

NEW ENGLAND FALL FOLIAGE BY RAIL 2012

Because we cancelled our November Tahiti cruise, we were looking for another tour in the fall. We had been interested in this tour previously, and decided to take it this time. On our Canada/New England cruise last year, we saw very little of the fall colors, mainly because we were always near the ocean and did not venture inland. The colder higher elevations get the colors first.



GETTING THERE

For the second time, we were faced with “Carnegeddon”, the closure of the only freeway between our home and LAX. Last time we changed our reservations at almost the last minute and incurred quite a bit of extra cost. This time we have had enough advance notice to make alternate plans. We will leave LAX around noon on a Sunday, which should ease any traffic problems.

This means we will miss the welcome reception, which will be around 7 PM, which is 4 PM California time. We checked the hotel website, and found we would be able to get something to eat, either snacks in the bar or room service when we arrive.

We have been closely following the news reports and after talking to our car service, we decided to leave an hour earlier. We will leave at 8 AM on a Sunday morning, and hopefully the traffic will not be too bad. I measured some distances, and figured it would take us an hour to get to the freeway closure point. Even if it takes us an hour to get to the other side of the closure, that still gives us an hour to get to the airport, which is normally only a half hour away from that point.

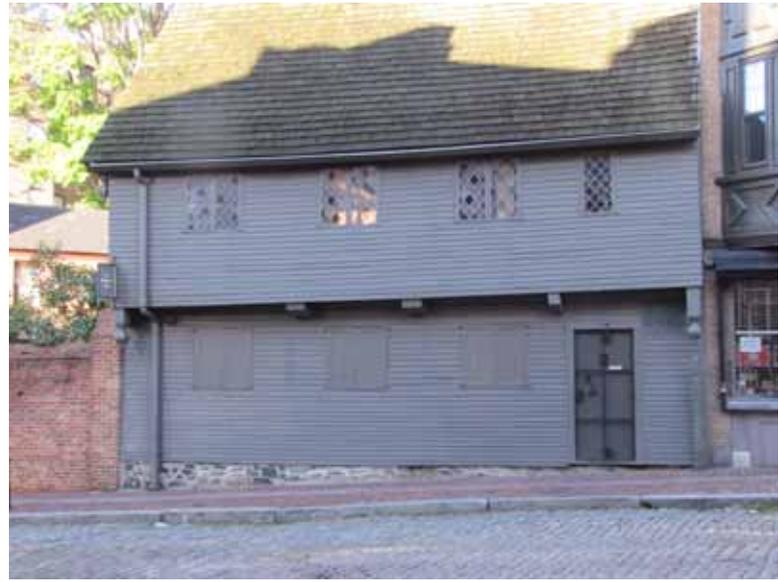
Our driver had an alternate plan, however. He took us on a roundabout course all on freeways rather than two lane canyon roads. We got a tour of downtown Los Angeles that added only a half hour to the trip.

BOSTON

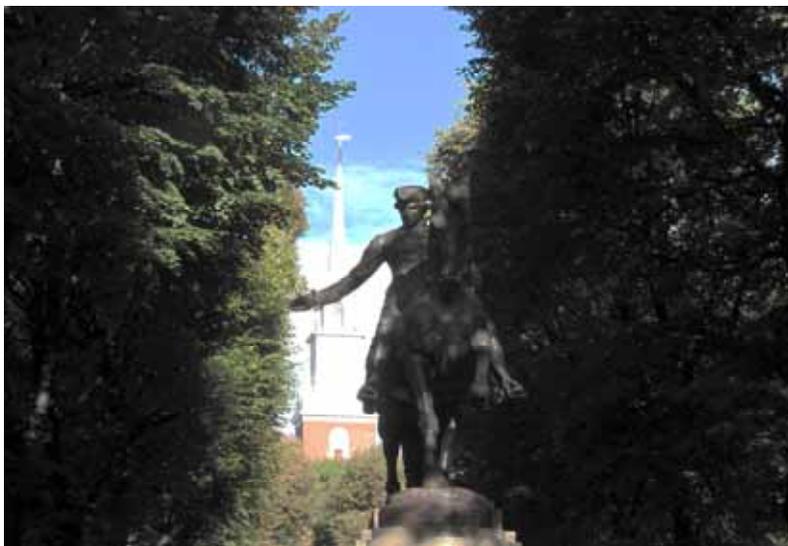
When we received all our documentation, the tour company suggested a shuttle service to the hotel. It turned out it was one of the shared shuttles that made numerous stops. This was unacceptable, since our hotel was 13 miles away, and we would be the last stop! It turned out we could take a taxi direct to our hotel for about the same cost.

Our flight was very comfortable on Jet Blue, and we took a taxi to our hotel. There was a message waiting for us that our bags had to be out by 7 AM (4 AM Pacific Time) and that was grim.

Kathy and I had been to Boston previously, but we were looking forward to touring the city again, especially if we could get a lobster roll for lunch! We first stopped near the Old North Church, where there were some unusual buildings with copper bay windows and Paul Revere's home. The house was very unassuming, with only a small sign marking it.



We then went to a park, where there was a statue of Paul Revere with the church in the background. We entered the church, and there was a clock dating from the 1700's that still worked!



The most unusual feature of this church was the pews. Instead of a series of benches, each pew was like box seats at a ball game! We were told the people actually paid for the pews. The pews were all plain, except for one that was highly decorated!



