

## Motor Rig in Oregon 2011

By Christina King

*Note: If you want to go straight to our picture & video picture show and skip this journal, [click on this link](#).*

Pete and I have been talking about renting an RV (recreational vehicle) for our annual Oregon Coast camping odyssey for years. We love camping at the numerous Oregon State Parks beaches starting at the beginning of the Columbia River Gorge all the way down to San Francisco and back home to Colorado on a loop through Lake Tahoe. Our route is typically ~ 3,000 + miles round trip. Most of the time we [car camp in our Suburban](#), traveling fast to and from Oregon. We camp a lot (both on rivers and car camping) but have never rented or stayed an RV. This year we finally decided that if the weather (snow storms) kept at bay we would rent a 25 foot RV and enjoy our trip in spacious luxury. After watching the national weather on a daily basis we delayed one day and decided to go ahead and rent. This last minute approach was easy to do because at this time of year most RV rentals sit in rental lots. There is not a lot of demand for RV rentals in winter. [Cruise America](#) was our company of choice and very flexible to work with because they had new RV's, a nearby office in Colorado Springs and reasonable prices (notice I did not say cheap). I have added a trip cost summary comparison at the end of my journal.

### Day 1, Sat, Nov 19, 2011- Colorado River State Park, Fruita Colorado

Cruise America's office in Colorado Springs was open at 10 am Sat morning and we were ready to pick up our RV, drive it home, load it up and then head out west. The weather remains shaky and we are worried about both Hoosier and Vail passes. We come up with the term "motor rig" for our new RV. Referring to the big 20 foot motor rigs that run the whitewater river in the Grand Canyon. Our motor rig is winterized so we cannot use the shower or water heater. But we are prepared with a jug of water to use as a handwash and toilet flush water. We can put water down the drain but the faucets are shut off for winter freezing conditions. Not a problem considering all our other amenities. Hoosier Pass turned out to be dry but Vail Pass was slick and icy. Pete drove slowly and we came through safely. A stop at Two Rivers Park in Glenwood Springs provided Pete, Otter and I a nice break from the road. We make it to Fruita, Colorado after dark around 8 pm. I am sure we have broken a cardinal rule in RV'ing (by arriving after dark to a campground) but we know [Colorado River State Park](#) well and have visited this Colorado State Park many times. The showers are shut off for winter but we parked in a campsite, plug in our RV and turn on the furnace. We warm up immediately and set up our supplies and fix a light dinner. Other than a dark silent truck camper at the other end of the park, we are the only campers in the entire park. Perfect, just the way we like it. We love the space in our motor rig as compared to our Suburban and it is nice to have a furnace rather than remote starting the car for heat. Otter snuggles up on her bed and we all settle down for the night.



## Day 2, Sun, Nov 20, 2011- Boise, Idaho

We wake early and take Otter for a walk along the Colorado River. After returning, we had to make a call to Cruise America's troubleshooting number because we noticed the wall outlets did not work. Once we figured out how to reset a breaker (under the dinette table) our toaster was crisping up some morning toast. We fill up in Fruita (yup, gas is a hefty cost each and every time we fill up). So



far, so good. On our way past Westwater I notice that they changed the takeout highway sign from Ranch exit to Danish Flat? What's up with that?! I'm sure it will fool a few boaters in the near future. As we turn into Green River, Utah Pete comments that the best watermelon we ever had on the river we bought here one summer years ago. Unbelievably a watermelon float is sitting in the parking lot at the [John Wesley Powell](#)

[Museum](#) when we make a stop to stretch our legs. Today is a long driving day, our goal is to get to Boise, Idaho. I watch movies on my laptop and listen to Odessa File book on CD in the back while Pete drives for hours. I give him some relief but he enjoys listening to the various NFL games on the radio so time passes relatively quickly. We ate lunch at the Walmart parking lot in Provo (after picking up food supplies). Otter spies a Prius in the parking lot and gets excited, she thinks it is my father's car stopping by for a visit.



We drive on in the wind and snow showers into the darkness (this will be a pattern). We googled KOA's and other campgrounds before we left and we knew finding a campground this time of year in Idaho would not be easy. We fell back to camping at a Motel 6 in Boise for \$39 a room. The RV travels most smoothly at 65 mph



but we crank it up to almost 80 mph on the flat (no wind sections of interstate). The gas mileage only varies from 9.5 mpg to 9.6 mpg (again no surprise) regardless of our speed. This is not a cheap trip but is really fun! RV's (diesel or gas) are all fuel hogs.

