the landing stage and in the distance we can see the little blue ferry bobbing across the waves towards us, the captain ties up alongside and we board BMBF again our ticket baffles the captain only this time so as to avoid future confusion he writes out a day ticket for us to use on any future trips, hey now that's a good idea. After the longest journey of the day we arrive at the dock, when we walk up the stairs to the roadway we see the BC Stadium, we walk around the stadium and as we do so there is music, loud U2 music coming from within, the place is locked up tight but the gift shop and the hall of fame is open. Inside the gift shop U2 is blasting out I say to the assistant "hey this is good music while you work" she tells me that U2 are opening their world tour from here next week, they have hired the place for a week to practice for the tour and that they are currently on stage now. I ask if there is anyway in but she tells me that she had tried but it was all locked up. We go outside and to be honest the stadium does not retain much noise and its nearly as good outside as it would be in the stadium, well nearly. There is a bar right alongside the stadium and its happy hour, we take a seat outside order a beer and listen to Bono, The Edge and co blast out some great tunes in the late afternoon sun. We are torn between BMBF and U2, as you can imagine U2 won the battle so that was the last we saw of BMBF, when the boys decide to call it a day we finish our drinks and ask for the bill when it arrives I put down a twenty dollar note to settle the ten dollar bill and when the waitress collects the money she asks do you want your change, sorry are you having a laugh yes I do want my change, that s tipping lark is really starting to wind me up and expecting a nine dollar plus change tip for serving two beers is taking the hit and miss, needless to say I get my change and the waitress gets no tip for the cheek. We start the hike back to the hotel with a few little drinky stops on the way, well it's hot you know, after a shower and a change we head out to get some food. After we have eaten and the bill arrives the waitress here must be related to the previous one and asks the same do you want your change question, damn right I do, and guess what she did not get a tip either. Then we head back to the hotel to take in our last views of Vancouver at night, then it's a bit more Law and Order, and sleepsville, last day tomorrow and I don't want any tears from any of you, until then that's all folks.

Day 36 & 37 3rd & 4th May

Well that's it, would you believe it this is our last day although it will be tomorrow before we arrive back in Blighty, our flight is not until this evening so we have most of the day to kill before we head for the airport, to be honest I am not a great fan of this situation, I would be sooner up and gone and on our way home, I always feel a bit in limbo with nowhere to go. As such I have organised a late check out which means that we can spend a leisurely morning and pack, now I am going home with the same amount of stuff that I arrived with, Barb on the other hand has everything she brought with her, plus one hundred and fifty seven yards of material which she has amassed on route. While Barb manages to pack all her stuff into her case, well she has gained a backpack which she plans to take on board, I on the other hand am struggling to close my suitcase and I am not sure why, its possibly due to my clothes being thrown in from the other side of the room, eventually it's closed and I hope that I don't need to open it for any reason. We head out to get some breakfast

then we return to the room to collect our bags say farewell to our dual aspect room and head to reception to check out, after settling our bill we have our bags put into storage to be collected later. It's raining and we still have a good few hours to kill, we head out onto Robson Street and wander down to main shopping area, not because we want to shop but as that's where the vast shopping mall is and its dry inside there, I take a seat in the man crèche no it's not a bar it's just a seating area full of blokes twiddling their thumbs, I make use of the wifi while Barb goes for a wander and to window shop at the posh shops in the mall. Then it's time to get something to eat We head back to the bakery which has become Barbs favorite place, after a sandwich, cake and coffee then it's one last wander around before we go back to the hotel to reclaim our bags. The hotel have booked a cab for us to get to the airport as it was only a few dollars more than getting the train and far more convenient. We still have a while to wait for the taxi and its happy hour in the hotel so it would be rude not to partake in one or possibly two last little drinkets. There is a group of peeps with little badges in the bar on some form of company related meeting type thing, we have great sport people watching and listening to what I can only describe as complete and utter bullshit spouting from the mouths of the Blue Sky thinkers with inverted comma's.

