

Explore Oregon - Columbia Gorge - July 11-14, 2013

By Hotz, Tuckwood and McCann

Three BMC cars: Jim & Marcy Hotz, Jim & Joanne Tuckwood, and Don & Linda McCann attended this event at The Dalles, OR. We all traveled different routes to The Dalles, and different routes home. The name of the city comes from the French word *dalle*, meaning either "sluice" or "flagstone" and refers to the [columnar basalt](#) rocks carved by the river, much like our own Wisconsin Dells (which are sandstone, not basalt).

Pre-event Routes

Hotz:

The Hotzes left on July 4th and went to Yellowstone NP, Grand Teton NP, Jackson Hole, WY, Craters of the Moon NP, etc. We approached The Dalles from the south on Hwy. 26 and were surprised by the magnificent sight ahead of us: Mt. Hood, towering over everything, topped with snow! It is Oregon's highest mountain, over 11,000 feet! It is considered the most likely volcano in Oregon to erupt; however, it is informally considered dormant.

Tuckwood:

The Tuckwoods visited Glacier NP, Road to the Sun and also Coulee Dam on their way out to The Dalles.

McCann:

The McCanns left on July 3rd and went to Lassen Volcanic and Crater Lake National Parks (NP) before the event. Lassen Peak erupted 390 times between 1914 and 1921 with devastating consequences; it is being monitored with very high tech equipment for another eruption. We had an invitation from a member of the Les Bois Miata club, who was attending the Explore Oregon event, to tour Crater Lake National Park and drive surrounding Miata roads with him, which we did for 2 days. We also had dinner with him and his wife. On our way to The Dalles we also saw Mt. Shasta, a volcano over 14,000 feet above sea level. The one thing I did not like about OR state is that you cannot pump your gas; an attendant must do it (state law). You need to tell the attendant to "top it off" or else you may not get a full gas tank.

At The Event

Thursday July 11th:

The three BMC cars drove on to our hotel, checked in, cleaned up and went to The Dalles Civic Auditorium to join our fellow Miatans, mostly from Oregon, Washington, California and western Canada, for the welcoming reception with an introduction from Chris McCarty, Willamette Valley Miata Club President, and also The Dalles mayor. There were 64 people from 14 different Miata Clubs. There we received shirts, goody bags and route sheets, while we signed up for the following days' Miata drives. A yummy dessert buffet was available, and raffle prizes were drawn. Marcy won a cup of coffee at a local shop and a growler of beer from a local tavern.

Friday July 12th:

Three different drives were offered for Friday. The three BMC cars took the 8:00 AM Group A drive and headed west through magnificent winding mountain roads with a stop for group (from above) and individual photos. After leaving this site, the leaders made a wrong turn onto I-84 and took half of the group along, including the McCanns. The Hotzes and Tuckwoods were in the group that did not make the mistake. After a U-turn and high speeds we all met at Multnomah Falls, a 620-ft, 2-tiered cascading waterfall. It is

the tallest waterfall in the state. From there, we followed more winding roads east to Vista House, which offered spectacular views of the Columbia River Gorge and surrounding Cascade Mountains. Then it was on to the Bonneville Fish Hatchery where we saw huge trout and sturgeon, including one 450-pound, 8-foot long fish. The area also offered gorgeous roses and other lovely flowers. Next stop was lunch at the Crazy Pepper, a great Mexican restaurant back in The Dalles.

Our afternoon journey took us south of The Dalles to Mount Hood and the Timberline Lodge, a ski and snowboarding resort. (*The exterior of this hotel/lodge was the one featured in the 1980 film "The Shining" with Jack Nicholson*) This beautiful lodge was opened in 1938, and is at 6000 feet elevation, but Mt. Hood's peak, towering nearby, is at 11250 feet elevation. The average winter snow depth is 21 feet. There were plenty of skiers and snowboarders around since snow was on the mountain at this elevation, although the ground temperature was in the mid-50s (we were wearing jackets). We commented that we had been driving in 100-degree-plus weather the first time we saw the mountain, just the day before!

On the way back to our hotel, we stopped at the Balch Hotel, a 1907 building on the National Register of Historic Places and currently still in use as a true hotel. It also had a lovely view of Mount Hood.

Back at the host hotel, the three BMC couples got cleaned up, changed and left for dinner at the Baldwin Restaurant and Saloon, a former brothel. The food was expensive yet mediocre. After dinner we picked up our free growler of beer (Hefe Weiss) at the Clock Ale House and everyone imbibed in the Hotzes' room.

Saturday July 13th:

On Saturday we had a choice to either drive 6 escorted laps on the Oregon Raceway Park, or drive over the state border into Washington, driving along the Columbia River Gorge and the Klickitat River Canyon. The three BMC cars joined Group C, the 3rd group to leave on the longest of the Saturday drives. We went to the north side of the Columbia River Highway in Washington State. The leader had no CB nor Walkie Talkie - in fact, most of the participants had no communication devices. (The three BMC couples talked to each other on CB channel 5.)

