

JOURNAL OF ROADSIDE GEMS, ADVENTURES, OBSERVATIONS, TIDBITS

Austin, Texas PAII Conference Trip

Professional Association of Innkeepers International Conference

Trip – March 5 to March 13. Trip miles – 1,546

Priority Holiday Inn Express (HIE) lodging

Left farm at 6:45AM. Followed MO-13 south thru Clinton. Near Osceola, saw a roadside stand that read, “Moo Burger barn,” with black and white spots, and then passed Fuzzy’s Bait shop and the same old billboard that reads “Go To www.planeturine.com.” Off MO-82 when going past Roscoe, discovered the town has Roscoe’s Steak House and Saloon. Just north of El Dorado Springs we saw a metal bison sculpture next to the highway. On US-52 heading for Nevada we passed the state’s Osage Village State Historic Site and nearby saw a soft armor company with the company’s armadillo on the building wall. When passing Carthage saw a church by name of Bykota, not sure what religion. Near Joplin off I-44 saw a sign for Duenwag, MO (pop 134).

OKLAHOMA (Towns are mentioned, but not the word Oklahoma)

We stopped at the Miami Tourism Center for Okla. about 10:15AM. 62 degrees at I-44 to US69, warmest we’ve seen in months. At the US-69 exit from the turnpike, there is a gigantic Indian statue at the intersection either welcoming folks to Okla or advertising a truck stop. Couldn’t believe there were 5,235 acres for sale on Hiway 69 out of Big Cabin. I had to ask Bill how big that ranch was in miles! There is a buffalo meat store in Adair, which we went thru at 11:09AM. At the Okla. welcoming center, Miami, I tried to memorize a chili recipe from a displayed cookbook: Buffalo ground meet, cumin, cilantro, pinto beans, and only add chili powder. Try that recipe, didn’t memorize amounts of each.

Lunch was at McDonald’s at Chouteau, where I heard my first Okla. accent. Then, we passed the cute named Okla. town of Mazie; not much in Mazie, but it sure looks old-time Okla. from hiway. When we passed Wagoner, saw this sign, “Home of Gatorhydes.” Surely, that’s a real business. And, must give the cuteness award to the name of a beauty shop in Latoka: Southern Dove Beauty Shop.

Oh yes, if you are familiar with country western music – next town south of Wagoner is Porter. Yes, there is a real renaissance park in Muskogee of all places. Saw first oil well near the Honey Springs Civil War battlefield on US-69. Checotah is the home of many world champion cowboys, but didn’t get the names. Soon we were leaving the Muskogee (Creek) Nation and into Choctaw Nation. We soon saw a sign for Bradford cattle, which Bill thinks is a breed between Herefords and Brahmas. Three more gems along the hiway include: Kiowa by 1:59PM, String Town by 2:45PM (this town is a tiny town with a mining, strip mining from the sides of the Kiamichi hills, plus a tiny casino). Even went across the Muddy Boggy River...it looked muddy. Oh yes, the Church of Living Water is in Muskogee.

In the Durant area, the Choctaw Senior Center special was Indian taco. Nearby we saw the Big Foot (country style) barbeque; just past it was an 8ft plus plastic palm tree in somebody's front yard. Maybe the folks were thinking of Florida and only made it to Durant. We decided to try our luck at the new Choctaw resort casino. Sometimes, first goers to a casino gets a free buffet or money to gamble. We lucked out goood. Never used our money! Oh yes, Durant's city symbol is a sailboat – Lake Texoma is located near Durant.

Fancy casino, really fancy. We got our cards and were given \$10 free play each. Bill soon ran our winnings high enough for two expensive buffet dinners, and then I met Todd, our waiter from Monroe, La. Bill ate prime rib and Todd talked about Louisiana while I kept asking Todd how I should eat crawfish with my crab legs (which I have mastered). Crawfish eating lessons were a failure. Made a mess, so quit and headed back to buffet for prime rib.