It's not too long before the taxi arrives, we load our luggage into the boot and head off through the rush hour traffic towards the airport, the journey takes a bit longer than usual due to the commuters making their way home or to wherever they are off to. We soon have our bags checked in and surprisingly Barbs bag is under the allowed 23kg even with the extra one hundred and fifty seven yards of material on board, she assures me that even though her back pack weighs in excess of the permitted allowance it has got nothing to do with it. Right we have three hours to kill before our flight leaves and after a walk around the duty free to have a free spray of the expensive perfumes and aftershaves, it's time to find a bar, it turns out that there is only one bar at the airport and as we still have some Canadian dollars it seems like a good place to spend them. It is obvious by the prices that this bar is not a J D Weatherspoon's, boy can they charge and that is before they add the tax and the enforced tip that will be required. While we are sitting at the bar we are treated to yet another example of the brashness and neck of the bar staff, there is an older Ozzy guy sitting next to us and when he settles his bill he gets out all his change to pay with, he asks the bar tender to check that he has left the correct amount, after counting the change he says yes but "you haven't left a tip and in this country it is customary to leave a tip as we rely on them as part of our wages" the embarrassed customer apologises and gets some more money out and the bar tender doesn't even say thank you. Now those of you that know me, know that I am by no means tight but this tipping lark is really starting to wind me up, I do believe in leaving a tip and in the past I have been known to tip excessively, but I do think that it should be in return for the service you have received and that it is be the customers right to leave what they feel is worthy of the service received not because the server just expects it and because their employer doesn't pay enough, although we don't actually know if this is true. I am nearly finished with my rant but just to continue for a minute, all this waiter has done is pour two pints which weren't full and put them on the bar in front of us without engaging in any form of polite conversation he has however managed to embarrass another customer in front of us and others. Needless to say that when it was our time to pay I weigh up the service we have received and the attitude of the bar tender before leaving a tip. I decided that all things considered I would leave him a tip and left him 10 cents as I thought that it may be more thought provoking than leaving nothing, however he most probably just thought, tight old English git, sorry rant over. We leave the bar before he has collect payment and head for the departure gates, we can see the plane through the windows at the departure gate,

mind you, you could hardly miss it as it is a right big bugger, a double decker Jumbo. As we wait to board we wonder if Eve has managed to get us bumped up to business class or even first class, the gate is open and we enter the massive craft and as the stewardess closely inspects our boarding cards and sees our names she says you need to come this way sir and directs us straight to the, wait for it, economy seats, oh well never mind. The pilot pipes up over the speaker system and introduces Himself now I am not worried about her competence flying his gigantic beast it I am a bit worried about her being able to parallel park it when we arrive at Heathrow. The flight itself is a bit boring so I won't give you a commentary on the whole nine hours well I can't anyway as I was asleep for lots of them. In brief just after takeoff they come around with drinks, then after a while they bring food which even for aircraft food was pretty disgusting to say the least, come on BA you are supposed to be a premier airline you need to buck up and raise your game in the catering department. It's approaching midnight and the flight crew put the plane into sleep mode turning off the lights and it is also said that they reduce the oxygen flow into the cabin, not sure how true that is, but whatever they do it works and people are nodding off to sleep all through the cabin, after watching 90% of a film I join them missing the ending.

Next thing you know its morning on Day 37 4th May, lights on blinds open and fresh air pumped through, the next minute you're in the wide awake club and the crew bring round breakfast, well that's being kind to it, what it actually is, is a stone cold nearly frozen bun some cream cheese and small orange juice, it was just about as awful as the previous meal, I bet that they are not serving this in first class. Nine hours gone and we land at Heathrow, we have to get from terminal three to terminal five and we have one and a half hours before the next flight doesn't sound like that's going to be a problem. As you well know lots of things work in theory but in practice it's a different matter, we have landed ten minutes late so that gives us 1 hour 20 minutes, now I am not sure if it was because he pilot was not too good at that parallel parking lark but the plane could not have been parked any further away from the transfer coach if they had tried, it was nearly in Gatwick, we finally get on the coach and are on our way. In some respects Heathrow is fairly primitively and the coach trip between is a prime example of this, it stops and starts while it goes on a world tour of Heathrow and its buildings. Eventually we arrive at T5 and the BA transfer section, we don't need to get our bags as they are going straight through but we do need to go through passport control at the BA desks, we join the queue, it's not a line because we are back in the UK and we queue we don't line, to be fair this is a fairly fast process and it needs to be as time is passing quickly. The guy on the desk says not to worry as we only have to go upstairs, what the prat failed to mention was once upstairs we had to join another queue for another passport control and then yet another queue for the baggage and us to be checked. The queue is not moving very quickly and we mention that our flight is imminent to one of the assistants who directs us to a fast track queue, now I am not sure what part of fast track this queue is but it's not fast that's for sure. We are now down to 20 minutes before takeoff time and we are not sure if the gate will be closed when we eventually get through the body scanner bit, Barb heads off to the gate to let them know we are here, while I wait for the bags to come through the scanner, mine come through and I collect them, as Barb's comes through my heart sinks as it is diverted off to the left to be opened and manually inspected, ffs. It sits there waiting to be inspected I explain to a member of staff that our flight is about to leave and he arranges for the bag to queue jump, then when I am asked if it is my bag and did I pack it myself and what is in it, I have to explain that no, no and I don't know. When I open the bag I find a 250ml bottle of expensive Channel Perfume, the assistant explains that it should be confiscated due to the size but he puts it through some machine to check what is in it, says its ok and hands it me

back. I thank him while trying to get everything back in the case, then carrying our three bags head off to the gate as fast as possible. Barb is waiting, they have kept the gate open and we board with minutes to spare as soon as we are in our seats the door is shut the engines burst into life and we are off. This is only a short 30 minute flight and it seems that as soon as we at cruising height we are preparing to land, then we are off to passport control and then to collect our bags. Richard collects us and we head through the rush hour traffic, been here before, towards the great city of Liverpool, we are soon back at number 53 but I can't find our keys, we go over to Bryan and Paula's to retrieve the spare key and while we are there they invite us in for a drink haven't had one for a while so it would be rude not to except their invitation, after a just the one Mrs. Wembley and a brief talk about our trip we head back over the road, and that's it the adventure is over, we talk to Jean, Jennie & Phil to let them know that we are home safe and sound, as always it's good to be home and who knows what's going to happen next. So that's it this is officially the last, that's all folks, well for this trip anyway, love to all P&B

