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While the hike to Beacon Rock is cumbersome, the reward is a spectacular view.



NINE HUNDRED
MILES OF RIVER
CRUISING FILL A
SUMMER WITH
LOCKS AND AWE.

GOING THE SHE CAND GAINST WITH THE FELLOW

Clarkston, Wash., doesn't seem to be a natural turnaround point for a cruising story on these pages, where locations such as Glacier Bay, the Inside Passage, the Sea of Cortez and even the South Pacific are more generally found. But that's where the adventure John and Tracey Cerul took last summer made its end. And its beginning on the return leg.

▼ John and Tracey Cerul



THE CERULS CALL LAS VEGAS HOME — their boat, a 2004 Selene 47, is called *Pairadice* in a nod to their hometown — but keep their yacht in Portland, Ore., so a summer cruise on the Columbia and Snake rivers made as much sense to them as the trips they'd already taken to British Columbia and Alaska.

We asked them about their time on the rivers, so we'll let their words and photos tell the story. If you want to read more about their adventures, visit mvpairadice.blogspot.com.

Sea: What is your cruising background?

Ceruls: John served in the Navy for 20 years, retiring as a Chief Petty Officer. He spent most of his time on aircraft carriers, with plenty of blue-water operations throughout the world.

John and I met in 2005. I had a sailing background from Michigan and Lake Mead in Nevada. I also owned various lake boats over the years. Meanwhile, John owned boats in Washington and California while in the Navy, and in the Southwest after retiring from the military.

Upon retiring again in 2015, we purchased *Pairadice*, and since then we have put over 10,000 nautical miles on her own hull. The first cruise was seven months in 2016 throughout the Inside Passage of British Columbia. In 2017 we took another seven-month cruise throughout southeast Alaska.

Next year we plan to head south along the West Coast, into Mexico and up the Sea of Cortez before hauling out for some yard work during the summer of 2020. After that we will continue south to the Panama Canal and into the Gulf of Mexico.

How many boats have you owned together through the years?

Our first boat together was a 22-foot Scarab (Wellcraft) for all the lakes and the Colorado River in Las Vegas, Utah and Arizona. A few years later we moved on to a 30-foot Sleek lake boat — more room for the grandkids — before purchasing the Selene 47.

What made you go with a trawler?

It started with boat shows and retirement ideas. Along the way, we met our yacht broker, Jeff Merrill, in Newport Beach, Calif. He later became a close friend. We began studying different types of boats, primarily for livability, comfort and seaworthiness for long periods. We were not interested in camping on a boat for months at a time. We decided on a trawler due to fuel efficiency and safety at sea.

Where have you done the bulk of your cruising?

As Nevada residents, we try to balance our time with home and family. The last few years we have been cruising more, and trips back home are becoming less frequent. A majority of our cruises have been concentrated on the Pacific Northwest. Once we head south in the Pacific Ocean, we will not return to the PNW. Our cruising itinerary is planned out well in advance, and we currently have a five-year plan, which is subject to change. Ultimately, the Great U and possibly the Great Loop are possibilities.

Where did the idea for a river cruise come from?

We have a bucket list. Both of us are in our 60s. Our motto is “go for adventure.” We started with a bareboat charter out of Anacortes — learning



we could work together handling a boat of this size — then attended Trawlerfest and a Selene rendezvous. We accomplished the Canadian Inside Passage in 2016 and Alaska in 2017. We are moored on Hayden Island at Salpare Bay Marina, so it made sense to get some experience traversing the locks on the Columbia River prior to heading south to Mexico ... and yet further through the Panama Canal.

Was planning and provisioning for this cruise different than previous trips you've made?

You have to do the research regarding grocery and drugstores. On this cruise we did not run the large freezer. Planning and provisioning is a work in progress. I am constantly removing clothes, utensils and extraneous baggage that goes unused. My lists have lists! One thing that has helped is using a black sharpie to date the top of the canned goods, in order to rotate the stock.

How many miles did you put under the hull in total?

Total miles in three years amount to 11,000. The Columbia River/Snake River cruise east and back was 900 miles, from Portland to Clarkston, Wash., and back to Portland using the same route.

There were several locks you had to traverse. Were you able to practice

Useful Info

Anyone thinking of making a similar journey along the Columbia and Snake rivers needs to conduct a lot of research, but here are a few tidbits to stoke the imagination.

