

The Skinny

(the Somewhat delayed, Kind of Intermittent Newsletter for the New Year)

February 6, 2016

from the desk of **Peter Kauffmann**

Season's greetings (?) and welcome to another edition of my New Year's newsletter! Let's get down to business (literally).

Year 5 of Working in DC

Work continues to go well. I'm enjoying what I do, and the company keeps providing interesting opportunities for extracurricular activities, including teambuilding trips to several baseball games and an escape room.

Once again, I tied for first place in the office Oscar pool (it's much easier to get 100% when they don't make us pick for documentaries or short films), and once again, we had an awesome time curling at the Potomac Curling Center. I really need to get a group together to rent the thing, except they're already booked solid through September.



I know it's hard to believe, but this is not proper curling form.

Oh, right, and there were actual projects to work on as well. This year's assortment of projects that I worked on had a distinct tilt towards transportation research rather than development projects. I managed the data collection for two DDOT-led projects, one looking at multimodal trip generation at new mixed-use buildings and another studying parking demand at multifamily residential buildings.

The latter of those is becoming my second publication, as I helped co-author an academic paper presented at the Transportation Research Board annual meeting (think 12,000 transportation nerds descending on DC over 5 days). Check out ParkRightDC.org to see what the analysis team was able to do with the data we collected for that one. The map is really cool!

Developments at Home

Late spring and early summer was something of a strange time at home, because after a particularly long streak of good health (including 21 years without taking a sick day for me) both the cat and I ran into some medical issues. I had surgery to repair a

hernia in April (hence missing a day of work), and Sprocket (who turned 15 in September!) followed that up in May with radioactive iodine therapy to treat his hyperthyroidism. Both of us are feeling much better now, thanks for asking!

Trivia!

Otherwise, life in the District is also going well. I continued to find new outlets for my transit-geekery despite a lack of new Metro stations to visit, making the hike out to Fairfax County one morning in April to see the launch of Metro's new railcars. Some friends and I also guest-hosted our local trivia night (note to self: pick less obscure Metro-themed questions next time).



"Wait – so people don't know the 10 least-used Metro stations?"

I Love Star Wars (but not as much as Julia)

In other news, and because I want to brag about this but can't figure out where else to work this in: I also went to see *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* five times (twice with Julia!), well exceeding my record of seeing 2009 *Star Trek* twice in theaters. I probably would've stopped at four, but I had the very unique opportunity to see it in all five projection formats: 2D, 3D, IMAX 3D, IMAX 70mm film, and IMAX Laser 3D. There can't be very many people who can say that – it was only at 12 70mm screens, and there are only 6 IMAX Laser screens nationwide. Fortunately DC has one at each, at the Air & Space museums.



In case it wasn't obvious, yes, I liked it. Totally worth \$77.

Family Gatherings

The past year also saw more opportunities to host or visit with family in the area and passing through town. My mom came to visit several times, finally passing her brother as the family

member who had been to my apartment most frequently (not that I gave her a hard time about that).

That's not to say that I didn't see the Wolff family – they continue to look me up when passing through town in various combinations, which I appreciate – but our meetups have started occurring in more exotic locales, like when we went hiking at Great Falls.

The year also included a number of trips to Richmond for Kauffmann family festivities, a big Kauffmann/Dery family reunion in Newport News, and several trips up to Westminster to visit my great aunt.

Flagship Trip: Australia

And now to move on to this newsletter's traditional travel-centric centerfold. This year, Julia and I took advantage of our network of college friends to mount an all-too-brief expedition to Australia, where our friends Mallory and Kevin are living.

They were kind enough to host us for five days at their place in Sydney, giving us a tour of that spectacular city, before joining us for a trip to explore the Outback, including Alice Springs and Uluru. The whole trip was absolutely spectacular.

Sydney

Getting to Sydney itself was an undertaking – it's a long trip, and American Airlines wasn't particularly helpful. But eventually we all made it and began our whirlwind tour of Sydney highlights. We walked across the Harbor Bridge, saw the Opera House, and visited iconic Bondi Beach. At night, we were lucky to see Vivid, Sydney's seasonal festival of lights, including spectacular art installations lighting up downtown and the waterfront. One day, we rode the train out to the Blue Mountains for a day of hiking. In a treat for Julia and me, we also worked in a trip to Featherdale Wildlife Park, where we saw plenty of native wildlife, pet a koala, and even fed some wallabies. We also ate our fill of fantastic Asian fusion cuisine.



