

## Road Trip

Retirement is supposed to be a time to slow down and enjoy the peace and quiet, right? Not if you're Mr. Outdoors and at the ripe old age of forty-seven, people expect you to get into the outdoors and let them know what's going on. The last couple of weeks have been to places like the Dixie Stampede and Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri. I'm sure you're saying, "been there done that". I enjoy seeing shows and spending time with my family in Branson; however, the next trip would definitely count as a road trip.

It all started when a friend bought some bronze statues at auction. One of the statues was a razorback, in which my friend wanted to donate to the University of Arkansas. I can always see opportunity when it presents itself. So, I piped up and said, "Do you need someone to pick them up?" He asked "are you interested?" Of course I thought he would never ask. What is interesting is that I worked for his dad when I was fresh out of high school cleaning mortar off of brick at an old school house in Fort Smith.

This is where the story starts to firm up. I flew to Miami, Florida and picked up a U-Haul drove to Star Island. Now you have to know that I have relatives in the Clearwater Beach area just south of Tampa Bay. I have been to a lot of the islands in the gulf around St. Petersburg. I just assumed that Star Island was just like the rest of the barrier islands off Florida's coast. That couldn't be further from the truth. I realized it was a little different when I crossed the bridge to Star Island and I was met with a guard at the guard house. I came to realize that this was a major estate where the rich and famous live. Well, I was on a mission to retrieve the statues and return home. So I drove up to the gate and was let in where the workers loaded the statues. Within two hours, I was loaded and ready to go, so I took a few quick photos from Star Island. I plugged in the coordinates to Tampa Bay and was off to see relatives. The trip took me across the everglades for the first time in my life. For a retired biology teacher, the everglade habitat was a sight to behold. If the wheat fields of Kansas had water like rice fields in the wheat that is similar to what it looked like. After five hours of drive time I arrived in Seminole, Florida to spend the night with some cousins. That morning I called into the radio show and reported the progress of the razorback returning to Arkansas. We ate breakfast and said our goodbyes and then it was on to Birmingham, Alabama.

MapQuest took me to Tallahassee but when I plugged in Birmingham on the GPS it took me up Interstate 75 north almost to Atlanta. I was in it for the trip so I followed the GPS and stopped along the way in Adel and Vienna, Georgia at Adel Outfitters and Ellis Brothers Pecans. The shopping list included a brand new pair of camouflaged shoes, peanuts, and Vidalia onions. I would like to thank Jody, Heather Salopek, and Brad Ellis for their hospitality in Georgia. After going north a long way it was finally time to turn west just south of Atlanta and head into Alabama. I went through the Talladega National Forest and then out of nowhere Talladega

Superspeedway popped up. It was huge and awesome all at the same time! It was Birmingham or bust at this time. Oh by the way, did you know that U-Hauls don't have cruise control. Leg cramps were starting to really have a life of their own at this point. After 11 hours of drive time, Birmingham was only minutes away. I thought I would call an old friend and get the directions from someone who knew the area. Matt Zimmerman, assistant men's basketball coach for the Razorbacks brought me into Birmingham, like an air traffic controller bringing in an untrained pilot to land the plane safely. The only exception was that I was in a U-Haul.

After a good night's rest at a Holiday Inn Express it was off again to Tupelo, Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee. Finally, it was Interstate 40 and the homestretch. Of course the cramp in my right leg was always present, but I kept pressing on. The construction at Brinkley put a stop on progress and traffic was stopped for over an hour. Then it was on to Little Rock and then to Fort Smith. The total trip was a little over fourteen hundred miles with no cruise control to give the cramp a break. It definitely qualified as a road trip. The razorback made it back to its rightful home and that was the mission as far as Mr. Outdoors was concerned. My friend got his statues and I got another story to pass on to you.