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## Great American Road Trips

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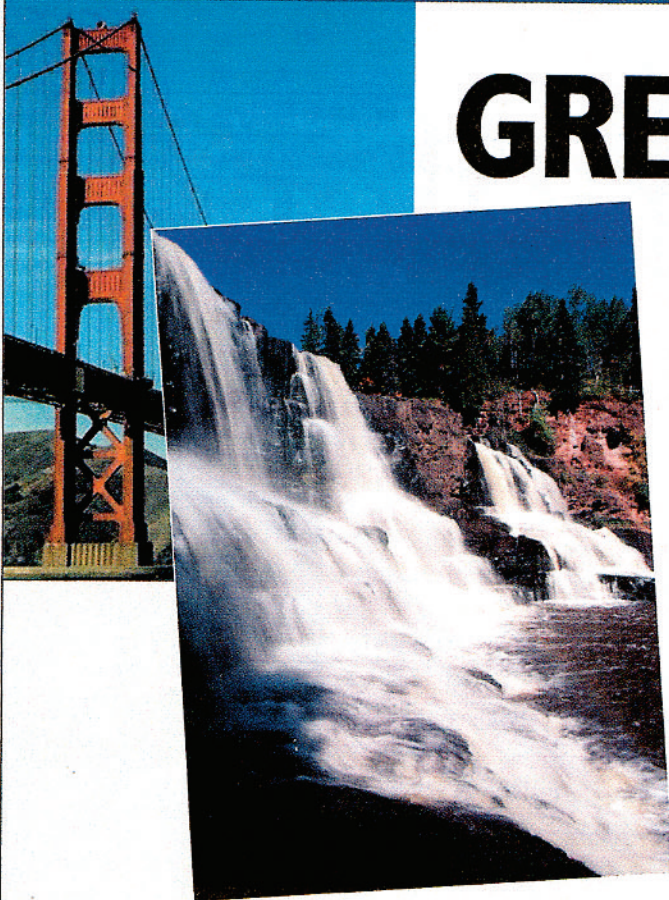
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# GREAT AMERICAN ROAD

*See the Country at Its*

LUCKY HARRY HEDGES, a recently retired program director with the National Science Foundation in Arlington, VA. He and his wife Kammie placed the winning bid on a fabulous trip to California at a charity bazaar.



So what did the couple want to do in California?

They immediately began planning a long-dreamed-about drive north from San Francisco along the state's wave-swept coast, one of the most scenic routes in America. Road trips remain a popular form of vacation travel in this country for young and old alike. You can, after all, set your own pace. They also are one of the least expensive ways to vacation.

To put you on the road, we've compiled our list of America's most scenic drives. Each requires at least three days, but you will enjoy them more if you linger along the way. All are dotted with historical and natural attractions, including numerous national parks and forests. Ranger-led talks and walks might be America's best on-the-road freebies.

As a scientist, Harry Hedges systematically organized the couple's California trip. For weeks in advance, he and Kammie gathered information about what to see and do along the way. Friends alerted them to the fresh oyster farm at Point Reyes National Seashore, which for these seafood fans became a must stop, he says.

Muir Woods National Monument was added to the itinerary when they learned that it sheltered a majestic grove of coastal redwoods, the world's tallest trees. And they definitely

wanted to spend a night or two in the Victorian-era arts colony of Mendocino, maybe America's most beautiful village.

In retirement, the Hedges spend a lot of time sightseeing from behind the wheel, usually in their own car. But maybe the record for senior road trips goes to Fred and Suzanne



**Fred and Suzanne Dow publish first-hand reports on camping in national forests.**

Dow of Bisbee, AZ. Retiring from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1996, Fred along with Suzanne created a new on-the-road job taking them throughout the country.

