

OPERATION LYNDA

By Dale Schwamborn

PROLOGUE

"I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravel'd world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move
How dull it is to pause, to make an end..."

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON Ulysses

Caravanning has become a normal and integral part of Airstream. Uncalculated miles and days have been spent in traveling from Katmandu to Timbuktu by curious adventurers using their Airstreams instead of a camel train. Within the perimeter of our own nation the excitement of travel can lure the adventurer to summer palaces, majestic mountains and lyrical waterways.

Programs have become a byline for government agencies. For most of us it is impossible to relate our lives to the farm programs, and to like political developments. However, this year President Johnson inaugurated a program to interest the nomadic American -- "See America First." To the unknowing traveler the lure of Paris, London and Rome may hold interest that Los Angeles, Denver and Boston may not have. But, the beauty of the Grand Canyon, Grand Tetons, and Yellowstone has no equal on this earth of ours.

In initiating this program the President's daughter, Lynda Bird Johnson, was chosen to tour the western part of the United States. Under the auspices of the Wally Byam Foundation the "See America First" Caravan spent five weeks touring the natural beauty of our country.

Before starting on the caravan, Miss Johnson spent two weeks in Grasshopper, Arizona, doing archaeology work with the University of Arizona's department of archaeology. There she uncovered the skeletal remains of an early American. The story of her seeing America first

begins with the silencing of her digging equipment.

The Itinerary for Miss Johnson's trip:

Grand Canyon, Ariz. June 23-26, 1965
Monument Valley, Ariz. June 27-28
Mesa Verde, Colo. June 29-30
Denver, Colo. July 1
Laramie, Wyo. July 2-4
Lander, Wyo. July 5
Grand Tetons, Wyo. July 6-13
Custer's Battlefield, Mont. July 14
Theodore Roosevelt National
Memorial Park, N.D. July 15
Fargo, N. D. July 16
Ely, Minn. July 17-23

On two occasions Miss Johnson left the caravan. The first time was to visit San Simeon, Calif. She visited Hearst's Castle and drove through the Big Sur area of California. In San Francisco she met briefly with her father, who was in the city to give an address commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Charter of the United Nations. She rejoined the caravan at the Grand Canyon. After leaving Mesa Verde, Lynda flew home to Washington to celebrate her sister's 18th birthday and to be present when Luci took her vows in the Catholic Church. She then rejoined the caravan at Laramie, Wyoming.

(Note: The following narrative is a story of the President's daughter and what she saw and did on her trip. It is impossible to create an image of the personality of Lynda Bird. She is a gracious person, with a keen perceptive mind. Amidst her life in Washington, her identity

as a 21 year old woman is lost in the fact that she is an international figure. She cannot enjoy a normal private or public life due to her position in society. To what extent she enjoyed her trip is questionable, but adding to the success of the trip was the absence of newspaper reporters. We became very adept at out-maneuvering the gentlemen of the press! Nor, can the secret service or communication men play a major roll in the story. Their background work day and night added to the accomplishment of the trip. A greater group of young men cannot be found; their dedication to their jobs is paramount, and the execution of duty is without question.)

GRASSHOPPER

In the northwestern most point of the Ft. Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona is a small archaeological site known as Grasshopper, near Cibique. Like most of central Arizona, this area is dramatically picturesque with blood red earth and green stands of pines. Lynda Bird Johnson had spent two weeks at this field site of the University of Arizona, digging for relics of the area's early inhabitants. She is deeply interested in prehistoric cultures and was very pleased when she unearthed the skeletal remains of an earlier resident.

GRAND CANYON

Nestled between the scrub pines of the Grand Canyon and the National Park's Ranger School, we settled down as a caravan of four Airstream trailers. The lead trailer, Lynda's, was the home of Lynda Johnson, Mrs. Marta Ross, press secretary, and Mrs. Carolyn Bennett Patterson, chairman of the Wally Byam Foundation Board of Trustees. No. 2 trailer housed the secret service men and the Army communication personnel; No. 3 was the home of the drivers of the three outfits and the National Geographic Society photographer; No. 4 was the home of the service engineer.

