

Friday, 26 March 2010

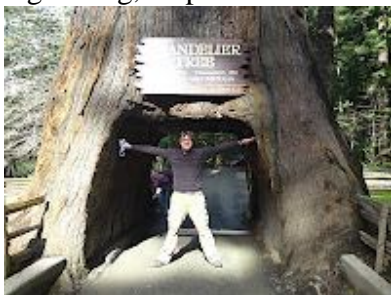
[Anthony's America 7: 'Pot Lane', Super 8 Bollywood Girl, Seattle's Blue Moon, Pike's Market, Man Cat & All-State Police Tickets](#)



I've come to the stunning, revelatory conclusion that America is a bloody big country. *'No shit!'*, I hear you all cry. But seriously, it is *massive*. This week I've been mostly driving, it seems; I even had motion sickness when I got out of my pickup because the roads are so twisty and bumpy over here.

I drove up to Seattle from Mendocino to see a city I'd wanted to visit for a long time. Not because of some corny *Sleepless in Seattle* reason; just because it's always struck me as a cool place. I can happily report that it was.

But, before we get to my Seattle adventures (and my latest 1700 mile road trip), I had a fun few weeks where I wrote features for the local paper about a 40th anniversary movie reunion I'm organising, helped out at a clam chowder tasting event (and ate free chowder, yummy!), went on



a wine-tasting tour and saw real-life llamas. I also drove through the "Drive Thru Tree" in Leggett. This tree is 2400 years old and has a car-sized hole cut in it. And, because this is America and nothing is free, you have to pay \$5 to drive your car through it. I'm glad I saw it, but as I love trees there was something slightly *wrong* about people turning a tree into what amounts to a stationary performing circus animal.

Yeah, okay, so I sound all hippy and Tree-Hugger-like, but trees are magical and need to be looked after. So there.

Before setting off to Seattle I promised Debra at the film office, where I'm doing my internship, that I would drive round the whole of Mendocino County to take pictures for promoting the area to Hollywood locations managers. Mendocino County is over 3500 square miles so this was quite an undertaking in one day. But, it was a beautiful, sunny, Californian day and so - just like the Famous Five - I set off an awfully big adventure. Minus the lashings of ginger ale.



The first part of my route took me along an old logging path called Branscomb Road. It's a tiny, windy road full of glorious views. But there was something else in the air along Branscomb

Road: skunk. No, not the smelly animal kind. Pot. Hash. Weed. Marijuana, you know. And the pungent, unmistakable smell of the drug was blowing in the wind along the road and across the Mendocino countryside. It seems Branscomb Road is a middle-of-nowhere hideout for the many Marijuana growers here in Mendocino. And, by the time I'd got halfway down the road with my window down, I was feeling VERY good about my day out. Yep, the smell was that strong.

I feel sorry for Sheriff Tom Allman. He and his men have to police this area. Stephen Fry (blatant name drop) and I have both met Sheriff Allman. You can see Mr Fry's drug bust and hilarious Magnum-shooting footage from his BBC show on youtube [here](#).

I did stop for roughly twenty seconds in Branscomb town, but it was a rather scary-looking trailer park community. Two, er, dirt-streaked *gentlemen* with big beards, no teeth and baseball caps stared at me with *we'll-kill-you-if-you-get-out-of-your-pickup* eyes so I put my camera away and quickly drove away.



Having done a lot of work in Portsmouth, England on drugs and rehabilitation services, this open growing of weed is quite alien to me. It adds a certain lawlessness to this area of America; one that exists behind the beauty of the Redwood trees. But then, every place on Earth has its dark sides.

Moving on, I went to a town called Ukiah. This place felt a little like Randomville, California - it was hot, humid and, well, quite inconsequential. I went there to take pictures of the Super 8 Motel because its owner said he wanted to help out by giving producers, writers and location managers a decent place to stay. The motel was nice - it had a spa and swimming pool (more than your average Super 8 motel) - but the owner's wife proceeded to parade her 5-year-old daughter in front of me, asking me to take pictures of her. I think she was hoping I could make her into a Hollywood or Bollywood star.



This made me feel very uncomfortable, so I politely explained that I wasn't a Hollywood talent scout, I *didn't* take her photo and said that I had to get going. I drove swiftly off for a tour of the beautiful Mendocino wineries and breweries. *The Goldeneye* winery in Anderson Valley (no connection to *James Bond*) is a stunning property and a perfect pre-made movie set.

This would have been an excellent day's work (driving round in the sunshine and taking pictures...people get paid to do this!?) except it ended with me being pulled over by the police. Again. Apparently I was going six miles an hour over the speed limit just outside Fort Bragg. I tried to persuade Mr Fascist Pig Number Two - in a Bumbling British fashion - to just smack my hand and let me off, but to no avail. He gave me a ticket, which means I now have one from Nevada and one from California. I'm thinking of starting a collection of tickets from each American state. Perhaps you'd like to play the *All-State American Police Ticket Game* with me? Or maybe not. It'll make you broke. It certainly has me.

Lesson: slow the hell down and obey the speed limit. Yawn.

On the way up to Seattle I stopped off at Jedediah Woods campsite and spent the evening with two of my Fort Bragg friends - Emily and Heather. They were on their own road trip as it was Emily's 25th birthday. We made a fire amongst the trees, cooked sausages, tortillas and beans, drank beer and had a good time. Sadly, it was cloudy and raining so there were no stars to look at. But at least I can say I spent the night in a tent with two girls (and a dog). We only slept though, just to be clear.