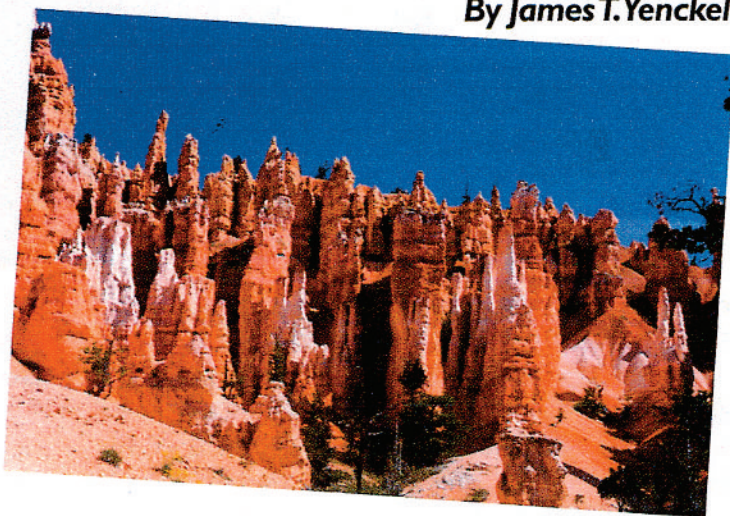
Camping enthusiasts, the pair visits national forests for six months of the year, gathering first-hand reports for their series of U.S. National Forest Campground Guides ([www.forestcamping.com](http://www.forestcamping.com)). While on the go, they live out of their 23-foot travel trailer. By next year, they hope to have visited all of America's 156 national forests. Their favorite campground remains the one that got them started on this project—Beartree Campground on Beartree Lake in southwestern Virginia's Jefferson National Forest. If you have invested in a recreational vehicle, their guides are very useful.

As a travel writer, I've explored all 50 states, mostly on road trips. These are the scenic routes that have impressed me the most. If you no longer drive, consider a motor coach tour that covers them.

By James T. Yenckel

# TRIPS

## Most Beautiful



### CALIFORNIA'S REDWOOD COAST: SAN FRANCISCO TO CRESCENT CITY, 400 MILES

San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge makes a spectacular gateway to the nearly nonstop Pacific views ahead. Follow State Rte. 1 for the first half of the drive, snaking alongside sheer ocean cliffs or edging rock-filled coves. Then connect to U.S. 101 as it tunnels through misty redwood groves en route to Redwood National Park near the Oregon border. At Point Reyes, sample the oysters, but also stretch your legs beneath aromatic eucalyptus on the easy Bear Valley Trail. Ahead, Fort Ross State Historical Park shelters a rebuilt fort on the site of an 1812 Russian outpost. Take in Mendocino's art scene, check out the fishing fleet at Fort Bragg and stroll the gentle trail through Redwood National Park's Lady Bird Johnson Grove. Information: 800-862-2543, [www.visitcalifornia.com](http://www.visitcalifornia.com).

### UTAH'S RED ROCK COUNTRY: LAS VEGAS, NV, TO TORREY, UT, 400 MILES

Colorful, curious rock formations highlight a route that links three national parks and the oddly named Grand Staircase/Escalante National Monument, one of America's lesser-known treasures. Treat yourself to a day or more at each. To start, catch I-15 north out of Vegas to Utah, stopping first via Rte. 9 to ponder the 3,000-foot-high sandstone walls rising above at Zion National Park. Continue north on U.S. 89 to Bryce Canyon National Park, where pink stone pillars in bizarre shapes called "hoodoos" soar like castle towers. State Rte. 12 east, one of America's most scenic highways, edges Grand Staircase/Escalante, a seeming ocean of shiny, sun-glazed rock that will make you stare in wonder. At Capital Reef National Park, Grand Wash Canyon's polished walls narrow perceptibly every step you take on this easy hike. Information: 800-233-UTAH, [www.utah.com](http://www.utah.com).

Trips offer spectacular scenery:

Page 20, left, Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, CA (Photo, Robert Holmes/California Tourism)

Page 20, right, Gooseberry Falls, MN (Photo, © Minnesota Office of Tourism)

This page, Bryce Canyon National Park (Photo, Fred and Suzanne Dow)

### BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY: WAYNESBORO, VA, TO CHEROKEE, NC, 469 MILES

Can you believe it? This two-lane National Park Service road winds through the mountains of Virginia and North Carolina for 469 miles without a stop sign or a stoplight. Mostly you're on a high ridge looking down on quilted valley farmland far below. At the posted speed of 35 miles per hour, the pace is gentle; you've got plenty of time to sniff the pines. Small museums, including the Mountain Farm at Mile 5 (from Waynesboro), recapture early settler life. Just off the parkway, browse the shops in Blowing Rock, NC, and spend a day in Asheville, NC, touring Biltmore House, a 250-room castle patterned after the chateaux in France. At road's end, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian tells the tragic "Trail of Tears" story of 1838, when tribal members were forced to leave their homeland. Information: 800-228-7275, [www.blueridgefriends.org](http://www.blueridgefriends.org).

