Saturday, June 9, 2018 I left Orem around 2:30 pm on my trip to see the giant redwood trees in California. Since I was driving route 50 across Nevada, I decided to catch the evening Astronomy Program at Great Basin National Park. I arrived around 5pm giving me 3 hours to make dinner, and explore before the program began. It was a very windy day, and I had to use some white gas to get a fire started in order to warm up my tinfoil dinner in a park designated fire pit. After dinner I explored the Grey Cliffs area, and took in the view of Wheeler Peak from Mather Overlook. Returning to Lehman Caves Visitor Center, for the 8pm program, I got worried about the weather potentially blocking the night sky when I stopped to check out the Osceola Ditch. I meet with a surprise when at the visitor center I was told the program had been moved inside, as it was too windy outside, and that the theater was full (it wasn’t even 8pm yet). I hung around to see if there would be a star viewing at 9pm, and after a while I was able to sneak to the door of the theater and catch some of the program about light pollution. At 9pm they announced it was still too windy to set up the telescopes outside. Bummed out I drove over to Sacramento Pass (BLM land) on route 50 and found a private place, away from the RV city, to park and sleep.

Sunday I was up with the sun, had a no-cook breakfast, and headed over to Ely, about 50 miles away to gas up, that was around 7:15 am (pacific time). I started with a full tank in Orem, and gassed up in Delta after only 99 miles, and had put on 197 miles between Delta and Ely (guess I didn’t need the Delta fill up, but I wasn’t taking chances along the Loneliest Highway of running out of gas). Ely appears to be on an Indian Reservation. From the time one leaves I-15 in Utah till you get to Fallon, NV there really is nothing but barren land, with a ranch here and there – 50 really is the loneliest highway. I marveled, and was impressed, that a few choice people lived that remotely. About 230 miles from Ely, around 11:30 (pacific time), I spotted Sand Mountain – a huge sand dune 2 miles long and 600 feet tall. About 28 miles further along route 50 I came to the town of Fallon, and they seemed to have irrigation water there, as crops were growing and things were green – town sign calmed Fallon is the Oasis of Nevada. With Reno about 60 miles away, I decided I’d have enough gas, even though it would put me over 300 miles since the last fill up, so I didn’t stop. I was shocked when I got to Sparks and saw gas prices up 40 cents a gallon over Fernley (where route 50 joined I-80). I drove through Reno, via Virginia St, just to see the town, and gas was over $4/gal. Next I headed out to Cold Springs Valley, as I wanted to see Peter’s old house. I stopped at Lemmon Ave where there is now a Walmart and Smiths, and a lot of shopping. Managed to use my Smith points to get gas at $3.36/gal, at 337.5 miles from Ely the low fuel light wasn’t yet on (it comes on with 3.5 gallons left), and I had burned 16.89 of the 21.125 gallon tank. Didn’t take me long to find Peter’s house in Cold Springs Valley, but wow has that place exploded, not much shopping but a lot more houses. Peter’s place is on Garret Pl, and I was shocked to see how unkept up it was. Next, for a trip down memory lane, I decided to drive up the 4X4 roads just NW of White Lake on the NV/CA border (pretty much). I drove the Rodeo up there back in 1997, and I thought it would be fun to take the Frontier up. It was steep and rocky but not to terribly rough, although I’d have turned around if it was any rougher. By 3pm, I had “topped out” (not the highest point, but a high point) and I took a few pictures and video of the urban sprawl of Cold Springs Valley. Next I headed back to I-80 and over to Truckee, CA – so touristy I got right back on the freeway and stopped at the Donner Summit rest stop at an elevation of 7,239 ft. While there I noticed a sigh for the Pacific Crest Trail. I stayed on the freeway over Yuba Pass then exited on to CA-20, toward Nevada City, stopping at the Raley’s grocery store in Grass Valley CA for a sandwich after finding nothing better in Nevada City. Next it was on to Colusa, through Yuba City, the forest and mountain driving gave way to the flat farm lands of the Northern Central Valley. The Central Valley is one of the world's most productive agricultural regions with over 230 crops grown there. Virtually all non-tropical crops are grown in the Central Valley. It was surprising to me and beautiful too, to see rice fields, alongside orchards, wheat fields, walnut and pistachio trees, rows of corn and beans, and sun flowers. 60% of the world’s almonds are grown in the Central Valley. The farm houses even had Palm trees growing around them. I hope to camp along the Sacramento River in Colusa as the map showed a state park but when I finally found it it was closed for the season due to a construction project. Luckily, about 35 miles west of Colusa, as highway 20 heads into the dry hills of California (that look like South Korea), I noticed a dirt road (called Walker Ridge Road) signed for a reservoir so I took it, and drove up 2 miles where I stopped, for the night, at a flat pull out on the side of the dirt road. I never did find or see the reservoir but the next morning, as I was having an early breakfast a truck drove by pulling a boat. 600 plus mile day, with around 6:30 am start till around 10:00 pm stop (15+ hours on the road and around Reno).