TEXAS (towns are mentioned, but not the word Texas)

Saw my first spring daisy plants at the HIE we stayed at in Durant. After Durant, we were on our way to the mecca of all Willie Nelson fans, Carl's Corner. We crossed the Red River and headed into Texas while listening to Willie Nelson on our XM radio network stationed called Willie's Place.

Shortly after entering Texas saw a billboard saying, "Real gambling in Louisiana." And, saw my first and only peanut shop and cowboy shop along the road. Also, saw a big green lizard, about 6ft. long looking like it was climbing up a building in Denison.

At Sherman saw a big Confederate flag hanging from a trailer as we were traveling along the Buck Owens freeway. First Texas oil well spotted in Sherman. As we went along, saw the biggest quarter horse ranch I've ever seen – fancy fences for the horses as well as passed a bit and spurs shop in the area. Didn't realize what the Midwest Mud Co. was in Gainesville. Not mud, but a special mud-like product to lubricate oil wells is what I saw. The ChippyAuto Mart is out of business there. The I-35 we are on is the same as goes to Kansas City. And, another big billboard that read, "Mugsy would never charged you to gamble in Louisiana." Since no casinos in Texas, seems like Louisiana is trying to compete with Oklahoma's Indian casinos.

Other signs of interest: the Big Fatty's barbeque in Valley View which brags "home of the gigantic farty burrito." What can one ponder in Ponder, Tex? There is a Wimpy's Pizzeria in Sanger, Tex., which we passed on I-35 west for Fort Worth. The immense Texas Motor Speedway is along this way.

We arrived in Fort Worth about 10AM from Durant. We went to the Sid Richardson and Amon Carter museums to see western art – Remington and Russell paintings & bronzes. After leaving those museums, we turned a corner and suddenly saw artists making a life-size longhorn steer into a chia pet (only in Fort Worth). Downtown Fort Worth is very pretty, a busy downtown, brick streets, and many businesses and friendly Texans.

Interesting newspaper story: Go to Ft. Worth Star Telegram, March 5, and look at www.startelegram.com for feature about a rescued baby squirrel and how a lady trained the baby squirrel to pose for pictures to help troubled children. Real cute photos.

After those two museums, we found the city's science museum which was packed with visitors and waiting lines of more visitors, so we toured the Cowgirl Hall of Fame because it had a Georgia O'Keeffe exhibit including a display of camp life in various New Mexico badlands. This exhibit centered on her black and pink mesa paintings.

Fort Worth has a downtown complex of museums and fair grounds (where a huge flea market was going on), but was told that 8,000 attended the first opening of the new science museum. We didn't know what the attraction was, but saw a lot of kids around standing in long lines.

After all that culture in Fort Worth, we headed for more culture in the middle of nowhere – home of Willie Nelson! Carl's Corner, Willie's entertainment center, at the intersection of two highways – that's it. The Corner complex includes a big bar, lots of Lone Star, a great restaurant for chicken fried steak, a big gift shop, a broadcasting room, and other features more for truck drivers. We ate a late lunch of chicken fried steak and walked around staring at photos and photos of Willie Nelson. Also, the Sirius/XM radio network station known as "Willie's Place" is broadcast from the auditorium down the hallway from the bar. Can you believe a Constitution Party was meeting at Carl's Corner and the guest speaker was a staunch Constitution party spokesperson, the sheriff of the county! Bill did visit some with the large crowd members of the party, but Bill is not that fond of the Constitution party.

Bill took a picture of me as I stood right under the huge wall portrait of Willie Nelson while holding a Lone Star. I could see those Willie Nelson fans I know green-eyed with envy of me there and not them! Yes, I toasted to Willie as I drank my Lone Star! The picture is on my Facebook page.

After "Willie's Place" we went on to Hillsboro, and enjoyed the evening touring downtown Hillsboro. As in most southern towns, including much of Texas, a nice Confederate soldier statue stands in front of the court house. Downtown had typical wide western streets, live oaks were planted in front of all the buildings for shade, some buildings were vacant, and saw the oldest pharmacy in Texas, the D.B. Bond pharmacy.