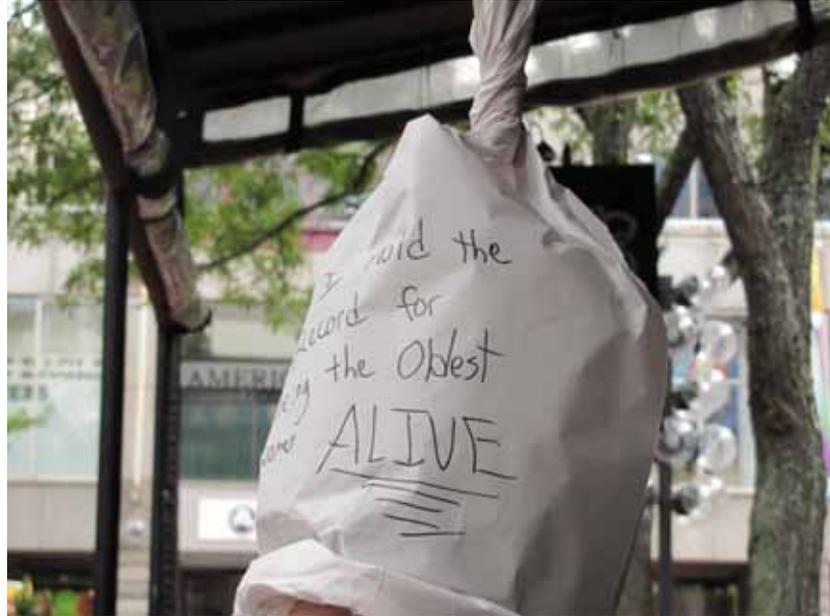
From there we went to visit the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides). Unfortunately, the ship was closed to visitors, but we had been there last year and we have included the pictures we took.



Next to the Constitution was a WW2 destroyer, named the Cassin Young. The ship saw service both in WW2 and the Korean War. It is in dry dock now for repairs, and I was surprised to read that the hull was only 5/8ths of an inch thick! No wonder they were called "tin cans". We also went into the museum and I took a picture of a model of the Constitution under full sail.



After visiting the church, we went to Quincy Market for lunch. We were told that the inside food court was a zoo (see below), so we found a place outside for lunch. It was called "Dick's Last Resort" and it was a lot of fun. The waiters insult you, and make you wear a silly hat with a terrible caption on it.



Kathy refused to have her picture taken wearing it, and I do not blame her! The caption on hers read, "I won the award for being the oldest women alive", and mine read, "I met her on Craig's List". After lunch we went to Faneuil Hall, built in 1742. The first floor of the Faneuil Hall served as a market place, the second floor contained a large meeting hall which was first used for town meetings in 1764. This is where Samuel Adams and fellow revolutionary colonists gathered and protested the "taxation without representation". The many meetings held by American patriots between 1764 and 1774 gave Faneuil Hall the nickname 'Cradle of Liberty'. The large picture shows Daniel Webster addressing the townspeople.



In the afternoon, we crossed the tiny piece of New Hampshire that is on the Atlantic coast, and drove to Cape Neddick. It was a pretty drive along the shore, and there were quite a number of vacation resorts, most of which were closed.

The lighthouse was built in 1879, and was automated in 1987. There is a covered walkway between the lighthouse and the light keeper's cottage to shield against the elements in the winter. The beacon emits a flashing red light that is visible for 20 miles at sea.



KENNEBUNKPORT

In the afternoon, we traveled north to the seaside community of Kennebunkport. We wandered around the shops, and suddenly I spotted a horse drawn carriage! I ran after the driver and told him to wait until I got my wife. Kathy was thrilled that we were going to ride in the carriage.

We try to do it wherever possible, as it is slow and a good way to see the sights. We thoroughly enjoyed the ride and headed back to our bus.

On our way to our hotel, we slowly drove by the Bush compound out on a point. Fortunately, my camera has a great telephoto capability in a small camera.



MT WASHINGTON COG RAILWAY/NORTH CONWAY

Even growing up back East, I never had the impact of forests full of fall colors. We had maple trees on our street, but I never noticed the changing of the colors. Driving through this area was almost a sensory overload, as I did not know where to look! The scenery is unprecedented as we entered the White Mountain National Forest, a land laden with lakes and forests covered with orange and red-leafed foliage.

We drove along the scenic Kancamagus highway, just being overwhelmed with the colors. We drove by Rocky Gorge and Lower Falls, but could not stop because there was no parking place for the bus. We were told we would have the opportunity to see them from a scenic train in a few days.



We took a turnoff on Bear Notch Road to see a covered bridge. The Bartlett Bridge was built in 1858 and renovated in 1970. I crossed the bridge and climbed down to the water to get some better shots.

