

Cheryll and Rich Odendahl Explore Route 66 by Tugboat

June, 2011

*Roam if you want to.
Roam around the world.
Without wings, without wheels,
Without anything but the love we feel.*

“Roam” lyrics by various members of the B-52's
See the music video at http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/b_52s/roam.html

After 30 years at General Motors, Rich signed his retirement paperwork and bought a 25-foot trawler/cruiser. It's a 2008 Ranger Tugs R-25. See the video tour of the boat at <http://rangertugs.com/R-25>. These boats are marketed as a trailerable cruiser that two people can live on for extended periods. The problem was that the boat was kept in a marina in San Diego, and we needed to get it back to our home in Michigan. Further complicating the matter, the sale did not include a trailer or shipping. Rich has a ¾-ton Chevrolet Silverado with a Duramax diesel as his company car until the retirement is official at the end of June, so instead of having the boat shipped, we decided to do this trip ourselves. It would serve as a transition to both retirement and the boat's new life in Michigan.

Rich ordered a trailer from Loadmaster in Port Clinton, Ohio, and drove down to pick it up. The next day, we headed west pulling the empty trailer, covering the direct route in four days with stops in Des Moines, Denver and Las Vegas. We had a lot to learn about pulling a 30-foot trailer with a diesel pickup. Things take a lot longer. Speed limits are lower. You can't make the turns required to use the drive-thru at McDonald's. Only certain gas stations sell diesel and have areas big enough to accommodate the truck and trailer. When we tried to buy diesel at one truck stop, Cheryll was asked “Do you need a big nozzle or a small nozzle? Only lane 7 has a small nozzle.” Hmmm....We had never discussed nozzle size before.



Black Dragon Canyon, Utah



Dwarfed; Sun Road Resort Marina, San Diego

The only incident during the trip out was when we arrived in Denver, the brand-new license plate and its mounting bracket were missing from the trailer. We had been bucking 30-mph headwinds across some bumpy sections of the interstate through Nebraska and Colorado and the mounting bracket was

just not up to the task. Our plate is likely lying on the side of the road in eastern Colorado someplace. We decided to continue on and practiced our speech for the police officers who would likely pull us over for the last 1000 miles of driving without a license plate. Then we spent an hour and a half on the phone with the Michigan Secretary of State's office and persuaded them to ship a replacement plate ahead to San Diego. Unfortunately, HSBC decided that a \$5 charge for the plate and \$32 for overnight shipping was likely fraudulent and canceled our credit card before the shipping could be approved. Fortunately, the Onstar cell phone was strong enough so that the connection could be maintained for another hour as we straightened this out while driving through rural Utah. Loadmaster agreed to cover the expense and send replacement parts.

As it turns out, we were not pulled over, and made it to San Diego without further incident. We moved onto the boat in the marina for a couple of nights to get to know the systems and wait for our new license plate. The boat was in a temporary storage slip in a row of 50-footers. The reaction from the other owners was amazing. Many were fascinated and wanted a tour. The owners of the large yachts seldom left the dock because it was just too difficult. One couple invited us over for cocktails and admitted that, due to their inexperience, the insurance company would not let them take so much as a harbor tour without a licensed captain aboard. We did not expect envy from people owning yachts worth ten times as much as our little Ranger Tug.

Cheryll's brother Paul and sister-in-law Mary Ann drove down from LA with a bottle of champagne to christen the boat. This would require a name, a ceremony and a speech. The boat was named "Sea Ranger". This is a take on "C-Ranger"; the name of the joint venture that formerly marketed these vessels. Rich is not a fan of the use of puns as boat names, so "Sea Ranger" was going to need to establish a new identity. We had to figure out a new name. We took Paul and Mary Ann for a tour out to Point Loma and through the San Diego harbor as the VHF radio was abuzz with instructions to clear the path where an aircraft carrier was departing for an extended cruise. Our friend Nancy Simioni and her husband Rick joined us the next day for another tour and to help us load the boat on the trailer for the first time. Rick was a great help, and the boat fit the trailer perfectly.