Day 3 – June 11, I was again up with the sun, and eager to get to Highway 101 and to see the Giant Redwoods. Highway 20 is not a quick or easy drive, it goes through towns with stop lights, and winds through mountain passes, and beside lakes, and leaving it would be just fine. About 30 miles from my overnight stopping point, I gassed up for $3.57 a gallon at New Marina Market in Nice CA near the western end of the 19 mile long Clear Lake; that had to be about 7:30 am, because by 9:15 am I was at Drive Through Tree (aka Chandelier Tree) in Leggett CA. When I paid the $10 to see the tree, the woman warned me that my truck might not fit through it. I was worried about the height of my truck, but it measured roughly about 6 foot 2 inches (I brought a tape measure with me), and the opening she told me was 6’8’. But as it turned out, the opening isn’t wide enough; it’s 72 inches wide and the truck is 69” plus 3”X2 for each folded in mirror, putting me at 75 inches. I hung out at the tree for about 1.5 hours, taking photos for various people, and enjoying watching cars drive through it. A minivan made it, as did a smaller Toyota SUV, and an older Tacoma (they are about 67 inches wide); lots of motor bikes drove through too. The tree claims to be 21 feet wide! About 30 miles north of Leggett is the southern entrance of the Avenue of the Giants. This section of the 101 Highway reminded me of Kalispell area, with all the “house of mystery”, and gift shop tourist stuff. For example I passed a one log house; hollowed out in 1946 from a single log. About a mile along the avenue of the giants my first stop was at Chimney tree - a 78-foot-tall remnant of a redwood tree that was hollowed out by fire in 1914.  I entered the tree through a doorway at the base, and look straight up to see the sky above! As I came to learn hollowed out trees by fire is actually quite common in the redwoods and the trees go on living - the dry central core is destroyed by fire, but the moist outer layers of the tree survive. I even saw a tree with half its length split off, yet it had green foliage on it. Between Chimney tree and the Humboldt Redwoods State Park visitor center I stopped at one of the many groves and just marveled at the size of the trees. I said aloud; this was worth the drive. I felt there life giving force, so inspiring. Next I ate lunch on my tail gate then and did a short hike, amongst the giant trees, popping out at a town that I’d guess is Miranda or Phillipsville. At Myers Flat I saw the sign for another drive through tree called Shrine Tree, but I skipped it having done the other one, and continued on to the visitor center. At the visitor center I asked about camping ($35 a night – no thanks) and dozed off watching a 12 minute film about the park. As I continued north I saw a sign for Women's Federation Grove, and I turned left and drove in. The trees were massive, and there was no one else around. The road was narrow, like single lane, between the massive trees and it felt adventurous. Honestly, nowhere on my entire trip was overcrowded or busy. I was typically alone in all the groves I visited. It was peaceful at the Women’s Grove so I took a short nap in the bed of my truck before returning to the Avenue of Giants and stopping at Mahan Grove. Mahan Grove honors a couple who helped preserve the trees there, but walking around in the grove to find their plaque one noticed many huge tree stumps of tree they couldn’t save. The auto tour info (I didn’t