

To the Redwood Forest

California = 2026



About ten years ago I happened to take an online summer class from what was then called Humboldt State University. (Today the school is generally referred to as “Cal Poly—Humboldt”, short for the California State Polytechnic University in Humboldt County.) This was a fairly generic education class offered by a school that was founded as northern California’s “normal school”, or teacher-training college. While I studied entirely from home, I was intrigued to earn

credit from such a distant institution. Humboldt State was located in Arcata, on the far northern coast of California in the heart of what Woody Guthrie referred to as “the redwood forest”. Having been to the Gulf Stream waters numerous times, I’ve always thought it would be fun to go to scenic coast on the other side of the country.

I’ve seen the Pacific coast both north and south of the redwood country, but I’ve never been to that specific region. That’s mostly because it’s not an easy place to get to. It’s far from any interstate highway, it’s not on any Amtrak route, and it’s not close to any major city. It would take until 2026 for me to finally make my way to there. Interestingly my trip would come shortly after one of my students went out to the coast with his family. My trip would be quicker and somewhat different from theirs, though. They took a two-week trip in a motorhome and barely managed to make it across the mountains at the end of winter. I would fly out to California over Easter weekend. I’d rent a car and explore the coast at a time when the weather there was pretty similar to what it was back home.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Algona, Iowa to Des Moines, Iowa

Today was a busy day at school, as I gave a test in one class and went through notes with others. This was the last “real” day of school before Easter, and the kids were not exactly eager to learn. I got through things, though, and I’ve certainly had far worse days in forty-plus years of teaching.

I left right at 3:30 and set out southward. Traffic was heavy on highway 169, but everything moved right along. I encountered a few drops of rain around Ft. Dodge, but the biggest problem was a stiff wind from the southwest. That cut my gas mileage and buffeted my car around.

While the wind was a problem, I was thankful the weather was much better than it was about a month ago when I was coming back from the state basketball tournament. I stayed overnight after our boys played at state. They got freezing rain in Des Moines that night and snow further north. While I made it back safely, it was not a pleasant drive. Today was also not an easy drive, but it was way better than in early March.

A few more drops of rain fell about the time I turned from U.S. 20 onto I-35. Then, just north of Story City it began truly pouring. I took a break to get gas in Story City. I’d checked online before leaving and found that the price there (\$3.37⁹ a gallon for E-15) was the lowest I’d see heading down to Des Moines. I also used the restroom at Kwik Star, and I decided to buy dinner there as well. My original plan was to go to a restaurant near the hotel (either Perkin’s or Panera), but with the bad weather I just wanted to settle into the room when I got there. So a packaged chef salad and a ham and cheese sandwich would be my dinner for the evening.

It rained quite heavily all the way down to Des Moines. Traffic backed up quite a bit between Ames and Ankeny, with some drivers going quite slowly while others tried to exceed the speed limit. Then, when I turned onto Interstate 80 at the north end of Des Moines, I slowed down to 15 miles per hour. Two trucks were in the right two lanes with their flashers on. I think there may have been an accident ahead, but if there was, it was past the interchange with the beltway. I crawled along until I got to the exit and was able to turn off.

The drive around the east edge of Des Moines was mostly uneventful. It was rush hour, though, so traffic was quite heavy. Eventually I made it around to the south side and exited onto Fleur Drive. I drove north just past the airport and turned into my home for tonight, the Hampton Inn—DSM. Originally I’d planned to stay at a slightly cheaper Quality Inn next door. However Hilton (the company that franchises Hampton Inn) was having a points promotion, so I switched my reservation. My hope is that stays at three different Hilton properties during this trip will give me enough points for a free night during my summer vacation.

I’d checked in online and requested a digital key. So I made my way down the hall to the elevator and then up to the fourth floor. Unfortunately when I got to Room 428 the digital key didn’t work. So I trudged back downstairs and had to show my ID to get a traditional key card there. The plastic key did work properly, but for some reason the light switch by the door didn’t seem to do anything at all.

Fortunately the individual switches by each light did turn things on, though—as is typical in most hotels—the lighting was a bit dim for my taste. I made things work, though, and eventually I got settled in.