Along the Columbia River, the locks, dams and bridges are at the following markers:

1. Bonneville Dam and Lock, Milepost 145
2. Dalles Dam and Lock, Milepost 192
3. Celilo Railroad Bridge, Milepost 199
4. John Day Dam and Lock, Milepost 218
5. McNary Dam and Lock, Milepost 294
6. Kalan Bridge, Milepost 323
7. Upper Columbia River RR Bridge, Milepost 328

Along the Snake River, be prepared to tackle the following obstacles:

8. Burlington Northern SF Snake River RR Bridge, Milepost 2
9. Ice Harbor Dam and Lock, Milepost 10
10. Lower Monumental Dam and Lock, Milepost 42
11. Little Goose Dam and Lock, Milepost 70
12. Lower Granite Dam and Lock, Milepost 107

To communicate with the appropriate folks:

- Dam lock masters monitor Channel 14
- Railroad bridge operators monitor Channel 13

for that? How was the overall locking experience?

We did not practice, but we received advice from other mariners who have accomplished it. They also provided us with a spreadsheet of info for all eight locks: bridge lifts, VHF channels, call signs, mileposts and phone numbers. The info proved to be *very* helpful! We also traveled with our friends Tom and Kay on *Alaskan Sea-Duction*. Both boats have an LOA of 52 feet. We took it slow and all came through uneventful.

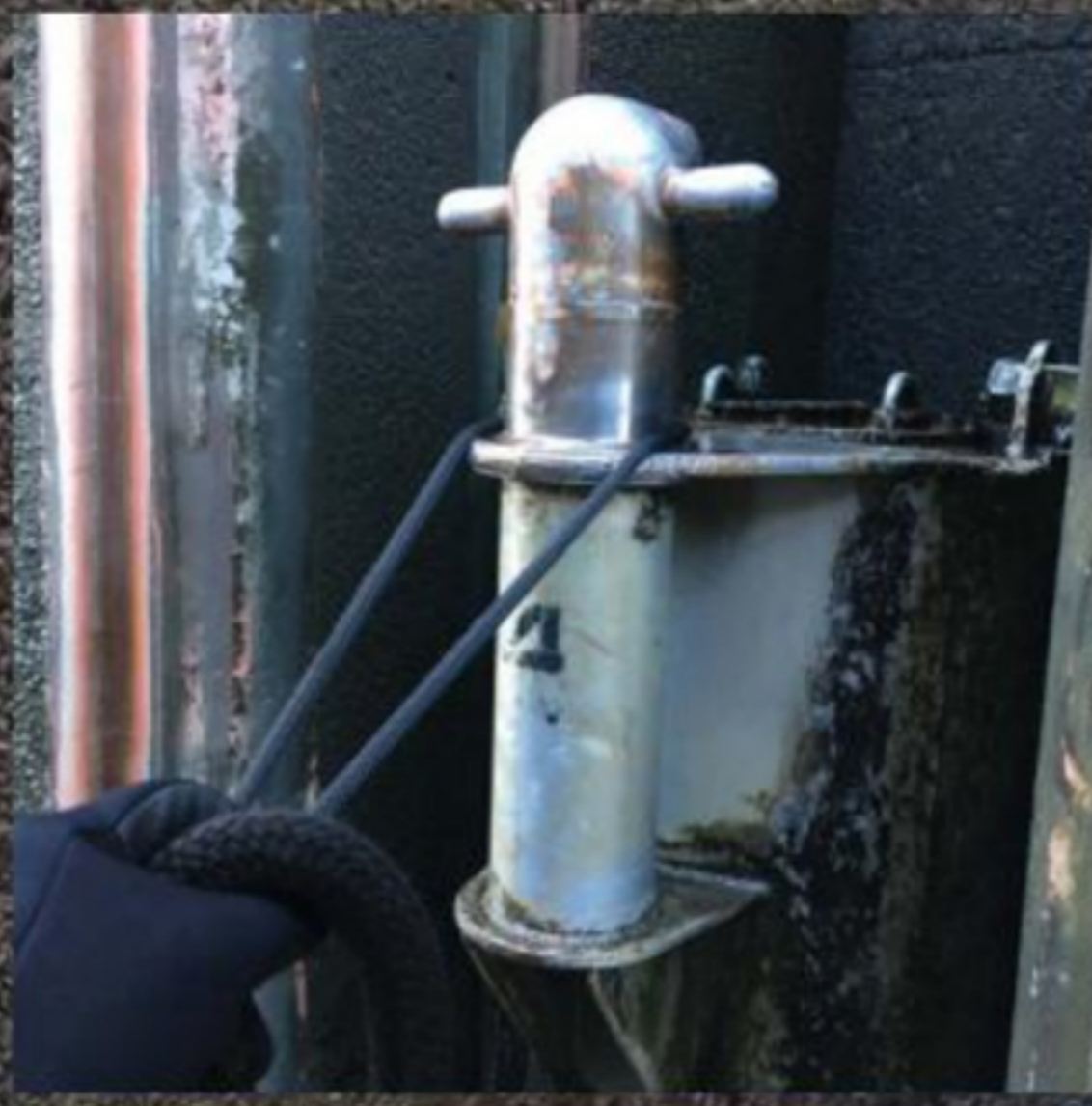
Our route included four locks/dams on the Columbia River, four more locks/dams on the Snake River and four bridge lifts. Our destination was Hells Canyon in Washington. And we did it all again getting back to our homeport.