The wallabies were SO CUTE I picked this photo over a Harbor Bridge photo to represent the Sydney leg of the trip. Shocking, I know.

Northern Territory

Before too long, it was time to jet out to NT. We flew into Alice Springs, really the only town in the Outback, full of aboriginal culture, colorful birds, and stark landscapes. But we were there to see Australia's crown jewels – the big red rocks in the middle of the desert – so we rented a campervan and started the 300-mile drive out to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.



We ignored the "No Swimming" signs posted at the Todd River.

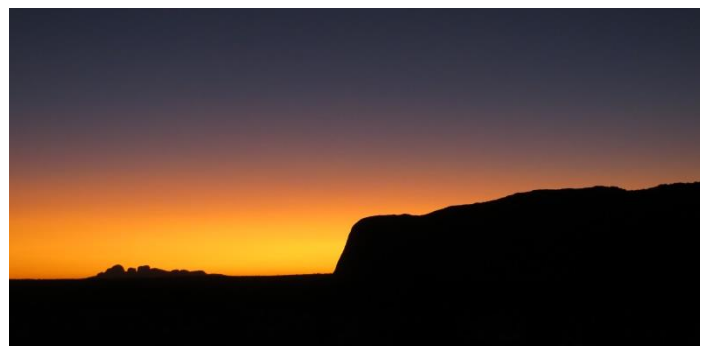
The park was AMAZING. I'd been wanting to see it since I saw *The Rescuers Down Under* as a kid, and it did not disappoint. Being in the presence of such imposing landmarks, it's easy to see why the aboriginal people treat them with such reverence. I could have stared at the textures and colors in the rocks for hours – and we often did, working in a pair of sunset and sunrise viewings during the course of the trip, making for some very long days. It's not an easy trip, but I intend to go back.



Kata Tjuta is less famous but larger (1,800' above the desert!), and several hikes actually let you explore the valleys between the peaks



Watching the progression of colors on Uluru at sunset is mesmerizing.



However, seeing the sunset in silhouette is where it's at. That gradient!

Other Travel Highlights

My other travels this year held their own surprisingly well in spite of the strong showing from Australia. Thanks to everybody who helped make all these trips a success!

California with Mom & Brad

In May, my great aunt and I made another trip to California to visit my Mom and Brad. The week saw a number of expeditions around the state, including three separate trips to visit extended family. We traveled east to Sonora (coming tantalizingly close to Yosemite – someday!) to attend the McDermed family reunion at their “apple ranch”, where they make hard cider and apple brandy. We also had a chance to head north for a visit with the Andersons in Moraga, and I got to check in with my friend Tory from college in Mountain View.

But the biggest trip of the visit was when we headed south to Los Angeles to visit the Blums, marking the first time in my life I’ve knowingly met third cousins – some grandchildren of my grandmother’s cousin were there. It was an amazing trip, and over the course of driving 950 miles we managed to fit in so many amazing sights, from whale watching in Monterey Bay, to driving down the coast through Big Sur, to looking out over LA from the Griffith Observatory, and so much in between.



The Bixby Bridge is one of my top 3 favorites. I’M SO EXCITED HERE.



There were HUNDREDS of seals on this beach at San Simeon.

Chicago with the Shapiros

Memorial Day saw Julia and I heading over to Chicago to visit the Shapiros, each our former dorm roommates. Visiting Brad and Elaine is always a great time, and in this visit we saw the zoo (always a favorite of Julia’s and mine), had drinks at the top of the Hancock Building, did our best Ferris Bueller at the Art Institute of Chicago, and went on an evening architectural boat tour on the Chicago River.



OF COURSE we saw The Bean.

Orlando with Mom

In November, my mom and I took a barnstorming tour of the Orlando theme parks. We managed to see all 4 Disney parks, plus both Universal parks in just over 2.5 days, while working in a behind-the-scenes tour at Epcot. It helped that we’d done a pretty thorough job at Disney the other time we went in 2004, but it was a pretty intense trip. Go ride Soarin’ at Epcot and do all the Harry Potter stuff at Universal if you ever get the chance.