Aside from the lighting issue, my room was fine. The Hampton Inn—DSM is an older property, but it's been well maintained. Everything was immaculate, and aside from the hall light, everything seemed to work properly. I even managed to share the digital key with my travel phone (the one I've mostly used overseas), and it worked fine there.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2

Des Moines, Iowa to Arcata, California

I can't say I slept particularly well last night. The bed was too soft for my taste, and the pillows reminded me of those weird ones I encountered in Japan that were filled with buckwheat husks. While I settled in fairly early, I tossed and turned much of the night and was up around 5:30am.

Breakfast was a definite strength of this hotel. I had scrambled eggs, bacon, potatoes, and a mini-scone—plus coffee and orange juice. The breakfast room seating was awkward (designed mostly for large groups, rather than solo travelers), and it was very dimly lit. The food was very good, though.

I checked out and made the short drive south to the airport. I had prepaid for parking in the airport garage. They e-mailed me a QR code I was supposed to scan for entry into the garage. The machine was extremely finicky, though. First it wouldn't recognize the code at all. When it finally did, it generated an error that said "invalid code". I tried repeatedly, during which time several other cars went through the lane next to me. I also tried to press their help button, but there was no response. Eventually I just took a ticket from the machine. Just before writing this I submitted a contact form to the airport in hopes of getting a refund on the prepaid parking. We'll see how that goes.



I found it odd that they don't seem to number the lanes in the garage. I tried to write as close of a description of where I'd left my car as I could, and hopefully I won't have too many problems finding it when I get back. It was convenient that I was fairly close to the elevator bank and just one level up from the skywalk that connects to the terminal. Especially on a rainy day I was glad I didn't have to go outside.

While I had checked in on the United app, I was checking a bag, which required me to check in again at a kiosk. The kiosk printed out the bag tag with no problem, but it wouldn't print a boarding pass. (These days they want you to just bring up the boarding pass on your phone, but I like having a paper souvenir.) So I went to the counter to both dump the bag and get a printed pass. It intrigued me that at DSM United used "old school" boarding passes printed on hard tagboard.

My flight to California would involve a connection in Denver. When booking they'd offered me an upgrade to first class. Doing the upgrade for the whole trip would have been quite expensive, but upgrading on just one sector rather than both cost just slightly more than checking a bag. Bags are "free" (more properly included) in first class, so it was an easy decision to choose the upgrade on the Des Moines—Denver segment. I'll also enjoy more space and better snacks on that flight.

I didn't really know what to expect at security after all the government-caused issues they've had with that this winter. TSA did receive checks this week, though, and if anything they seemed overstaffed at DSM. It took about ten minutes from the start of the line to the end—and that included getting an explosives scan and a metal wand because the knee brace I wear came up as an anomaly on their scanner. That meant I had way more time than I needed in the gate area. It appeared almost everyone else had gotten to the airport early as well, since lots of gates (including mine) were packed with passengers before any employees got there.

Des Moines seems to be about the last place on earth that doesn't have free wi-fi for passengers at their airport. (Apparently they actually do have wi-fi, but it wasn't working properly today.) Fortunately I was able to use my travel phone as a wi-fi hotspot. That allowed me to contact the airport about the parking issue. I was pleasantly surprised to get an e-mail response right after 8am stating that they were indeed cancelling the original reservation and refunding my pre-payment. There was a nicely worded apology as well.

I took a break from sitting at the gate to get some coffee. At \$4.01 (including tax), it was far from cheap, but it was quite a bit tastier than the brew they had at the hotel. I nursed it for much of the time I was waiting.

While I was waiting some men's sports team from Drake came past in three separate groups. I suppose this time of year it was most likely a track team, though I don't know that for certain. It appeared they were also flying to Denver, though where they might go after that I have no clue.

A gate agent arrived at 8:15, and she began pre-boarding almost immediately, though in her initial announcement she announced our flight was bound for Chicago rather than Denver. That's an understandable mistake, since the bulk of United flights from Des Moines head eastward. Only three people came up in all the pre-boarding groups, but a couple dozen of the people that airlines derogatorily refer to as "gate lice" blocked the boarding area. When they finally called the first actual boarding group, I had to shove my way past them to get to the jetway.



In seat 3-A on United flight 581

things in the catering cart, and one of the coach attendants (who was much more senior) had to assist him numerous times. He read all the announcements off a script on his phone, and he didn't seem to recognize that this model of plane didn't have video screens, so the safety demonstration had to be done by hand.

