



Class of 65 Newsletter Edition 35-March 2011



Disclaimer: This Newsletter is produced for members of the RMC Class of 1965 and is based solely on inputs from members of the Class of 65. It is not an official publication of the Royal Military College nor does it purport to represent the views or opinions of all members of the Class of 65. Articles will be entered in the official language in which they are received. Regrettably the Editorial staff still lacks the linguistic skills to produce a bilingual version.

Editor's Corner

Apparently my plea for inputs did not fall on deaf ears, or at least it woke **Hugh Spence** from his Florida slumbers, as we have quite a bit of stuff in this month's edition, most of it from the aforementioned Secretary - for - life.

In addition to Hugh's thoughts, some of them irreverent as usual, there is the first part of an article from **Rick Johnson** on his decision to become a snowbird.

Waine McQuinn, with badgering from some and unsolicited help from others has drafted a confidentiality policy for the Class of 65 Web Page that addresses privacy issues raised by some class members.

Finally **Georges Wilson** passed along an update on an old CMR classmate and one time roommate of both **Tom Defaye** and myself -
Georges Lariviere.

Georges (Wilson) reported that he had bumped into **Georges (Lariviere)** who enquired about his old roommates. **Georges L** travels to Prague once a year where he is working on a project at Charles University.



Georges Lariviere

Otherwise, he is in good health - cycling a lot, but apparently not with the fanaticism of Rudy Roelofsen! He is retired but as noted above, takes on the occasional project. He lives in Chambly, Quebec.

CLASS OF 65 WEBSITE CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

In response to a few classmate enquiries, the webmaster will introduce the following Confidentiality Policy for the RMC65 Website

En réponse à quelques enquêtes des camarades de classe, le webmestre mettra en place la Politique de confidentialité du site Internet RMC65 suivante.

Confidentiality Policy Classmates	Politique de confidentialité Membres de la classe
<p>With the next update of the RMC65 website, all personal email addresses will be removed. They will be replaced with a graphic that indicates the information is available from the webmaster.</p> <p>Please advise the webmaster if you also wish that your other personal data be replaced with a similar graphic which will indicate that your data exists but is not available on the website. Visitors will have to request the information from the webmaster who will maintain the data off of the website.</p> <p>If an enquirer is another member of the class of 65, the webmaster will release the information automatically. All other enquiries will be forwarded to you to deal with.</p>	<p>Lors de la prochaine mise à jour du site Internet RMC65, toutes les adresses courriel personnelles seront retirées. Elles seront remplacées par un graphique indiquant que les renseignements sont disponibles auprès du Webmestre.</p> <p>Veillez aviser le webmestre si vous souhaitez également que vos autres données personnelles soient remplacées par un graphique semblable indiquant que vos données existent mais ne sont pas disponibles sur le site. Les visiteurs devront demander les informations au webmestre qui maintiendra ces données hors du site.</p> <p>Si le demandeur est un autre membre de la classe de 65, le webmestre lui transmettra les informations automatiquement. Toutes les autres demandes vous seront transmises, et vous en disposerez à votre guise.</p>
Webmaster/Webmestre tunbridge@ncf.ca	

REUNION SOUVENIR DVD AVAILABLE



Thanks to **6560 Andrew Nellestyn** who donated a proof copy to the Class, a DVD featuring reunion parades including our March to the Arch is available free to anyone who paid for attendance at our RMC reunion in 2010. The DVD also has scenes sprinkled here and there of Class members doing their thing on that great weekend.

If you would like a copy, please send your request *along with your college number, name and current snail-mail address* to the Secretary at:

hjm.spence@rogers.com

or

Hugh Spence
RMC Class of 65
35 Ridgefield Cr.
Ottawa, ON
K2H 6S3

Hugh Spence has also asked that the following appeal for help be posted.

The RMC Museum needs help

- an appeal from the RMC Club Kingston Branch

Have you ever visited the RMC Museum? It is a little known treasure, situated in the Martello Tower within the old walls on RMC's southern extremity, Fort Frederick. It happens to be one of the most underfunded museums in the Canadian Armed Forces, (not that underfunded things in the forces are rare.)