### NEBRASKA'S PRAIRIE SPACES: LINCOLN TO SCOTTSBLUFF, 425 MILES

A native Nebraskan, I revel in the state's wide-open spaces, rolling green hills, empty back roads and rich pioneer heritage. This is a drive that boosts the spirit. From Lincoln, take U.S. 77 south to Homestead National Monument in Beatrice. The park marks one of the first 160-acre plots granted free to settlers under the Homestead Act of 1862. Pick up U.S. 136 west, joining up briefly with the Oregon Trail at Rock Creek Station Historical Park, where wagon ruts still are visible. Move on to Red Cloud, a sleepy farm town

that preserves the childhood home of author Willa Cather. State Rte. 10 north takes you to Kearny State Historic Park, an Oregon Trail fort where you learn how sod houses were built. Head west on U.S.30/U.S. 26 to ascend (by foot or car) Scotts Bluff, another Oregon Trail landmark. Information: 800-228-4307, [www.visitnebraska.org](http://www.visitnebraska.org).



### **COLORADO'S SAN JUAN SKYWAY: ROUNDRIP OUT OF MONTROSE, 250 MILES**

A dozen peaks in Colorado's San Juan Mountains tower above 14,000 feet, and this high country drive weaves among them, sometimes clinging to precipitous cliff edges. But grand mountain panoramas make the white-knuckle moments worth it. In Montrose, don't miss Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, named for its deep, narrow gorge. Next stop via U.S. 550/State Rte. 62/145 is the famed ski resort of Telluride. Catch the free tram ride up the mountain. On south, Mesa Verde National Park preserves the largest ancient cliff dwelling in America. From nearby Durango, make the climb on U.S. 550 north to Silverton, a former boomtown with a rough frontier look. After cresting 11,008-foot Red Mountain Pass, relax in Ouray's massive outdoor hot springs pool. Information: 800-265-6723, [www.colorado.com](http://www.colorado.com).

### **NATIVE AMERICAN TRAILS: ROUNDRIP OUT OF HOLBROOK, AZ, 450 MILES**

This is as much a cultural journey through Navajo and Hopi reservations as it is a look at a unique landscape featured in Hollywood westerns. From Holbrook, take U.S. 180 south to Petrified Forest National Park, an arid badlands scattered with fallen forests turned to colorful rock. Exit onto I-40 east, connecting to U.S. 191 north onto the Navajo Nation. In Chinle, join a bouncing truck tour deep into Canyon de Chelly, a maze of red rock passageways that once was a Navajo stronghold. Follow U.S.191 north/U.S. 160 south to Kayenta, gateway (via U.S. 163) to Monument Valley. Its wind-sculpted rocks provided a majestic backdrop to "Stagecoach," the 1939 John Wayne/John Ford classic. In Tuba City, turn east on State Rte. 264 across the Hopi preserve. Atop Second Mesa, the Hopi Cultural Center details tribal history.

## **If You Go**

**O**n all of these road trips you will find a choice of lodgings, including major budget chains such as Super 8, Motel 6, Days Inn and Comfort Inn.

But over the years, I've come upon a number of lodges and inns—most moderately priced—that enjoy a spectacular setting. Try to fit them into your itinerary on these road trips.

**California's Redwood Coast:** Outside Redwood National Park, the little 10-room Requa Inn in Klamath overlooks the wide Klamath River just before it flows into the Pacific. Bedrooms are simple in the 90-year-old lodge, but the river views from the spacious sitting room are grand. 707-482-1425, [www.requainn.com](http://www.requainn.com).

**Utah's Red Rock Country:** Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks both offer comfortable lodge and cabin accommodations, 303-297-2757, [www.xanterra.com](http://www.xanterra.com). On the edge of Grand Staircase/Escalante National Monument, the lovely 20-room Boulder Mountain Lodge in tiny Boulder overlooks an 11-acre lake. It's one of my favorite places. 800-556-3446, [www.boulder-utah.com](http://www.boulder-utah.com).

**Blue Ridge Parkway:** Three Spartan but comfortable lodges are conveniently spaced an easy day's drive apart on the parkway. From north to south, they are the 63-room Peaks of Otter Lodge, Mile 86 (800-542-5927, [www.peaksofotter.com](http://www.peaksofotter.com)); 24-room Bluff's Lodge, Mile 241 (336-372-4499); and 51-room Pisgah Inn, Mile 408 (828-235-8228, [www.pisgahinn.com](http://www.pisgahinn.com)).

**Colorado's San Juan Skyway:** The 115-room Far View Lodge at Mesa Verde National Park lives up to its name. High atop the mesa, it looks out onto a wilderness vista that seems to stretch forever. 800-449-2288, [www.visitmesaverde.com](http://www.visitmesaverde.com).

