

# Along the California Trail

## Getting Around

**A little explanation is necessary here. California is a departure from my usual forays into Southeast Asia, but sometimes change is necessary. In this instance, a medical necessity meant a visit to the City of Hope in Los Angeles .**

For those who are curious about the old California Trail of early settlers heading West from Missouri, it meant that the trail to the Gold Fields of Sacramento was fraught with hardship and danger. Fording rivers, crossing the Great Plains and then tackling the Rocky Mountains involved both danger and tragedy. Like today, going West isn't easy; it wasn't then and in a manner of speaking, it isn't a walk in the park today.

I guess, I can speak with some authority. I've visited California numerous times, the first being when I was 13 years old and heading to California from Honolulu via the SS President Cleveland. To call that trip a cruise would be misleading as we, a bunch of Boy Scouts heading to the National Jamboree in Pennsylvania were housed in deep steerage class so far below deck that when the ship rocked to port, we rocked to starboard.

It was a trip of adventure, probably not unlike the early settlers. Conditions were somewhat primitive, but surely not as austere as settlers of the American West. We were not settling anywhere except at Valley Forge where Washington's troops endured a cold winter encampment in 1777. While we were going to camp on the very same ground, it would be during a warm week in June, two hundred years later. Yes, it wasn't the same, except for one condition. Like Washington's troops, we had to dig our own latrines and while we only used them for a week, I certainly had a sense of the hardship that Washington's troops faced. But it was a bit different with a shy teenager whose only exposure to a toilet was an in-house, flushing porcelain bowl behind locked doors. Our latrine was dug by backhoes and seemed intimidatingly deep and dark. It was not a user friendly place that I recall with a couple lengths of bare, splintery timber spanning the trench upon which to perch.

So for me, I felt that yes, I could empathize with both the troops of the Revolutionary Army and the early settlers of the West, at least in one personal aspect.

Since that first trip to California, I have returned numerous times and each visit saw changes, some shocking for a 13 year old like when I visited San Francisco's Seal Rock and wandered into a curio shop catering to tourist. While looking for something to bring home to my dad, I came across shelves of cigarette trays one of which caught my eye. It was of a gentleman who had both arms wrapped around a couple of buxom blondes. When I flipped the ashtray over, it revealed that this gentleman actually had his hand up the ladies' skirts. It was both shocking and riveting at the same time. I don't recall if I ever purchased that for my dad, more than likely, I probably bought it for myself.

The next visit to the West Coast was during my college days when after driving cross country on the original Route 66, I ended up in Las Vegas driving a car slated for resale in Barstow. As luck would have it, I had about \$60 in my pocket and had one night to spare in Sin City. I checked into a cheap motel which had both a 17" black and white coin operated tv as well as a vibrating bed, coin operated as well.

A quarter gave me about ten minutes of sheer pleasure except that I fell asleep immediately and didn't wake up until the next morning. My one best opportunity to have an adventure was a complete disaster. As a 21 year old, I never did learn what was so sinful about Las Vegas.

Over the years, Los Angeles was often a stop over place during college breaks. Crashing out for a day or two with classmates was fun, but even then, L.A. was a car culture and one had to have decent wheels to have any chance with the ladies. Again my luck never changed as the only car that my buddy had was a beat up old '49 Chevy whose doors swung open at every turn so that it had to be tied down with rope. That may have explained our luck with the ladies.

The last time that I drove on the freeways of L.A. was about 15 years ago and my only memory was that even driving at 80 mph, cars were passing me on the fly. This was before GPS and every driver new to the freeways had to have a decent navigator in the shotgun seat who could read maps both accurately and quickly. Having excellent eyes were a plus. So yes, there were hardships before the days of smart phones and navigational systems. There were no Lyft or Uber to do the driving for us. But now, these amateur drivers are a blessing to us all. They offer worry free driving and can take you anywhere with little worry. Getting around is so easy.

I imagine it was nothing like crossing the country in a covered prairie schooner. My complaints have no merit in comparison.

That's Earle, brother  
Los Angeles, California