## Day 3, Mon, Nov 21, 2011- The Dalles, Oregon

We get going by 8 am to slip through our last set of snow passes before we descend to the [Columbia River Gorge](#). Some vehicles look abandoned on the side of the road from last night (snow) and we can tell the snowplows did a good job (either last night or early this morning) because we cruise through the snowy Cascades with no problems and even make one last stop at the overlook above the Columbia River for lunch. The wind is screaming on top of the overlook but we turn on the generator, run the furnace and toast up some warm bagel sandwiches for lunch. Clouds are extensive, sky is spitting snow, the parking lot is filled with unplowed wet and heavy Northwest snow. After lunch we enjoy a long walk up the Heritage Trail at [Boardman](#)

[Marina and RV park](#) along Columbia River. This is a favorite park for us but we arrive really early (1 pm Oregon time) so we decide to head to The Dalles area to get closer to the coast for our final leg to the coast tomorrow. The Dalles has no open campgrounds (all closed for winter) so we have dinner at a local bar/grill/hotel (Cousins) so we can watch the KC/Patriots NFL game. Cousins Restaurant supplied us with our first warm piece of Marionberry pie for dessert to finish out the evening. KC lost badly. After the game we retired to our motor rig in their parking lot and slept there for the night (RV'ers call this dry docking). It rained most of the night but we stayed cozy in our motor rig.

#### Day 4, Tues, Nov 22, 2011- The OREGON COAST!



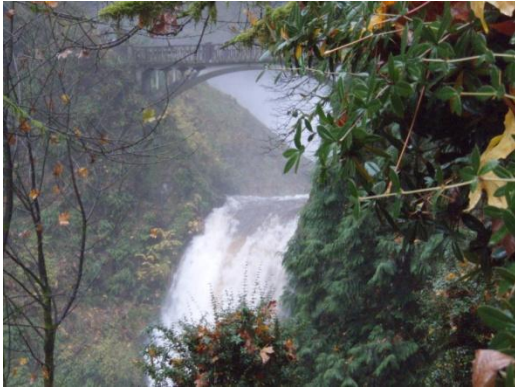
We were one of the first visitors to the [Discovery Center in The Dalles](#) this morning. The building is really unique and we wandered the exhibits looking at old artifacts from the Columbia river valley. We left the museum and had a spare motor rig key made at the local Home Depot. Having only one set of keys to our motor rig proves to be irritating and we make a



spare set for convenience. We arrived at Multnomah Falls in driving rain/wind. The roaring of the falls were spectacular, Despite wearing our long rain



slickers our pant legs got wet so we changed and had a warm lunch in our motor rig. We quickly realize this is not a normal storm but a BIG storm - even by Oregon standards. The locals are all talking about the 97 mph winds and massive amount of rain. We stop at a Fred Meyer store outside of Portland (Scappose) to pick up some more food staples and aim for Astoria. I spy a local [Astoria Home Bakery](#) (Finnish and Swedish) to pick up some warm Cardemom



bread. It is too rainy/windy to walk around the marina so we head further west. The bridge that crosses an inlet to the Columbia is unbelievable windy. Pete and I hold our breath as we cross the bridge and hope the wind does not blow us into the river. Pete mentions that it is good it is low tide so we will not drown if we blow over but that does not make me feel better. We stop at a favorite seafood restaurant ([Doogers](#)) before heading into [Fort Stevens Campground](#) for the night. Everyone is exclaiming over the wind and power outages. We arrive at Fort Stevens just as it is getting

dark and we make a quick stop at the Peter Iredale wreck and drive out on the beach. The wind is blowing the sand sideways and we do not dare get out of our motor rig. A few minutes later we tuck into a campsite and hope that the trees around us hold for at least one more night. Oregon State Parks are great- full hookups, water, endless hot showers, power and sewer hookups. Delightful amenities that we did not always use fully when car camping before. It is nice to plug into “shore power” and settle in with plenty of room for the night. I read and listen to the rain fall before going to sleep.