There is a political sign that intrigued us until we figured it out: The sign read, "Fire Chet – Hire Dave." Very direct wording, so did some asking around at the HIE and Bill figured it out – both politicians are Democrats, but Chet didn't vote for the president's health reform and Dave would if elected. Good political cat fight. I think Chet won the primary.

When we left Fort Worth, traffic was not too bad on a Saturday, but boy were we warned about Austin. Think Los Angeles traffic with four levels of freeway, above and below.

As we neared Austin, we began to notice Czech heritage. Migrations of Czech pioneers came into Texas and this is one the areas. Ethnic names were noticed around Waco. Also, noticed a bar sign as we went thru Waco, "Buzzard Billy's Bar." I was sort of surprised because Waco is home of Baylor University (Southern Baptist). Plus, this site is a company making dominoes – www.dominoes.com.

In Lorena there is a Bubba business and a Cowboy Social Club. At Troy there is an Inner Space Cavern plus a snake farm. And, must not forget the Horny Toad Harley Davidson shop. Onward after that in Salado is the Horse Feather Furniture store. And, after that is the Salt Lick Barbeque which boasts, "You can smell our pits for miles."

Describing traffic – tough, extensive, fast, darting in and out of lanes, and real struggle staying in traffic going fast to find downtown Austin, so we could get off the freeway frenzy to tour the majestic State Capitol in pink granite. We went to the lobby of the capitol and looked up to about four huge stories to the central portion of the capitol's dome. Many visitors were there. Also, we went to the State Museum, which is a story of Texas independence and the Mexican conflicts. We stayed a long time at the State Museum where I learned Roy Orbison was from Wink. Also, I was going to learn salsa dancing at the State Museum, but Bill wouldn't join me, so I could only watch. The State Museum had polish flooring with horse hoof indents. Very fun to walk on. Lots of exhibits, very impressed. It was like a circular museum. All three floors were like walkways around down and up. Very clever.

After the Capitol and Museum, we went to the grocery store before checking at our Candlewood Suites, which was an extended stay facility: Free laundry, take out your own trash, and no room service, but you could go to desk and get anything you wanted like fresh towels. The grocery store was called Whole Foods. It was crowded, no parking, and soon we learned it was organic. I went in thinking finding milk was no problem, and I was going to get some Lone Star. Milk was whole, organic, and heavy butterfat. Tasted so goood. The Lone Star I asked for and sure got some stares from other shoppers. Beer wasn't organic, but available at the very bottom shelf of organic sodas and other non-alcoholic drinks. The store was an adventure trying to shop in a crowd, tiny price labels, and items I had never seen before. Think about the fun of being in a store totally organic. Couldn't understand labels, understand half the products, and was glared at for carrying out a six pack of beer!

The PAII conference began on Monday, but I had several hours free while Bill was in his first session. With fear of driving in "that kind" of traffic, I headed for the public bus stop and decided to tour Austin on a public bus. The Univ. of Texas makes Univ. of Missouri look like small fry. The buildings, etc. go on for blocks and blocks. Parts of Austin's downtown is college businesses, including bars, night clubs, coffee houses, and "funky" stores as one conference goer told me. However, what was really impressive was how every student riding the bus I rode thanked the bus driver when they departed. Monroe was our bus driver, and he told me some sights along the way. Good feeling about Texas folks.

The Conference attendees went to many sessions by professional speakers who detailed new trends in the B&B business, internet opportunities, marketing, and the interest in blogging and using twitter and facebook. I went to some serious sessions as well as “how to clean” and do more gourmet baking sessions. Also, I can fancy fold a napkin. Don’t let these just mentioned sessions fool you, the serious sessions really dealt new approaches, marketing, connecting with guests, and much more. And, there were “more serious” sessions I fell asleep in because I already knew the subjects. Bad girl.

