



Battling the elements for the man in black

By Geoff Stevenson
Second of three parts

We made West Helena our base for two days. This gave us both a chance to change engine oil – and to do some more Johnny Cash exploring in rural Arkansas. At Dyess (say Dice), we knew there was a new museum developed by the University of Arkansas, and including a replica of Cash's boyhood home.

One of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs amidst the Great Depression of the early 1930's was the Agricultural Relief and Rehabilitation plan. In Arkansas, on lands then best suited

to growing cotton, the plan sold qualified families 20- or 40-acre plots of land. The government constructed for each family a plain-built, three-bedroom, 1,000 sq. ft. house of locally-grown pine. The theory was that each family would eventually pay back the government loan, but, in the interim, grow cotton and provide a stable life for the families involved.

The museum was excellent. Better still, we were the only visitors and had unlimited time to learn more about the Dyess colony. Two more visitors later joined the visiting Canadian bikers and the four of us were driven perhaps 3 km to a

replica of the Cash family house. It was not unlike the modest farmhouse in which I grew up in rural New Zealand in the 1950s; I felt right at home among the basic kitchen plumbing, small bedrooms and modest living room furniture. No insulation or central heating, either.

Next day we headed to Hot Springs Village, where Ernie's wife Carol had booked us a timeshare for a week. We each had our own suite – and even had a washing machine and dryer, which would finally end the odd smell now coming from our riding socks. The village is the biggest gated community in the U.S.

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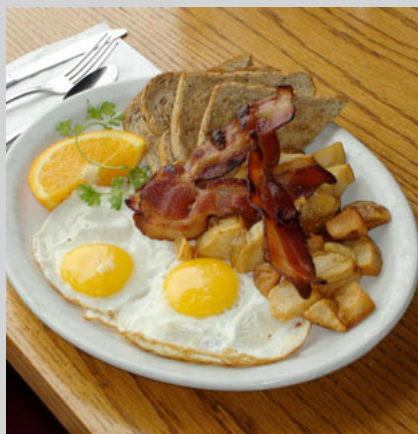
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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Saturday, August 6



WHERE:

Pioneer House
4675 Trans Canada Hwy
Duncan

WHEN:

9:30 at the restaurant



Arkansas has some great switchbacks



On the Peel Lake ferry in northern Arkansas, two-wheelers outnumber cages 8 to 1.

(and the world, I'd guess). It opened in the 1970s and covers 26,000 acres with about 15,000 semi-permanent residents. There are eight golf courses, 13 tennis courts, 20 restaurants – and, unsurprisingly, even the odd investment adviser.

Now we could focus on shorter rides – and even start later in the day if there was rain.

Arkansas is hardly Western Canada with the Rockies (the highest point, for heaven's sake, is Mount

Magazine, which, at 2,753 feet, is barely taller than Mount Douglas). But the brochures were right: There were some great roads (including a few serious switchbacks in places), lots of good scenery and, apart from Greater Little Rock, precious little traffic.

Ernie planned a different ride each day. These were easy excursions now; we rarely covered more than 400km., and the weather was generally both warmer and drier.

The depressed economy was good news for Canadians spending their depreciated dollars. In Fordyce, for example, the lunch special was a tasty pork chop, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, unlimited iced tea and a generous slice of cake for \$7. (We noted on the last day of the trip, when we stopped for breakfast on Washington's Hood Canal, that the omelette which had been about \$8 in Arkansas was now suddenly \$13.99).



Visiting Clinton library in Little Rock

A highlight of these shorter rides was Petit Jean State Park, near Morrilton. Those of you of a certain age will remember Winthrop Rockefeller, younger brother of Nelson and son of John D., who was (Republican) governor of Arkansas

from 1967 to 1971. His foundation gave the University of Arkansas a 188-acre campus near Petit Jean Park. We didn't tour the campus, but did visit the nearby Museum of the Automobile, also assisted by Rockefeller money.

The Cadillac in which he campaigned for the governorship was there, along with close to a hundred American vehicles. There was a Lincoln Zephyr V12 (black, of course, with a hood that seemed to go on forever); Packards; the omnipresent Ford Models T and A; and my favorite, an exquisitely-restored '40s Chevy pickup, with perfect red and black paint and chrome everywhere.

We took a day to visit the William J. Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock. This was a fascinating – and educational – insight into eight years of White House/ American history. Our guided tour lasted close to 90 minutes and we spent another hour or so perusing exhibits on our own. We admired a striking replica of the Oval Office, with elegant red-and-white striped loveseats for visitors. I was even Secretary of Energy for a minute or two, sitting at the cabinet table. And, yes, there was a reference to Monica, briefly making the point that Bill had been cleared of inappropriate behavior by Congress (or, at least, not impeached).

The building was some urban renewal project, too. It's built on the south shore of the Arkansas River (which is navigable from its confluence with the Mississippi to Tulsa, OK., with a series of locks) and is surrounded by acres of grass and parkland. Plenty of room for a second library to President Hillary,



Eureka Springs, in a remote corner of Northern Arkansas, has a number of well-preserved Victoria buildings.



