

Leg 8 - Anaheim

Day 37 - Tuesday 25 January 2000

The alarm sounds at 6:30pm to get us going to catch the train in Oakland but I am already awake due to the fire trucks with their horns and alarms shattering the peaceful morning. We are looking forward to visiting Disneyland in Anaheim some 494 miles and 13 hours down the west coast.

When we checked in our luggage in at the depot in San Francisco one of our bags was overweight and cost us \$10 and another bag was 1 lb overweight and needed some of the literature (brochures and other printed material) we had collected on our journey removed so it met the 50 lb weight limit for each piece of luggage.

Today is overcast but at least it is not raining as our bus makes its way on the lower level of the Bay Bridge to Oakland Amtrak Railway Station and from the bus we get a great view of the island in the bay and Oakland itself. The port facility was built after the San Francisco dock strikes and is huge and also houses an army and navy base. No more ships go to the docks in San Francisco and they are being remodelled for tourist theme parks and shops.

The city of Oakland is larger than Brisbane (Queensland), possibly as big as Sydney and our bus takes us to the Jack London Square about 30 minutes before the train arrives so it gives me time to catch up with this entry to reflect on the past couple of days in San Francisco and prepare for the next leg of the journey which will come to a close in 6 days.

The only disappointing aspect of our visit as the train heads south is not experiencing an earthquake or at least an earth tremor. I know the residents of San Francisco wouldn't agree but when you hear they occur regularly we must have picked a quiet time to visit.

As we travel through the heavy industrial areas, houses, apartment blocks you can't help but notice the different standards of living, or in my opinion existing. We venture further into Silicon Valley and the transformation is unbelievable as all of a sudden the standard of housing is for the wealthy with grassy yards, gardens, tree lined streets, security enclosures, gated communities, and well kept shopping centres.

The reclining seating on the train is like business class in an aeroplane, very comfortable, wide seats with fold down footrests and ample support for the legs set off with large windows to enjoy the view. There is more room in these chairs than in our economy sleeper and perfect for a 1 day journey south the LA.

Outside the rich soil produces a variety of produce such as artichokes, cabbage, lettuce and in certain areas vineyards producing the Californian wines and table grapes. In most fields you see portable toilets and contract labourers picking crops or working the fields.

Every now and again the countryside changes to rocky barren land with cattle and sheep, swamps with ducks, oil wells and pumps, gum trees, small towns and dirt roads. One thing you notice on a majority of houses and apartments are the satellite dishes you can purchase for around \$100

providing 25 channels of television for around \$29.95 per month or 100 channels for \$39.95 per month. These small dishes are less obvious than our television aerials.

There are few landmarks that stand out on the journey:

1. Camp Roberts National Guard base just outside San Miguel that stretches for several miles with all sorts of military hardware, barracks, airstrip, training grounds and workshops;
2. The old mission at San Miguel with its high walls and architecture; and
3. San Luis Obispo a beautiful town the train its way down through the cloudy range going back and forth around horse shoe bends. In the town there is the Californian Male Prison, a university, an airport and once again agricultural industries as this is a rich fertile valley.

As we leave the fertile valley we cross the ranges where cattle graze and get our first look at the Pacific Ocean. The miles and miles of beaches and small surf is broken by rocky headlands and the occasional small seaside resort for RVs, caravans and tents. Popular no doubt during the summer but not many people around in winter.

It is hard to work out the difference between earthquake monitoring bunkers and the towers and the USAF defence monitoring towers until you see the distinctive towers marked TITAN where the underground missiles are stored and ready to fire when the President gives the command.

In many places along the Santa Barbara coastline just off shore you can see the numerous oil rigs and they make a beautiful site with the surf, open beaches and headlands against the setting sun, a golden picture.

About 2 hours out of LA you can start to see the glow of the city in the night sky and the traffic along the coast intensifies as the road system goes to 3 lanes in both directions. Our train is trying to make up time as many passengers like us have connecting trains or busses to catch. Our train for Anaheim is scheduled to leave at 9:50pm but we have been informed that we should be there on time to make the connection otherwise they will bus us to our destination.

Changing trains we boarded the 'Coaster' for Anaheim a 45 minute journey and were relieved that our luggage had been transferred for us and all we had to do was collect them when we got to Anaheim. Our hotel is the Anaheim Camelot Inn and Suites at 1520 South Harbor Blvd and across the road from Disneyland perfect for an early morning start.

Day 38 - Wednesday 26 January 2000 - Australia Day

"When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
Will come to you" (Disney Lyrics)

I remember watching Disneyland on the black and white television set as a kid wishing that one day I could be there and live what we saw. And so on a brilliant sunn morning (Australia Day) Robyn and I burst through the gates at 10:00am ready to be kids again.

Golly, where do you start? Which direction to do go? No time to stand around or even toss a coin, we were off down Main Street and when we hit Central Plaza we agreed to work our way clockwise and hopefully we will see as much as we can before the gates close at 8:00pm.

I am not going even attempt to trace our steps, explain each of the rides, sites, sounds, smells and tastes as you have to visit Disneyland and experience it for yourself, every kid is different. For me, one of the pictures that will stick in my mind forever is the look on the children's face when they one of their favourite characters in real life and rush up to them with open arms for a hug and an autograph.

We were like little kids ourselves as we went from ride to ride amazing ourselves at times as we simply rushed onto rides that we would normally stop and think twice before saying yes or no. To help matters there are no long queues of people at this time of the year so we hopped off one ride and straight onto the next ride. I think we rode more rides and saw more attractions than most people would see using a 3 day pass in peak season, so plan to visit in off season if you only have 1 day.

The adventures we enjoyed the most and have a lasting impression:

1. Indiana Jones Adventure is a must ride for all regardless of age;
2. Jungle Cruise and Tarzan Treehouse (if you can climb the ladders);
3. Splash Mountain is so much fun, sit in the front even if you don't like getting wet;
4. Big Thunder Mountain is a roller coaster packed with turns and dips and is fast;
5. Go over to Tom Sawyer Island for a gently walk (recovery time) as well as go on the Mark Twain Riverboat to relax and get your breath back while sorting out where next to go;
6. The Haunted Mansion is fun to walk through;
7. For a scary ride take the Matterhorn Bobsled for a gut wrenching experience;
8. Go on all the gentle rides through Fantasyland to see the story books come to life and be a big kid riding King Arthur's Carrousel as it will bring back your childhood days at the Ekker (Brisbane Royal Show);
9. Experience all the thrills and magic of Tomorrowland and for me, this was the highlight of the whole day blending thrilling rides with 3D images in the theatre with life like effects;
10. At night, finish the day with a journey on the Disneyland Railroad and see the park under lights; and finally
11. Fantasyland Theatre Stage put on a live show and tonight it was 'Animazement – The Musical' and for about 20 minutes they blended all the Disneyland stories into one of the most fantastic performances with props, costumes, voice, visual effects and interaction I have even seen.

We left at 8:00pm with tired legs but our hearts were still racing, what a blast for all ages and a must on your travel plans.

Even though we had walked ourselves into the ground we had to walk about a mile or so up the road to get some more cough medicine for Robyn before having tea and turning in for the night. We are mentally visualising the Astro Orbiter, Rockets Red, Star Tours and a great show called 'Honey I shrunk the audience' as we drifted off peacefully into never never land.