Lynda visited the various rim views with a park naturalist, and learned of the dynamic

geological history that transformed this area from a plateau into the breathtaking gorge which visitors view today.

Our farewell party at the Grand Canyon was a steak bake the last night that would leave a Parisienne crying, "c'est magnifique." Our guests were the park superintendent and his family.

MONUMENT VALLEY

En route to Monument Valley our entourage stopped at an Indian trading post to shop for Indian artifacts. We left loaded with bracelets, necklaces and dolls.

Once again we entered an Indian reservation, this time the Navajo Reservation. The Navajos have a complex of several thousand square miles, with a population of over 100,000 persons. They wrench a meager existence from this desert habitat.

Monument Valley can best be described as a meeting place for lofty cathedrals on the desert. Chartes, Rhelms, Ulm and Notre Dame are all there, helping to hold the skies upward. Unlike the ~~normal~~ usual tourist, we parked in the valley next to the monuments. At night one could feel the presence of God, and hear the chimes ringing out in all their glory in the bell towers.

The two evenings were spent with cook-outs, followed by fellowship and conversation around the campfire. Several Navajo families joined us for these evening get-togethers.

The day was filled with horseback riding. We concluded that Navajo ponies would never be found at Churchill Downs, but reliability in the desert was paramount to performance.

MESA VERDE

Mid-day we crossed Four Corners and "walked through" the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah in a matter of minutes. Chief Good Luck presented Lynda with an Indian blanket to remember her stop at this unique, and only meeting place of four states.

Mesa Verde brought our group back into the realm of archaeological locations. The precipitous road to the top of the mesa conjured thoughts of earlier cliff dwellers searching for a Shangri-la in the wilderness, and their difficulties in transporting their civilization to the top of the world.

In the park proper can be found the main cliff dwellings, where the park tourists visit. In the museum one can see Esther, a basket-maker maiden who lived 1500 years ago. Her mummified smile welcomes one and all to join her on a tour of the past. Our group was interested in the Wetherill Mesa dwellings that were sponsored by the National Geographic Society. After a long trip over a cow trail, we viewed and explored the ruins. Lynda was quite interested in the fact that the prehistoric natives used cotton for weaving, though they didn't raise any on the Mesa. With whom did they trade? Aztecs? Another bygone tribe from the lowlands? And, if they traded, what did they barter with?

LARAMIE

Lynda was overwhelmed by the sight of 2600 Airstreams at the 8th International Rally of the Wally Byam Caravan Club at Laramie, Wyoming. She was the guest of honor in the 4th of July parade, and was warmly received by the Caravanners in attendance.

Mrs. Vic Raney, wife of WBCC International President, presented Lynda with a bouquet of long-stemmed red roses, tied with a wide red, white and blue ribbons, as she approached the reviewing stand. Lynda was amazed at the parade. To her it was incredible that a masterpiece of this type could be created after the members had arrived at the rally site. She commented that she had especially enjoyed the float of the Pioneer Woman, an entry from the Oklahoma Unit of the WBCC.

Following the parade, Lynda was honored at a reception given by the Wally Byam Foundation. Andy Charles, a member of the Foundation Board, formally welcomed and introduced her to WBCC members and guests. Her response was short, but most appreciated by the WBCC'ers.

LANDER

A one-night stand was in line on our way to the Grand Tetons. Lander is a center for the sportsmen: antelope hunting, fishing and deer. The setting for our night's stay was several miles from the center of Lander, along a creek with a ridge of mountains shadowing our site. The Shoshone National Forest is not only noted for its beauty but it is the oldest of the national forests. Several of our party went fishing and were delighted with the trout caught nearby. This was proclaimed as one of our most beautiful and serene campsites. We all agreed that on future trips through the west we would again venture into the rugged, evergreen of Shoshone National Forest.

GRAND TETONS

If Atlas were to become indifferent to his duty of fending off the enclosing heavens, he could find proxy in the Grand Tetons. Rising perpendicular from a 7000-foot base, the 6000 feet of massive granite stands silently guiding the four winds in their troubled paths. Jackson Hole has been synonymous with the "wild west" for many years. Tourists have marveled at its rugged beauty; trappers in their quest for pelts have stood challenged by God; and we, humble creatures here below, could only pay tribute to the grandeur through silence.