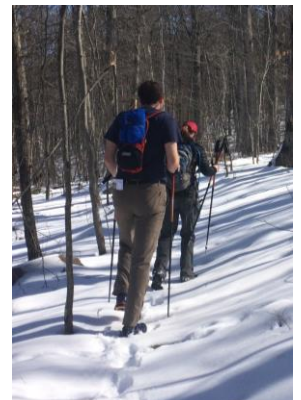


It was SO HOT in this picture. In NOVEMBER.

Expeditions with Julia and Friends

So many other cool trips happened and I’m running out of space, so I wanted to give quick mention of a few: numerous visits with Julia in Memphis (including a charmingly nerdy Pi Day celebration), a 4th of July trip to the beach with Julia’s family, the now-traditional Labor Day weekend getaway with college friends, and a trip to the Yuengling Brewery in Pennsylvania for my friend Michael’s birthday.

Outdoorsy trips were also well-represented on the year, including a pair of trips with my cousins Paul and Carla to hike Kennedy Peak in March (complete with 8” of fresh snow) and to backpack at Little Schloss in August. August also saw a backpacking trip with Jeremy to celebrate our friend Haninah’s impending fatherhood, and the season concluded with me roping in a diverse group of friends to tackle the Maryland Heights hike at Harpers Ferry, which had been on my list for literally a decade.



Bicycle-related activity also continued at a good pace this year, although less than last year. I adopted one of my dad's nice bikes (so lightweight!), got it fixed up (courtesy of Bryan Bridgeman in a visit that included checking in with my friends



David and Bryan from high school!), and took it out for a couple of neat rides. My coworker Maris and I entered in the Thunder Ridge ride near Lynchburg (I had to do an easier version because of the surgery, but she conquered a 3,000' mountain!) and took another of DC's 50 State Streets in September (OF COURSE it rained).

The year's cycling culminated in September when the annual Road Cycling World Championships came to my hometown of Richmond – the first time they'd been in the US since 1980. Thanks to Paul and Carla's hosting generosity, I got a free place to stay that was within a 10 mile bike ride on the new Virginia Capital Trail of all the good vantage points. We staked out some good spots at Libby Hill Park and watched the men, women, and U-23 riders hit the cobblestones each lap when they got to the hill. Being there with a big screen, a well-informed announcer, and thousands of screaming cycling fans was an AMAZING experience, and I'm confident we won't have to wait another 35 years for World's to visit the US again.



You try riding at 20+mph uphill on damp cobblestones.

Local "Expeditions"

Things that happen around town can still be considered "expeditions", right? Some DC-area highlights included a visit to the National Building Museum's "The Beach" (a gigantic ball pit creating a convincing – if slow-motion – illusion), disc golfing outings with stepbrother Colin (he's much better than I am), and visits to the newly-



renovated Renwick Gallery (their current "Wonder" exhibit is a MUST-SEE). I also attended a whopping SEVEN soccer games with DC United, taking full advantage of my membership in the Screaming Eagles supporters group.

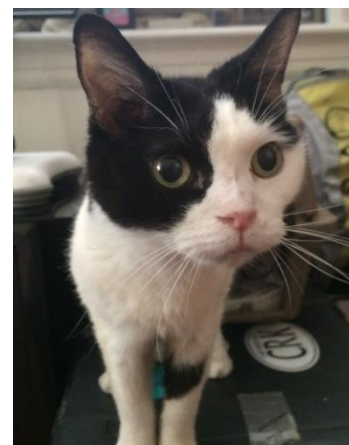
My local friend group also made a return to some typical annual events, including the Washington Post hunt, easily setting a personal best by solving the final puzzle and getting SIXTH PLACE out of thousands (mark your calendars for Post Hunt 2016 on May 22, 2016), and the Nightmare on M Street at Halloween, really upping our costume game at the same time.



Conclusion

Since we're already several weeks into 2016, I sincerely do hope this newsletter finds you well and getting a good start to your resolutions. I for one am resolving to get better at coming up with helpful metaphors at the spur-of-the-moment, which is going about as well as something that doesn't go very well.

As always, thanks for reading, and be sure to get in touch if you'll be passing through town – I'm still at pdkauffmann@gmail.com. As has become my typical sign-off, be sure to have a great 2016, and try not to get in too much trouble!



*"Have a furry February!"
-- Sprocket*