

DESTINATION DULUTH – and THE SHORES OF GITCHEE GUMME (that’s Lake Superior if you missed the Great Lakes day in high school Geography class)

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Our “original” red Mustang 2005 convertible was ready for the 2,200 mile drive to the shores of Gitchee Gumme and the wide open spaces of our cross country trek from our home in Scottsdale, AZ to Duluth, MN this summer. We spent five weeks at senior summer camp at the University of MN – Duluth after taking a fantasy road trip that touched nine states and was the envy of our friends and family. In seven weeks we logged in almost 5,600 miles on our “little red wonder.”

Day one took us from Scottsdale to Santa Fe, NM, the city that will celebrate 400 years in 2010. Climbing 7,000 feet, our “little red bomber” was quite the lady – keeping her cool with temperature changes from 112 degrees in the Valley of the Sun to 78 degrees at the height of the Sandia Mountains as she busted loose to the richness of the North Country.

The next morning we hit the open highway to Loveland, CO. The scenery comes alive immediately featuring the lush green of Colorado. Our “little red delight” sails through the foothills of the mountain ranges accelerating on up from Pueblo to Colorado Springs, the home of the Air Force Academy where we met rain in sheets - time to put that smart black hat on the “little lady.”

We had the top down about 80% of the time; until the street showed true signs of rain. Drizzle on the windshield is no reason to cap a Mustang convertible – the “little sweetie” is audacious enough to outrun that much rain!

We gave “our girl” a rest in Loveland at my sister’s house for two nights catching up with family, then on to Omaha - the land of the Rivers, Missouri to the West and Mississippi on the East. Nebraska resonates with farmland as rich as gold and crops of the heartland as alive as early spring. The little “red bird” soared and chirped – it was her kind of road with a few big trucks to out run just to show them that she was still the Queen – Steve Mc Queen’s girl that is - she is retro baby!

We had packed this pony in “easy rider” style, with no room to spare. Newlyweds on their belated “honeymoon”, this Mustang couple has their first anniversary October, 2006. The second Mustang as a couple and a third Mustang for the groom – his first one was in 1967. The retro model of 2005 was the perfect vehicle to replace the 2002 bought

when they first met. A love story if ever there was one – a Mustang before the little gold band, under the auspices of unity forever.

Omaha meant it was time to celebrate. Not with steak – but with Catfish from Old Miss – in preparation for Walleye from Gitche Gumme. We were beginning to bond with water again and indulge in our passion of summering at the shore, eating fresh fish, seeing green, finding solitude amongst the trees and sailing through life in a Mustang.

Iowa's farm country delighted us with even more prosperous farms and people who smile and wave giving an intimate warm feeling of being home. Two passengers in a Mustang – one originally from northern Michigan's Mackinac area of the UP and the other from Oregon's cheese country – Tillamook on the Pacific coast now enjoying every minute of this adventure across the tapestry of Americana in a truly American automobile, the retro Mustang convertible. Life is good.

The last leg of the trip in Minneapolis means dinner at the legendary Mall of America with shrimp at Buba Gump's Restaurant - just what Forest would recommend. Why not, if the Mustang could go almost 2000 miles without a squeak or a complaint of any kind from us, Lt. Dan deserved at least a hello.

We hopped back into the "little lady in red" the next day filled with anticipation at seeing the Twin Ports. A stop at Toby's in Hinckley, MN for lunch and a chicken salad with the texture of Ojibwa Minnesota Rice on top was all part of our orientation to a culture that we knew was different, yet a familiar portrait, home, yet far from home. Welcome to the Northland and a special vacation.

We roared down the freeway, hair flying and smiles wide, to the entrance of the North Shore of Lake Superior at Duluth – the city we would call home for the next five weeks. We had logged in 2131 miles on the "little beauty" and she was looking fine!

The city of Duluth – all 65,000 of its magnificent people – greeted us and our "wild horse" with open arms, skies as blue as lapis stone and a lake the size of God's heavens. Duluth proved to be perfect for an icon like the Mustang by letting her put her top down everyday and climb high up on rolling hills and stretch herself across the Skyline Parkway or take the Scenic Drive up the North Shore to take in the history of this complex land.

When admiring a stately aging home or old church on the hill's flanks Duluth welcomed us immediately, embracing the couple in the sporty red Mustang convertible with "REDROVR" AZ license plates. Many times a smile and a wave let us know the natives were happy we had made the trip and hoped we would tell you how great it was to be in this fair city and to be a part of the U of MN – Duluth program for seniors for five weeks.

Duluth is the "little San Fran on the Lake" because the hills and the views are breathtaking and the "lake effect" adds to the ambience that can be appreciated at the four mile Lake Walk and Leif Erickson Rose Garden. We did this walk every other day to

enjoy the view and the cool breezes and the plants indigenous to the area that make it such a memorable place. These effects of Duluth will engage you to Chester Park for a concert, or Canal Park to watch the freighters come in or sail boat races pass by or to catch a Vista Cruise to visit the ore loading docks and hear an in-depth tour of the area.