Of the many tours and activities proffered in this National Park, the float trip down the Snake River is foremost. Lynda was engrossed by the wild flowers, the geologic history of the region, and the many moose that we saw. The river wends its way through channels skirting the beaver ponds and on through rapids with rugged banks and overhanging cliffs that was a challenge to the two skilled keelers. Fittingly, and proof that we were in little-visited country, we observed a bald eagle soaring on pinions, steady and wise.

Swimming, horseback riding, and a trip on Jackson Lake provided additional adventure

and inspiration.

Lynda gave a party that will be the talk of the park for months to come. She invited our group and dates: the boatmen, various employees of the Jackson Lake Lodge, and a group from the Jackson Hole summer theater. The rustic park cabin that we used was nestled on the shore of the lake. A table of choice hors d'oeuvres, perfected for an epicurean, lined one wall of the cabin. Dancing and fellowship was the order of the evening.

The employees of the lodge are college students enjoying a summer in the outdoors. One evening they hosted a square dance in their recreation hall, and Lynda joined them for a relaxing, lighthearted evening.

We visited Yellowstone by car from the Tetons. marvelled at the bears rambling on the highways seeking foodstuffs from passing tourists. Old Faithful performed and lived up to its namesake by spouting on time. Other volcanic cauldrons not only provided a myriad of colors from mineral deposits, but extended an odoriferous reminder of the sulphur gas that propogates this natural phenomenon.

CUSTER'S BATTLEFIELD

Cowboys and Indians have become a heritage of the American youth, a fantasy of a growing nation. The United States 7th Cavalry had little resemblance to Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, or Marshall Dillon in 1876. Under the command of George Armstrong Custer they met disaster at the Little Bighorn River. Immortalized in historical archives, Custer and the 7th Cavalry are as meaningful to the younger generation as Jesse James, Wild Bill Hickock or Wyatt Earp.

Our caravan spent the night on Calhoun's Hill, overlooking the site of the Cheyenne and Sioux village of ninety years ago. At our doorstep were markers, mute reminders of the

heroic US soldiers that had died here, fighting to create a nation out of the wilderness. The still of the night brought forth visions of the hordes of Indians fighting for their land, and the soldiers valiantly fighting for their lives.

The Battlefield has a beauty of its own nestled in the rolling hills of Montana. However, the beauty was not the prime mover. Spending the night on such hollowed grounds made a terrific impact, and made this a memorable stop.

As we sat under the stars pondering over what life was like in Custer's day, someone said, "I wonder how the Little Bighorn looked with over 2500 tepees?" One of the secret service men said he couldn't visualize that many tepees, but he did know what 2600 Airstreams looked like.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK

Teddy Roosevelt as a youth was adjudged sickly and weak. He became strong by working on a ranch in North Dakota. His inspiration towards greatness was formulated during his struggle for physical fitness. To the memory of his youth the Theodore Roosevelt National Park has been set aside. The Badlands of North Dakota offer the tourist a beautiful rambling terraceset in a wilderness.

Lynda's small caravan parked in the southern part of the memorial on a green velvet plain surrounded by hills, inhabited by a community of prairie dogs. These squealing creatures serenaded us until sunset, and then welcomed in the dawn with their infallible curiosity. It took a pair of coyotes slinking through our colony in the early morning to send our friendly neighbors scurrying into their burrows. Though we didn't see any buffalo, there is a herd of bison that roam the park at will.

Our dinner at the park was traditional--buffalo roast. Preference of beef was held by everyone, but to pass through the plain states without savoring this dish would be like passing

through Paris without experiencing snails.

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The tour's end; it is now time for farewells. America has been seen, and the journey has been successful. We part, each with our own imperishable memories.

Lynda flew to Bloomfield, Illinois for the funeral of Adalal Stevenson. On her return she took a trip by canoe through the wilds of northern Minnesota.

For all of us this was an exciting adventure, a statement of the greatness of our vast and beautiful nation. It is an invitation to the almost 200,000,000 Americans to discover our land from sea to shining sea.