

Monday, 28 December 2009

Anthony's America 1: Cougars, Widowmakers and the CC Rider



After leaving a minus 5C London crusted with freezing fog - and travelling for well over 18 hours - I made it to a chilly but sunny West Coast of America. Whohoo! After a few hours sleep, I caught the Sonoma County Airport Express, driving up through San Francisco and over the shining Golden Gate bridge.

When I reached Santa Rosa, I waited for the "CC Rider" - the next bus that would take me three hours north to Fort Bragg. I love the fact Americans give their buses cool names, and the bus itself was painted with a big gray whale (as this is a whale watching county). But the bright paintwork didnt make the journey any smoother - the trip into the mountains and the Mendocino forest countryside was the roughest bus ride I've ever had.

It was around here I realised I truly was heading into the middle of nowhere for the first part of my stay in the US.



are "in pursuit of happiness".

I finally reached Fort Bragg Irene and Frank - who I would be house-sitting their cottage for. They drove another 20 minutes or so north into the countryside, where it was proper pitch black, and they immediately warned me not to go walking at night around these y'ere parts because there were mountain lions - pumas and cougars - that prowled through the night. And, according to Frank, they weren't adverse to jumping on hapless humans, especially British ones, such as myself. Gulp. What the hell had I done coming out here?



On the bus, I sat next to a lovely, interesting girl called Susan and we chatted the whole way. She was a social worker in Manhattan (doing educational project work) and over from New York visiting her relatives for christmas. She took my picture and said she'd add it to her collection of those people she meets that Which, I suppose, I am.



and met the retired couple - They showed me to my cottage - a little place next to their house - and I immediately fell in love with it. A relaxing feeling came over me; there was something quite magical about it, with the enormous ten-storey high Redwood trees surrounding the wooden shack (although inside it's like a luxury house).

The next day Frank took me for a walk around their perimeter fence, through the deep undergrowth, Bear Grylls style. One of my jobs whilst Frank and Irene are away would be to mend any parts of the fence - which surrounded their two acre plot of land - after a storm, to stop deer breaking in and eating their plants.



Not being someone much accustomed to, er, *manual work* I knew this would be a challenging part of my *Mission: America*. Especially when Frank ratcheted up the danger level by telling me to watch out for falling branches from the Redwoods; these are nicknamed "Widowmakers" because they're so big - and plummet so fast due to the trees' height - that they instantly kill you.



Mountain lions and falling branches...all trying to jump me. Which way was I supposed to look?

Anyway, I needed some light relief so, later on, I went for my first drive to town in the car Irene had leant me (a Saturn). I remembered to keep to the right hand side of the road, but I'm finding it hard to work out who has the right of way when you come to a crossroad junction. (I think I'll just listen out for beeps to know if I'm in the wrong.)

To see the rest of the photos that go with part one [click here](#)