There are some 10,000 items in RMC's Heritage collection, including over 7,000 of national historic value - artwork, documents, photographs, weapons and uniforms relevant to the history of RMC and the service of ex-cadets.

What is the problem?

Each Canadian Forces museum is an independent, self-financed, non-public institution. DND limits public support to the provision of accommodation and one employee. The museums are not eligible for grants for operations from municipal, provincial or federal support programs and they rely totally on donations.

It wasn't until 2006 that the RMC Museum had a full-time staff of one, supplemented by part-time summer students. That staffing level is inadequate to manage the collection or the increasing artifact backlog, and the lack of resources to maintain an effective inventory control system has resulted in some valuable donated items being lost, stolen or damaged.

The museum operations require additional funding for collection management, repairs, restoration and preservation. The cost is approximately **\$60,000 per year** and the Kingston Branch of the RMC Club has taken a leadership role, establishing a special project with a goal of obtaining sufficient funding for an initial period of two years. Project ***RMC Museum Operations*** has a long-term goal of building an endowment to alleviate the Museum's unfunded resource needs.

The Class of 65 already has its own magnificent endowment project supporting the College, and a major contribution to *RMC Museum Operations* would detract from this. However, any individual Class member is invited to support this worthy effort through a financial donation, one-time or annual. You can even contribute to one or more of a dozen or so Heritage Projects being undertaken by the Kingston Branch, with money or your time as a volunteer.

Financial donations can be made through the RMC Foundation, resulting in a tax receipt.

Take a virtual tour of the museum at www.rmcvirtualmuseum.com

Further information:

5256 Gwynn "Griff" Griffith, Chair, Heritage Working Group, at glg@cogeco.ca

8057 Ross McKenzie, Museum Curator, at mckenzie_r@rmc.ca

College name calling (III)

by 6439 Hugh J.M. Spence

From the last bulletin, Charlie Emond's excellent treatise on the whys and wherefores of bilingualism as it pertains to the common usage of our military college names in both official languages deserves a rebuttal, because it completely misses the point of my original "thesis".



In his quite remarkable position as the one and only commandant of two of Canada's military colleges, each with critical bilingual influences and issues, he is uniquely positioned to address the subject, and his article was most informative. Indeed, from his article it would appear Charlie was a prime motivator behind the current misguided "system", so I shall tut-tut at him personally.

In my view, speaking as a former college recruiter in both the provincial and federal environments, the muddling of similar institutional names and the hodge podge of confusing abbreviations is counterproductive with respect to recruiting and *esprit de corps*. For what it's worth, there are others in the Class who agree with me.

In accordance with government rules and policy, it is certainly right and appropriate that the colleges have bilingual identifiers on their gates, their letterheads, their vehicles, band bass drums, and so on. Apart from serving the needs of both of Canada's language groups, this achieves what Charlie calls "manifesting the Colleges' (and therefore Canada's) linguistic duality...when dealing with Canadians (and) other military institutions..." Fine and dandy. *Chapeau à tous!*

But the forced application of bilingual naming in what I call "varsity vernacular" or common usage borders on dumb. Anyway, why is it not RMCCK and CMRCSJ...? Does that peculiarity not suggest a problem?

At the most simplistic level of argument, I do hope never to see an athletic team from either college appear with *both* RMC and CMR (or any aggregation of the lengthier abbreviations) on their jerseys. Nor will I ever claim to have attended RMCSJ, even to someone who might understand what that means.

Charlie calls it "history trumping new rules," which tends to support the notion that RMC, CMR and their longer name versions are fundamentally not "translatable" in the traditional sense. I agree, and add that it is a matter of common sense prevailing over bone-headed bureaucracy.

A Pox on the Pillbox!

by 6439 Hugh J.M. Spence

It is rumoured that there is a movement afoot to seriously lobby the Harper government to replace the sadly outdated pillbox hat in the order of dress for the two military colleges.

