IN THE SHADOW OF HOGAN'S MOUNTAIN

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Travel Experiences Not in the Travel Guide

For those of us who travel in our senior years, we often find ourselves in unique or humorous situations. Some are dangerous, some are self-created, and some were just fun to be there when they happened. See if you can match some of these experiences during our travels.

Interaction with living things from the animal kingdom often causes vacation consternation. Many people enjoy hiking and other outdoor activities as part of their vacations. Who can forget the mosquitos, bees, and ticks that created irritations? However, bigger animals most likely created lasting memories. While traveling near Rainbow Lake in Alaska, we stopped to get gas and use the facilities. The facilities were in a restaurant where something had to be purchased to use the rest rooms. We bought coffee and enjoyed it while watching a mama moose and her two offspring cross the road and go under the Alaska Pipeline. The moose sighting offered a special reward for the cost of the coffee.

While touring the Parker Ranch on the Big Island of Hawaii, a donkey enjoyed a meal of my wife's straw hat that had blown into his fenced area. We had another donkey experience while walking on a Grand Canyon trail. We soon realized donkeys have the right-of-way and choose to walk on the wall side of the canyon. This leaves hikers to move nearer the sheer cliffs of the canyon and experience a scary walk. A word to the wise for hikers on Yosemite trails is to read warning posters at trail heads. It is quite an eerie feeling to finish your hike and then read the poster indicating mountain lion sighting of the trail the day before. We wondered why we had only seen one other couple and they did not speak English.

When we first entered Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, my wife began looking for the perfect picture. We came upon a buffalo in a field adjoining the highway. After exiting the car, she soon realized there was no fence separating her from the buffalo when it snorted and began pawing the ground. Then she asked the man next to her how fast he could run? His response was "faster than you I hope!" As she slipped away from the vicinity of the buffalo, she dropped her lens cover. I refused to retrieve the lens cover she dropped during her speedy return to the vehicle. On a river tour in Belize, my wife showed significant skepticism that an alligator was real because the boat pilot spotted it so far away on the shore. The boat skipper heard the skepticism by my wife and turned her side of the boat near the alligator that promptly snapped its jaws and swam directly under the boat. She screamed and almost dropped her camera in the water. The boat passengers got a good laugh.

If you have not experienced a snake encounter in a canoe, you can consider yourself lucky. The question on the New River was whether to abandon the canoe or try to remove the snake from the bottom of the canoe. We had to make this choice when inadvertently coasting under some overhanding limbs. Another piece of advice is to know the animals you encounter. While visiting a family member in Florida, a young relative almost allowed a skunk to enter their home with the family cats. They didn't need a stinking kitty in their living room.

And finally, if you don't watch where you step at the Stones of Stennis on the Orkney Islands in Scotland, you are likely to step in the deposits from the south end of a north bound sheep. And if you don't clean your shoes well, it creates a false positive reading for chemicals at the TSA Checkpoint at Heathrow Airport in London.

Issues with directions and vehicle malfunctions create some unique opportunities. In Tucson, Arizona, we knew we were directionally impaired with the Garmin, when the roadside sign said "Mexico, ten miles." In Montreal, we found that a subway map is not very helpful in finding a hotel on the St. Lawrence Seaway. We lost some trust in the airline in Boseman, Montana when the plane was stopped on the runway and the co-pilot came back through the plane and slammed the back door. In Death Valley, we learned the importance of not putting a foot on the windshield of an air-conditioned car when the door is opened. Thank goodness for rental car insurance. It is also sad to watch an old couple try to flag down a cruise ship as it sails out of port (Thankfully not us!). They unfortunately learned their lesson that when the captain says the ship sails at a certain time, it is important to be on board before the gangplank is removed.

You never know who you will meet on your travels. While sitting on a large rock with a stranger at Yavapai Point at the Grand Canyon, we struck up a conversation as our wives jockeyed for the best color sunset picture of the Grand Canyon. We were talking about our wives' enthusiasm for the best pictures. The man said, I would have to overlook his wife's behavior since they were from North Carolina. I was soon to find out that they lived directly across the lake from our home and that our wives shared the same first name. While walking in Wailea, Maui, my wife recognized Magic Johnson. I sat on a bench with a man while my wife sought a picture. Much to my surprise, my seatmate turned out to be Dave Winfield, former N.Y. Yankee baseball player.

Finally, the pink hotel high above Kona, Hawaii offered us a unique experience. Our travel book told us that there was a unique experience waiting for hotel visitors. We will never forget the experience using the facilities reached via a catwalk with a view of the Pacific Ocean. It is also advisable to carry change to use the bus station facilities in Inverness near Loch Ness. Otherwise, one must sneak under the turnstiles. In fact, paying for restroom use was a common occurrence in many countries. The pay-for-use bathrooms in the center of a Paris street near Notre Dame that sanitized after each use were some of the most unique we have encountered.

So, now it is your turn to remember some of your unique travel experiences. Get out that picture album or open your files from the I Cloud and enjoy some of those memories of past travels.

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