strictly follow the auto tour) claims Sasquatch siting have been reported in the grove. Next I drove down to the South Fork of the Eel River at Dyerville, and there decided to leave the Avenue of the Giants and head west into the Rockefeller Forest. A good decision as I got to see Tall Tree with its 42 foot circumference at a height of 359 feet. Imagine that, 359 feet – if you cut that down you’d need a whole football fields (100 yards plus two 10 yard end zones) to lay it down on, and that is just one tree and not even the tallest Redwood tree! I also saw Giant Tree which is 363 feet tall and 16.9 feet in diameter, as well as the fallen elliptical Flat Iron tree. It was after 5pm when I got back to my truck and decided to not head back to the avenue of giants but to instead follow Mattole Road west to see the Pacific Ocean. Such a great drive, Mattole Road goes up and over mountain (one of those dry California hills – like South Korea) for 26 miles until it comes to this amazing single lane truss bridge crossing the Mattole River at the town of Honeydew. En route to the bridge I passed one car going the other way, and one truck stopped by the bridge. I stopped on the bridge to take a photo and noticed a car approach behind me. Dry hills, and farms, and such a remote felling, I loved it. More of the same awesomeness as I head NW to Petrolia. Within 4 or 5 miles from Petrolia you climb a hill and as you start down the ocean appears. The beach along the remote Mattole Road is apparently unnamed and I was sure seldom visited – I had the place to myself. Russ Ranch and Timber Company has put up signs and fences around their property at the north end of Mattole Road (or so I have now read), where I saw cattle on the beach, so there is no beach access up there, but I was at the public south end by Mussel Rock. I arrived just after 6:30 pm, and I immediately hit the beach and Mussel Rock before returning to the car for dinner and to watch the sunset. I planned to spend the night, but at 8:44 pm when the sun was below the horizon and it was still light out, and a truck pasted by I decided to head toward Ferndale and find a more hidden spot. At the north end at what I assume is the Russ Ranch on the right (east) and Lost Coast beach (Cape Mendocino Beach) to the north; there the road turns right and goes up a very steep climb. All pull outs were gated, and with the darkness it became foggy. I finally came to a side road, but as soon as I decided on a place to park for the night a car passed, and I took that as a sign to head down to Ferndale which is 30 miles from Petrolia. As I drove into town, it was dark and no one was out, a saw a sign saying RV parking, but that turned out to be day time parking for shopping, so I took a chance and headed west on Ocean Ave. My instinct said that would obviously lead to the ocean and perhaps a BLM type of beach. I soon came to Centerville beach where the road turned left (south) along the beach, and then in another couple miles, like a miracle, I saw a sigh for public lands, and then I came to the Guthrie Creek trailhead, and it didn’t say no overnight parking. Looking on a map Guthrie Creek Beach is only 6.6 miles from Cape Mendocino Beach (Sugarloaf Island) which is about 7 miles from Mussel Rock where I strolled the beach alone but I drove 32 miles or so to get there from my beach parking spot. After researching this to write it up, I need to go back and hike into the Punta Gorda Lighthouse. Such an amazing day!