Then I set off early for the remaining 11-hour drive to Seattle, up through the impressive Avenue of the Giants (the biggest Redwood trees in America) and the State of Oregon. I had already arranged to have my first "couch surfing" experience whilst in Seattle. Couch Surfing is a fairly new, underground phenomena (at least, online it is) where a community of like-minded, kind people offer their couch (sofa) and some dinner to hard-up travellers. They also show you around their town too if they have time. The idea is, you get to stay for free, see sights you might have missed just being an ordinary tourist, and then, in return, you offer your couch to them - and others - in the future. Thus your *Roof-Over-Their-Head* karma is nicely complete in

an old-fashioned like-for-like trade kinda way.



I stayed with Lisa and her five other housemates (who included the lovely Cathy, Timika and Rob - a great, generous guy who, bizarrely, made screeching cat noises all the time and talked to himself a lot) in the University of Washington district of Seattle. They took me on a "real American night out" where we went to a rancid, piss-smelling old bar called *The Blue Moon*. Although it sounds like the camp, YMCA-esque gay bar in the *Police Academy* films, it is actually an ex-anti-communist, "counter-culture" haunt that opened in 1934 (just after the end

of the American Prohibition in 1933). It became a popular place for University of Washington professors to meet, drink and have secret anti-McCarthyist (anti-communist) discussions in the 1940s and 50s.



So, to paraphrase the UK's ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair, in this bar "I felt the hand of history on my shoulder" and downed several pitchers of ale and drank shots of Seattle Bourbon; hard American liquor. Grrr. Can you feel the manliness of it all? There was even a bar brawl around 1.30am. Except it was the feeblest bar fight I've ever seen: three men grabbed one another's arms and spun each other round in circles whilst growling and stamping their feet. No punches were thrown. Lame.

The next day, when I went out for a walk around downtown Seattle, I noticed that it's a city full of angst-ridden Hoodie Wearers. The UK Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, would be very busy hugging people here (ooh, two British political references in a row Anthony, well done). Seattle has the cultural electricity of San Francisco and England's Manchester mixed with a darker, spiritual undertone (Seattle's Aurora Bridge is the second most jumped-off bridge in the USA, the Golden Gate Bridge has the honour of being the country's number one suicide spot). A lot of creative people love it here because the weather is so rainy, cloudy and depressing; it kicks off the right artistic hormones.



This might be the reason why I liked the place. I walked along the seafront, ate fish n' chips and felt quite at home. I also went up the 605 foot (184m) Space Needle to look at the city, but was taken aback that it cost \$18 (£12) to go up the lift (elevator)! Friggin' rip off. The 1960s structure provided a good view but it didn't particularly impress me. In fact, it reminded me of a rather sorry-looking, rusty Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth in the UK: lots of promise but no orgasm, if you see what I mean.

What did get me excited (not in that way) is Pike's Place Market on the Seattle waterfront. It's difficult to describe this vibrant concoction of stalls, fish sellers and buzzing cafes. You really have to go there to experience the bright colours of the flower and vegetable stores, the magnificence of the freshly-caught lobsters, the smell of the fish and the loud mouths and smiles of the competing trawlermen. The place is truly buzzing and full of positive energy. Walking in, I felt very happy and full of life.



But Seattle did also have a whiff of the over-the-top about it; maybe too 'achingly cool' for me. So, after contracting roughly 38 bed bug bites all over my stomach from Lisa's flea-ridden couch (sofa), I headed south for a scenic drive down the Oregon coastline. This was full of various photo-stop opportunities: large standing stones, huge Pacific North West beaches, tree-lined highways and breath-taking orange sunsets.

made me consider my Big Road



Trip across America. I now have a route for my trip planned (thanks to Seattle Lisa's excellent suggestions), but wondered why I was actually doing it. What purpose did I have for driving approximately 6 weeks and 3000 miles across-country? Just to say I've done it? Or do I expect my life to be fuller at the end? Yes, there's no doubt it will be, especially as it is often about the journey not the destination. But I realised, driving through Oregon, that being on the unending American roads can be hypnotic, tiring, ass-numbing, sometimes boring and quite bereft of any emotional fulfilment too.

I also learnt, importantly, that America has more awful, preachy, Christian radio stations than any country should lawfully be allowed to broadcast. Without wishing to sound anti-religious (as I was brought up a Christian but tend to be indefinably spiritual now), not only do these Evangelical stations rant about the [mostly non-existent] guilt you have in your life that makes you a sinner, but they also play the most terrible music you've ever heard. The songs sound exactly the same no matter what station you listen to: imagine the worst boyband song you can think of, make it last twenty minutes in your head, add some cheesy guitar strumming and a sorrowful singer who growls lyrics about 'Finding the Light of God' - or some such thing - and you might come close to just how bad the music is. I think even my closest, devout Christian friends would have a hard time not turning these radio stations off. They're just ridiculous. Can you give me a '*Hallelujah, amen?*'

So, perhaps I need a Road Trip Buddy to share the experience with? Hmm. I wonder if Stephen Fry fancies another trip across the States? He'd be a fantastic person to go on a journey with. Stephen, if you read this, my email is anthonyburt@hotmail.com - drop me a line.

In the mean time, as usual, you can see all the photos relating to this part of my American Adventure by clicking [here](#). Stay well, healthy and happy. Until next time. Wink.