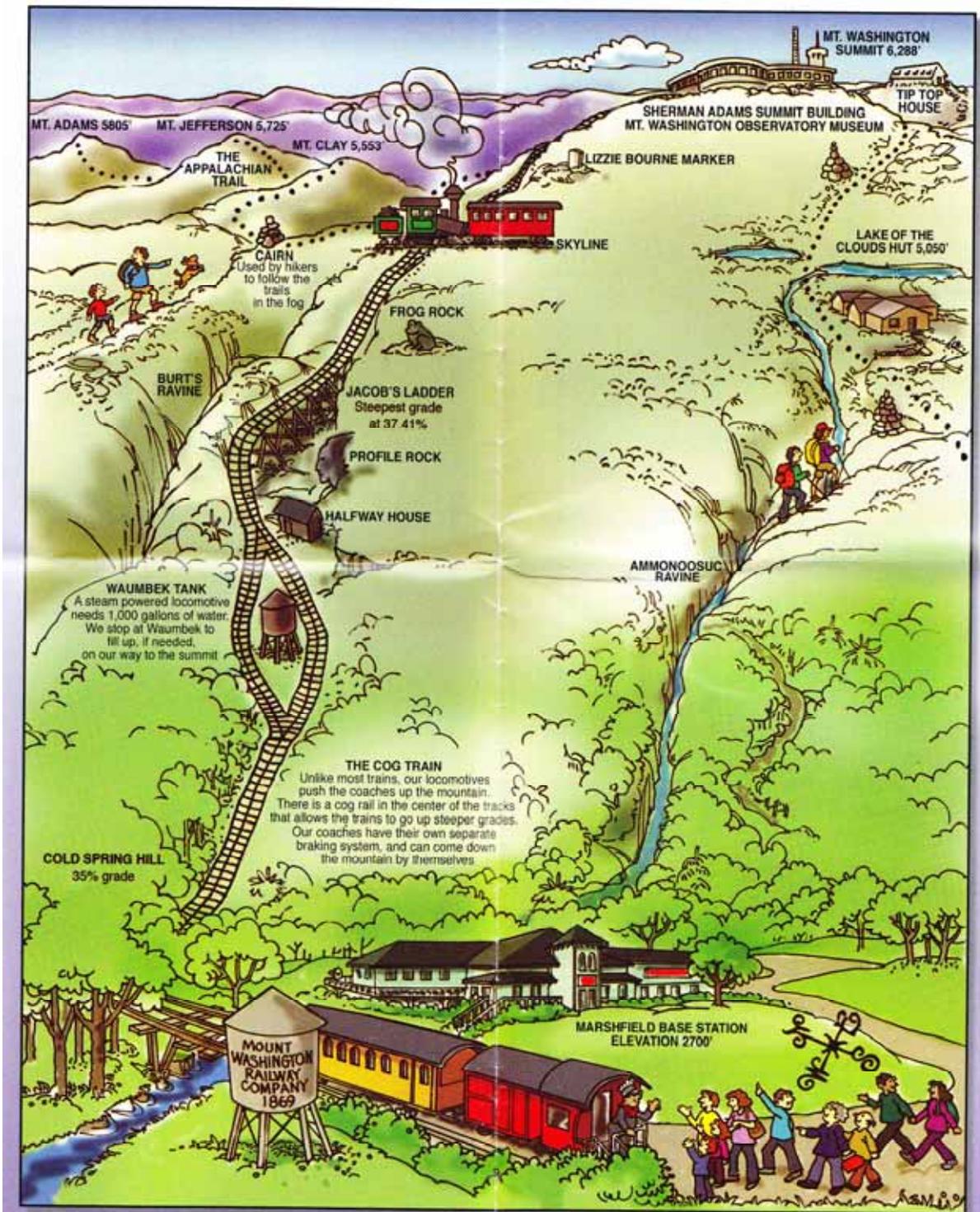




After viewing the bridge, we headed off to the town of Bartlett where we spent the night. Our dinner was a buffet, but included lobster rolls! They were delicious, and I split a second one with Kathy. The next morning we headed off to the Mt. Washington cog railway. On our way there, we passed the Mt. Washington hotel, where the Bretton Woods treaty was signed. The Bretton Woods system of monetary management established the rules for commercial and financial relations among the world's major industrial states in the mid-20th century. The Bretton Woods system was the first example of a fully negotiated monetary order intended to govern monetary relations among independent nation-states. Preparing to rebuild the international economic system as World War 2 was still raging, 730 delegates from all 44 Allied nations gathered at the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, for the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference. The delegates deliberated during 1–22 July 1944, and signed the Agreement on its final day. As we passed the hotel, we got our first sight of Mt. Washington with the cog railway on its left side.



We boarded the Mt. Washington's Cog Railway for the magnificent views, sights, and some of the steepest railroad tracks in existence. This is considered to be one of the best railroad journeys in the world. The Mount Washington Cog Railway provided a sense of adventure and history as it carried passengers up a trestle and the steepest railroad tracks in North America to the 6,288-foot summit of Mount Washington. At the summit, we took in the spectacular panoramic view, spanning the mountains and valleys of New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont, north into Canada, and east to the Atlantic Ocean. This was the first cog railway ever built, predating those in Switzerland which we rode in June.



What I never realized was that the Appalachian Trail crosses the top of Mt. Washington. I was hoping to see the steam engine in action, but unfortunately it only makes one run in the morning.



When Kathy looked at the locomotive, she thought it was broken, because of the way the boiler and cab were at an angle. I explained that was because of the steep angle of the railway, the boiler had to be that way to prevent part of it being uncovered by the water inside as it went up and down the hill. If the boiler is uncovered, it is the same thing as cooking a pot dry and the boiler would be damaged or burned through.

We looked up the mountain, and saw one of the trains coming down the hill. We got on the train and saw that the seats flip over so you are always facing in the direction of travel.