#### Day 5, Wed, Nov 23, 2011- Cape Lookout, Oregon



The wind died down last night around midnight but news report estimated 80-97 mph winds. Our tree sheltered campsite at Fort Stevens provided some protection but we did worry about the potential of large trees falling around us. No worries, by morning all creeks/streams were bankfull, tree limbs were on roads but we were fine. The Peter Iredale wreck was overtaken by the high tides so we walked down the remainder of the beach with Otter stopping to sniff every dead bird (there were lots of dead birds this morning). I guess the wind really knocked the birds out of the sky and broke their necks! We find one pelican laying dead in the middle of a parking lot. We drove to the mouth of the Columbia River where it meets the Pacific Ocean and were thrilled to see the enormous surf hit the South Jetty area from our high observation post. The waves were huge and crash into the rock jetty with loud explosions. Most of our day was spent at Seaside because of the flooding which closed Hwy 101 just 2 miles south of town. We had delicious clam chowder at Doogers, shopped for fun rubber rainboots (for me), visited an internet café and walked on the beach. We have off and on hard rain most of the day. We finally decide to make a run south and “run” the flooding river road to make it down to Haystack Rock at Cannon Beach and below.



We drive slowly and make it through. We see one car that does not make it and the Oregon DOT used their truck to push it off the flooded roadway. I am glad we make it through and we enjoy a bit of blue sky (only for an hour) at Haystack Rock in Cannon Beach. A short stop at [Tillamook Cheese factory](#) before pushing on into the dark to our [Cape Lookout campsite](#). This campsite is right behind a short sand dune on the beach and we are toast if a tsunami comes in overnight- as are most of our camps. So far we pull into all our campsites well after dark and usually in pouring rain. The skies clear and we actually see stars before we go to bed tonight. I make our second call tonight to Cruise America because it appears that a breaker has blown again. This time it is at the campsite end of the cord in their breaker box. Glad they helped me figure this out quickly! They have a quick solution for every question so far.



### **Day 6, Thurs, Nov 24, 2011- Thankful Thanksgiving in Newport**

Last night was a cold night but at least the rain and wind stopped so we were able to listen to the pounding surf all night. We woke early this Thanksgiving morning to check out the beach. Only to find out today's high tide will peak at 9+ feet at 10 am and is one of the highest tides this year. We check the tide table booklet and sure enough it confirms the high water. The waves careen up against our tiny sand dune right near our camp so there is no beach walk for Otter. We stick to the trail in the nearby trees with a view of the numerous waterfalls pouring from the



cliffs above into the ocean south of us. Our first beach walk is at Cape Kiwanda (dory launching area) where we keep a sharp eye on the sneaker waves and lean into the wind. We enjoy a warm breakfast in our motor rig at the [Cape Kiwanda beach](#) parking lot watching the surf from the inside of our warm and dry motor rig. The wind gusted up to 60-70 mph and at times we feel like our motor rig will tip over. Pete encourages me to "highside" when we get slammed by a strong side gust.



We stop at Lincoln City to check out the crabbers (find 2 pots and 1 crab) and walk with our heads down along the beach in the pelting rain. I love my new rainboots and boot socks! My feet stay warm and dry all day.

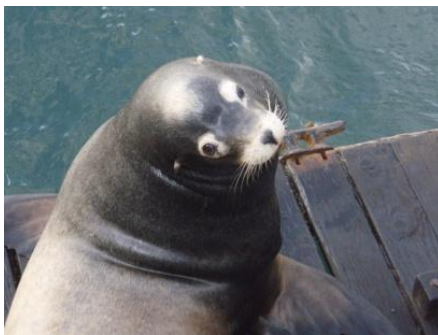
The Depoe Bay walkway above the tiny harbor produces monster waves spraying over the walls. We park and watch the waves and I spot one lone seal having fun in the surf. The wind hit a peak while we ate a delicious Thanksgiving dinner at the Shiloh Inn in Newport. We attempted



to check out the tidepools in late afternoon but even the lower tide level was too high and covered the tidepools with waves and water. While crossing the big harbor bridge in Newport we decided to call it a day as our motor rig was rocking wildly side to side at only 40 mph in 70 mph winds. For once, we pulled into [South Beach campground](#) while it was still light and hunkered down for the night. We mostly followed the RV rules today. We are learning.

