

MIGRATING TO WYOMING – 2012 BEGINNING THE LONG PROCESS

As in the past, we spent several days driving across the country to Wyoming. The main difference this time is that we are making this a permanent move. That did not stop us from seeing the sights along the way and visiting with several firearm, or firearm - related companies and individuals. This trip we were towing an enclosed utility trailer as well as a full load of household gear in the SUV. It was going to be a five day, not the usual three day trip this time.



First up was a short stop at Dayton Ohio, at the Wright Patterson Air Force base and the Air Force Museum. If you are interested in aircraft, some with BIG GUNS, then this is a must see. Our timing gave us only about 1-1/2 hours to rush through the many exhibits in the four Huge main hangers. We will have to stop there again soon.

The next day we started out from eastern Indiana with a stop in Montezum, Iowa. That is about 1/3 of the way across the state on I-80, between Davenport and Des Moines, and the home of Brownells, the very large firearm accessory business. I had called ahead and asked if it would be possible to visit and was informed that there were no formal tours or attractions, only the sales pickup point in a small front office. We stopped anyway and were given a rather thorough personal tour from a friendly and knowledgeable long time staff member. The operation is quite automated but depends on an extensive and efficient staff. Working conditions were very good and were being improved and expanded based on the construction we saw. It was impressive that a new and enlarged employee lunch room and other rooms were being set up. We got a generous supply of catalogs to take to the Jackson Hole Gun Club.



There was plenty of time left in the day so we headed west toward our next stop at Waterloo, Nebraska and the home of Shepherd Scopes. I had dealt with them many times over the years and have three Shepherd scopes on various rifles. Actually I have two and Cathy has one! But that is another story. I had talked with Dan Shepherd several times. He was the founder and innovator behind the scope designs (and other items yet to appear). When I called before our departure in June I talked with a lady to arrange for a visit and was told that the designer had just died. I asked if that was Dan and she said yes. I did not ask, but was certain I was talking to Dan's wife, and this was confirmed in our visit. Cathy, Bess Shepherd and I talked at length in the yard behind her house as the sun set in the west. It was amazing how many common interests and acquaintances we have as we noted in the photographs and awards in her house. If you are looking for the definition of a family business, this is it - Dan and Bess and other family members and friends, all make up Shepherd scopes.



Dan may be gone but his ideas live on, as I understand it there are more yet to be put into production. If you can support this type of small business, do so. I have a Shepherd on a Barrett Model 99 with about 500 rounds through it and it works just fine. As we began to leave, and Bess directed us down the road, back to I-80 and the motels west of Omaha, one more surprise arose. Cathy said she thought she recognized Bess and after a few seconds of discussion we remembered we had met at the first NRA convention in Charlotte, In 2001 if I recall. Bess had marched with us from a park in a

group of Grass Roots North Carolina gun owners, counter protesting some anti-gun folks. We remembered the Smith and Wesson brouhaha and other events from then.

On the road to Wyoming

The Remaining two days of travel soon had us in Wyoming and I could open carry my 1911. As an interesting technical side note, Wyoming has "self service" weigh stations along the various highways. You drive onto an unattended scale and an LED display shows the weight on the scale. The scales are small enough that you can measure each axle, or the whole vehicle and the trailer separately. I had measured the weights of the boxes and items I loaded into the trailer and this was a check on that. The scales confirmed that we had 800# of load in the SUV and about 1200# in the trailer. The trip covered 2209 miles at an average of 14.2 MPG. Usually we make 20+ MPG on this route, but hauling nearly 3/4 ton of cargo plus two passengers, and a trailer and fighting headwinds in most of the mid west and west, really knocks down the milage.

Open carry in the park - at the barbers - at AMK Ranch

Open carrying around town and at Teton and Yellowstone parks comes quite naturally now and the park rangers and employees seem to have become accustom to that practice. A two hour hike around String lake passed as usual with only a few glances from other visitors.

Later at Teton Barbers, the humorous comment of the day was by the owner as he suggested the one "gun shy" lady barber should cut my hair.

