

## TRAVELOGUE 2 - LAKBAYAN TRIP TO YELLOWSTONE

I wrote up the first installment while the van was en route from Yellowstone to the Tetons (the laptop was plugged into a power inverter), and I emailed it out at the Teton hotel. TonyN immediately commented that the photo of the Milky Way should also be included, and what I had identified as Saturn really was Jupiter. So here is the photo provided by TonyN of the Milky Way, taken by his Canon pro model DSLR 5D2, with a tripod, using 30 second exposure at F4 opening. I also attempted to duplicate it with my Nikon DSLR at similar settings, but I had no tripod, and the results were pitiful.



The drive from Bryce Canyon to Yellowstone the following morning was a whole day affair, about 600 miles, which Mapquest indicated would take about 9 hours, if non-stop driving. TonyN said he had no trouble driving his Mercedes AMG all the way, and we agreed he'd lead the way as I follow in the van. The road to Yellowstone was about 80% through Interstate 15, or I-15, a four lane divided highway. The first leg was from Bryce Canyon to I-15, a picturesque winding road that had fantastic views. Once on I-15, it was quite a contrast. See the two photos below: a road archway in Bryce, and a stretch of I-15. Parts of the

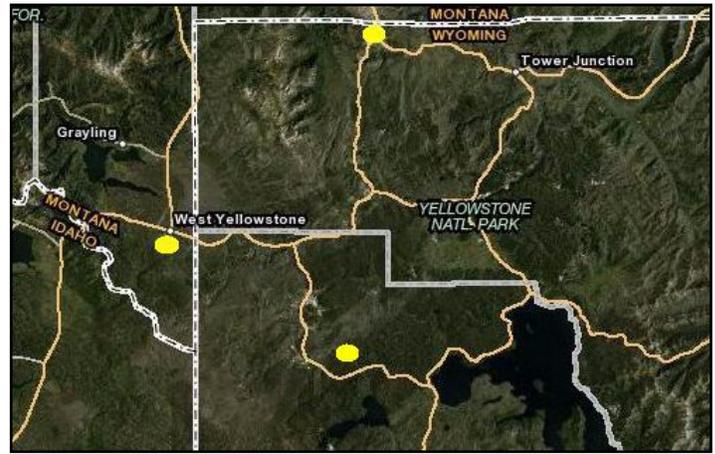


Interstate I-15 run through high desert, especially on the Nevada side, hence the look of desolateness, but yet pristine beauty. Surprisingly, the route cuts through a corner of Arizona. Though none of us were illegals, we all felt the feeling of trepidation when driving through the odd 20 miles or so in that xenophobic state.

Another item that struck me was that TonyN's big house in north-west Las Vegas has always been a gathering place of some many of his friends and family. We were there last year, and so have been the other Lakbayanis. And the street address seems so apropos, "Geese Gathering Street". Does that make me now a goose?

TonyN is a fast driver, and rightfully so, with his Mercedes AMG. But I also like fast driving, and even way back in our Lakbay trip to France where each of us drove a rented Renault van, and convoyed, we made good time. Fortunately, the van TonyE rented was a new Towne & Country with automatic 6 speed transmission which shifted effortlessly as I followed TonyN on I-15 at an average speed of 75-80 mph, sometimes hitting 100 mph. Posted speed limits were 65, or 75 and in certain stretches were 80 mph. Most drivers allow themselves a 10 mph over-the-limit speed, and this seems to be tolerated by the cops. It was exhilarating driving, especially since we didn't see any cops on the way north. But on the way back, that was a totally different story. They saw us.

How I wished this had been North Dakota where the daytime posted speed limit is "Safe Speed", or the German Autobahn which is unlimited.



Map above shows part of the 2.2 million acre Yellowstone National Park. It is huge. The three yellow dots above indicate where we spent most of our time. The two upper dots are about 50 miles apart. Our hotel at West Yellowstone at the Park's West Entrance is the left dot. We spanned 3 states. And in between, there were numerous interesting spots to rest, snap photos, picnic, and enjoy nature.

The park actually is a huge caldera, or crater of a volcano. So the area is dotted with hot springs, geysers, and other oddities of nature. The North Entrance, on the top dot, had the most attractions, with hot springs, museums, restaurants, etc. Old Faithful, the famous geyser, was our destination the second day, shown as the bottom dot.