We drove the mountainous terrain, through lava-flow mountains. The rocks and hills were blackish-red, created of huge deposits of molten lava, drippings of vertical columns of basalt, broken into boulders, rocks, stones, pebbles and gravel. Around and around, up hills and down valleys, and in the distance we caught glimpses of Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams and Mt. St. Helens towering above everything else, white with caps of snow. The views were breathtaking and left us quite speechless. Descriptive words came to mind: majestic, incredible, magnificent, awesome, etc.

Atop some of the lower mountains we saw wind turbines. We drove through farmland - apparently lava dirt is fertile, albeit rocky. We went over a single-lane bridge and through a breathtakingly beautiful river valley. White water flowed over rocks. We drove along a shallow, clear trout stream.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ through the morning run, 9 cars, including the Hotz car, got separated from the main pack. The Hotzes' CB was out of range of both the Tuckwoods and McCanns. Phone reception was nil in the mountains. Our new lead car was unfamiliar with the area, but went back to the point where he missed the turn and followed the route sheet - to a point. A truck driver (UPS type truck) stopped to ask if we needed help. He pointed us in the right direction and we took a short cut to the restaurant where lunch was planned. We were about 30 minutes late, but we found the place.

After a good lunch, we were on our way to a place atop a mountain where you could see four major mountains:

Mt. Hood 11,250 feet.

Mt. St. Helens 8,366 feet.

Mt. Adams 12,280 feet.

Mt. Rainier 14,409 feet.

From there, we were on our own and could visit either the Mary Hill art museum, 3 wineries, or a replica of Stonehenge. Jim and Marcy drove to the art museum, but time was short, so they decided to drive back to the host hotel to shower, change and ready ourselves for the banquet. The McCanns left for Saturday Mass. We all met at the banquet, and we all hoped that we wouldn't win any big raffle prizes, because no one had room in their cars.

That evening we had our social hour and banquet again at The Dalles Civic Auditorium. The food and prizes were outstanding. We all won prizes: Hotz won a USB car charger, Tuckwood won a large car cleaning kit, and McCann won a very large blue Mazda banner and an aluminum "Mazda Only" parking sign.

Sunday July 14th:

A short informal morning ride was offered, but none of the BMC cars went on it and instead headed their separate ways after breakfast.

Post-event Routes

Hotz:

After a quick breakfast with the McCanns, we packed the car and rolled out of the Cousins Hotel parking lot. Along the way, we stopped at additional notable sites: Mt. Rushmore, the Crazy Horse monument, Deadwood/Lead/Sturgis, the Badlands NP, Devils Tower NM, Dinosaur Park (Rapid City SD), Black Hills Caverns and more. We put 5,000 miles on the Miata, and along the way we learned much about geology, Native American culture, Wild West history and how beautiful this part of the United States is. We plan to visit more Miata rallies in other parts of the country to give us the opportunity to tour the US on the ground.

Tuckwood:

We visited more NPs and other good stuff on the way back. Crater Lake NP was awesome - I think it's just a cardboard cutout. We also traveled the "Loneliest Road in America" and found out that potty stops are even more limited there than in Grant County, WI. Our Miata only spent 6-8 hours on I-systems in the two weeks we were gone, and we saw more 'outback' than either of us ever knew existed. We are still speaking to each other after 5,500 miles together, but it's not always pleasant conversation. The lodging was not always first class, but it was always interesting. We would do it again in a heartbeat!

McCann:

We bid farewell to the Tuckwoods on Saturday night since they were leaving early Sunday morning. After breakfast with Marcy and Jim we headed for Portland for a few days, then drove the costal highways US101 and CA1 from essentially Astoria OR to San Francisco CA. It was breathtaking and cool as daytime temperature was about 58F in some locations; we stopped often for photos. We made a stop at Redwood NP, which is unbelievable in its beauty; a fairy land.

After a short visit with our daughter in Santa Cruz and a day spent whale watching, we continued our journey visiting Yosemite NP, Kings Canyon NP and Sequoia NP (two days in each NP); all outstanding parks. Some of the Sequoia are 40 feet in diameter, weigh

more than 1,300 tons, and are estimated to be more than 3,000 year old - fantastic!

Next we visited the Santa Monica Pier, the starting point of Route 66, and then headed for WI on Route 66. Notable stops along Route 66 were driving the Oatman Highway from Oatman over the mountains to Kingman AZ, and spending one night at the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook AZ. We also visited the Petrified Forest NP, but were cut off part way through the park by three flash floods from heavy rains that day. After the water across the road became navigable, we headed for Interstate I-40 ASAP.

This was a very enjoyable trip; we were gone 29 days and put on 8,235 miles on the Miata. Daytime temperatures ranged from 58F to over 100F - no problem! It is apparent that OR, WA and northern CA have outstanding Miata roads that beckon us to come back. We can see why there are many Miata clubs in the area. The club members were very friendly (one helped Don wash our Miata) and apparently are very active with their club events. We look forward to another national Miata event in 2014 with our BMC friends, as well as meeting new Miata club members along the way.