Baseball, museums, food and drink



The Oark Café, not far from Little Rock, opened in 1890 and claims to be the oldest continuously-operating business in the state.

too, should that be necessary!

Before Bill's library was built, this was just another inner-city disaster (think Detroit). The soil was heavily polluted; it was trucked away by the ton and replaced, and three levels of government were involved in the remediation. We enjoyed a refined lunch in the library restaurant. It's called simply 42 (political

junkies will know that Clinton was president #42, sandwiched between Bush Sr. at 41 and Bush Jr. at 43).

We spent parts of a couple of days down the road from the timeshare in Hot Springs. This had been a quite a place in the 1920s, but now seemed well past its best-before date.

Before World War II, Hot Springs

was an important spring training venue for major league baseballers (Babe Ruth, among others, was a regular visitor. Al Capone stayed there for a while, too) With only a few exceptions, these guys played hard by day, chased women and liquid refreshments by night – and then took the mineral waters next morning in an attempt to recover.



Branson music scene calls for a stop

The main street has five big bath buildings today, but only one is still operating. One now doubles as the Visitor Center for Hot Springs National Park; we walked around inside and enjoyed an informative, self-guided tour and video. The town looked, to be polite, tired. Will the bath buildings be preserved – or even renovated? Can someone bring back the town’s glory days?

But it was soon to start heading home – or, at least, heading for Branson, MO., so we could then start heading home. En route, we stayed in Fayetteville, one of America’s fastest-growing cities, and stopped in Eureka Springs, in the far north of the state (lots of elegant old Victorian buildings), before crossing Peel Lake on a ferry (just a barge propelled by a tiny tug tied alongside) and into Missouri. (We rode through 13 states on our 29 days away: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, Kansas and Nevada).

Pre-ride research had told us plenty about the music scene in Branson. However, it was both bigger and better than we’d expected; we were there three days, but it could easily have been ten). The city styles itself as the country music capital of the world and this is easy to believe. There are about 50 musical theatres; more seats than Broadway; three shows a day at some locations – at



At the Clinton presidential library in Little Rock, you can relive the history of the 1990s – and imagine dining at a White House state dinner.



Million Dollar Quartet the hot ticket

1000, 1400 and 2000 - and clones of Waylon and Willie, Patsy and Hank, Elvis and dozens of others singing those country songs some of us can never get too much of. Average ticket price in town is around \$35, a fraction of what you'd pay in, say, Las Vegas.

Of course, there would be more Johnny Cash clones. I reckoned the best copycat was a guy with the stage name of Jackson Cash (real name Jack Quist). He was singing twice a day beside WalMart in the Branson Mall, which had been seriously damaged by a tornado in February, 2012, and had apparently been the focus of endless stalling by the insurance companies involved before repairs were finally completed a few weeks ago.

Jackson Cash told us that he was a cocaine baby. He never knew his

father and was adopted as a child by a Utah couple who raised him. He always dreamed of singing, but, like his mother, soon fell into a life of drug overdosing and alcohol addiction. (He's no relation to Johnny, but claims to have met him in rehab. in Nashville in the early 1970s). He says he's been clean for several years now. But he has a seriously damaged liver and needs a \$53,000 drug to extend his life. At 62, he has three years to await until Medicare pays for the medication at age 65. He recently married (for the sixth time, according to some reports). But he sure can sing. With his guitar and some canned accompaniment in the background, he was the equal of any Johnny Cash wannabe I've heard.

The hottest show in town seemed to be the Million Dollar Quartet, playing at a new theatre a few miles

out of town and apparently financed in part by Lawrence Welk. This celebrates the night in December, 1956, when Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, had a jam session at the recording studio of Sun Records (which helped launch all four careers). This was really a Broadway show and there was some terrific music, but I didn't enjoy it any more than poor, struggling Jackson Cash on his makeshift stage in the mall.

Branson also has a museum to the ill-fated Titanic (complete with "iceberg."). It came highly recommended, but we reckoned the \$28 admission charge was a bit rich. (The ship model towers over the main street, its funnels visible for hundreds of yards). And there were amusement parks, magic shows, and outlet malls.

To be continued

Club 2016 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Saturday, August 6, 2016	Monthly Gathering	Pioneer House, Duncan
Sunday, August 7, 2016	Victoria Vintage Motorcycle Show	Western Speedway
August 11 to 14, 2016	43rd Stanley Stomp Rally	Grandjean, ID
August 18 to 21, 2016	Hotsprings Rally	Nakusp, BC
Sunday, August 28, 2016	Club BBQ	Chez Conrad
Saturday, Sept 3, 2016	Monthly Gathering	Oak & Carriage, Duncan
Sunday, Sept 18, 2016	Monthly Ride	Port Renfrew / Cowichan Loop
October, 2016	BMW RA National Rally	
Sunday, October 2, 2016	Monthly Gathering	The Crooked Goose
Saturday, October 15, 2016	Annual Meeting	TBD