The view looking down was fantastic. I have never seen such a profusion of color in my life. In looking back through the end of the car, I saw the engineer and he gave me the thumbs up! When we got to the summit, the view was spectacular

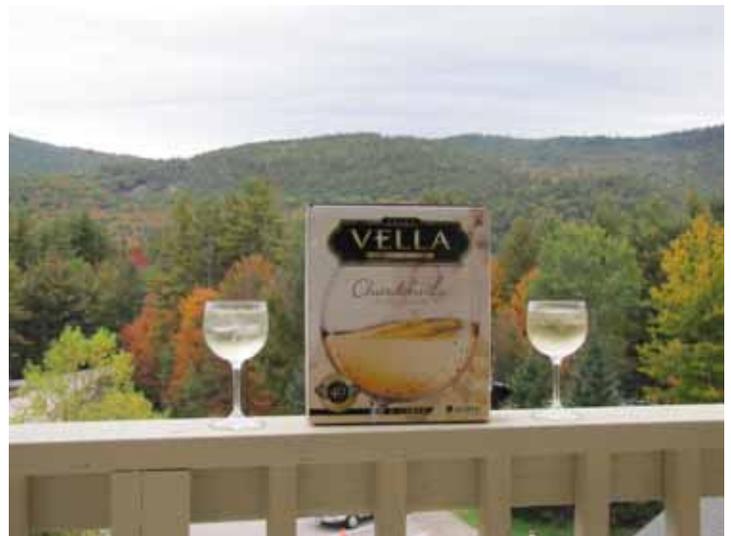


At the summit there is a pile of stone, and on top of the pile is a sign marking the exact elevation. I of course had to climb it and have my picture taken, just as I did at the top of Pike's Peak.



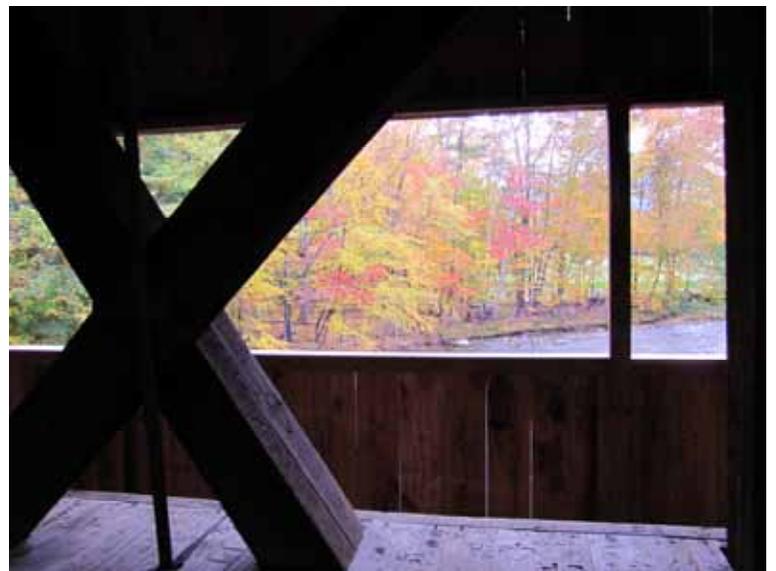
After coming down from the summit of Mt. Washington, we drove through more beautiful fall colors until we got to our hotel. We had a very nice room with a balcony, and had to take our usual picture with our wineglasses.

Just so you all understand that we are not wine snobs, below a picture of the wine we normally enjoy. It is a California boxed Chardonnay that we lovingly refer to as "Chateau Box". In addition, the box won't break in our luggage. We also enjoy purchasing local wines when we travel.

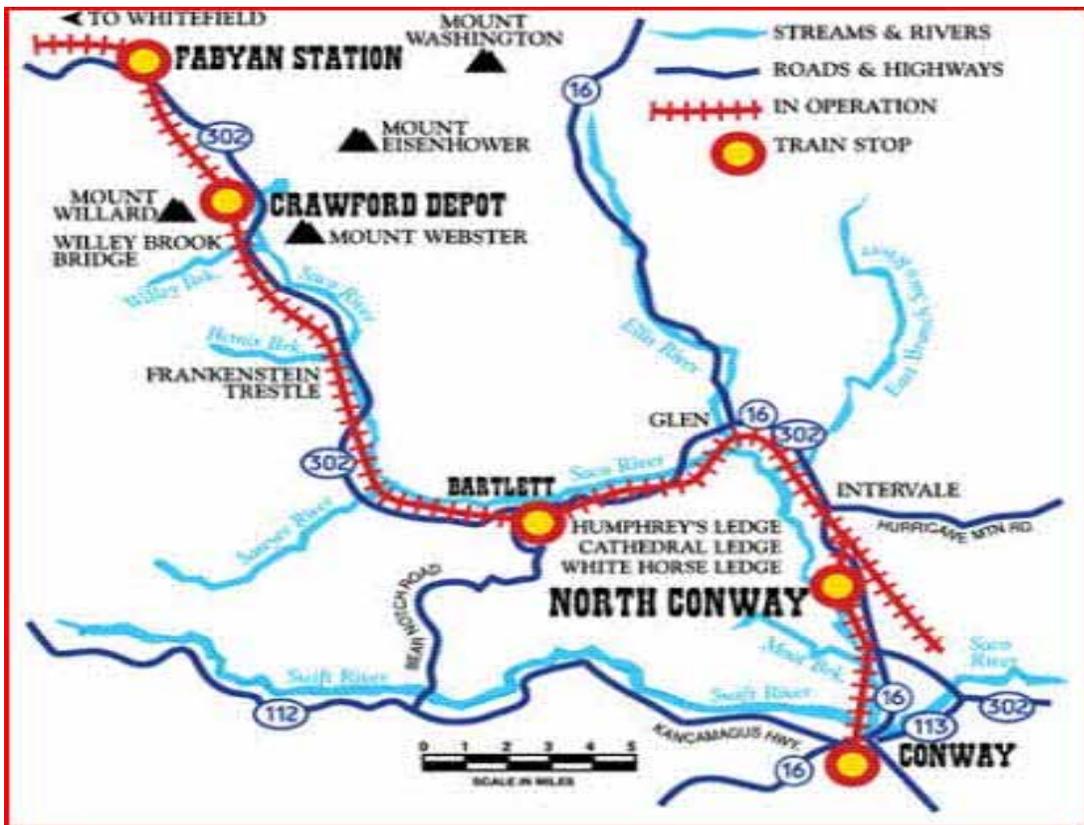


CONWAY SCENIC RAILROAD/FRANCONIA NOTCH/STOWE

On our way to the railroad, driving many of the back roads, we noticed many people had their Halloween decorations out on their lawns. As we pulled up to the Jackson Covered Bridge, which was built in 1876, there was a cute one on the right side of the bridge. It was a representation of "American Gothic" by Grant Wood, except they had pumpkins for heads!