Evidently the leader of this "*ban the boîte*" initiative is **6523 Terry Colfer**. In his role as a Canadian ambassador, he has literally carried his distaste for that super silly topper all over the world.



We enthusiastically support this attack on the ridiculous lid, not least because the Phillip Morris bellboy/Jackie Kennedy-style chapeau has become a laughingstock in the military context today. Cadets are known to be embarrassed to wear the pillbox, which has a certain snicker factor among today's youth, and probably has had for maybe two generations.

In fact modern cadets rarely have to wear the detested box since "parade dress" is not often called for today; marching drill is not a priority at the

colleges. The current catechism is that officers should know about drill, its ceremonial functions, skills and techniques, but not necessarily be proficient at any of it.

Furthermore, a generation or so of cadets are relatively unfamiliar with headgear that uses a chin-strap. The informal blue wedge caps/kepis are worn in air force fashion *sans* straps, and the result is that on the odd occasion when pillboxes are required, the chin strap is a nuisance rather than an essential tool. Watch a modern Wing parade and you will see cadets with the strap swinging uselessly beneath the chin and banging off many a (male) Adam's apple - from persistent non-use, the cadets have no idea how to use chin tension on the strap to keep the bucket on their head.

The pillbox as military headgear has a confusing history involving Roman soldiers and even Ghurkas. However, it is believed to have been foisted on RMC (and much later CMR) as a nod to the British army artillery roots of Canada's early military training, artillerymen being noted for their mathematical brains, ability to sketch, and propensity to require hearing aids in their dotage. (Note the bellboy look is also fashionable in the Fort Henry Guard, originally fortress artillery troops and now a fine bunch of large calibre blank-shooters.)

For the enlisted British artilleryman in muzzle-loading days, the first purpose of the fez-like bonnet was to have something to aim his saluting hand at, forelocks having gone out of fashion. The second was more practical - the cap's shape allowed it to collect urine when the gunner needed urgently to cool an overheated cannon barrel. The ugly headgear was, in fact, known originally in British Ordnance parlance as "Pisspot, dual-purpose, gunners for the use of". In the delicate, high-moral Victorian times the name was changed to "Pillbox" which, with true military efficiency, has exactly the same vowels and total number of letters as the original, so as to not confuse quartermaster inventory records. (*"Pass me the Whiteout will yez 'Arry old cock."*)

There are a lot of good reasons for maintaining traditions, but embarrassing young officer cadets is surely not one of them. Would it not save money and

make more sense to equip the lads and lasses with *standard* officers' forage caps, male and female versions, and army style to coordinate with the basically army-pattern scarlet tunic and the blue "patrol" one? They will wear something similar throughout their military career so might as well get used to them. The wedge cap could be retained for daily on-campus use - after all, a comfy classroom headrest is needed in the absence of the wooly astrakhan.

In scarlets or blues, the cadets would look sharp, proud and "appropriate" in an officer's cap. With an RMC cap badge and a scarlet or perhaps tri-coloured hat band (like our old "tri-service" trouser belts,) the headgear would publicly announce an up and coming officer and not a hotel lobby lackey.

We're not absolutely mired in tradition; significant college uniform changes have occurred over the years - witness the adoption of pith helmets for cadet officers on parade. And other old-fashioned uniform accoutrements like swagger sticks, capes and hob-nailed boots have been consigned to the "has been" bin. It's now high time for the pillbox to be trashed, too.

Editorial Note: I would be interested in views - supporting and otherwise - on this proposal.

Ottawa Class Lunch

Owing to bad weather, a somewhat smaller crowd than usual gathered at the customary watering-hole to moan about the winter or to regale their recent forays to warmer climes. Attending this time were **Vil Auns, Rick Archer, Jim Cale, Jim Carruthers, Bruce Corbett, Doug Cope, Gord Diamond, Charlie Emond, Andy Nellestyn, Ed Sanford, Hugh Spence,** and yours truly.

Speaking of regaling with tales of trips south, **Rick Johnson** has kindly provided the following reminiscences on becoming a "snowbird".

