

ROUTE 66 - The Last Bit

By now the Haimes and Howes and their trusty 2003 Buick Le Sabre rented in Chicago some three weeks earlier and post Buick Centenary in Flint, had reached the Nevada, Arizona and California corner. We had deviated off "66" for a few days R & R in Las Vegas. Once you cross the Nevada border coming from the south, there is a well run visitors centre where the staff are very helpful. A bank of telephones connects you with people giving you the current prices of hotels on the Strip. We arranged two nights accommodation at the "Imperial Palace Hotel" for US\$59 per night which is less than half rate. Had a great time, explored the Imperial Car Museum, attacked the buffet with a vengeance, saw a show and left behind a few dollars at the gaming, but that's what Vegas is all about.



Classic Detroit Iron in Seligman Arizona

Rejoining "66" in Kingman, Arizona we headed west across very dry country with massive cacti. The road climbed and hairpinned across the mountains leading down to the little town of Oatman. In the early days there were many miners panning for gold in these mountains. Unfortunately when the gold ran out the miners abandoned their burros (donkeys) and they have now made the mountains their home (the burros that is). That is except when they take over Oatman. Burros rule on the streets and sidewalks. I made the mistake of lowering my car window and a great boofhead stuck in. What a breath! We parked the car and wandered around this tiny town, now geared up for tourists. Clark Gable and Carole Lombard were married here and had their honeymoon in the old Oatman Hotel. The town seems so remote, it must have seemed like the end of the world in those days.



Donkeys and tourists mingling in front of Oatman Hotel

One of the burros had backed into a cactus and a kind lady shopkeeper was endeavouring to pull the spines out of its rear end with tweezers. It kept putting its ears backwards and had a mad look in its eye and I feared she was about to collect her teeth in her hand. I moved on rather than watch.

Heading out across the Mojave Desert, we passed the area where in WWII General Patton had trained his troops in tank warfare. He chose an area similar to the North African desert for the training. It must have been hell in those days for the soldiers, with no air conditioning, however it paid off as he whupped the Germans. Later on we crossed the Colorado River and drove into the town of Needles (not the prick of a place you might think). Needles has a faded glory about it and a huge railway station with freight trains passing through about ten minutes apart. The heat was pretty intense but a dry heat.

The next day we headed towards Los Angeles through Barstowe and then to the outskirts of LA. Its such a drama crossing LA - down the Pasadena Freeway, onto Sunset Boulevard and then down Santa Monica Boulevard to the beach. We took the mandatory photo at the Pacific Ocean which is the end of Route 66 and then drove down the Pacific Coast Highway, turning left at Route 27 down Topanga Canyon Road. Eventually you reach Highway 101 at Woodland Hills which we have found previously to be relatively quiet and safe.

As we had a few days before flying out, we drove out on 405 and headed north towards Sequoia. We drove into the Sequoia National Park and headed upwards to see the giant redwoods. Late afternoon we drove down out of the park into the lush farming area around Tulare. This area probably supplies all the greengrocers in California. Lush orchards and vegetable

gardens in rich red loam, all grown with irrigation Found a great restaurant (Ryan's) and sampled some California wines.

Headed back up into the mountains the next day and visited an Endangered Cat Haven where they had snow leopards, tigers etc, one of which was sloshing around in a galvanised water tank. We thought we might have come across some of the local product - cougars or mountain lions but obviously they are not endangered and seem to keep quietly to themselves. They only seem to be newsworthy when one has inadvertently chomped on a jogger bopping along a bush track with earphones on.

We visited the biggest two trees - the General Grant and the Robert E Lee, both massive. Its a bit ironic when our oldest and biggest tree in Tasmania was burnt down by the local forestry blokes! Wonderful forest in the mountains. The usual long hairpin journey down the mountain again. That night we returned to Ryan's and Marny and I were determined to tackle the pie of the month - banana cream pie. While everyone seems very critical of American food, their cream pies are unbeatable, as was the general standard of cooking and wonderful ingredients at this restaurant.

It was time to return to LA and we drove through many Spanish named towns - Pasa Roble and Atanascado where Bob's Automobilia is based. Many Buick owners will know that name for mail order parts. We visited his premises and Alan and Tony disappeared inside to buy some "must haves".

The traffic on the Pacific Coast Highway is interminable and I think you would become demented if you had to drive in it everyday. We decided to pick a Best Western near the airport so not to have too far to drive the next day.

Our last day we drove down an already busy 101 and did some shopping at Woodland Hills. Great shopping here with a Robinsons department store and a Macys. At one small boutique I went into I was informed I had missed Heather Locklear by an hour. Darn! In Robinsons shopping for my sons the assistant informed me Jesus had visited her house and she had the photos to prove it. You just know you're in La La Looney Land. She hauled out a pack of photos which were of a barely recognisable shape/face reflected on the inner wall of the house. Obviously a car had been parked out the front of her house and the chrome and glass had reflected onto the inside walls of the house. I ventured the opinion to her that I thought the face looked more like Antonio Banderas but she was having none of that. Eventually I retrieved my credit card and backed away.

Back to the motel taking the usual wrong exit. Alan is great driving down the freeways but we seemed to have a communication breakdown as to what "take the next exit means". Did I mean this one or the next one? Too late! Then came the drama of packing and repacking all the souvenirs and car parts into bags.

Our last trip in the Buick to the airport. All up we had clocked up over 6,000 miles (10,000 kilometres) in four weeks. The Le Sabre was a big roomy car and fuel wise was surprisingly good, actually getting its best fuel consumption at 80 mph+. A quick trip to LA International (real name Tom Bradley International Airport - how many knew that?). Into the National

Car Rental to drop off the car, which is one of the few rental companies which does not charge an exorbitant drop-off fee (about US\$500) if you're dropping off an out-of-state car.

Onto the shuttle bus where we parted company - Tony and Marny off to Sydney and then onto Perth, Alan and myself off to Auckland and then onto Perth. It was beautiful to travel with like-minded friends with similar interests and tastes, people who thought nothing of doing many U-turns because a familiar Buick silhouette was spotted in a paddock or car yard, people who were happy to stock up a shopping trolley to the gunnels with wine, cheese etc to have a "quiet night in" at the motel, people who were happy to drive well off the road for hours to check out Buick parts and spares. A very memorable four weeks, especially unforgettable Flint and the Buick Centenary and the three weeks spent driving down Main Street USA, the Mother Road or Route 66.

L Haime (WA Buicks)



Route 66 was built to last - concrete paving 8 inches thick