Rich Instructs His Brother-in-Law Paul in Yacht Handling



Rick Simioni does some Acrobatics to Hook Up the Boat

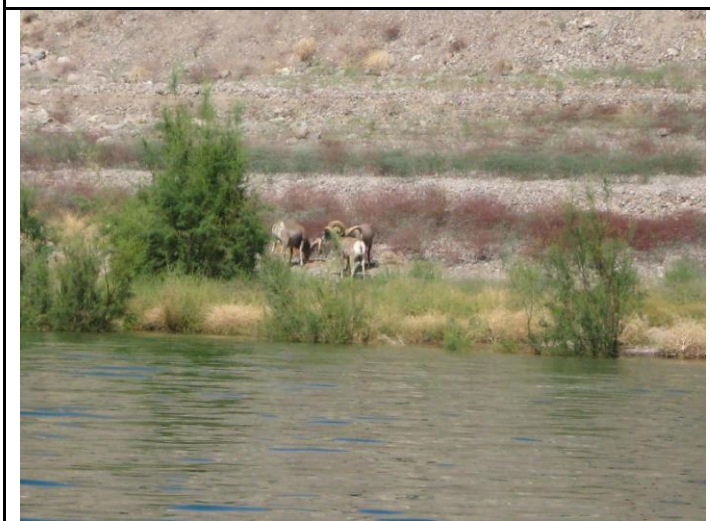
Rich has trailered Hobie Cats and a small daysailer before but never anything this big. It was nervous as we headed out through the busy San Diego traffic. After seven hours we arrived in Henderson, Nevada and spent the night at the Fiesta Casino Hotel. The next day we launched for the first time in Lake Mead. We explored some narrow canyons and took a look at the upper side of Hoover Dam. After anchoring in a secluded cove, we watched some rams tussling on shore. Lake Mead is a wonderful place. Navigation is a challenge as the lake is down 120 feet. That means that a place showing 80 feet deep on the chart is actually a 40-foot high island.



Lake Mead – The Narrows



Cruising On Lake Mead



Bighorn Sheep on Shore



Hoover Dam

Our boat launching and retrieval skills were improving, and it was getting easier to pull the boat and move it south to Lake Mojave for another night and a tour of this lake formed by Davis Dam in the Colorado River. Along the way we stopped at a canvas shop to fabricate a secondary strut to support the mast when it's lowered for trailering. The top of the mast is still over 13 feet above the road, even after lowering, so it's important to look up for low wires and tree branches. The mounting screws for the single support strut had stripped out, so a second support strut provided extra insurance that the radar and GPS antennae would not bang around. After we left Lake Mojave, it was getting hotter. We spent one night at The Golden Nugget Hotel in Laughlin, Nevada, just as the thermometer hit 100 degrees for the first time this year. Cheryl spent a few hours at the penny slots and Rich went to the pool.



Cottonwood Cove, Nevada



Lake Mojave

Rich has dreamed of a trip across Route 66, “America’s Mother Road”, ever since he read John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath” decades earlier. What he didn’t dream was doing it in a heavy-duty diesel pickup pulling 9400 lbs. of boat and trailer. Route 66 is the symbol of America’s western expansion, but we would be traveling in the opposite direction. After leaving Laughlin, we roughly followed the remains of Route 66 and made many stops to visit historic roadside icons in a romp of nostalgia. There were cafes, motels, restored gas stations and kitschy souvenir shops in various stages of repair. To the best of our knowledge, and judging by the reaction of the people along the way, we were probably the first to bring a tugboat on such a trip. It’s definitely the first tugboat that now sports a tacky Route 66 refrigerator magnet. We’re not sure if it will screw up the ship’s magnetic compass.



**Road Kill Café and Motel
Seligman, Arizona**



**Drive-In Restaurant Converted into a
Tacky Tourist Trap; Seligman, Arizona**



Standing on a Corner in Winslow, Arizona



Jack Rabbit Trading Post, Arizona



**We're not Fitting under the Awning
Holbrook, Arizona**



**Cheryl's Favorite Actor, Jimmy Stewart
Stayed Here; Gallup, New Mexico**



**Yet Another Souvenir Opportunity
Tucumcari, New Mexico**



**Halfway from Chicago to Los Angeles
Midpoint Café; Adrian, Texas**

Top-Ten Questions and Comments Heard Pulling a Tugboat along Route 66

10. That boat is soooo cute!
9. How long did it take you to convert that from a real tugboat?
8. Thumbs up from many truckers.
7. "Not many lakes 'round these parts" says a cowboy in the Texas panhandle.
6. Oklahoma Turnpike tollbooth operator; "That'll be \$9.75 and I'm goin' with ya." In fact, there were similar propositions along the way from five different women with a wide variety of tooth counts. They included waitresses and cashiers at truck stops. None seemed to care that Cheryl was right there at the time.
5. Looks like an ocean going vessel.
4. The "coolest" boat on Lake Mead.
3. Adorable...oh you mean the boat not Captain Richie.
2. Hmmm.....interesting.

and the number one, top-ten question;

1. Can you water ski behind it?

Rich the ever-practical engineer had picked out this boat based on its combination of livability and trailerability. Apparently, it also has style. That will take some getting used to.



**Cadillac Ranch
Amarillo, Texas**



**Restored Phillips 66 Station
McLean, Texas**



Conoco Station; Shamrock, Texas



Swimming Hole; Catoosa, Oklahoma

Our happy ride through history took a pause when we reached Joplin, Missouri. Three weeks earlier a tornado had leveled several square miles of the city, right along Route 66. Most everything, including the street signs were gone. That made navigation a challenge, but our problems were trivial compared to what the surviving residents faced as they recovered from the devastation. We talked to two locals who were proud to explain the progress they've made in cleaning up and opening all of the streets. They've got a lot of work to do, but we admire their resolve and work ethic.