**Washington's Cascades Loop:** Outside Winthrop, sprawling 102-room Sun Mountain Lodge is the upscale entry in this list. But go ahead and splurge for the comfort and the grand views of the North Cascade peaks. 800-572-0493, [www.sunmountainlodge.com](http://www.sunmountainlodge.com). In Winthrop, the newly rebuilt Hotel Rio Vista offers a great river view at affordable rates. 800-398-0911, [www.hotelriovista.com](http://www.hotelriovista.com).

—James T. Yenckel



See all the variety of America on these trips. Photos left to right: Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina (Photo, North Carolina Tourism/Bill Russ); Canyon de Chelly in Arizona (Photo, Arizona Office of Tourism); Leavenworth, WA, (Photo, Sunny Walter/Washington State Tourism Office)

Atop First Mesa, step into an ancient world in the 17-century adobe village of Walpi. Return to Holbrook on State Rte. 77. Information: 602-364-3700, [www.arizonaguide.com](http://www.arizonaguide.com).

### **MINNESOTA'S LAKE SUPERIOR SHORE: DULUTH TO GRAND PORTAGE AND BACK, 300 MILES**

From start to finish, State Rte. 6 edges the western shore of Lake Superior so closely you might think you're piloting a boat rather than a car. And yet lake views frequently are overshadowed by the many roadside waterfalls—all easily seen on short hikes. At Magney State Park, a mighty waterfall disappears into the open mouth of Devil's Kettle, a pot-like rock formation. At Grand Portage State Park, the High Falls of the Pigeon River live up to the name. Grand Portage National Monument recreates an 18th-century fur trading post; learn here about the Great Lakes Voyageurs. Information: 888-TOURISM, [www.exploreminnesota.com](http://www.exploreminnesota.com).

### **WASHINGTON'S CASCADES LOOP: ROUNDRIP OUT OF SEATTLE, 600 MILES**

When summer's heat hits, this is the drive to take. It climbs almost to the edge of Mount Rainier's vast ice fields. From Seattle, take I-5/405 north to State Rte. 20 east, which cuts through North Cascades National Park—one of the country's wildest corners. Countless waterfalls spill from high cliffs along the highway. Spend an evening in Winthrop, a former mining outpost that looks like a "Gunsmoke" set. Follow State Rte. 153/U.S. 97 south to Chelan, a busy resort town on Lake Chelan. On south, little Leavenworth (detour west briefly on U.S. 2) has re-created itself as an ersatz Bavaria that looks like the real thing. In Yakima, take U.S. 12 west/State Rte. 410 into Mount Rainier National Park. Stroll at glacier's edge through fields of summer wildflowers. Exit Mount Rainier cool and refreshed at the Nisqually gate and return to Seattle. Information: 800-544-1800, [www.experiencewashington.com](http://www.experiencewashington.com).

*James T. Yenckel was chief travel writer for The Washington Post for 16 years.*

## **On the Road Tips**

I've crisscrossed America on road trips all of my life, beginning as the son of a career Air Force master sergeant. Here are steps I take to assure a satisfying journey, especially now that I'm a senior citizen.

- **Plan ahead:** I'm organized. I plot out my trip day by day. I buy a guidebook and map, check Web sites, obtain free travel literature. And I use it, noting things to do and places to see. What can I skip; what's a must see?

- **Book in advance:** I book many of my lodging reservations before I leave home. This gets me into special places such as national park lodges that often book full months ahead. Who wants to be turned away at the door?

- **Limit daily miles:** I think covering 200 miles a day is max; more than that and you don't leave time to take advantage of attractions along the way. On slow mountain roads, 150 miles may be too many.

- **Get out of the car:** I seldom drive more than hour without stopping to stretch. Best stretches are short hikes to scenic overlooks that you find in almost every national park and forest.

- **Stay off the Interstates:** Interstate driving is work, not a vacation. When possible, I try to find an alternate route, away from roaring trucks.

- **Linger awhile:** Don't drive to a new destination every day. Spend an occasional second day or even a third to get to know a place better.

- **Be on the lookout for offbeat things to do:** On my Out West vacation last year, I visited a salmon fish hatchery, soaked in a hot springs pool, toured a wilderness smoke-jumpers base, rode a horse-drawn wagon to a cook-out, watched a local parade, helped celebrate a lavender-harvest festival and took a quick plunge into an icy mountain stream.

- **Relax a little:** Take a day off to sit beside the lodge or motel pool to nap and read a book.

- **Be ready for a picnic:** Keep an inexpensive cooler in the trunk stocked with easy picnic fixings. On these drives, you'll find the perfect spot every day.

*-James T. Yenckel*