

TRAVELING BY RV IN MEXICO

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OREGON'S DUNES

Playing in the Sand

PICKIN' IN THE SQUARE

Music of the Ozarks

SCENIC FLAMING GORGE

Rainbows to Remember



Chasing Rainbows at Flaming



Mark and Emily Fagan

By Emily Fagan

Perched between Utah and Wyoming, Flaming Gorge is a striking ravine filled with the colors of two of earth's primary elements: fire and water. The heart of the canyon—where the vivid reds of the steep canyon walls and the rich blues of the river and sky are most dramatic—is in the Utah portion of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area.

Long before we arrived there, however, my husband, Mark, and I were smitten with the stunning views that lined the scenic byway as we traveled south along Wyoming State Route 530, on the west side of the gorge that holds the Green River and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir.

We soon discovered this entire area is loaded with magnificent vistas, plentiful camping options, big game sightings and scenic drives. Our first stop was in the Lucerne Valley, where there is a lovely campground next to the water. Taking our bikes out to explore the area, we were amazed to discover a herd of pronghorn antelope that had taken up residence in the campground. They grazed on grasses between the RVs and lolled in the shade of the trees, calmly watching us and the other campers. Glancing upward, we realized winged creatures were keeping an eye on us too: an osprey peered over the edge of her sizable nest and quietly watched our every move.

Summer Storms

Summertime in this area brings dazzling thunderstorms—and accompanying rainbows. Throughout our visit, we were treated to some of the most vicious downpours and beautiful rainbows we have seen. We even saw a double rainbow shooting out of the sky into the river in the Lucerne Valley. There had to be a pot of gold at the end of that rainbow, but it was out in the river underwater somewhere!

Just south of Lucerne Valley, we drove the paved Sheep Creek Geological Loop, one of several scenic backways that detour off the scenic byways encircling the region. The narrow, winding road took us past fantastic twisted and craggy rock formations that jutted into the sky on either side of the road. These crazy shapes are the aboveground evidence of the Uinta Fault that runs for 100 miles along the north slope of the Uinta Mountains.

Sheep Creek Geological Loop is a great spot to see bighorn sheep, and while my eyes were glued toward the sky as I marveled at the towering rock walls around us, Mark kept his eyes at ground level in hopes of sighting sheep. Sure enough, after we emerged

back onto the main road, he spotted two bighorn sheep grazing contentedly. They paused for just a moment to check us out, but soon went back to munching the grass by the side of the road.

Lucerne Valley is lush with farm fields, and we stopped at a scenic overlook for lunch to take in the view. Storm clouds gathered in the distance, and before long another summer storm sent



Mark and Emily Fagan

A rainbow can be seen above the farms of Lucerne Valley.

us scurrying for cover. Within minutes another glorious rainbow filled the sky in the distance. Unlike the crisp rainbow we had seen curving into the lake the day before, this one was wide and soft, painting the sky in pastel hues.

Scenic Climb

Following the Flaming Gorge Scenic Byway south, we had to negotiate a series of climbing switchbacks. The slow sweeping turns offered better and better views as we climbed higher until we reached the spectacular Sheep Creek Overlook that takes in the whole mid-section of Flaming Gorge. Rain kept us at the overlook for a few hours (we didn't want to descend the backside of this pass on wet roads), but the view was so lovely we didn't mind the delay one bit.

The most awe-inspiring views at Flaming Gorge are at the national recreation area's visitor center. The Green River takes a sharp 90-degree turn just below the center's windows, and a series of wide, flat rocks invite tourists to get fabulous photos of themselves with this incredible backdrop behind them. What a place to take your Christmas photo, complete with the red of the rocks and the green of the soft pines that grow in between!

John Wesley Powell named Flaming Gorge when he went on his 1869 summer expedition down the Green River. As you stare at the breathtaking views today, the name he chose for the area seems perfect.

The Canyon Rim hike, which heads east from the visitors center, lures young and old alike on a path that follows the contour of the rim. Daring hikers can venture onto the rock promontories that are sprinkled along the way. Our cameras were running overtime as we walked, skipped and hopped along the rocks on the rim.

The Red Canyon Campground is situated along this hike, and is a great place to settle in for a while. By staying there, it is possible to do the Canyon Rim hike both at dawn and at dusk, seeing the gorge lit up from both east and west and watching throughout the day as the light plays on the rocky crevices of the canyon and on the water far below.

We had been excited to see bighorn sheep at the Sheep Creek Geological Loop, but that was nothing compared with what we saw on our arrival at the campground. A good-sized herd of bighorn sheep had been hanging out there for quite a while, and they weren't shy in the least. We took endless photos of the group as they stood staring at us. After a while, the youngest sheep got tired of waiting around for their parents, and lied down on the pavement!