Our “little red buggy” was happy to take us to Superior, WI just across the bridge and directly to Barker’s Island and a dinner of Walleye at the Boathouse Restaurant. A day of golf at Nemidji Golf Course outside of Superior, or a longer drive down to Bayfield and the sites at their marina is another chance for peaceful pleasure.

When tennis was my game, the Longview Tennis Club and coffee later at the Blue Note near Canal Park was a good match. More of the hospitality of Duluth and recreation abounds if we need to give the Mustang a rest and rent a bicycle for the day at Munger Park Trail.

The “little lady” was always ready to go up the North Shore to Two Harbors and Gooseberry Falls or the Split Rock Lighthouse tour. She loved the day we went further to Grand Marias and took in the Fisherman’s Festival. We take her everywhere we can because she fits in so well with our lifestyle. She is family you know.

The Mustang easily took us to the Skyline Parkway and a climb high above the city to find views that took our breath away near Enger’s Tower, a 360 degree view of the area with all the green and blue you could need in one day – perfect for two desert rats on vacation. Duluth prides itself on the comfortable coexistence it has with Superior, WI as Twin Ports – the view from the Skyline will show you why they join hands and make this incredible place inviting.

The city of Duluth and UMD honor you at the Glensheen Mansion for a tour, the historic family site on Lake Superior at the entrance to the North Shore Drive. The Gardens and stables and boathouse add to the adventure of what life was like for this prestigious family of Duluth’s 3M history.

Leaving Duluth is a hard thing to do, unless you know you will be back to the shores of the biggest body of fresh water in the world, the Depot’s museums - one for Vietnam Vets and one for Immigrants and the cultural events of UMD’s summer season of plays and operas. You know the little red car cannot stay away from this life of winding around the tree lined streets in town and shady spots of the shore and backwoods that take you to the many beaches and lakes with all their precious stories and northern flavor.

You know you will remember your time at Timber Lodge for Walleye dinner as scrumptious mom used to make, or Fitger's Brewery history and old photos, views of the Lake from many points that will remain unchanged or that day at Park Point when you finally surrendered and put your feet in Lake Superior. Or the night of the storm when you sat near the window at the Va Bene Café and watched the white caps crash the shoreline down at the famous Aerial Bridge entrance from the Lake with lighted freighters flickering amid the waves.

Leaving means a new way home for you and the little red car ready for more adventures. This is not a once in a lifetime journey for you will surely pass this way again; staying longer at Gitche Gumme next summer. The Mustang took us safely to Sioux Falls the night we left, even with harsh rains she never a bad moment of stopping or missing a beat. Tomorrow is the journey across South Dakota.

South Dakota is a whole new kind of beauty. The trees are not as close but the prairies were with us, and the Mustang was free and in her element making great time with little traffic knowing the wild horses of South Dakota still roamed the area – maybe wild Mustangs were somewhere in those hills. Rapid City meant a stop at the newly appointed Wounded Knee Museum. The Mustang was proud to visit this important museum of American history and to receive a feather from the Dakota Indians that she keeps safely in the car for good luck.

Rapid City is the “City of Presidents” with bronze statues of all the presidents on street corners adding to the feeling of pride you expect when you know tomorrow you will visit Mt. Rushmore National Park. We tour the history of the sculptor’s 14 years of work and toil until the mountain became the treasure we know today. The Mustang took us to the pinnacle of parks because the next day we were heading to Rocky Mountain National Park.

Another stop in Colorado meant a side trip to Estes Park and a viewing of elk roaming the streets of this tourist inhabited quaint little village. We continued on up 10,000 feet in the Rockies to see some of the most breathtaking mountains in this country. This day, the Mustang was resting in my sister’s garage.

After a couple days of rest it was on to Taos for dinner and a taste of the Land of Enchantment with an overnight in Santa Fe that beckoned us to the oldest church and the oldest house in America, as well as fine dining and impressive galleries. The trip would not have been complete without a leisurely drive home and stops in Albuquerque, Gallop and Grants for coffee, lunch and jewelry shopping.

Our Valley of the Sun had a lot of summer flooding while we were gone, but the Mustang was confident she could get us home safely after a nice dinner in the historic section of Flagstaff. We entered Scottsdale for the first time in exactly seven weeks to witness the after effects of a Monsoon season and record flooding we had missed by just days. This has been one special summer and the memories of the Northland and our cross country trip in our Mustang would be with us forever in our hearts. We wait now for the temperatures to drop below 100 degrees and our “season” to begin in the desert of Arizona and more convertible weather. Welcome home!