### Day 7, Fri, Nov 25, 2011 – Bullards Beach

This morning we awoke to blue sky with just a few clouds and not a whisper of wind. Yeah! Our first order of the day was to walk to the beach for a long hike down to the Newport South Jetty. Brilliant mushrooms dotted the way until we reached the beach. I forgot my sunglasses and felt like a bat out of my cave during the day. Nice change. After our long walk we cruised into [Newport](#) and did a load of laundry and then “power shopped” our way through the marina historic area. Pete bought a supply of clam chowder for later lunches in our motor rig and I marched up and down the fishing boat docks admiring their top heavy crab pot rigging.



Along the way I watched the sea lions (the local seals) as they put on a show for me at the nearby fish mongers docks. A few stops for scenic overlooks, more seal watching, fruitless whale watching, a hike down to Devils Spout, a stroll in historic Florence and Myrtlewood shopping led us to our campsite at [Bullards Beach](#). We caught the tail end of a gorgeous beach sunset before finding a camp (in the dark). No rain or wind at all today, even though the forecast called for gale wind and 21 foot seas starting at 7 pm tonight.

## Day 8, Sat, Nov 26, 2011 – Cape Blanco



Another good weather day, some clouds, some sun but no rain or wind. We got an early start to enjoy a sunrise at [Bandon](#) (Coquille lighthouse) and were rewarded with good light and a driftwood/sand beach. I collected a heavy pocketful



of multicolored stones while Pete persuaded Otter to fetch sticks. After our long beach walk, we crossed the bridge into Bandon for a stroll in the town art galleries. Then I paid a visit to the friendly dock crabbers. I learned all about the tricks of crab pot fishing. Number One- use smelly raw chicken bait your pot. If you use smelly fish the seals pry them open and steal them. They have named the dock seals today, Pete, RePeat and ThreePeat because they repeatedly sneak in to steal the crabs and bait when they think the crabbers are not watching. Smart crabbers haul their crabpots in every 10 minutes to minimize



seal stealing their catch. One successful family filled their large cooler half-full this morning (eight crabs). Crabbers should only fish for crabs in months that have an R in them. All other months are taboo- crabs are moulting. This year has been an exceptional crab year and all the Oregon crabbers are very happy. The commercial industry is only allowed to fish during specific dates set by the Oregon Division of Wildlife and

they delayed the Dec start by two weeks (rumor has it so the prices will spike up). Private (general public) crabbers who get an annual shellfish license can crab whenever they like and have a daily catch limit (which changes depending on how the crab population is doing). If we lived here, we would definitely be crabbers! Crabpots sell for about \$25-40, annual license is minimal but you do have to buy chicken as



bait. A friendly family we met on the dock filled us in on all the rules while we ate lunch with them on the dock. We bought our crab from the local sidewalk vendor while they had a few of their caught crabs steamed by the same vendor for free. After a late crab lunch we drove down to the South Bandon Jetty and walked down to Face Rock and watched local seals “watching” us from the surf. A delightful afternoon with a short drive to [Cape Blanco campground](#) for the night. We parked at the lighthouse overlook but the clouds hid most of the sunset. Clam Chowder and grilled cheese in our motor rig for dinner!

## Day 9, Sun, Nov 27, 2011 – Harris Beach



While Pete packed up our motor rig, Otter and I took a back path to the high cliffs above the beach to the Cape Blanco lighthouse. The trail started out in the thick dark forest and ended up in the open coastal cliffs. I stayed away from the very edge of the dirt cliffs but enjoyed the wild winds and endless ocean views from high above. I was glad to see Pete when he arrived in the motor rig because the biting wind was beginning to cut through my thick fleece. Today we had lots of stops at



beaches and viewpoints. Saw a surfer at the beach in Brookings with full wetsuit including hood. [Arch Rock](#) is a favorite picturesque viewpoint. No sunset today but lots of gorgeous coastline views. Harris Beach provided a great skyline with a few seals playing hide and seek in the waves peeking at us as we walked along the low tide line. We watched the Chiefs/Steelers game at Sebastian's Restaurant while enjoying fresh crab for dinner. The skies were mostly cloudy today and it finally started raining lightly as we drove back to our [Harris Beach campsite](#) from Brookings (in the dark). Tonight will be our last camping night on the coast.



