

Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada and Great Falls, Montana, USA

8th to 24th June 2005

About one third of our FFC membership shared cars to Gatwick where we all met up for dinner at a pub before spending the night at a very good guest house where we were able to leave the cars and enjoy early cooked breakfasts before being taken to the airport to check in.

The flight, with Thomas Cook Airlines (Canadian Affair), was very pleasant and the customs officials we saw in Calgary airport were the most welcoming we have ever encountered. We then met some of our hosts and boarded a chartered coach for the three hour trip home. We soon became familiar with the vast open prairies with occasional cattle and nodding donkeys before being met by the rest of our hosts, complete with music, in Medicine Hat.



Medicine Hat is renowned for its sunshine and low rainfall but we arrived to find the South Saskatchewan River some 30 feet higher than normal and the population somewhat pre-occupied with laying sand bags. Fortunately the weather then changed and remained clear, hot and dry for almost all the next fortnight except for golf ball size hail which caused a lot of damage shortly after we left Medicine Hat.

During the week, we had many outings to places such as the world renowned Royal Tyrrell Dinosaur museum, the local annual chuck wagon races, old and modern farms and Native Americans in Tepees. What was even more memorable was the real friendliness of our hosts and their obvious pride in their immaculate city with its impressive sculptures and city hall. The sculptor is not an FF member but we are hoping to see him in Cornwall next year.

Several of our new friends accompanied us on the long bus journey south into Montana where we met up with many of our new hosts in Havre for lunch together before the Canadians left to return.

After exploring the restored underground sights of Havre, it was on to Great Falls, arriving just in time for a welcome dinner and introductory talk. This week also we had really excellent hosts and visited some of the most beautiful scenery to see wildlife, the biggest life-size dinosaur reconstruction in the world, the shortest river in the world, some amazing views of the wide Missouri and we shall never forget the colours of the mountain bluebirds. We also saw a lot of the art of Charlie Russell and began to appreciate the endeavours of the pioneer explorers, Lewis and Clark.



Montana is a vast and beautiful state, bigger than the whole of the UK but with a population of less than a million. As with Alberta to the north, the plains meet the Rockies on the western side and the altitude is some 1000 metres minimum. Driving long distances is normal for Montanans but we still estimated that each of our hosts covered some 1000 miles in their enthusiasm to show us as much as possible.

It is difficult for us to appreciate that the Great Falls were found only some 200 years ago and that Medicine Hat began little more than 100 years ago. We can thoroughly recommend this whole area and its people, especially as it is off the normal tourist routes.

Because the trip from Great Falls to Calgary was many hours, we took the opportunity to visit some of the splendid sites of Glacier Park with a guide from the Blackfeet, before crossing the border and being entertained to a very welcome spaghetti supper with the Lethbridge FF club before spending the night at a hotel. We were particularly happy that some of our new friends from Medicine Hat had made the 200 mile round trip to again be with us. The next morning we visited the famous Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump, this time with a guide from the Blackfeet, before heading on to Calgary, a memorable visit to Heritage Park and an early evening departure from Calgary airport. We arrived in Gatwick on time, were re-united with our cars and reached home without problems.



Several of our ambassadors stated that this was the best holiday that they had ever had, with new friends made for life and it really demonstrated what Friendship Force is all about. Our hosts spared no effort in making us feel at home and their organisation and hard work was very evident in the success they achieved.

Because of the success of the exchange, the President of the Medicine Hat club, in particular, was keen to organise a return exchange to Cornwall. This was discussed by the FF Cornwall committee and it was agreed that invitations should be personal rather than having an official exchange. In fact many of us have invited our hosts and others privately and are looking forward to entertaining a number of them next May (probably after the Russian visit in the first half of May) when they are en route back from their exchange to Hamburg. During this time, it will be good if we can arrange one or two FFC social events to involve both them and all our FFC members.

From a financial viewpoint, it was very satisfactory that the whole trip, from door to door and including absolutely everything except personal shopping was achieved at slightly less than £1000 per person.

We should note that one host club did actually have to supplement from its funds and its own people also paid for many of the events in which they participated.

Costs for Exchange 7561 to Medicine Hat Canada and Great Falls USA, 8th to 24th June 2005.

Estimated for one person (in UK£) as part of a couple, door to door from Cornwall

Air fare including guaranteed seats in economy	351
Cost of driving to Gatwick and return as one of four	25
Food en route and at Horley	20
Night, breakfast, transfers and parking at Gatwick	35
Atlanta Fees of USD225	119
Payment to Medicine Hat FF	94
This is made up of contribution to 100USD donation (124CAD or 6.53 each) plus host fees (75USD each or 93.16CAD) plus transport of 120 CAD each	
Payment to Great Falls FF	113
This is made up of Transport (USD115.79 each) Host Fees USD90 each, contribution to USD 100 donation of USD5.26 each	
Gifts to Hosts	25
Meals with hosts paid for by ambassador	80
Hotel and breakfast after exchange	25
US Border fees	4
Entrance fees, donations, tips etc during exchange	18
Entrance fees, tips, meals etc after exchange	25
Administration and club gifts	3
Total costs	937