Was there anything you prepared for that didn't actually come to pass?

Yes. We were actually overprepared for the locks. We expected to use more lines than necessary. One midship line is plenty! Gloves and life jackets are mandatory. Each time going through a lock made the next one easier. Communicating with the lockmaster on the VHF is very important.

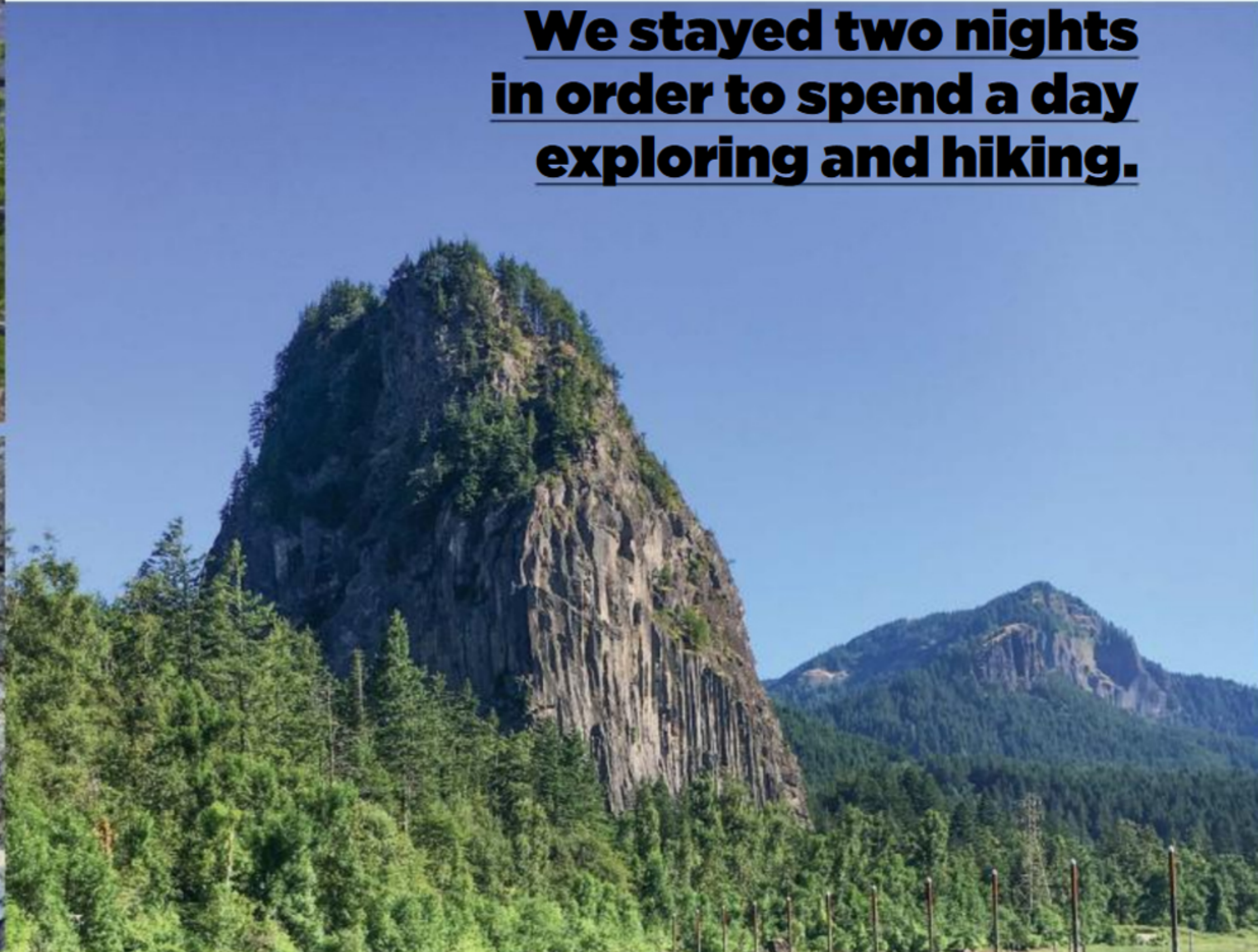
Do boaters share the rivers with vessels/equipment/adventurers that they don't have to worry about in

**Each time
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Traversing the Bonneville Dam (top) and waiting for railroad bridges to lift (bottom left) are but two challenges Columbia and Snake River cruisers face. The rewards, including Boyer Park (bottom middle) and Hells Canyon Resort, are worth it.