The coach attendants also spent quite a while playing tetris with the overhead bags. Eventually they managed to get all but one of them to fit. The gate agent courtesy checked that bag, and she also brought a boarding pass that a customer had left by the gate. Then, at about 8:50, they closed the door.

We stayed at the gate a while, and even after pushback we spent about five minutes just beyond the jetway. Then we had what seemed like a very long taxi for a not particularly large airport. Finally, right at 11:15, we took off.

I had a window seat (3-F on Flight UA518), not that there was much advantage to that. We were flying through thick clouds for nearly half an hour, and even when we were above them, there was nothing to see but white below. With the storm below, it's understandable that there was quite a bit of turbulence.

Once we'd reached altitude, Marco came around to take drink orders. He entered everything into a touchscreen computer, and it took him about ten minutes just to take the orders for twelve first-class passengers. When he began serving drinks, he'd prepare them two at a time and bring them back to the passengers by hand. In the process he managed to spill coffee on a man in the row in front of me. I think it would have been way more efficient to just serve them from the traditional cart.

Theoretically there is wi-fi on this flight. It costs \$8 for the single flight, though, and that's certainly not worth it for an hour and a half of wi-fi. They do have free entertainment that can be accessed through passengers' phones and computers. What they don't have, though is the map and flight information I always enjoy looking at when I fly.

The drinks in first class were served in china and glass. While this looks nice, it also means that the portions are less than generous. After he'd served the drinks, Marco brought around a tray of the "elevated" snacks that were served to first-class passengers on this flight. This flight was far too short for "real" food, but we could choose from bags of chips you might find in a vending machine. In coach these are priced at \$5 each, so I guess my upgrade gave me good value. In theory I could have also gotten one of their \$10 snack boxes, but none of those appealed to me. My "lunch" was a bag of mustard-flavored pretzels and a bag of caramel covered rice crackers.

The clouds eventually cleared up as we made our way west. I don't know exactly where we were, but the dry, rugged ground below looked like badlands. Most likely we were over western Kansas or Nebraska, though. The terrain switched to farmland as we continued further west. About half the fields were green already, presumably with winter wheat. They do a lot of central pivot irrigation here, and it's interesting that some of that had been planted, while other fields were bare. This area looks much nicer than Iowa does this time of year. I always think spring is the ugliest time of year in Iowa, with completely bare fields as far as the eye can see.

We started decreasing our altitude around 9:30 Mountain Time. Marco came around to refill the drinks at that point. I can't help but think, though, that it would be more efficient to just give the can initially rather than refilling the glass cups. The final approach to Denver offered a lovely view of snowcapped mountains, though there were just farms and run-on suburbia in the foreground.

We landed at Denver International Airport at 10:02am, about five minutes ahead of schedule. Just yesterday I had visited with our former Spanish teacher (who is now a frequent substitute), whose son is an air traffic controller at DIA. She said there were often delays at Denver because of strong winds that come down off the Rockies. I was glad I wasn't affected by those this morning.

Our taxi on landing was shorter than it had been taking off in Des Moines. We soon arrived at Gate B-18. The United app had advised me to turn right there, and the TVs did indeed confirm that the flight to Arcata/Eureka would be leaving from Gate B-80, which was to the right. Denver is an enormous and honestly kind of boring airport. Fortunately they do have moving walkways, but even so the trip down the B-concourse took about fifteen minutes. I was intrigued that large planes to minor destinations (like Des Moines) all leave from one end of the concourse, flights to United's hubs and major global cities (Tokyo, Mexico City, Honolulu, etc.) leave from the middle, and small planes to minor places (like my next flight) from the other end.

I stopped briefly to use a surprisingly dirty restroom (one of the worst ones I've seen at an airport), and once I found B-80 I also picked up an overpriced fruit and cheese tray to snack on as I headed further west. The incoming flight arrived from Colorado Springs as I was buying my snack tray, and soon after that they started making announcements for "Eureka". It's interesting that while Eureka is

the largest place vaguely close to Humboldt County Airport, it's actually Arcata (home of the university) that gets top billing and that the airport code (ACV) comes from. The airport itself is in McKinleyville, about five miles north of Arcata and fifteen miles north of Eureka. Each of the three cities has a population in the 20,000 range, and the whole of Humboldt County is about 135,000.