The University of Wyoming has an extension facility at the AMK ranch on the east shore of Jackson Lake, which was once was a working ranch and a magnificent setting. They offer weekly lectures of interest and Cathy and I attended one on trout fishing. As usual we went early, this time accompanied by a neighbor, for the BBQ Burger and Hotdog cookout. I open carried as I had in the past. As Cathy explored the area I hovered at our picnic table with some other visitors. One lady asked if I was expecting trouble and I replied that I was not, but I was following the advise of that well known fellow, Justin - Just In Time - I wanted to be prepared if a need arose. She mentioned she had just participated in a shooting class and naming the instructor, I was aware he was a person I knew, a friend of mine who runs a "shooting experience" operation in town. She said she had written a story about it for the local news paper. I then mentioned I had written several guest editorials. She asked if I was from Maryland and when I replied yes she said, "I know who you are!" Notoriety from my Walk In The Park events had preceded me. We had a further cordial discussion, and I presented my card to the writer, Jennifer Dorsey, and invited her to go shooting at any time.

Open carry at St Hubert the Hunter BBQ and fishing.

A few days later Cathy and I attended a fund raiser cookout at the St. Hubert the Hunter church in Bondurant, Wy. As in the past I open carried without incident and had a few casual conversations. One was with a lady hunting guide who got a Bison last year and we discussed cartridge/caliber and the range of her shot - it was short. Late at the event we were engaged in conversation with one of the event helpers. He said he was somewhat opposed to my point of view but he accepted my comments and the material I had for him.

Next Cathy wanted to do some fishing so we grabbed her gear and headed to some previously scouted and interesting areas but did not find a good spot. Finally just off the highway we stopped at an open area near the Hoback river where another couple was stopped with a day camper. As

Cathy hit the river, I talked to the other couple and discovered they were past neighbors of ours on Snow King. Again an extensive conversation ensued without any strained feelings.

Dirty Harry at NAPA auto parts.

The several radio stations in town, all operated by the same company BTW, had one of their morning show personalities, who we have come to know quite well, doing a live remote from the local Auto Parts store in celebration of their many years of business in town. To promote the event they had a trivia quiz with the question, "what was the caliber of the handgun used by Dirty Harry"? I don't think you would ever hear that question on the radio in Maryland or DC but here in Wyoming it is a natural, especially knowing the radio personality as I do. The prize was a pair of wiper blades for the first person arriving at the event with the correct answer. Needing some anyway, we hopped in the car and headed down. I felt sure someone would have answered in the 15 minutes it took us to get ready to get out of the house and down to the event, but walking in the store (and out back to the remote site) with the 1911 side arm, DelRay, the radio guy said, "here comes the answer". It turns out they had not gotten the .44 Magnum answer and we scored TWO pair of wiper blades, one of which was booted winter blades, Two NAPA Intrepid Fallen Heros Fund T-shirts AND hotdogs and burgers at the cookout they were having. We also met about 50% of the local mechanics including the ones who work on our cars. Did I tell you this is a small close knit town?

Open carry Independence Day

Jackson has a large and well supported Independence Day celebration (which happens to fall on July 4th). There is also a good firearm contingent in town, of which Cathy and I are part. Firearms and Independence Day - What a natural. When the county sheriff stops the parade and salutes the stars and stripes, you know you are in the right place.



Two years ago I instituted the "Walk In The Park" event where we open carried at the morning Pancake fund raiser breakfast, at the town parade immediately after and later in the day in the parks. An unusual twist of fate canceled the fireworks display this day because of the very dry conditions and the high fire danger. The breakfast fund raiser was to help pay for the fireworks, a point not lost on those putting on the event. Perhaps next years show will be much bigger.

We had made contact with others to open carry, notably Mason Tibbs, the "Saddle Tramp", a local very conservative talk show person (obviously with a cowboy flavor to his show). He partly offsets some of the imported liberal attitudes in town. We did not see Mason at the parade but he reported he was there. We did not see Dick Cheney either, but it was reported he was there, seated right in front of where we stood with sidearms in plain view. We talked to several people that morning about our open carrying, notably a resident formerly from Mexico and a visitor from China. Cathy and I were able to explain our actions and supply them with our Walk In The Park flyers (you can find it on the MCSM web site as a PDF file).