On Becoming a Snowbird

By 6544 Rick Johnson



In 2003 I had decided to retire, but my employer, Navtech Systems, persuaded me to keep working at least two days a week. Since Gail was still busy running her store in St. Jacobs and was not yet ready to quit, that was OK, so I settled into a two-day work-week. For quite some time I had been toying with the idea of getting a camper and touring around North America once we were retired, and the more I thought about it, the more that appealed to me. Knowing that some activities don't always turn out to be as much fun as you thought they were going to, however, it seemed as though it would be prudent to do some camping as see how we liked it before we invested a huge amount of money in a motor-home. We looked at the cost of renting a small motor-home, and even considered a sort of "shared ownership" program where the cost of purchase was offset by having the dealership rent the vehicle for those weeks of the summer that you did not book it for yourself. In the end, however, we decided that buying an older used camper would be the least expensive way for us to try things out. We picked up an RV Trader magazine and started looking, and eventually settled on a 1978 Tioga, listed for \$6K.



The 1978 Tioga

It was a bit beat up...getting it tuned up so that we felt safe driving out of town in it, and fixing up the air conditioning system set us back another

thousand. The one (and only?) advantage of the vehicle's age was that it qualified as an "antique" and did not need to meet any emissions test standards! We had new carpeting installed, and Gail re-upholstered the sofa-bed and the swivel-chairs at the dining table. Our first camping trip, if you could call it that, was to a campground on the edge of town. There we learned the ins and outs of parking 'on the level', and hooking up the hydro, water, and sewer connections. With that experience under our belt, we ventured a little further from home on our second trip, making a two-hour run over to Grand Bend on Lake Huron. That worked out well, though it did illuminate one of the more significant drawbacks of a motor-home (as opposed to a trailer): once you were set up in a campground it was inconvenient to get disconnected in order to go anywhere, so unless you were towing a second vehicle, it was an impediment to going sightseeing, shopping, or out for dinner and a movie, you were more or less confined to the campground.

With these proving runs under our belt, our next big trip was to go all the way to Nova Scotia and back via the Gaspé peninsula. That was a fun trip, but we also learned a few more things along the way. First we discovered that folks in Quebec are avid campers, and that if you want to go camping in Quebec on a summer holiday weekend, you had best make a reservation at the campground, or you will wind up having to park for the night in front of the local drive in theatre! We also learned that there's a large variation in what is deemed a camp site from one campground to another. Some are nice level areas, nestled in the trees in a way which provides plenty of privacy. Others are nothing more than hydro, water, and sewage hookups out in the middle of a not-so-level field. Sometimes the 'field' is more akin to a large parking lot. Still, we were happy to find that, around the Gaspé in July, getting a campsite was a great deal easier than getting a motel room!

Our old camper didn't let us down, although we discovered that on some of the steeper slopes our maximum speed, with the accelerator right to the floor, was no more than 28 miles per hour! Had we been towing another vehicle, I'm sure we would've found that the only way to ascend some of these hills would have been to disconnect and drive both vehicles independently. It fulfilled its main purpose in life: it confirmed that Gail and

I both enjoyed traveling and living in a camper, and that we could get along in such small quarters. It gave us insight into one of the drawbacks of having a motor-home, and made us decide to go for a 5th wheel so that we would have the truck to drive around in once we had set the trailer up in a campground.

Early in the spring of 2005 we attended an RV show at the International Center in Toronto to see what was available in 5th wheels, and in April we bought a 29 ft. K-Z "Durango".



Gail and the Durango

We had just stopped to "have a look" at a dealership in Belleville, and were sold when they were prepared to offer us \$9K for our Tioga, sight unseen. Before we could take delivery we had to lease a truck, and get it fitted with a hitch. Having read up on the hazards of towing 5th wheels, we paid extra to get the sliding hitch which could move rearward to provide greater clearance between the trailer and the truck cab when turning. The truck we chose was a Chevy Silverado with 4-wheel drive and a 6L gas engine. We considered going diesel, and although we were a little concerned about it being noisier, and possibly smellier, the ultimate decision maker was price...diesel would have added another \$10K to the vehicle's price, and put our monthly payment above the amount we had budgeted. In retrospect, if we had it to do over again, we would go diesel.