On the Conway Scenic Railroad, we travelled on what was once the Maine Central Railroad's famed *Mountain Division* line, on tracks that were laid in the 1870s. We enjoyed some of the most dramatic natural scenery in the East as we travelled through spectacular Crawford Notch – past sheer bluffs, steep ravines, cascading brooks and streams, panoramic mountain vistas, across Frankenstein Trestle and Willey Brook Bridge – enroute to Crawford and Fabyan stations.



As we pulled up to the depot, we noticed a speeder (work car) decorated with two men with pumpkin heads for Halloween.



There were two trains running, the Crawford Notch train, and the Valley train. The Valley train was going to be pulled by a steam engine, while ours would be pulled by a diesel.



The Valley train featured a Victorian parlor car called the "Gertrude Emma" which was a very pretty car.



For most of the trip, we followed the Saco River and marveled at the colors we saw.



As we rolled along, we passed the Rocky Gorge and Lower Falls that we saw from the bus previously.



I was lucky enough to get a good picture of the train going around a bend, and also Crawford Notch.



We got off the train across from Saco Lake, which is the headwater for Saco River.



We got on the bus and drove out of New Hampshire into Vermont. We arrived at Stowe, which is a very popular ski resort. We could look up the hills and see where the ski trails would be in winter. I have read that Eastern skiing is totally different than Western skiing. In the East, the elevations are quite a bit lower and the runs tend to be icier. Mount Mansfield is the highest mountain in Vermont with an elevation of 4,400 feet. By contrast, Mount Baldy ski area in the Southern California area is at 10,000 feet.

VERMONT AMTRAK TRAIN/ MYSTIC SEAPORT

We enjoyed a scenic drive through Stowe before boarding Amtrak's Vermonter at Waterbury Station. We journeyed by rail through 3 states along the spine of the Green Mountains, where marble is mined and 150,000 gallons of maple syrup is harvested annually. We enjoyed commentary from an expert guide who highlighted the history and folklore of the Connecticut River Valley, one of America's great waterways.

We got off the train and then took a long bus trip to visit Mystic Seaport to experience life in a thriving 19th century New England seaport village.

There were two ships docked that you could board, the Joseph Conrad on the left, and the Lynx on the right.



There was also a working ship smith shop, with a man demonstrating fabricating all the hardware for ships. He had a huge rack of hammers for forming and shaping the metal.



From the shop we walked to a Figurehead Museum that was quite interesting. The purpose of the figurehead was often to indicate the name of the ship, and to demonstrate the wealth and might of the owner. At the height of the Baroque period, some ships of the line boasted gigantic figureheads, weighing several tons and sometimes twinned on both sides of the bowsprit. A large figurehead,

being carved from massive wood and perched on the very foremost tip of the hull, adversely affected the sailing qualities of the ship. This, and cost considerations, led to figureheads being made dramatically smaller during the 18th century, and in some cases they were abolished altogether around 1800. After the Napoleonic wars they made something of a comeback, but were then often in the form of a small waist-up bust rather than the oversized full figures previously used.



By the time we finished visiting this museum and an art gallery, the village was closing. We took a short ride on our bus to our hotel. There we were treated to wine and cheese supplied by Sheri, our tour manager.

BREAKERS MANSION

The next morning we boarded our motor coach for the short ride to Newport, Rhode Island; yachting capital of America and playground of the rich and famous. We had been there last year on a cruise, and visited Rosecliff, one of the many mansions on famed Ocean Drive.

We had a local tour guide that gave a running commentary as we drove past many of the mansions. We stopped at "The Breakers", Vanderbilt's turn-of-the-century mansion with its lavish furnishings and decor.

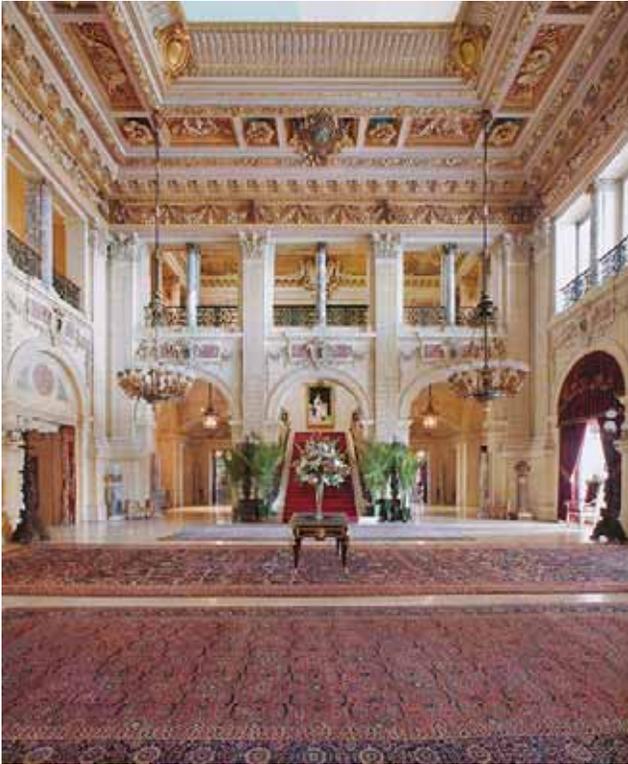
The Breakers is the grandest of Newport's summer "cottages" and a symbol of the Vanderbilt family's social and financial preeminence in turn of the century America.

Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) established the family fortune in steamships and later in the New York Central Railroad, which was a pivotal development in the industrial growth of the nation during the late 19th century.



The Commodore's grandson, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, became Chairman and President of the New York Central Railroad system in 1885, and purchased a wooden house called The Breakers in Newport during that same year. In 1893, he commissioned architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a villa to replace the earlier wood-framed house which was destroyed by fire the previous year. Hunt directed an international team of craftsmen and artisans to create a 70 room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo inspired by the 16th century palaces of Genoa and Turin. Allard and Sons of Paris assisted Hunt with furnishings and fixtures, Austro-American sculptor Karl Bitter designed relief sculpture, and Boston architect Ogden Codman decorated the family quarters.

We walked past the huge entry gates and walked up to the entry, where we were given audio headsets to help guide us around. We were not allowed to take any pictures inside the house, but I found a website that had pictures of many of the rooms. The first stop was in the Great Hall, whose ceiling rose fifty feet. Just off the great hall was vaulted alcove with a huge fireplace.



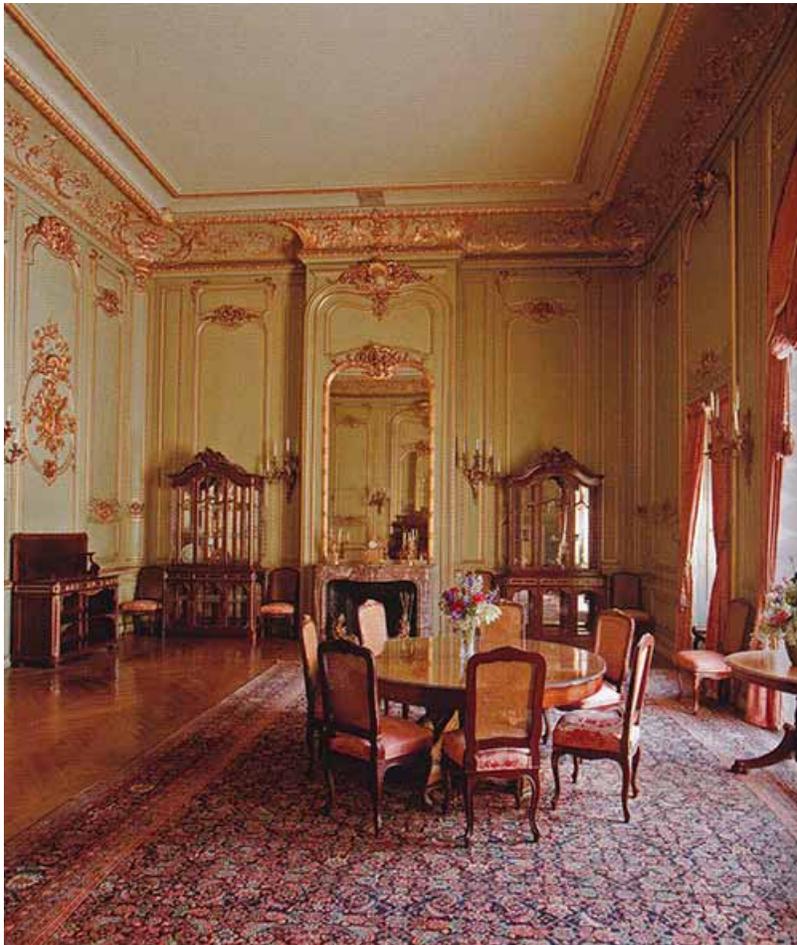
From the alcove we entered the Library, with a stone fireplace from a French Chateau. From the Library we went into the Music Room, which was constructed in Paris and shipped to Newport. It was the scene of many recitals and dances.



The Billiard Room was where the men would retire to after dinner to enjoy cigars and Port. The Morning Room on the right was used by the Vanderbilts for informal gatherings.



The pictures below are the two dining rooms. The one on the left is the family dining room, and the room on the right is the formal dining room, richly decorated with marble and gilt bronze.



We visited all of the rooms on the first and second floors. One of the most fascinating places was the bathrooms, where there were 4 taps on the bathtubs. Two dispensed pure rainwater, and the other two dispensed saltwater. It was the thought at the time that bathing in saltwater was very healthful. On the second floor there was a loggia, or open area that looked out on the Atlantic Ocean and the manicured lawns behind the house.

It was interesting to watch a gardener carefully sculpt one of the large bushes flanking the terrace. He was using an electric hedge cutter with the finesse of a surgeon.



Unfortunately, we wished we could have had more time to take in everything at a more leisurely pace. Perhaps we will be back someday, as it is a much shorter flight than overseas.

We drove from Newport and over the canal to Cape Cod to our hotel in Yarmouth. I was quite surprised at the stores such as Macy's on the Cape. I had always pictured it as extremely rustic and very beach oriented. When I looked at a map of the Cape, this might be true in the outer reaches where the Cape swings North, but not where we were.

We got our key package, and as we were walking to our room, we saw one of the staff rolling our suitcases the other way. We enquired about what he was doing, and he said someone else was in that room. I told him to deliver the suitcases to the room, and when we got there we were greeted by another couple from our trip. We called to the desk, and they were very apologetic about the mix-up. We were in 116, and they were supposed to be upstairs in 216, but someone wrote 116 on their key envelope. The manager came by and apologized, and gave them a nicer room on the same floor we were on.