At the Cattlemans Bridge - fishing watcher

Cathy and I decided to take a short trip and picnic lunch and of course she took along her fish hunting gear - the fishing pole (AKA Fly Rod). Cathy is a catch-and-release fly fisher. Some of our judges and politicians also appear to practice catch-and-release, but that is another story. While Cathy fished in the Snake River I watched, read some magazines and talked to a few other folks. An interesting conversation was struck up with two ladies who were park service biologists surveying the area for invasive aquatic organisms and checking on the informational sign postings about them. As was my planned effect, they were interested in my sidearm. They were carrying bear spray and I had my own brand of 1911 bear repellent. We talked about four and two legged predators, various tactics, and many other items for about 15 minutes. It turns out they were summer employees from CHICAGO. One was, or had been, actively seeking an Illinois firearm permit but gave up because of the extreme difficulty of the process. They obviously were receptive to the discussion and probably had their positions reinforced by the encounter.

A few days later, Cathy decided to purchase some Bear Spray. Now when we are out it is a belt and suspenders bear affair. I'll have to be careful around her, if the spray blows back in our faces I might be blinded and can't bring the sidearm into proper action. I might shoot that large dark blurred object I see and it might be her car ;-)

Rifles at the Camp Creek Ho-down

Out in public, a "conversation piece" will do just that, start conversations. On Friday evening there was a live concert with some well known country singers and the "Saddle Tramp" (mentioned above) as M.C. We ate some bratwurst and sauerkraut, with good Snake River Brewery beer, at the Camp Creek Inn, just east of Hoback Junction. We sat on the deck watching the sunset glow on the surrounding buttes and listened to the music. Obviously I did not open carry while drinking beer, but wore an NRA black and yellow insignia hat with the scrambled eggs on the bill. Near the end of the evening while slowly heading to the door, one fellow looked at me and asked, "What is your favorite rifle?". I just had to reply that I liked them all, but mostly the accurate ones. If I had to choose just one I guess it would be the M1A. He said, "me too!" So he, Cathy and I had a good 15 minute conversation. We will no doubt be seeing more of him at the range or shooting at some land he manages. This encounter reinforces the need for anyone to wear some type of conversation starter and do not be afraid to be a good will ambassador for Second Amendment Firearm Issues.



Confrontation at Yellowstone

On Saturday, July 21, 2012, we headed north to Yellowstone to see the sights. Stopping at West Thumb, Cathy visited the Yellowstone Association shop and I loitered outside - open carrying. We then went on a hike around the boardwalk at the thermal features. I have discussed this area walk in previous travelogs. Many folks passed by, including many foreign tourists and a few rangers. No big deal and a few friendly conversations ensued. Next we headed further north for a 4 mile hike to Lone Star Geyser. Two hours of vigorous walking was quite comfortable with the Fobus paddle holster and the 1911 without the light.

We finished our walk about 8:15 pm, so we immediately headed into the Old Faithful area for some dinner because it was getting late. We went into the Yellowstone General Store to check out the

snack bar. Looking carefully, we saw there were no signs restricting firearms but the snack bar was about to close and the food selection was limited. The very friendly staff recommended the Old Faithful Lodge cafeteria which had a bigger selection and stayed open later. They had no reaction to the openly carried sidearm. We walked through the parking lot to the lodge and saw no firearm restriction signs at the open doors, so we walked in through the common lobby area and into the cafeteria to look at the selection boards. After several minutes of surveying the menus, we decided on our selections, got our meals and drinks and headed to the cashier.

While paying for our meals a fellow approached from my right and spoke; I thought he was speaking to the cashiers, as they looked up at him. He said something along the lines of when you finish checking out step outside to have your meals. That sounded strange so I looked over at him and saw he was speaking to me. He had just started speaking without addressing me or gaining my attention before hand. Seeing my quizzical look he inferred correctly that I did not understand. He then said something about having a policy of not allowing firearms in the establishment. I informed him that I had looked for signs restricting this, as I am usually quite thorough in observing signs, but saw none. As an aside, the cash register clerk made some statements indicating that he understood my viewpoint and firearm position. Indeed, from our next viewpoint, as we moved away from the cashier and to the condiment stand in the dining room, there were clearly no signs on the entrance doors going directly to the dining room from an outside porch (though not the ones we entered at the front of the building). We discussed the requirement for signs at all entrances and he acknowledged the apparent lack, thereof. But the cafeteria staff member said that he checked with the front desk management and the policy stands; he reiterated his request that we eat outside on the porch and not in the dining room. I will not go into details but I told him I objected to being required to leave the dining room and eat outside; it was a kind of "back of the bus moment", yet I told him I would comply with his request. The exchange was quite cordial throughout.