As with our first camper, we started out by making a first sortie to the nearby Green Acres campground in Waterloo. We had one memorable learning experience: when I removed the cap on the sewage pipe, believing

naively that the tank valves would of course have been closed when we took delivery of the trailer, I was treated to a rude surprise! Yes, I know what "assume" means.....

Our first lengthy trip was to New York and Washington, DC, in 2005, and everything went fine until we got to Gettysburg. While we were camping there, it rained heavily overnight. As a result, some of the campsites became very muddy, and some campers were having difficulty moving out in the morning. This in turn was blocking some new arrivals from moving into other campsites, and two RV's were parked in the entrance to the campground. We had no difficulty pulling away from our campsite, but could not negotiate the 90° left turn to get past the campers in the entrance way. They had made the situation more difficult for us by parking on the wrong side of the road to begin with, and they were not prepared to move in order for us to escape. The only alternative left to us was to pull across the parking lot and make a 3 point turn. As I was backing up, my attention was focused on the rear end of the trailer, and not on how close the front of the trailer was getting to the cab of the truck. All of a sudden there was a huge bang, as if someone had fired a shotgun, and I was showered with pieces of glass as the rear window blew out! I had made the classic new fifth wheel owner error, and turned too tightly. What made the situation all the more annoying was the fact that I had no one but myself to blame—I had not taken the time to adjust the hitch position to its rearward, maneuvering position.



Oops!

We were not able to get a new window installed while we're on this trip, but we were able to get a local auto glass business to vacuum out all of the glass fragments, and tape a temporary plastic sheet "window" over the gaping hole. In a somewhat noisier, less elegant vehicle we continued our trip. The cost to repair this boo boo: a little over \$1,000.

In 2006 Gail and I found ourselves both unexpectedly retired at the end of May. Although I had submitted my resignation to Navtech some six months earlier, Gail had expected to continue running her store for several more years. When one of her crafters became seriously interested in buying the business, however, she took advantage of the opportunity, and by a strange coincidence, we each retired on the same day. Gail's father had not been well, so the very first thing we did was hitch up the camper and head for Halifax for a month. This was a good test of how long we could live together in the confined quarters of the 29 ft. long 5th wheel. I had been concerned that although the camper might be fine for a long weekend, or even a week, it might prove to be a little too "tight" for a more extended stay, which would make us have to think twice about going south for the winter. We were pleased to find that we had no trouble at all adjusting to the smaller living space.

Shortly after we returned from Nova Scotia we decided that it was time we made good on a promise we had made to our grandson the previous year to take him camping in our new trailer. We decided that Grand Bend would have the sorts of activities that a young teen-age boy would enjoy, and since it was the Canada Day holiday weekend, we called ahead for a reservation. Gail flipped through the campground guide and selected the first in alphabetical order: Birch Bark Trailer Park. Although they were not right close to the beach, they had a very nice covered swimming pool which we put to good use. We enjoyed our stay so much that at the end of the weekend we decided to return Jesse to Kitchener and stay on for the balance of the week by ourselves. One week stretched into two, and two into three, and since there was very little difference between the cost of three weeks and one month, we stayed for the full month. Before that time was up we had become aware that they were opening up 40 lots at the back of the campground for a year-round retirement community. That fit in well with our plans to go south for

six months each year, because it would remove a couple of the main stumbling blocks associated with having a house in a city subdivision: having to have someone keep the driveway clear of snow so the place looked occupied, and check on the house on a regular basis for insurance purposes. At the back of the campground we would have no security worries, and we could save money by draining the plumbing and turning off the heat while we were away. We picked out a floor-plan and a lot, and committed to having a place custom-built for us for delivery in October.

