

Sartorial Elegance

I fell foul of my sartorial advisors during our trip across America on four separate items.

Firstly, I had been given a pair of real "Granddad" slippers for my 60th last year, and, as we were in a motorhome, I determined to drive across America in them. This I did.

Secondly, I was my hearts desire to go the entire trip in the same pair of jeans. In this I was thwarted. Somewhere between

the mid-west and Chicago Liz whipped them away and washed them. Unnecessary and unkind I thought. Very necessary Liz thought. Bryan offered no comment.

Thirdly, we were all prepared for the horse riding. We had all taken cowboy boots and cowboy hats, and I also had my cowboy jeans, my cowboy belt buckle, and my cowboy shirt. However, at around 4,000 feet it was a little chilly, so I completed the look with my cowboy cardigan!

Finally, we handed the RV in at around 08:00 on the last day, and loaded the bulging suitcases into a taxi for the New York hotel, where we arrived around 10:00. Unfortunately our rooms weren't ready, and, while we could leave the suitcases, they weren't happy about us leaving the hats. So we spent our first five or six hours in New York walking round in our cowboy hats.

The Duck Pond

Below you see it. The twin duck ponds. Finally, after many months of digging by all sorts of people, it now holds water.

It still leaks slightly, but it manages to keep water in it, and the ducks love it, so, until it starts to empty again, we are happy.



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teaching them to come in at night. We have a duck island in the middle of the pond, but we learned that foxes are quite capable of swimming and anyway, if the pond was frozen, a fox could just walk across to eat them.

Just before we went on holiday, I had them going into a coop at night by calling "Quacky Ducks!" in a high pitched voice. Terry's cousin Michael, an ex-policeman, was looking after the house while we were away, and refused to shout anything so girly, but did manage to coax them into the coop under the threat of arrest.

However, when we got back

weakness or fear to the onlookers. Andy had weeded out a couple of his old ewes who we could use as test

they were very badly behaved. So, we did the only sensible thing, we went away to see our friends Florence and Clive in Italy for a week and left Rachael in charge, with instructions to do some serious duck training. (She is in education after all.)

I'm not sure of her technique, but I think threats of spending nights in the Naughty Corner came into it (and we did find a dunce's hat hidden under the straw), but they now go to bed without problems.

So, we have four ducks and four drakes adorning our pond, and we are currently getting four eggs every day. Not brilliant as boiled eggs but excellent for any other method of cooking them and very good in cakes and Christmas Puddings.

of it. No messing about - no shilly-shallying - just on with the job.

After lunch, she had in fact dried to a fairly acceptable colour, but there was still just a hint of dusky pink to it. Appropriate to a young teenager I thought, but I kept that one to myself.

In the end, we decided that the colour we were actually looking for would be better achieved with darker dye - something for next year - but in the meantime Liz coined the phrase "Champagne Biscuit". A bit too girly for us bluff northern farmer types, but a pretty good description nonetheless.

That's one of the things I like about farming - the decisiveness

Sheep Dip Time

It has been another quiet year with the sheep. We now just buy ewe lambs at six months old and let them run round the farm for a year, maturing. When they are 18 months old we sell them on for breeding, and make about £15 to £20 per head for our troubles. Relatively easy stuff.

But, as most of the world seems to know by now, when preparing them for market last year, we produced an orange sheep (or two). (Out of deference to

Andy's feelings I have refrained from reproducing the photo, but could put a copy on my web site if sufficient interest is shown).

So, this year, Andy was playing it cautious. "You can mix the stuff" he said to me as we embarked on the job. Ian just lurked behind the sheep race, making non-committal noises, and pretending he wasn't there - pretty much his reaction to the orange job last year. So. I was on my own.

We knew the quantities, so I mixed the stuff, and poured it in. In all this, I was strong and resolute, showing no signs of

cases, so in went the first. The air was tense. Breath was held. What colour would she be?

Then, out she came. And what colour was she? Well, actually, pale pink probably comes closest.

There was a lot of walking about, and "She'll get darker as she dries", but not much sign of the lovely light biscuit colour we had been hoping for. In the end a major decision was reached - we would go and have lunch and see what she looked like afterwards.

The Big Trip

This was the one we had been planning for the last three or four years. Liz, Bryan, and I would drive another of those vast American motorhomes right across the United States. From coast to coast. From San Francisco to New York. A major undertaking involving some 4,000 miles.