Day 4 – June 12. Of course I woke up early so I and decided to go for a hike. I packed a light breakfast to eat at the beach, and headed down the Guthrie trail at 6:00 am sharp. The Guthrie Creek Trail follows an old closed road that switchbacks down for about one mile to Guthrie Creek Beach , but I tried to take a shortcut but that was to rugged, and then I got cliffed-out on one of the many scenic but crumbling cliffs high above the beach, so I had to bushwhack back to the trail meeting the trail just above the point the BLM labels as unstable (it’s a sort of minor down climb 10 or 12 feet to the beach). I still made it to the sand by 6:30 am, where I crossed the Guthrie creek and ate my breakfast. I strolled around for 20 or 30 minutes on the beach and then headed back to the parking lot. Still no one around, which was great as I needed a nap. About the time my nap was over a lone woman arrived and headed out on the hike. It was misty out and I decided to hang out in the bed of the truck and make some notes and two deer approached within 20 feet of me. I left before the hiker returned. I stopped at the Fleener Creek Beach overlook and then drove to Ferndale. Tried to get water there but a bunch of kids showed up when I located a tap at a park so I headed out instead. Seemed like a trendy town, but very nice. Drove the 20 miles up to Eureka where I thought I’d walk along the sand bar at Humbolt Bay, but Eureka was so full of homeless drug addicts that I couldn’t get away fast enough, plus the sand bar wasn’t appealing in real life. I picked up some groceries and got some expensive gas in Euerka ($3.84/gal), and continued north on the 101 with Patrick’s point in mind. Patrick’s turned out to be a fee area, so I continued up past Big Lagoon to Kuchel Visitor Center near Orick, CA in Redwood National Park. There I got a permit for the Tall Trees hike. En route to the hike, I attempted to get water, around 2:45pm, in Orick at a school only to find it was still in for the year. I drove up to the trailhead and stared hiking about by 4pm, and was back to the car by 5:30pm (they had told me it was a ½ day hike, whatever, it’s like a mile on foot to the grove, and a half mile to loop around it. The 2.5 to 3 mile round-trip Tall Trees Trail leads to the Tall Trees Grove, an alluvial flat next to Redwood Creek that hosts a former title-holder of world’s tallest tree, the Howard Libbey Tree at 362 feet till but with a diameter of only 9.5 feet (7 plus feet less than the Giant Tree in Rockerfeller grove). This former record-holder, discovered by a National Geographic survey team in 1963, in part spurred the creation of the National Park in 1968. The tree with its smaller diameter didn’t really capture much of my attention. I think the trees on the loop hike around the grove covered in moss might be maple trees. Next I drove the 13 miles back to 101 and then 11 miles to the Prairie Creek Visitor Center in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, seeing some elk along the way. There I finally got water to fill up my 5 gallon jug, and then located Big Tree along the Newton B Drury Parkway. Big tree is 1500 years old with almost a 24 foot diameter. I photographed it at 7:30 pm, then found the Corkscrew Tree at 8pm. Next I need to figure out camping for the evening – that was becoming a sort of daunting time of day, but I always had faith that it would work out, and it always did. I set off to highway 169 just over the Klamath River but nothing worthwhile appear there going east of 101, so I tried it west of 101 and came to a river access, but the area felt weird, and I soon learned that it was on an Indian Reservation. So I looked at the map again and notice Klamath Beach road just south of the river which I thought would take me to Flint Ridge where there was parking for backcountry camping, but I’d stay at the parking lot. Well that turned out to be a one way road once I got to the ocean. So I had to go back to Alder Camp Rd to get access to the Coastal Drive (in the right direction). I found the Flint Ridge parking area, but it was full of cars, by now it was 10 pm so I just went down the one-way road a few hundred yards to the first pull out (with an incredible view of the ocean) and decided to take my chances. I figured the truth was the best story in the unlikely event a ranger came along, on a backcountry one way road at 10 pm – the truth being the pay for campgrounds were all full, and I was too tired to drive (safety first), Sleep didn’t come easy, but the sound of the ocean and the night view of the lights of the ships was pleasing.