The next thing for us to do was to decide where it was we would go for the winter. My mom and step-dad had spent many winters in St. Petersburg, Florida, and I had always found visits there a little disappointing. Sure, there was no snow, and you did not need a parka, but it was never as warm as I imagined it would be, and often it was cloudy and there would be the occasional rain shower. The warm, dry climate of the Arizona desert seemed a lot more appealing to me, even though it was a lot further to travel. By coincidence, the camper who parked next to us during August told us that they had spent the previous winter at an RV resort called "Hidden Shores" on the Colorado River, just north of Yuma, Arizona. They told us that it only cost \$350/month, which seemed incredibly cheap compared to the \$600/month we were paying in Grand Bend. We decided that we would give it a try.

We couldn't leave until after we had moved into our new home, and that didn't happen until mid-November. Having stayed that long, we decided to remain until after Christmas, so it was not until December 28th, 2006, that we pulled out of Grand Bend headed for the sunny south. We were lucky...it had been a very mild winter and there had been no snow. There were a few wet flakes in the air as we left the campground at 6 a.m., but it had cleared up by the time we reached the US border at Sarnia an hour later. Our plan was to head directly south until we reached a point where the over-night low temperature would be above freezing before we struck west. We didn't want to have to be worried about the negative side-effects of frozen water tanks. By nightfall we had made it to Louisville, Kentucky, and were headed for Nashville. We stopped for the night at a rest-stop along I-65, nestled in between a couple of 18-wheelers who had also stopped there for the night.

The next morning our pre-departure safety inspection revealed a problem with the bike-rack attached to the rear bumper of the 5th wheel. One of the four bolts had become loose and was bent. The resulting play in the mount had allowed the bike handles to make a dint in the back of the trailer. This meant that we had to take them off the carrier and stow them inside the trailer, laid out on the bed. This was going to be a big nuisance, because it meant that they would have to be moved in and out of the camper at every over-night stop.

On day 2 we passed through Nashville, Memphis, and Little Rock, before finally coming to rest at another rest stop on I-40 just inside the Oklahoma state line. When we stopped for gas on the west side of Memphis we were approached by a woman who said that her car was broken down, that it needed a new alternator, and that thanks to the generosity of others she needed just \$20 more to get it fixed. We weren't carrying cash, so we couldn't contribute, which was just as well, because two years later when we stopped there again for gas they were still playing the same scam!

On the morning of day 3 we were pleased to find that the State of Oklahoma was good enough to provide its weary travelers with a Wi-Fi Internet connection. That was just as well, because when we pulled up the weather radar we were dismayed to see that almost the entire state of New Mexico was painted blue...indicating heavy snow. At the first opportunity, we diverted south towards Dallas-Fort Worth. It was just as well that we did, because when we stopped at a travel information booth at the Texas/Oklahoma border to get some maps, the girl at the booth told me that highways in the Texas pan-handle and northern New Mexico were all closed due to snow. We pressed on to the south-west, making it as far as New Salem in I-20 before we stopped at a Flying-J truck stop for the night.

On day 4, (December 31st), we struck off for El Paso, where we arrived at sunset. Although the weather was clear, it was considerably chillier than we had expected, with the temperature hovering just above the freezing mark. We stopped for gas, had supper, and drove around a sub-division till we found a WiFi connection we could piggy-back on long enough to check our e-

mail and send out a quick progress report to family and friends. Then we pressed on into New Mexico. Just before midnight we pulled over at a Love's gas bar at Las Cruces to welcome in the new year. By then the temperature had dipped below freezing. We toyed with the idea of driving on till daylight, but after another hour we pulled into a truck-stop at Deming. The overnight low was -6°C , and since we had no power hookup, the furnace ran the camper battery flat long before it was time to get up. Luckily we had enough extra blankets with us to stay warm under the covers, but crawling out of bed wasn't nice. We were pleased that there was a restaurant available where we could enjoy a hot meal and a cup of coffee.

