

10th Storyworth: What is one of the most memorable camping trips you've been on?

I don't really recall much camping as a child, although I recognize that we had to have done some, or we would not have had the camping gear we used when we travelled to Disney World for my High School Graduation, about which I wrote earlier, and the three room tent we had which I subsequently used with my now Ex, Lynne, to travel to Nova Scotia, the reason we decided when we returned to purchase a pop-up camper because we could leave it packed and merely add food to escape for weekends.

That trailer, a Skamper with a pull-out kitchen which allowed us to avoid any cooking grease and the like inside, was a fabulous rig, and perfect for us. I recall its body was about 10 feet long folded up, and had a single axle, and was one step down from their largest unit which had two. It had a crank-up mechanism and fabric sides, except the end beds, which were essentially queen sized, had vinyl roof fabric. The sides and ends also had built-in window screens, with clear vinyl windows which could unzip, so the trailer was very comfy in all but oppressive weather. It also had a two-fuel refrigerator, propane or 110VAC, which operated on the ammonia cycle, and a propane heater. And that would keep the interior comfy even with outside air below freezing, as long as we plugged any gaps with socks and the like ;-)

That thermal capability mattered as basis for my article on the subject of this week's Storyworth question above. While we lived in Liverpool, Lynne and I would work on our Master's Degrees on the weekends by getting away from the house. Otherwise, normal day to day stuff would undoubtedly interfere with the concentration needed to study, since we both were working full time. This was, at the time, before Jess came along, although we certainly did plenty of similar camping with her once she joined the family in 1982 ;-)

We liked to go to a Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada called Charleston Lake. It took us just over two hours to get there by driving straight north on I-81 and crossing at the Thousand Islands Bridges. That was also WELL before 9/11 made cross-border travel a LOT more difficult, because at the time about the only questions asked were a) Where are you going? And b) Did you bring a wallet? ;-) I promise you based on my many years working in Ogdensburg as well, the questions were little different for Canadians coming here. The return leg of the trips took a little more time because they had to do customs inspections, as they were always asking if we were bringing any alcohol back to the States. They rarely even glanced sideways at the caseloads of AC&C I would buy at pretty much every pharmacy in southern Ontario while we were there, as it was an OTC medicine consisting of Aspirin, Codeine and Caffeine. And was brilliant at pain relief without making me drowsy. I had found the US equivalent, made with Acetaminophen, which has never been more than a placebo for me, vs Aspirin, but required a prescription here in NYS and was far more costly. So we'd stock up every trip ;-)

Anyway, we of course had lots of co-campers in the spring thru fall there. But one day we arrived to find snow mounds along either side of the road, and a gate across the road. The park was officially closed, but we had not known it. We did, however, know of a path through the woods we could drive into the park, and we figured we would not be likely to be disturbed. Normally, they had power at some of the sites, and they were still active then. So we had lights and could use a space heater, too. We typically arrived at dusk on a Friday night, even in winter, but our setup took very little time and we were accustomed to the process by then; crank up the lid, pull out the wings, pull the cooler out of the doorway, and insert the door frame and tuck the fabric sides into their tracks and we were able to read for about four hours before night. Late morning breakfast gave way to more reading in the afternoon, then cooking for the nighttime meal, before more studying before bed.

We'd been there in the snow for just over a day. This was our first actual winter stint, but we thought little about it. We were "campers" ;-). Seemingly the Ranger had seen our trailer through the night, and our path in could not have been more obvious since there was about 3 inches of snow. So he waited until we were obviously up and dressed, then came and knocked on the door. He told us that the park was, in fact, closed for the season, but that we could stay the remainder of the weekend, so long as we understood that our safety could not be assured by his patrols. Can you imagine ANY government employee doing that TODAY?! The quiet stillness, especially when it started snowing again, was heavenly ;-)

Some years later, after Jess was born and I was an Independent Contractor, I had a project with Duracell which required me to be in Brookville IN. For some years I had been using a motorhome towing a car trailer to go to client sites, then leaving the rig parked at some area park, while I took the car from the trailer for my daily needs. I had been to a variety of locations including Sencorp out on Cape Cod, a place I HATED because they have exactly one lane each way the length of the Cape, so the slowest person gets to determine EVERYBODY's speed. But those had all been in normal "camping season". However, I knew my stint in IN would require me to arrive in winter. It must be noted, though, that the RV was a LOT lower cost than, for example, an "extended stay" motel, even after paying for its gas to get there. And the sheets would smell like my home, and my Dish 500 setup got all the same channels I had back at the house, for only \$5 more per month. They even worked in Canada, despite supposedly not legally being able to. In fact, I was doing so in Montreal Quebec on 9/11, testing a transformer for GE, and watched the planes hit the towers.

Anyway, I had researched the State Park in Brookville, and it SAID it was open year-round. So I trundled across NYS, south through central Ohio to Cincinnati, then west to Brookville, all in the winter, and slept in truck stops along the way. When I arrived at the Park there was nobody at the Welcome Station, but the road was plowed. So I headed into the park. Only to arrive where they STOPPED plowing just beyond where I could easily have turned around. Thankfully, the maintenance shed had signs of life, and after expressing surprise that ANYBODY wanted to camp in this season, they confirmed that the park WAS supposed to be open, because they had people who fished the lake in winter, much like Oneida lake in CNY.

So they plowed to the first two sites, which were each limited to 30A service, So I setup to plug into the two sites separately so I had space heaters in parallel with my furnace, along with my water heater, and the aforementioned Satellite TV setup, and I kept the water trickling so I never ran out. And headed off the next day to J&J Packaging, where I would be working through the summer and fall as they adapted machines per my designs to make new packaging for Duracell. Oddly, although the State Park ONLY enforced it during the "peak season" they had a two week limit for guests. So we played the game of musical sites as I uprooted to move to another site in the same park to start the clock all over again every two weeks. Even THEY got a chuckle about THAT because they ALWAYS had open sites on weekdays, which was why I ONLY moved then. Hey, REAL campers learn how to adapt, right? ;-)

BTW – that Duracell job is the reason I have my '95 Porsche 993 Cabrio Tiptronic, which I managed to hang onto despite a divorce and bankruptcy. It was NOT with me when I first arrived that winter day, but I drove it down for my daily use once the weather cleared, and had some memorable experiences in Indiana which I wrote about for the Porsche Club, which are available on my website at <http://www.holzerent.com/pdfpages.htm> along with downloadable music and other articles I've written. Careful, though; it's addictive. Start reading and you might need to camp there all winter long ;-)

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