## Day 10, Mon, Nov 28, 2011 – KOA in Petaluma

We had planned an early start today because we wanted to get to Petaluma before dark and the long drive from Brookings to Petaluma always wears us out. So I looked at my watch this morning and THOUGHT it said 6 am (it was really 5 am). We got going and when I noticed the sky was not brightening up with the sunrise. I realized we left an hour earlier than we intended. A walk stop at a favorite California beach perked us up for breakfast and then onward through the zombie land of northern California. From [Crescent City, CA to Willets, CA](#) is a real spooky trip. I think this is where the fringe California people live and thrive. Decrepit mobile homes, falling down cabins and abandoned cars are interspersed with the dark woods and open fields. This is not a favorite section of Hwy 101 for us and we always try to get past this section as quick as possible but it takes hours. We reach [Petaluma mid-afternoon and find a KOA](#) easily. We have never camped at a KOA before and the \$50 fee is about \$20 beyond my comfort zone for "camping". Pete is certain that the local Motel 6 is only \$10 more and it has showers in our room, toilet and TV. We like to spend the night in Petaluma because it stages us nicely to head

into San Francisco for the day tomorrow. The KOA is very nice and pretty but we do not need all the amenities, which include a petting zoo, pool, hot tub, bocce ball court, etc....We head into historic downtown Petaluma to visit [Clavey](#) so Pete can get his Avon fix. He finds out they have a white Avon Pro sitting in their warehouse and just drools at the thought of picking it up today. We did not buy an Avon raft today. Clavey recommends a local brewery ([Dempsey's](#)) for dinner and we enjoy a relaxing early dinner before heading back to our KOA to camp (we again did not make it before dark).

## Day 11, Tue, Nov 29, 2011 – San Francisco/KOA in Reno vs Motel 6

We empty our grey and black water tanks at our Petaluma KOA and then head into San Francisco for a day on [Fisherman's Wharf](#). Thick fog obscures all vistas and as we exit off of the Golden Gate bridge we miss our turnoff and are forced through a long way around the city to get back to where we want to go. Pete is "cursing" the bulkiness of our motor rig as we weave our way through neighborhoods working our way back to Fisherman's Wharf. I view it as a fun sightseeing tour of San Francisco [Haight/Ashbury neighborhoods](#). Pete reminds me I can step off anytime I want....

We finally reach Fisherman's Wharf and park our motor rig in a big empty parking lot right next



to the crab restaurants. They validate for 2 free hours of parking if we visit a crab restaurant-which of course we do so we have lunch at a crab house and then set about walking around the wharf area. Occupy Wall Street protestors



have taken a chunk of park by the Financial district and our bush man is still in business. The local seals are gone. The [Boudin Bakery](#) has remodeled and we browse a long time in this



fabulous bread bakery. We stay at Fisherman's Wharf until about 3 pm and then head out of town towards Reno. We decided to skip Lake Tahoe this trip because we would arrive in the dark (and not see the lake until morning), campgrounds are closed this time of year and local hotels have really tight parking. We make it to Reno around 7 pm and almost leave town before we spot a Motel 6 for \$24. We cannot wait to get out of Nevada, it is a depressing state. Everyone seems to be panhandling, buildings and homes are run down, people approach Pete asking him for money

several times. We are ready to leave Nevada quickly. I wish we would have headed into Lake Tahoe instead. KOA in Reno (behind the Boomtown casino) lost us by a long shot!

## **Day 12, Wed, Nov 30, 2011 – Salt Lake City, Utah**



Today we drove endlessly in very high winds. Speed limit is 75 mph and most traffic is struggling to go 60-70 mph. We arrived in Wendover in very late afternoon and decided that camping at the KOA behind a casino was too depressing. By adding two more hours of drive time, we decided to head into Salt Lake City and find a Motel 6. The radio is forecasting snow tomorrow so we are a bit worried about getting over mountains. Our goal will be Colorado State Park tomorrow night in Fruita Colorado, then home on Friday. Pete is tired of driving/riding in the motor rig and chomping to get home. It is hard to believe we were at Harris Beach just a few days ago.