Sessions were every day, lunch provided, but the highlight of the event was 300 attendees invited to a barbeque downtown Austin in the evening with two-step country music, huge barbeque, and the lights of downtown – yes, the term Austin city lights is real and beautiful. Small world moment – a security guard, named Jerry, and I talked about the downtown lights of Austin, when he said he was born and raised in Raytown, Mo., and he knew all about Warrensburg. He asked about Kansas City, and we sure had a good time sharing history of Raytown, etc. The conference was over on Thursday about 4PM, so we packed up and headed for the next night in Pflugerville. However, I must reflect a little about the hotel where the conference was held – 240 rooms and a glass, floor to ceiling, observation elevator that went up what seemed like 20 floors (really only 8), and ride was fun over-looking all those tiny people in the hotel lobby!

The entertainment for the opening of the conference was music by a 15-yr.-old professional fiddle player named Ruby Jane. She has played with Willie Nelson. Her music was old-time bluegrass and so professional, I was right there in the first row watching her show – she was accompanied by a mandolin and a guitar player. I have heard about her before, and was so surprised to see her play in person. Go to www.therubyjaneshow.com.

Also, one of the conference speakers gave a humorous program about how to handle stress at a B&B. We were to put on clown red noses and try to let go stress by talking to those sitting next to us. That went well, but I had another idea: Why don’t I wear my clown red nose (and Bill’s) as earrings. So, I walked around wearing my new earrings! Got a lot of laughs and some B&B owners began telling their stories about guests, mostly humorous. I did stir up some fun, and my red earrings stayed on quite a while.

We traveled home basically the same way we came, except through Dallas instead of Ft. Worth. Traffic wasn’t bad because Bill timed it to avoid morning rush hour and the noon lunch crowd. Stopped at Pryor OK to visit with Roberta and her husband, Phil. Roberta I met at the local Historical Society when we were travelling in Okla. during last year’s anniversary. Roberta is a professional artist with no formal training, but her artwork is outstanding in oil, watercolor, and pencil. She specializes in scenery, people, and dogs/cats. Roberta also has a white baby grand piano, which she does play, and she even played Scott Joplin ragtime for us. What a fun evening with them. We went out for supper, and Bill had his last Okla. chicken fried steak until we go to Okla. again.

Our diet for the trip was barbeque, Tex-Mex., chicken fried steak, Lone Star beer, and one half-gallon of butter fat rich organic whole milk. Yum, yum. Of course, the casino buffet is not included, nor all the chocolate chip cookies I made for the trip!

Coming back saw basically the same “gems” along the road. Stopped at Okla., Tex., Mo., tourism info centers, so if any of you want travel brochures just let me know.

Roadside “gems” in conclusion: Outside of McAlester, Okla., saw life-size statues of several longhorn cattle being driven by two cowboys on horses (also statues) along the hiway. North of Atoka, Okla. is a mailbox in shape of a hand gun. Durant, Okla. is home of the national clogging team champions. And, in Dallas, there will be a conference of the greatest hunters in the world. Outside of Waxahachie, Tex., is a sign that reads: “Stop vegetable abuse.” There’s an Italian festival in Italy, Tex. There is a town called Godly, Tex. We heard on a radio, while enjoying the Texas accent from callers, that one caller had “sugar gliders” for sale. Took us a while to figure out that sugar gliders were something like flying squirrels. Billboard near Austin says, “Everything is bigger in Texas.” I believe it. Couldn’t believe I saw a “stretched” Hummer going down a hiway.

The PAII conference was very serious, but many B&B goers talked about their sometimes “strange” guests, such as the B&B host who delivered breakfast to a guest wearing a bunny suit, so the B&B host wondered if the husband was the Easter egg. And, an interesting new amenity at one resort is how a guest can have a pet in their room, if they aren’t bringing a pet: Goldfish by name of Precious and Zorba are pets in the room for some guests at an eastern resort called Four Seasons, a \$300 night place. If a guest brings a pet, like a cat, then a cat bed is prepared for the cat with toy. Don’t think we’ll get into that

Sandra