We moved to the porch outside the dining room and even though there were no tables and chairs, we made due with some comfortable rockers and a great view of Old Faithful and a beautiful sunset with a very new moon setting behind the mountains. I took a few minutes to again visit the front entrance doors (by an outside route) and DID find some small square signs with a red circle and slash over a handgun and a brief notation referring to a Xanterra Parks & Resorts policy. Unfortunately, I did not have a camera at that time. I had not seen the signs when we first entered because the doors were PROPPED OPEN and the signs on the outside front of the doors COULD NOT BE SEEN from our direct approach to and through the doors. Yes, the front doors were posted but in a useless fashion and the side doors were not posted.

The person who confronted us was Joe Caruso, the assistant cafeteria manager, a very pleasant and professional young man. Xanterra does not hire fools. He again approached us after our meal (fair quality, by the way) and we had an extended conversation and I gave him my MCSM card and explained our reasons for open carrying. He appeared sympathetic and I gave him one of the Walk In The Park flyers. I asked him several times to take my comments to Xanterra and suggested they should modify their policy. Joe then supplied me with comment cards. I have carefully checked the Xanterra web sites and can find no reference to any firearm or related policy. This is a serious shortcoming because potential visitors and guests will not be aware of this policy before arrival. Times are changing and more folks will be carrying sidearm defense tools, especially in areas like Yellowstone.

Any organization which actively denies the carrying of personal defense tools should understand the potential liability of their actions. There obviously is the potential for a loss of business as I already have a short list of businesses I will avoid. I need to get some Gun Owner - business educational

cards - printed up to explain this at future contacts. If a business chooses to exclude me and others from doing business with them, that is their choice. I guess there is also the safety and legal liability for Xanterra, but not the one they are thinking about when they ask their lawyers about this position. What is their liability if by denying self defense, in the event of an attack, an individual is more seriously hurt or killed? This hazard extends not only to the denied firearm carrier but to the whole room - they can not benefit from an individual defending himself and thus the whole group suffers. As we left the building I had the clear thought, that now the people in the building were in MORE DANGER because they were in a victim disarmament zone. If Xanterra is worried about the reaction of some of their guests who might be upset at the sight of someone carrying a self defense tool, I reminded Joe of the 8 oz. Bear Spray my wife was carrying, it would clear most of a building in seconds as the pepper mist spread throughout. All of our encounters with tourists and rangers in the parks have been very positive, often resulting in conversations and curiosity satisfied.

If you care to contact Xanterra, here is the information to do so.

Xanterra Parks & Resorts - 6312 South Fiddlers Green Circle, Suite 600N

Greenwood Village, Colorado 80111 - Phone: 303.600.3400 - Fax: 303.600.3600

<<http://www.xanterra.com/Corporate-Offices-350.html>>

Specifically for Yellowstone; <info-ynp@xanterra.com>

Be kind to them. They are in the midst of an emotional reaction, denying firearm owners access to an area thinking it makes the area safer, and they will be bound up in a changing tide. Gentle and reasoned persuasion, and business changes, will educate them.

Wrapping this up I must mention a current Knox Update Column in Shotgun News by Jeff Knox. He discusses the killing of Erik Scott who was carrying concealed at a Costco and accidentally made his firearm visible when he moved to examine some goods. An anti-gun comment got relayed and embellished as it was passed on to law enforcement who responded in force - amped up thinking a armed combative man was present. They forcefully verbally confronted Erik and immediately shot him many times. At no time have I ever been in such a situation, but I know it is possible. I think open carrying defuses that somewhat - criminals will not be open carrying. I will have to remember that it could always happen, that someone in a position of authority and carrying a gun and protected from most civil and some criminal prosecutions if they do wrong, could get the wrong information and just start shooting.

Stay tuned for more adventures in moving to freedom. BTW, there is the town of Freedom, Wyoming, about 1 hour from Jackson, but that is another story.

Bob and Cathy Culver - July 2012