Engineering Marvel

When John Wesley Powell floated down the Green River 124 years ago, it was a natural river that flowed south from the Wind River Mountain Range near Pinedale, Wyoming. However, in 1964 the Flaming Gorge Dam was erected, creating the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and Flaming Gorge Power Plant. On one of our last days in the gorge we took a tour of the dam. I find the engineering behind all the dams in the West to be absolutely staggering, and Flaming Gorge was no different. As with the other more famous dams, the erection of this dam required re-routing the river and pouring tons and



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Summer storms bring numerous rainbows to Flaming Gorge.

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Mark and Emily Fagan

The Canyon Rim hike leads to extraordinary views.

tons of concrete.

Our tour took us to the lowest level of the dam, past rooms full of 1960s-era equipment with gauges and knobs that seemed to have come off the Star Trek soundstage. Power is generated at the dam by taking water from the reservoir and passing it through three huge turbines that are coupled to generators. They produce enough electricity to power 50,000 homes. Some of the equipment has been upgraded since the initial installation, and one turbine that was installed in 1963 and replaced in 2005 is now on display for tourists.

A sign next to this turbine stated that during its 42 years of service, it had produced enough energy to power over a million households for a year, and 7.1 billion gallons of water had flowed through it. Numbers like these are hard to fathom, but the most impressive statistic we heard from our tour guide was that the concrete at the center of this dam will not be fully cured until the early 2060s, a full 100 years after it was poured!

We ended up staying for a week in this beautiful corner of the country, but we barely scratched the surface of all the things to do. We will return to explore the many hiking paths, mountain biking trails and the historic buildings of the Swett homestead that we somehow missed this time. However, a return trip will be a joy, and I know we will never get tired of the brilliant colors and majestic views that are in such abundance at Flaming Gorge. ■

Mark and Emily Fagan have been traveling full-time since 2007, and they share their stories and photos at roadslesstraveled.us.



Mark and Emily Fagan

A rainbow is captured at the Greendale overlook.



Oregon's Heceta Head Lighthouse has reopened to tourists after a two-year restoration.

Restored Lighthouse Reopens

A two-year project to restore the Heceta Head Lighthouse, 12 miles north of Florence, Oregon, has been completed at a cost of nearly \$1.6 million, and the lighthouse is again open for tours.

The lighthouse, originally built in 1893, is one of the most photographed lighthouses in the U.S. and has the brightest light on the Oregon coast. A team of 100 craftspeople undertook the restoration work, which included removing cement stucco that had sealed in moisture, installing new windows, repairing the lens rotating mechanism, and replacing and restoring the tower's metalwork and masonry. A \$1.27 million grant from the Federal Highway Administration helped pay for the work.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department closed the lighthouse in August 2011 and reopened it last month for tours from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. For information, visit oregonstateparks.org.

Washington Parks Offer Geocache Tour

To celebrate this year's 100th anniversary of Washington state parks, geocaches have been placed at points of interest in 100 state parks in a program called the State Parks Centennial GeoTour.

The state park system and the Washington State Geocaching Association collaborated on the program. The first participants to find 50 caches can earn a silver GeoCoin and the first 30 participants to find 100 caches can earn a gold Geo-Coin. A printable map, passport and other information can be found at parks.wa.gov/geocaching. Geocaching is a family-oriented activity where participants search for hidden containers, called geocaches, using a smartphone or GPS unit.

Thor Industries Expands

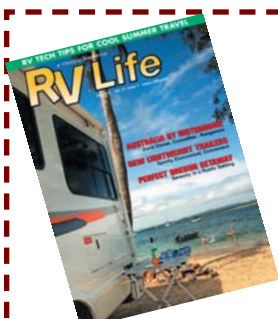
Thor Industries, the world's largest RV manufacturer, is expanding its operations by purchasing the production facilities in Wakarusa, Indiana, where Navistar built motorhomes.

The 150-acre property is currently occupied by Allied Specialty Vehicles, which bought Navistar's RV business, including the Monaco and Holiday Rambler brands, in May. Allied Specialty is selling the property because it is shifting all motorhome production to Decatur, Indiana, where it builds Fleetwood motorhomes. Thor will take over the property this summer.

Thor will use the facilities, which include nearly one million square feet of production space, to increase the manufacturing capacity of Thor Motor Coach. The property includes 35 paint booths, which will be used by Thor's Keystone RV subsidiary.

Meanwhile, Thor Industries also announced that Bob Martin, president and chief operating officer, has been given the added title of chief executive officer, succeeding Peter B. Orthwein, who will remain as executive chairman of the Board of Directors.

Martin, 43, is a former president of Keystone RV. Thor, which manufactures both RVs and commercial buses, had \$2.67 billion in



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