Beacon Rock State Park (top, right and below) is definitely worth a stop. The crews of *Pairadice* and *Alaskan Sea-Duction* made it a two-night stop. On a jetboat tour of Hells Canyon, the crews spotted big horn sheep.



**Beacon Rock State Park
was another favorite.
We stayed two nights
in order to spend a day
exploring and hiking.**

more open waters?

Heck yes! You still have commercial traffic, fishermen, nets, small watercraft, debris, kayakers, PWCs, etc. The Hood River area was by far the most hazardous. This area is world famous for the kite-boarders, sailboarders and light sailboats. When the wind is up, it's not uncommon for thousands of them to be on the river, with little regard to larger craft. The mystery of other boaters' intentions ... go figure. You can't be too careful!

Did you experience anything unexpected? How did you handle it?

Upon arriving at our destination, which was Hells Canyon Resort on the Snake River, we were greeted by a local gentleman on the dock who cautioned us to follow the "trench" due to shallow water. *Alaskan Sea-Duction* went in first. It was so shallow that Tom brought the boat in perpendicular to the transient dock and turned a hard 90 degrees for a starboard tie. Remaining in VHF radio communication, we followed but did bottom out. Once secure, Tom dropped his dinghy with a depthfinder and learned exactly what the

bottom was like. We walked both boats forward into deeper water for the duration of our visit. We used the dinghy to map out our exit. As irony would have it, we were parked right next to a decommissioned dredge, which hadn't operated in years.

And then there was the time the skipper moored in front of us fell off his boat onto the dock. We all sprang into action, busting out the first aid gear, packing the laceration on his leg and calling 9-1-1 for the medics! We made sure he had I.D. for transport. The EMTs complimented us on our skills. One of his crew stayed behind to move his boat, so I quickly became his deckhand. When the injured boat owner returned five hours later — with 60-some stitches in his wounded

leg — we realized he also had a broken arm! We never even learned his name.

What were a few of your favorite sights/sounds/stops?

Favorites? That's a difficult one. Everywhere we stopped was so unique and special. Everywhere we seem to meet up with guys John talks to on Trawler Forum (TF). With the aid of AIS, there is always someone there to greet us for dockline handling and refreshments of Alaskan Amber. Port of Kennewick, Wash., was no exception. The transient dock is on Clover Island and the harbormasters are the best,



Tom and John ready the dinghies for a scouting trip to find the best path through the shallow water of Hells Canyon.

complete with swag! We stayed twice, once upriver and once downriver. Trawler Forum buddies hosted an amazing rib dinner at their home. Later we took our boat out for the July 4 fireworks show on the river.

Beacon Rock State Park was another favorite. We stayed two nights in order to spend a day exploring and hiking. The trail up Beacon Rock was built in 1918, has 54 switchbacks and the view is from 800 feet above sea level. It's spectacular! We always share a "happy hour" with anyone who wants

to partake, as well as a nice grilled dinner on the dock, regardless of where we are.

We also really enjoyed the KOA Park and Marina at Boyer Park on the Snake River. It is located between Little Goose Dam & Lock and Lower Granite Dam & Lock, which are the last two locks when one is heading east. Kay and I enjoyed long walks with the dog while the guys played horseshoes in the beautiful, huge park. The restaurant and gift shop hosts do a great job.

Did you visit any sites of historical importance?

I look for history everywhere we go. Other boaters tease me about being the "historian," but I think of myself as a "photo journalist for fun." This summer's cruise east on the Columbia River and through most of the Snake River was all about the Lewis and Clark expedition. Although the marina in Clarkston left a bit to be desired — we personally repaired the dock — we visited the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and enjoyed the jetboat tour with Snake Dancer Excursions. There we visited a museum with a root cellar and saw native petroglyphs. Hells Canyon Resort and Marina has a river

walkway that relates the tales of the original 1804–1806 expedition with explanations and pictographs from the actual Lewis and Clark journals. The history is so abundant, it is very time consuming to record it all. Perhaps something for my book.

If you were going to write the definitive guide to cruising America's big rivers, what would you call it?

"The Ups and Downs of Cruising American's Waterways."

If you were to summarize your trip in one tweet, what would it say?

Why aren't more boaters cruising the rivers? 🐦