Day 5 was bright and sunny, and the temperature staggered back above the freezing mark once the sun came up. We drove on across New Mexico and on into Arizona, and made an early stop at a rest-stop about 50 miles short of Yuma. We had decided that it would make more sense to reach our destination early in the day so that we could take a look around, find the campground, and get parked and set up before dark.

January 2nd, day 6 of our trip, was another fine sunny day, and we arrived in downtown Yuma at the Tourist Information booth just before noon. We knew that "Hidden Shores" was along the river just north of the city, but hadn't figured out exactly how to get there. We were amazed when we saw that one wall of Information office was filled with a listing of all of the RV parks in town with their phone numbers and the number of available spaces...there must have been a hundred campgrounds with thousands of spaces. Of course, Hidden Shores was not listed, and the staff hadn't heard of them! Luckily we were able to locate them in the Yuma phone book and the use Microsoft's Streets & Trips program to figure out how to get there.

Hidden Shores was a very nice RV park, and their price was as good as we had been told it was. Unfortunately, although they were only about 15 miles north of Yuma as the crow flies, it was at least 25 miles by road, which meant that any round trip to town to go shopping, or to go out for supper or to a movie, would take at least an hour's travel. As we explored the local countryside over the next few days we became aware of the seven campgrounds within a 50 mile radius that were operated by the Bureau of

Land Management. These BLM sites had very few services: there were no hydro, water, or sewage hookups at any of them, and only a couple had places where you could dump your sewage tanks or get fresh water. Their principal attraction was that you could park there for just \$2/night, and a permit for one was valid at any of the others so you could move from one to another if you wished. The \$300 savings per month looked very attractive. We could have parked out in the desert for free, but we felt that the BLM campgrounds offered a little more security since there was someone there to keep track of who came and went. Hidden Shores was not hesitant to give us a refund, so we moved to the BLM campground at Pilot Knob, just to the west of Yuma. We used our refund to buy a small generator and a second battery so that we would have enough battery power to run the furnace through the night, and then be able to re-charge them during the day. This was really important because during the second week of January we experienced some record low temperatures which meant the mercury dipped to -3°C for three or more nights in a row,

After a couple of weeks at Pilot Knob we decided to move west to the Hot Springs campground, which was about 60 miles to the west of Yuma along I-8. The attraction of this particular campground was that it put us an hour closer to San Diego, which was a location we wanted to explore. As its name implies, it also had a nice little hot spring oasis, so there was a nice little hot tub you could go relax in whenever you felt like it. We found a spot to park where a small embankment gave us shelter from the west wind, and protected other campers from the noise of our small generator. As luck would have it, our closest neighbors were fellow Canadians from Alberta, with whom we soon struck up a warm friendship. Of the approximately 100 trailers in the campground, more than half were from Canada, primarily from Alberta and BC. A couple of weeks after we had arrived we spotted on plates on a newcomer, so we had to go over and find out where they were from. "Oh, just a small place you've probably never heard of: Grand Bend," was their reply! It really is a small world.

We spent the next 2 1/2 months at Hot Springs, walking, biking, and enjoying the daily happy hour with our neighbors. Whenever we needed groceries we would drive into the closest town, which was Holtville. We

discovered that the library would allow us to sign out books even though we were not residents, and that they had a Wi-Fi Internet connection which allowed us to send and receive e-mail and generally stay in touch with the rest of the world. Every two weeks we could also take our fifth wheel into town to dump our gray and black water tanks, and take on 40 gallons of fresh water all for just \$9.00. Once a week we would go to El Centro, which was about 20 miles west of the campground, to take in a movie, browse around the mall, and have supper out. We also did a lot of sightseeing trips, exploring San Diego, the Pacific Coast up to Oceanside, the Salton Sea and the Imperial Valley. It was all amazingly interesting, and so different from anything we've ever seen in Ontario.



Rick, 5th Wheel and California Desert

At the end of March we left for home, and along the way we visited Las Vegas, the Hoover dam, the Grand Canyon, Sedona, the Painted Desert, and the Petrified Forest national park. By the time that we arrived home in mid April, the winter snow had melted off, and although it was still chilly, we could look forward to a nice warm summer.