## **Day 13, Thurs, Dec 1, 2011 – Colorado River State Park Fruita, Colorado**

Our drive from SLC to was epic compared to all other wind events on this trip. By the time we arrived in Green River, Utah we heard that ten semi-trucks had tipped over and winds in SLC had peaked at 102 mph (highest recorded events). My hands were exhausted from gripping the steering wheel and we never got over 60 mph and even then that felt reckless. High wind warnings were in effect in Utah and we were tired of fighting that tipover feeling. Gas mileage dipped to 9.2 mpg. We arrived in Fruita to a sudden drop in wind and warm temperatures. Thank goodness. Pete dropped into a movie theater to decompress and I took Otter on an hour long walk to calm my wind-strained nerves. The late afternoon was beautiful and we retired to an early dinner at our campsite in Colorado River State Park.

## **Day 14, Fri, Dec 2, 2011 – Home to Woodland Park, Colorado**

We make one last stop at our favorite Breckenridge Windy City restaurant for a relaxing lunch before our final push home. We arrive home mid-afternoon, hustle to empty out the RV, clean it up, fill up propane and return it to Cruise America before 5 pm. The weather forecast for tomorrow looks awful (cold and snow) and we want to return it clean and avoid driving it down the pass in snow. Overall it has been a great trip. I liked the motor rig a lot more than Pete. Pete enjoys traveling quickly and nimbly in our Suburban and does not enjoy the rattles, noise and lumbering quality of the motor rig. You can see our joint list of pros and cons on the next page along with actual costs. During our trip, we had many complete strangers ask how we liked renting our motor rig and what the cost entailed. We figure friends and family might want to know also. To see a complete video show of our trip, visit our [Youtube link](#). It is about 22 minutes long, enjoy.



**Pros and Cons of Renting an RV for 2 weeks**

<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wonderful to camp in</li> <li>• Allows us to camp or motel easily</li> <li>• Complete freedom where/when to stay</li> <li>• Nice to cook meals in the RV (breakfast, lunch or dinner)</li> <li>• Take naps in vehicle when parked at viewpoints</li> <li>• Nap comfortably while the other drives</li> <li>• Otter likes it</li> <li>• Sets up and hooks up easily to campground electric hookups.</li> <li>• Can allow water down drains in winter</li> <li>• Generator is VERY easy to use/start</li> <li>• Convenient for passenger to get up and walk around in camper while driver is driving</li> <li>• Picnics can be easily had anywhere, anytime</li> <li>• Nice to always have a clean bathroom to use when on the road</li> <li>• Great escape during rain events (which Oregon has a lot of)!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It shakes, rattles and rolls a lot when driving</li> <li>• Harder to drive than a car</li> <li>• Scary in snow/ice &amp; high winds</li> <li>• Pain in the butt to park and back- we use walkie talkies to spot for each other when backing.</li> <li>• Can't use water tank in the winter</li> <li>• Poor gas mileage (9.7 mpg is highest it ever got)</li> <li>• Generator is noisy</li> <li>• Propane furnace fan is noisy</li> <li>• Some campgrounds closed in winter-only in cold regions</li> <li>• Shower use is unrealistic for a tall person</li> <li>• Driving in big city traffic is stressful!</li> <li>• Making U-Turns are very tricky- but we do them often, even managed to go the wrong way in a one-way in Reno.</li> <li>• KOA's are more expensive than we thought.</li> <li>• Real RV owners wave at each other but not at us (in a rental)</li> </ul>

## Total Actual RV Costs

2011 RV Rental Actual costs		\$
Rental: includes daily rental fee, mileage fee and replacing cracked windshield (\$250)	\$	1,962
Fuel: RV 9.5 mpg	\$	1,360
Campground Fees:	\$	231
Motel Fees:	\$	126
Propane:	\$	13
Total Miles: 3,611		
Total:	\$	3,692
As compared to estimated car/motel costs:		
Fuel: Suburban 18 mpg	\$	680
Motel Costs: Avg \$100/night on coast, Avg \$50/night coming and going	\$	1,000
Total Miles: 3,611		
Total:	\$	1,680
<i>Difference between renting RV and taking Suburban</i>	\$	2,012

*Note: I did not factor in food savings- I figure car/motel food option could be more expensive since we eat out for dinner often when on the road. But then again motels usually have free breakfasts and we usually picnic lunch with a small cooler and buy food at grocery stores along the way. We do not eat in to save money but enjoy having picnics at the beach when possible.*