

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

The California landscape is so diverse. It may be the most diverse of all the states we have visited so far. After leaving Las Vegas, we wound our way through America's golden state for a week beginning Easter Day. We crossed the desert and climbed mountains. On our way to the coast, we saw cows grazing in meadows, enormous wind farms on hills way above the highway and even a llama ranch. We experienced Yosemite's granite mountains and wonderful waterfalls. We drove across San Francisco's two great bridges. We stopped for photos with Redwood trees many times the size of our RV. And we camped 50-feet from a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

That's a lot in one week. It's also a lot for one state to encompass. It's a beautiful drive. In addition to the views and attractions, we also dip into little communities all along the way. We stop for gas or groceries. Sometimes I wonder about the people we see during our stops. I see shopkeepers and people sitting at bus stops. Who are they? Did they grow up here? I look for clues in the way they dress or how they maintain their lawns. I look at the town welcome signs for more information.

Then I start thinking about home. I wonder what I would think about Delphos if I traveled through on Old Lincoln Highway in my RV. I think I would see the canal, and the murals and Veterans Memorial Park, all right downtown. I'd see quaint little restaurants and ice cream shops. A friend once told me after visiting Delphos for the first time how charming she found it. Right out of a storybook, she'd said, with all the old homes, picket fences and pretty churches.

"America's Friendliest City" or "The oldest incorporated city in California", these are the names residents own, they identify themselves with it. That's something all towns do, big and small. They distinguish themselves in some way. It might be the town's proximity to a national park or a natural feature. Sometimes it's the centerpiece of a town, like the largest ball of twine. Each place has something to call their own. This week alone I've been to the lowest point of elevation in North America, Badwater Basin, and I've seen the highest summit in 48 states, Mount Whitney. Eureka, California is the best small arts town in America and Smith River is the Easter lily bulb capital of the world. Communities hold festivals surrounding their wonders. Delphos has Canal Days. People are determined to let the world know how tall, how old, how long and most importantly, how unique their community is.

I call this phenomenon "the most trillion-est thing." That's when nothing can outdo you. For example, "I think I just saw the most trillion-est redwood tree," I say to Dan. He laughs at my made up word. I laugh too because of the irony. The way I see it no matter how wonderfully unique a waterway or a grove or an attraction is, something gets lost in the labeling. It's not just a place or a thing that is unique, it's the people who preserve and promote it. They are proud of where they live. They are the most trillion-est thing too.

Maybe that's why I wish I had more time in the towns where we stop for gas and groceries. Besides all the attractions and sightseeing, I like to meet people too.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at www.ourtriptakesus.com. Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may e-mail Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com