Day 5 June 13– Up with the sun, as always, happy no one had come along. Wanted to do the Coastal drive in daylight, and stop at High Bluff and WWII Radar station along the way, but I didn’t want to drive all the way around again, so I did it in the wrong one-day direction, and no one came along. I stopped at High Bluff and took in the Ocean views from two spots (one was a small hike). I was too restless to sleep, as I thought I might, so I had breakfast and then did the drive again in the right direction stopping at WWII Radar station. No one out not even at the Flint Ridge parking area. I decided I might as well finish the 101 in CA up to the Oregon border as the Stout Grove outside Crescent city, in the Jedidiah Smith Redwood State Park, sounded cool to see and was a recommended scenic drive. Got there at 7 am only to find Howland Hills road gated a few miles in. Returned to Crescent City but the visitor center didn’t open till 9am, so I got a few groceries and then visited Battery Point Lighthouse. By then it was 9:20 ish and I stopped at the Visitor center and then said the road was closed for construction not just gate for the evening. Being less than 20 miles from Oregon I went ahead a finish the CA 101 getting to Oregon at 10:12 am. Returning from Oregon I got gas for $3.12/gal on the reservation and headed down to highway 299 from McKinleyville to Redding, CA, a pleasant 140 mile drive through the Salmon Mountains. En route I again drove the 10 mile long Newton B Drury Parkway this time stopping at the Ah Pah trail. Redding turned out to be another one of those drug infested homeless loser towns like Eureka, I got gas there and an awful “gourmet” burger before heading over to the Lassen National Forest 50 miles away down highway 44. Found a camping spot, maybe around 9 or 9:30 pm, one mile from the National Park entrance, and it felt legal and safe, so I rested good – I noticed a SUV in the trees a few hundred yards away, but they didn’t bother me.

Day 6 June 14 – Had an alarm set for this morning as I wanted to make sure to get into the National Park before the toll booth opened at 7 am. Not a problem, I woke up before the 5:45 am alarm and was in the park before 6:00am. The road through the park is only 26 miles long, and less than 10 miles in I pulled over at the Devasted trailhead and learned about the 1915 Lassen Peak volcano eruption from a short interruptive hike. I took a photo of the mountain at 6:30 am, and figured I might be out of the park before 7:00 am. Passing Kings Creek Picnic area, I realized it would be after 7 am before I exited so I decided to stop and make breakfast at 7:00am just before the road highpoint of 8512 feet. Kings picnic area was full of snow so picnicking along the road was better. As I was making breakfast I kept wondering if the peak NW of me was another aspect of Lassen Peak, which I really wanted to climb as it seemed so close from this side. A park employee did a U-Turn where I was pulled over and just as he left I thought I should have asked him if that Peak was Lassen or not. As it turned out, it was Lassen and at the road highpoint, shortly up the road, I came across a sign and a parking lot for the peak hike. Of course I pulled over, confirmed my intention to climb the peak with some folks in the parking lot, and was geared up and ready to go by 8:15 am. I reached the crater at 9:20 am, and the 10457 foot peak at 9:30 am. It’s only 1945 feet to the summit in 2.5 miles. I climbed all of the three highpoints on the summit then headed over to circumnavigate the crater. In doing so I discovered there is a second crater north of the first one. While hiking around the craters, I surprised what appeared to be a weasel, he didn’t run away so I threw a rock in his direction, and that spooked him to run into his snow cave. I was able to glissade some of the down hike by leaving the trail, and was back at the carpark by 10:56 am. Chatted with a skier at the parking lot, and then continued to the south west exit, stopping to photograph the ice in Lake Helen. Next I was fascinated to discover the park has thermal geysers and such. Bumpass pass was closed, but I stopped at Sulphur Works. Before leaving I stopped at the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor center. The Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center gets its name from the Mountain Maidu word for Lassen Peak, which means “Snow Mountain.” I read somewhere that volcanos make mountains, and glaciers sculpt them. I dozed off in the film, but decided I’d like to see Boiling Springs Lake. So at Chester, along highway 36, I turned north on to Warner Valley Road and drove the 17 miles to the trailhead. The park was self-registration there, so I just put the stub on my window and left the envelope hidden in the truck. I was worried about not paying so I ran the mile or so into the Lake, got a few pics, and was back to my truck in less than one hour (Park claims it to be a 2 hour hike). As I was driving back to highway 36 this woman flagged me down by her cabin and asked me to slap her on the back as she had a respiratory problem. Weird but I did it, and then stopped at Warner creek to wash some clothes and to wash off some hiking sweat. To sunny to rest at the creek, so I tried the Juniper creek road, but was soon on my way to Susanville 35 miles down highway 36. There I got on highway 395 to Reno, 120 miles away. Might have been 8 pm when I reached Cold Springs Valley, and it seemed to early and light out to stop, so I drove into Reno, and got a sandwich at Wendy’s (stupid idea) only to realize I better go back to Cold Spring Valley and camp up on the 4X4 tracks along the NV/CA border rather than risk the trouble of finding a spot along I-80. I had to drive up the 4x4 road in the dark, only did it because I’d done it a few day prior. It was impossible to find a hidden flat spot, as there are no trees in Nevada, so I had to settle for semi-flat, unhidden one. It felt legal, and so I wasn’t worried. Was after 10 pm when I got settled in. Another big, awesome day!

