

Travelogue

On a Cross Country Drive in the US - 2004

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... I reached yesterday 4PM at Grand Rapids from New York via Chicago, drove down to Kalamazoo to deliver a talk at the Osthemo Library.

... The cross country drive was fascinating.

We started on 16 August 7AM. The previous day I flew from Detroit to LA after a one-day program at Troy. From LA we drove to Salt Lake City in Utah, the epicentre of Mormon branch of Christianity. They call themselves 'Latter Day Saints of Christ'. Has built fabulous temples all over the world and has 6 million adherents. We visited their temple and listened to the organ music in their acoustically perfect Tabernacle. We also went to see the salt lake, the world's largest inland body of salty water, sitting in a huge valley, deep in the Rocky Mountains. Salt Lake City is 36 miles east of the lake.

The Mormons, a persecuted religious minority, trudged all the way [2000 miles] from New York and Ohio to this God forsaken barren valley in the 1850-s on hand carts and horse drawn carts. What I found fascinating as well as intriguing in them was their youthful innocence, enthusiasm, cleanliness, but frightening secretiveness and mechanical orderliness. They also seem to have a fetish with white cloths.

It is interesting to study how America, the most advanced country, promotes such cult organizations based on incomprehensible and nonsensical creeds and beliefs. Our drive to Salt lake City was via Las Vegas, but no stop at this sin city. Las Vegas, if you see at night, is a city of dazzling lights, a wavy sea of diamonds, a vista of blinding fireworks ...

It was about 700 miles' drive, and we reached SLC at about 7 PM. The following morning, we were up at 6 AM and were ready to go by 7 AM to Jackson in Idaho, 600 miles to the North. This small city surrounded by mountains, like even a lamb in the bosom of a belle, is the base camp for those who visit Yellow Stone State Park. The drive to Jackson was fabulous. The deserts, valleys and the hills and mountains were otherworldly; they gave a me a eerie feeling, as though I trespassed into the land of ghosts and other disembodied pale spirits.

As you climb up a pass (Ghat) you feel sucked into a tunnel and then you are disgorged onto a vast plain of shrubs and cactuses to float on your wings.

From Idaho Falls 100 miles short of Jackson, we took a wrong turn and went 80 miles on the wrong track, before we realized that we were heading back to Salt Lake City. The mistake helped us to explore our way and take to a scenic route which was simply breath-taking. I couldn't believe my eyes that people lived in such heavenly places, unbeknown to the lusty beasts of the city, tucked away in the lap of beauty.

Jackson was on the other side of a mountain of 8000 feet elevation. It was dark, cold and drizzling, terrifyingly silent and lonely. We cut through the silent mist over a silvery river and on

our right was the smiling Jackson, waiting anxiously.

Next morning, we went to National Yellow Stone Park, in the state of Wyoming. Almost 100 miles north of Jackson city. We passed by the Grand Teton mountain ranges, a garland of rugged snowy granite spires, like hoods of aroused serpents, rising vertically from the flat stomach of the long valley.

The Yellow Stone Park must be about 1000 square miles of which 200 square mile area is full of sulphur. Geysers, sulphur mixed with water shoot up 100 to 200 meters, and there are hundreds of them. Some of them spew sulphur water 100 degree centigrade temperature, which can scald and in some cases sear your shoes even.

There are sign posts all over warning people of dare consequences if they stray from designated paths. In one area I saw a pond full of blue and violet boiling water, beside a large field which was like a raw festering wound on the stomach of Earth, or like a large womb, streaks of red, yellow, crimson, blue liquids flowing, creating a sense of the grotesque. The tallest Sulphur jet occurs every one hour and is called significantly 'The old faithful'. This is the central sanctum of Yellow Park. The continental divide passes through this park.

'Dragon's mouth' is a mud and Sulphur volcano, the jet of boiling hot water moves in a spiral, causing the grunt and rumbling sound of undigested food in a dragon's cavernous inside. The Yellow stone River and lake were sights to see.

... Rapids City in South Dakota. This was another memorable drive of 600 miles. The mountains were bigger and the valleys larger, endless stretch of cloudless blue sky canopying over dry grass lands. The drive through canyons was unforgettable experiences, 2 billion years old rocks beckoning you on both sides with their wordless stories. The rocks sat uncomfortably on piles upon piles, some were lying on mirthful poses as though after an drunken party. Rapid city we reached about 10 PM. An ungainly western outpost, of cowboy rowdiesm, of guns, liquor and music.

After Rapid City, it was almost plain land, stretching indolently, laden with flat dry fussy hills. It was 21 August. We were driving along South Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin...and finally reached Rochester, after 600 miles of driving, slightly off the mighty Mississippi.

On the way we took off to a side road 30 miles inside to see the Devil's rock. ...Another interesting sight was the Rushmore Mountains, where on one of the black hills the busts of four American Presidents- Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt - were carved to perfection.

From Rochester it was plain journey, nothing memorable. 21 August we stayed in Mishawaka, Indiana, after a pleasant drive of 600 hundred miles, via Chicago. This was familiar territory for me. Nothing exciting to the eye. Never ending green fields on both sides, sometimes broken by patch of forests.

... The following day we were on the last leg of our odyssey. To Boston.

Source: Swami Bodhananda in an Email response: Sent: Friday, August 27, 2004

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