Our room was great, and looked out on the ocean and the beach. I went down to the beach and got some sand to add to our collection of beach sand from all over the world.

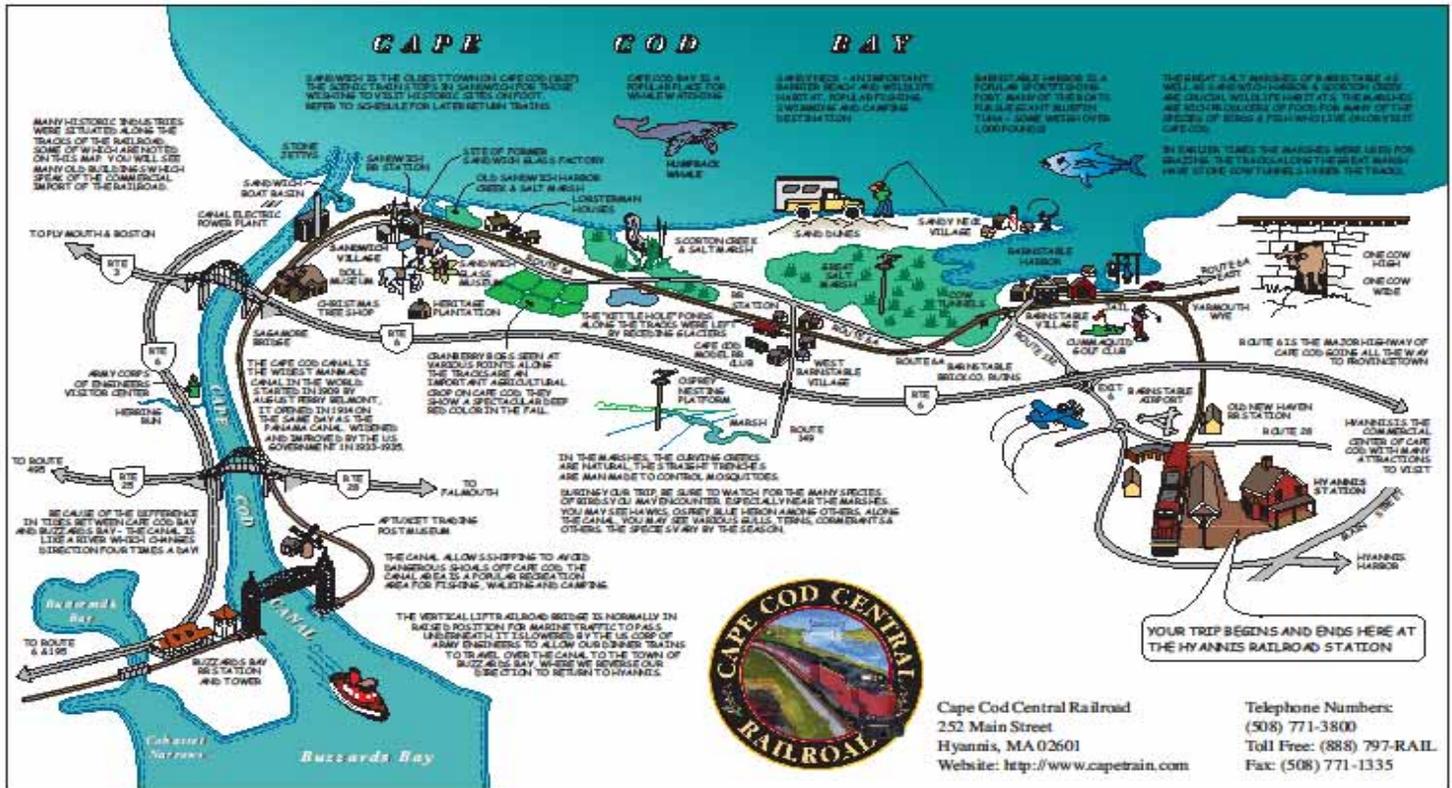


CAPE COD CENTRAL RAILROAD

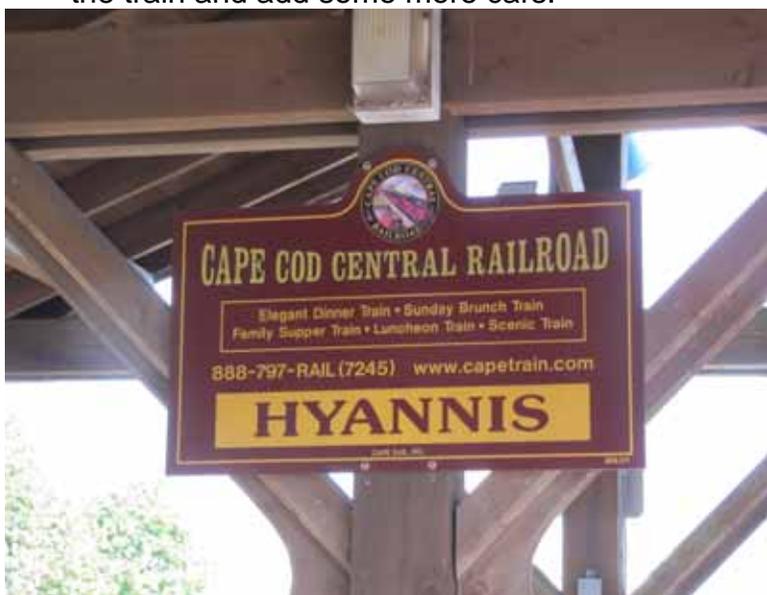
We enjoyed a leisurely morning on the Cape before boarding the Cape Cod Central Railroad at the Hyannis Station. Once part of a larger railroad system carrying passengers from Boston to

Provincetown, the re-established Cape Cod Central Railroad offers scenic trips from Hyannis across the Great Marsh of Barnstable to the Cape Cod Canal.