Day 7 June 15 – By 6:30 am I was on my way home. From Cold Springs to Salt Lake via I-80 is 534 miles (to Orem is 572 miles – to Orem via 50 is 13 miles longer). I decide to take I-80 for variety. First stop was for gas at Fernley where I did get the low fuel light to come on and I had to get 17.85 gallons for the 356 miles since I filled up in ghetto drug infested Redding. Gas was only $3.03 in Fernley. Arrive in Elko around noon, having gone 257 miles I gassed up again then got lunch at Arbys. To Wendover is another 109 miles, and I was so tired when I reached the Bonneville Flats Rest Area that when I lucked out and got an end shaded parking area, I lay down in the truck bed for an hour or so to doze off. Rested I got back on I-80 eastbound and soon pulled over at the Knols OHV area; taking a couple photos across the freeway from there. When I got to Grantsville I had to decide if I should continue on I-80 to I-15 or head over to Ophir and Lehi. To make the decision I called the Patagonia store in SLC, that was 6pm, as I wanted to drop my jacket off for warranty on the Velcro zipper cover. They were open till 7pm, so I decided to go for it. I could have dropped the coat of in Reno, as I passed the store, but thought I might need it in CA if it rained, and then on the way back I passed Reno before the store was open. I seconded guess myself on the eastness of Highland drive, and it almost cost me the dropping off of my coat but I did make it about 6:53 pm. I was back in Orem by 8 pm. A trip to remember!!

Only things I would now do different, is I wouldn’t go further north than the Klamath river. I’d also spend a full day at the beaches along Mattole Road and definitely hike into the Punta Gorda Lighthouse now that I know about it – one could likely find camping en route to Punta Gorda. My full beach day was going to be around Eureka, but I was turned off by Eureka that I skipped beach day. I’d try for a backcountry permit for Flint Ridge camping (instead of poaching), and I’d likely hike into Fern Canyon or for sure Gold Bluffs Beach from Prairie Creek Visitor area. I guess I’m saying I’d mix a bit more ocean in with the trees. I learned to late that the Woman’s Grove has an Albino Redwood, and I’d try to see that next time, and Founders Grove sounds alright too. It could be cool too to try to find the 379.7 foot tallest tree in the world called Hyperion (they don’t advertise its exact location but it’s near the Tall Trees hike, across the river, apparently). For as little planning as I did, armed with a few almost useless printouts, and a road atlas, I had such an amazing trip – perhaps the limited planning is what made it more adventurous.

Overall I spent $441.61 on gas (133.148 gallons) and I drove 2495 miles averaging 18.74 mpg. I ate out 4 times, for about $30 dollars, and spent $22.70 on grocery on the road plus $17.06 in Orem before leaving. Only site I had to pay for was Drive Through tree and that was $10. So the week-long trip cost less than $525.