We had enjoyed our stay in Arizona and California so much that there was no doubt that we would return the following winter. The only difference was that instead of waiting until after Christmas, we headed south in mid-October. This time we didn't have to worry about running into snow and ice,

so we were able to take a somewhat more direct route. We went straight to the BLM campground at Hot Springs, planning to camp in the same location we had had before. We quickly discovered that things were great deal different at Hot Springs in October than they had been January. For starters, it was considerably warmer. The temperature was in the high thirties (Celsius), which made the lack of electricity and hence a lack of air conditioning far more significant. Secondly, there was almost no one else in the campground other than a few hardy souls whom we suspect stayed there all year. It took just one night for us to decide to go back to Yuma and look for a "real" campground. After a little looking around, we found a place along the Colorado River on the northwest side of the city that we liked. Although we had enjoyed our time roughing it out in the desert, it did not take very long to become so accustomed to having electricity, running water, cable TV, and cable Internet that we would never want be without it again!

By mid November we had found life in Yuma to be so comfortable that we began to think about coming there every winter. Our truck lease was due to expire when we return home the following April, so it occurred to us that if we were able to leave our trailer in Yuma, we could just turn in the truck at the end of the lease. That would save us \$600 a month for the lease and insurance, or \$50 K to purchase a new truck. The campground we were staying in would not allow us to leave our trailer there, however. We would have to put it in storage, which would pose the difficulty of how to have it moved out of storage in the fall. Besides, we had also used our camper as a spare bedroom for visitors during the summer, so we didn't really want to leave it behind.

Our next thought was to buy another travel trailer and have it permanently installed at another campground. A little investigation soon revealed that for the price of a new trailer, we could buy a used park model trailer that would be more spacious. With that in mind, we went to look at brand new park model trailers so that we would have a price benchmark against which to assess the price of a used one. The new trailers were impressive, but their \$55-\$65K price tags were far higher than we wanted to pay. The salesman encouraged us to come and see the place that he had installed at Sun Vista RV Resort while he was there for the winter. He had added a deck and

central air conditioning, and was intending to sell it for \$52K at the end of the season. That was an exceptionally good deal, but still far higher than our budget would allow. It did bring us into Sun Vista, however, and we spent some time looking over the facilities which were most impressive, and by comparison made those of the campground in which we were staying look decidedly primitive.

We discovered that there were many park model trailers for sale, so we called and made appointments to view a number of them. Some we found too expensive, one was too much like a pigsty, and a couple of others did not appeal to us. We did find one we liked, however, and the owner agreed that he would accept \$25K for it, even though he had been asking \$27.9K. We had planned to go home (back to our fifth wheel) and think it over, but while we were taking one last look at the place from across the street, we saw another van pull up in front, and write down the phone number to call for a viewing. We realized that time was of the essence, and with the Canadian dollar practically at par with the U.S., we decided this was a good time to buy, so we called the owner right there and then and sealed the deal.



Home Away From Home, Yuma, AZ

For the last three winters we have enjoyed having a permanent home to come back to. Although we liked having the camper for a variety of reasons (it offered flexibility in where we went, our own bed to sleep in each night,

and a place to stop for a snack, a bathroom break, or a nap whenever we felt like it), it also had its disadvantages, the biggest of which was its short range. We could go little more than 250 Km per tank of gas, so we tended to stick to the Interstate highways where we could be sure to find service stations that were both open and accessible. Although now that we are traveling by van we have to pay for motels and meals, we can pay for that with what we save in gas. More importantly, we can travel the backroads without worrying about not finding a gas station we can get in to, or low bridges blocking our path.

Closing Notes

Thanks again to this month's contributors. Hopefully they will serve as a reminder to the rest of you coming out of hibernation that it is about time to pony up and let us know where you are and what you have been doing over the past 50 years.

If life has not been of sufficient interest to share it with the rest of us, you might want to vent your spleen at one or more of Hugh Spence's rants.

Gotta go now. Time to clean the clubs!!