Since Bryan's wife, Jacqui, won't fly under any circumstances, she would not be going, but very graciously gave us four weeks to do it in. That's home to home, so by the time we had flown to San Francisco, stayed a couple of nights with Bob and Gerri, and stayed a couple of nights in New York the other end, along with the flight home etc, we had around 22 days to cover the distance.

A great deal of planning went into this. What did we want to see? Well, Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, Teton National Park, Yellowstone, and on the other side of the country Niagara Falls. Liz very much wanted to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir practice in Salt Lake City, and we established that this happened every Thursday night, so this gave us our timetable. We all wanted to do some trail riding, so we booked into a place in the Black Hills (South Dakota) for a couple of nights, and I wanted to visit Cedar Point, Ohio (www.cedarpoint.com) as this is the home to some of the world's

really great white knuckle rides.

We reckoned we could do all of this, and still find time to eat, drink, and sleep, and in fact, we did it. There was perhaps rather more time travelling than we had anticipated as we had worked out that, if we had to travel 200 miles on one day, that would take us four hours. Indeed it did, but it didn't allow for the fact that we would stop for an hour for breakfast. We would also need to stop most days to visit a supermarket. And there was frequently something we just wanted to stop and see. The result was that we would start driving around 9:00, but not arrive at our destination until nearly 5:00.

Still, Bryan had most of the camp sites sorted out, and we had a fantastic trip. Bryan describes it as "More of an adventure than a trip" and I guess that is fair. One to tell the grandchildren about.

If you are interested, there is a map, and details of our trip on my web site - [www.DuckPond-View\chisman\Bak4Mor.htm](#)

Umbria

Our friends Florence and Clive have a villa near the little town of Umbertide, in Umbria, quite close to the Tuscan border and shortly after we returned from America we had agreed to go and join them for a few days.

It is a beautiful place and a lovely villa with it's own pool and vineyard. We hadn't realised how tired we were after our American Adventure, so it was wonderful to blob out for the week, read books, and dip into the pool when it got too hot! We did try a day trip to Assisi - but



it was full, we couldn't even get into a car park, so we had lunch and went home!

A Birthday Surprise

I had been told we were going away for my birthday present, and, as Terry had got the caravan out the week before, I assumed it would be in that. When asked about clothes, Terry replied "Think Bournemouth" and that was the only clue I had.

On the day, I had just started to pack the caravan when Terry told me we weren't going in it. So I packed a case, and off we set down the M1 with me still "Thinking Bournemouth". But we went to see Vicki and Nash in Chesham, and that evening Terry produced a birthday present for me which he insisted I open. This was very unusual as Terry is stickler for not opening presents early, but it turned out to contain an Italian dictionary, a European menu reader, two air tickets and a map of Venice.

Stupidly, I didn't heed the advice to 'Think Bournemouth'. "Venice", I thought, "Mediterranean" I thought,

"warm" I thought, and so removed two of my jumpers from the suitcase. Wrong. I was freezing! (T. - I had looked up the weather in Venice, and then looked for a misleading place in the UK with the same sort of temperatures. Cunning eh?)

Terry had found a hotel near the Rialto bridge, with typical period decorated rooms. And there was no traffic! It was lovely.

Venice is a very beautiful city, and we loved it, although we found we preferred the quieter streets away from the main tourist areas. We had a bus pass (just like Terry at home - he! he!), and we rode the water buses and walked for miles. Terry found the canals and their construction fascinating, and all in all, it was a wonderful break.

The highlight for me was undoubtedly standing three inches away from a Michaelangelo drawing in the Guggenheim gallery.

For Terry it was the water taxi ride to the airport at 40+ knots across the lagoon - he belongs firmly in the "Seen one

Italians rather than geriatric ex-Volvo drivers. A six speed close ratio gearbox meant lots of wiggling the thing in the middle of the floor (why doesn't everybody get an automatic?), and the brakes were fine until you got to below 5mph, when they went ON. We drove round Italy leaving 10" rubber marks on the road where we had screeched to a halt as the brakes locked at the last minute.

Thank you, Florence and Clive, for a wonderful break. The only down side was the fattening food. I managed to lose a pound after four weeks in the States, but a week in Umbria and I had put on six!

The Italian driving is - creative, shall we say, and the car we hired was designed for speedy