To the Cape's ecologically-minded residents, who have consistently opposed the construction of wider roads, the train whistle is a time machine, a wake-up call for that neglected but still efficient mode of transportation. Hearing its call echoing through the marsh, its carriages rolling through the scenic countryside, seems a serenade to the once seemingly stable world of yesterday, long before the legendary summer traffic passing over the Cape's twin gateways, the Sagamore and Bourne bridges.



We had some time before boarding, so I introduced myself to the engineer, and told him I worked on a tourist railroad in Southern California. I did not think any more about it, as the engineer had to move the train and add some more cars.

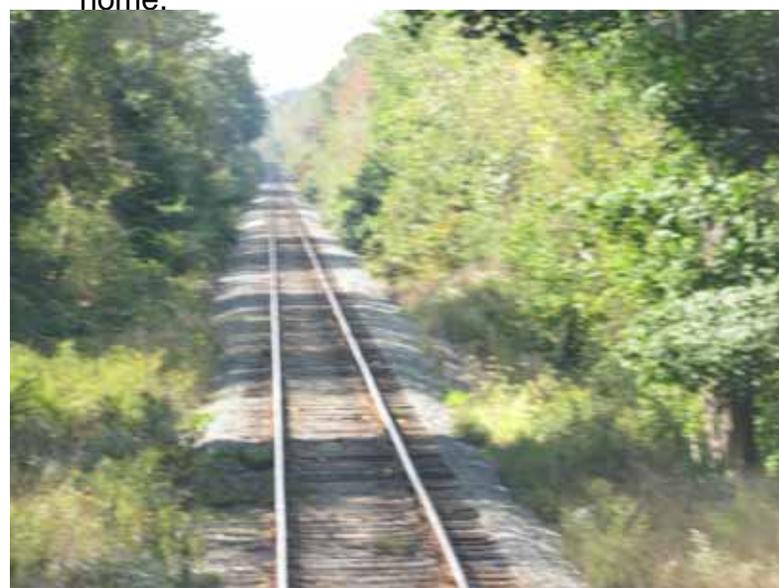


We boarded the train and were chatting with our tablemates. All of a sudden the Conductor and one of the staff appear, and are looking for a man in a blue shirt with a camera. I fitted the description, but was really concerned I was going to get tossed off the train for some reason.

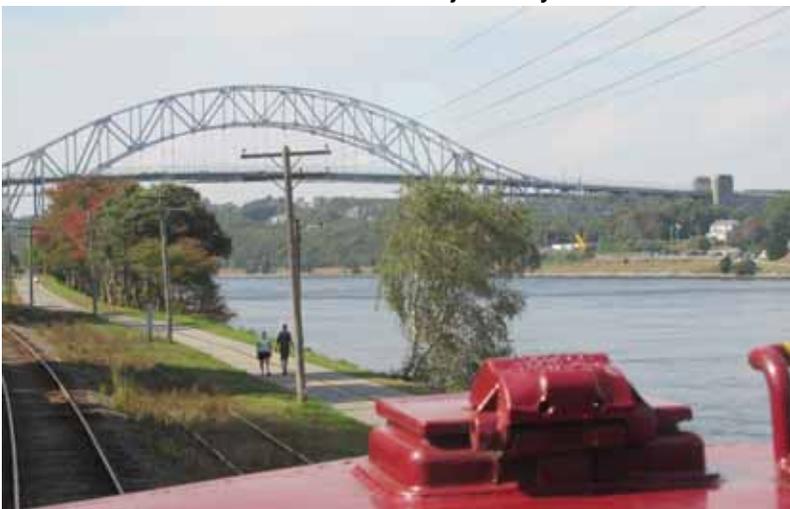
Instead, I was invited to ride in the cab with the engineer whose name was also Steve! I was given a release form to sign, and an orange safety vest. Well, you cannot believe how fast I made it to the front of the train and up into the cab! I introduced myself and sat to enjoy the ride. I think I felt the same way as I had when I rode the outside of the engine on the Trans Siberian Express.



It was really exciting riding in the cab, and the engineer pointed out various places of interest as we rode along. Unfortunately, most of the journey was through wooded areas, so I could not see much of interest. We stopped to pick up some passengers and I took a picture of a typical New England home.



We reached the Cape Cod Canal, and passed under the Sagamore and Bourne highway bridges. This marked the end of our journey in this direction.



I thanked the engineer for the privilege of riding with him, and headed back to the dining car. The conductor walked through the cars to open a vestibule so I could get on the train. I walked into the dining car to the cheers of our fellow travelers. It was just a little embarrassing, but I loved it.

The trip back to the station was uneventful, but I was still smiling a lot.

That evening we were treated to a lobster dinner, which was great, and we packed for our trip back to our hotel in the Boston area.

Just before we got off the bus, our tour manager Sheri, and our driver, Hank stood up for a photo! What a great sendoff in their lobster hats!



The next day we were taken to the airport and caught our flight back to Los Angeles. The trip was uneventful, and we were home by 4 PM. We are slightly jet lagged, but 3 hours time difference is a lot different from 8 to 10 hours time difference coming back from Europe.

This was another memorable trip in our own beautiful country and when Fall comes again here on the left coast, we'll fondly remember the spectacular beauty of New England in Autumn.

© Steve Goch