Epilogue

I thought that you might be missing your daily Hawks on Tour fix, so even though the blog is up to nearly up to thirty five thousand words, I have put together a few more words after the journey as a reminder of some of the things we learnt, observed, saw and achieved during our journey. Now where do we start, well let's start with the journey itself, we drove over 3,300 miles travelling through 11 of America's 50 states and 1 of Canada's well we didn't actually drive ourselves through Canada but we did technically drive through part of it and actually the Canadian one was a province not a state. This trip brings our tally of American states visited to 19 leaving us with 31 still to do, one of which we cannot drive to, it also leaves us with a further 9 Canadian province's to visit, so there are plenty of more miles to be covered in the future. It is only three years since we were last in America but we noticed that prices of, well everything have rocketed and America is no longer cheap, well it's still "cheap" but everything is expensive, this is compounded by the once great British pound being worth next to buggar all, against the Dollar as well as the Euro, yes it will come back one day but that's in the future not now. Forgetting the exchange rates, everything from eating out, drinks and general shopping items even in Walmart are all just more expensive than we remember, fuel is still reasonable which is a good job as it appears that the Americans have got absolutely no regards for the greenhouse gasses they are pumping out through the exhaust pipes of the gas guzzling V8 and V10 monsters that they love to drive.

That said I do miss the burbling sounds omitted from them, and the extremely loud sounds from the Harley Davidson's especially the ones with the cut off exhausts which are not just loud they are very loud, they also spit flames under both acceleration and overrun. Mid America is the home of the Pick Up Truck with big V8 and V10 engines no turbo diesels here, even if they would pump out the same if not more BHP while returning a least twice the MPG, but that would be without the tremendous soundtrack that the petrol engines afford us. Up until we arrived in Vancouver the best sounding engine we had heard was in a Dodge Challenger SRT, the world's fastest production road car which has a V8 6.2 Supercharged Hemi stuffed under the bonnet which pumps out, wait for it 840HP, yes that's correct 840 HP it's not a typing error, all this power propels the Dodge from 0-60 in

2.3 seconds and from 0-100 faster than any other production car, it is both completely daft and fantastic at the same time. Not wishing to be sexist but ladies please excuse this bit of car stuff and stay with me, I won't go on for much longer about cars, bikes and engine noises. So I said that the ridiculous Dodge Challenger was the best sounding thing we had heard before we arrived in Vancouver, so what sounded better in Canada than America, well it's not from either of these countries, it's not even from the same continent, it originated in Europe and to be precise Italy oh and a bit of Germany however the company was once owned by Chrysler, of course I am talking about Lamborghini. In particular a Lamborghini Huracan which was charging down the streets of Vancouver on full bore with the exhaust noise resonating off the surrounding buildings it sounded fantastic, but dollar for dollar the Dodge provides more of well everything apart from looks, style and sophistication, that said it's about a tenth of the price of the Lamborghini and I would have the Dodge, oh and the Lamborghini, not that I could afford either of them, right ladies, that's the car lark over.

Not wishing to be unfair to the total population of the United States of America, as I haven't met them all, however going by the ones I have met it never ceases to amaze me that America is the super power that it is, as how do I put this, well they are not the sharpest knife in the drawer or even the brightest bulb in the box. They have managed to come out with some great ones while we were there, such as "did you drive over from England", "oh you live in Liverpool I met someone from London you might know them", "why do you put the steering wheel on the wrong side", "Is it the same time in the U.K. as it is here", "beefeaters look after the Pope the in Rome", "would you like your change" and the very best one, "Yes I voted for Trump". We have been asked what part of the trip we enjoyed the most and this is a difficult question to answer as each different place that we visited well most of them had an individual usp. So city or countryside, cities are great for a day or so but once you have seen the usual attractions, buildings and so on, then they are mainly the same well except from New York that is just amazing and 5 days there does not give you a chance to see everything the others just have the same shops that we have in the U.K. and I don't particularly enjoy shopping at the best of times, so with hindsight 5 days in Chicago was too long. So the countryside wins and wins by a country mile, the views have been just stunning, breathtaking, beautiful and awesome, you get the idea, and we have been privileged to see parts of America that lots of Americans have not seen. Until our next trip keep safe P&B.