On the first day into the park, we hit a long line of traffic. TonyE, having visited before, was surprised because it was not anymore the summer peak season. Well, it was two bison holding up the traffic as shown above right. The lone bison was at another location. Later, we found that there are countless wildlife in the park roaming free. One just has to be careful about grizzly and black bears, and moose



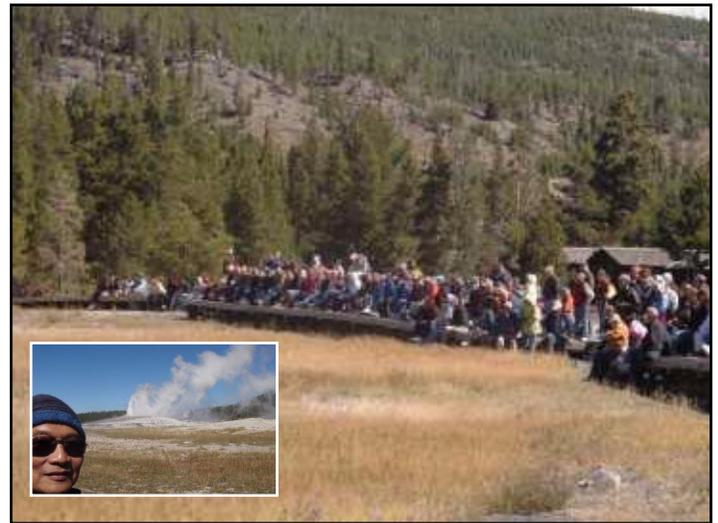
We had a fine dinner at a popular restaurant that night; all ordered bison steak. Next time we saw a bison on the roadside and wondered whether we should stop for more pictures, we'd say, no need, we ate it already.

Below, yours truly posing at the Morris-Mammoth Fault, flanked by the calcium carbonate deposits with their steaming fissures, and the famous tall, hardened accretion called Liberty Cap, misnamed I think.





It is safe to step out for photo shoots if it is just a mule-deer.



Danny & Jimmy straddle the Continental Divide, an imaginary ridge meandering the crests of the Rocky Mountains, such that any rainfall to the left eventually drains to the Pacific and to the right the Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico. I had a thought of passing some water on each side, but that would be totally unacceptable, and illegal, even without a rest room.



In upper photo, the crowd sits on benches around Old Faithful, waiting for the next show. Then after about four minutes, lower photo, it is all over. The cycle repeats itself. In between, we had lunch at the Old Faithful Lodge.



Aside from the usual tourist trappings of shopping, dining, shutterbugging and sightseeing, the other big item was eating. Master chef TonyN is shown above grilling dinner. Since it was very cold, we ate inside the hotel room. We deliberately cooked lots of food so the leftovers could be carted in the cooler for picnics and snacks on the way back.



At Old Faithful, the geyser that spurts steam like clockwork about every 50 minutes or so. That's Mon & Mimi Pasicolan, Tony Estrera, Mercy & Jimmy Abad, Tony & Bernie Nievera, Lisa & Danny Gil. This was about noon, still quite cold.

But even before we drove to Old Faithful, we did not forget our Sunday obligations. There was a church near the hotel with a scheduled 10:30 mass. When we got there, it was a full congregation, mainly visitors of course, and the person at the altar was a nun. We overheard snippets that they don't have a regular priest, so when the nun continued on with the Gospel, then her homily, we were most curious about whether this would be the first mass we heard with a woman priestess. Well, she skipped the consecration and went directly to communion. We found out later this was a pre-consecrated mass.

The next day was even more interesting: we met a Filipino priest, Visayan at that, at the posh enclave of Jackson Hole Wyoming, the "new" Aspen Colorado where the well-heeled go for skiing and is home to Cheney and other such luminaries in the corporate world, politics, and entertainment.

Allocating expenses and paying for them amongst four couples and an individual proved not at all formidable. I made a spreadsheet with prorated ratios on who shares what of which expenses, and I entered the data as we went along. Anybody could pick up the tab for hotels, gas, meals, groceries, etc. and even advance payments, like the two speeding tickets tacked to TonyN and one to me. If I agreed to, all these would be shared proportionately by all.