Devastation in Joplin, Missouri



Only the Tree Trunks are Still Standing

The remainder of the return trip went well, and we spent nights in hotels near Oklahoma City and St. Louis. The pre-departure morning check in Oklahoma City found that the pressure had dropped in one of the trailer tires. Rich got to try out his new bottle jack and spare tire. It was much easier in the hotel parking lot than on the freeway shoulder. We were worried about finding a tire in the Bible Belt on a Sunday morning, but a couple of hours later, the people at the Wal-Mart had removed a roofing nail from the tread, patched the hole and we were on our way.

Our final splash was at Lake of the Ozarks in central Missouri. It's a beautiful, man-made lake that winds back and forth through the Ozark Mountains. We launched at the state park and cruised up the lake for a couple of hours. It's a long way from any major city, and we wondered where the money came from to build all of the mega-mansions that line the shoreline. We had an excellent lunch at a boat-in restaurant and then we headed back to the state park. It offers an aquatic trail through an undeveloped section of the lake and a pamphlet explains the geology and history of the area at several lettered buoys. We were out on the lake when a severe thunderstorm rumbled through. The boat handled the wind and waves very well and didn't leak a drop. In fact, it didn't leak a bit the next day when trailering through a similar storm at 65 mph. Most boats leak a little somewhere, but this was a testament to the quality of Ranger Tugs.



Lake of the Ozarks



Lunch @ Dorsey's Pit Stop; Lake of the Ozarks



Arch Rock; Lake of the Ozarks



Route 66 Murals; Cuba, Missouri

Our last night was spent at Indiana's Pokagon State Park using the vessel as an RV. Here we got lots of looks, but most people were too shy to ask many questions. It's a beautiful, wooded setting and we enjoyed beers in the cockpit and the smell of our neighbors' campfires. The full moon rose just after sunset and its glow intermixed with the shadows of the oak leaves and the rhythmic flashing of the fireflies. One woman told Cheryll; "I've been camping for 50 years, and this is the first time that I ever saw a boat in a campground. I just texted my son; 'We're heading for higher ground!'"



Pokagon State Park; Angola Indiana



Home in Sterling Heights, Michigan

After careful consideration, the decision was made. The boat will be renamed Roam. It might be a tribute to our favorite B-52's song. Or it might be an acronym;

Rich is **O**ut of **A**ll of his **M**oney,
RV Park **O**r **A**Marina,
Riding **O**ver **A**merica's **M**other Road, or possibly
Rich **O**dendahl's **A**ttitude **M**odification

You decide which.



"I dub thee, Roam."



"Safe passages to all who sail upon you."

In any case this adventure served as a perfect transition to retirement. It was a good career with GM, but it's time to roam on. This was confirmed by reviewing our credit card receipts. It seems that several restaurants and hotels gave us the senior citizen discount even though we didn't request it. Apparently, Rich is looking old. It is definitely time to retire while in good health and able to enjoy life to the max.

Thank you to so many who helped make this trip a success. Jon Fruth taught us that bigger boats are not necessarily better when he took us on a week-long cruise on his 24-foot sailboat fourteen years earlier. John Gray owns a sister ship and went out of his way to accompany Rich to San Diego for the survey and patiently answered many questions as we became familiar with the boat's systems. He obviously knew more than the professional surveyor. Denny O has a sister ship near Saginaw, Michigan and took Rich for a ride and gave him a lesson in launching and retrieving. Rich's friend David Dimberger helped install the mud flaps on the truck that kept the boat chip-free. Bob, the previous owner and a retired United Airlines Captain meticulously maintained the boat. While sad to see the boat go, he was clearly pleased to see that she would be moving from the harsh, salty water of Southern California to the pure, fresh water of the Great Lakes. Our broker, Gil Devine arranged to store the boat and looked after it for a month from the closing of the sale until we could get the trailer built and bring it across the country. David Smith helped pick up the trailer in Ohio. David and Maureen Baker offered advice on explorations of Lakes Mead and Mojave. Rich's brother David did some research to help us identify low-clearance bridges under which the boat and trailer would not fit. He was very helpful even though he believes that this tugboat thing is a cult, and that there should be an intervention to get it replaced by something with sails. John and David Livingston and the people of Ranger Tugs designed and built such a wonderful and classy yacht. Thanx also to our many friends and colleagues at GM who engineered the Heavy Duty Silverado/Duramax pickup that flawlessly handled the 100 degree days pulling a heavy boat through the deserts and over the mountains; especially Brad Sevald who will be joining Rich this fall for a two-week trek to the Mount Everest Base Camp in Nepal.

Future plans for Roam include some time this summer in the northern Great Lakes. This winter, we'll take it to Florida. Then Seattle to Alaska, Texas, Maine, Nova Scotia and then who knows. Stay tuned.

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