One of the announcements said that they were looking for volunteers to change flights because of "weight and balance issues". The volunteers would receive several thousand United miles, and they would have guaranteed seats on a routing via either San Francisco or Los Angeles that would get into Arcata late tonight. In theory I could have taken that offer. I was hoping to see some things this afternoon, though, so I kept my mouth shut.

I'm not sure if they bumped anyone or not, but this was a very full flight. It certainly didn't help that we were on a Canadair regional jet, one of the most cramped planes there is. I couldn't put the tray table down comfortably, which meant that I didn't do anything with my computer. There was also an obese woman next to me, so I was pretty much trapped in Seat 20-A the whole way to California. I don't think I've ever taken that long of a flight in a regional jet before, and after the return trip hopefully I won't be doing that again.



The Rockies west of Denver

While the seats were cramped, there were beautiful views much of the way. We took off from Denver to the south, turned right, and flew across the snowcapped Rockies.

Many of the people on this flight were members of various Indian tribes. They were headed to Arcata for a Native American festival that was being held this weekend. It might be interesting to see some of that, but I doubt I actually will. It clouded up a bit over Utah and Nevada, but we did see the endless desert landscapes of Nevada. Then quite suddenly we crossed the Sierras and began our descent towards the Pacific coast. There was virtually no population below the whole route, which made things all the more beautiful.

When I wasn't gawking out the window, I spent most of my time reading in the Kindle app on my phone. The woman next to me spent pretty much the entire flight playing some phone game that involved moving colored tiles around. I'd get bored after about one minute of that, but she seemed to like it.

Two women were the cabin crew on this flight. An older Hispanic woman named Rosa mostly served first class, but she helped out in economy much of the time too. The main economy attendant was a young Asian woman named Barbi. While she was working for United Express, she seemed to have things much more together than Marco had on the mainline route this morning.

They did a drink service, and it intrigued me that in United Express economy they did serve whole cans of pop. The free food that came with it was a choice of pretzels, cookies, and authentic stroopwafels imported from the Netherlands. Barbi automatically gave everyone two packages of whichever food they ordered.

It stood out that a woman sitting toward the front of economy had to use the toilet during the drink service. I think she had some medical issue, because she used the toilet twice more later in the flight. The flight attendant was able to briefly park the cart in front of the people seated in the exit row, which allowed the woman to pass. It was quite a maneuver, though.

We began descending around 12:35 Pacific time. Shortly after that the pilot pointed out Mt. Shasta, which was unfortunately on the opposite side of the plane from me. There were plenty of snowcapped mountains on the left side as well, though, and deep green forests that reminded me of Washington state. Far north California is often lumped together with the Pacific Northwest, and I could see why on this flight.

The descent was really quite slow. We spent nearly an hour curving around to the south and then basically following the coast northward until we finally got to Arcata (which, by the way, is pronounced ar-KATE-uh). While it seemed to take forever, it really was a beautiful routing.



View of Humboldt Bay before landing in Arcata

Humboldt County Airport isn't much larger than the airport in Mason City, though they do serve a lot of destinations. In addition to United's western hubs, Breeze Airlines (which I'd never heard of) provides service to Burbank, Las Vegas, and Provo; and Alaska Airlines (actually operated by SkyWest, which also runs the United Express flights) has service to Seattle. There is a single gate at ACV, and all the planes board from the tarmac. A Breeze flight with a tiny plane was boarding as our flight arrived.

I used the restroom while I waited for my checked bag to arrive. Then I went to the Avis desk and got the key (or rather fob) to my rental car, a bright red Kia with Arizona plates. There were several things I didn't care for about this car. First of all, I couldn't seem to get the seat adjusted to my liking. I prefer the seat fairly far forward. This one sat quite far back, and I couldn't seem to change that. It also took me quite a while to figure out how the climate control worked. Also annoying was that there was no cruise control. It was one of the smallest cars they had on the lot, though, so I couldn't really complain.

The airport is just off U.S. highway 101, which is **the** main drag along the California coast. The route I followed today was all either four or six lanes. Part of the route is limited access (though with abrupt exits that aren't really to interstate standards), part has crossroads, and part runs on one-way streets. You get a clue of just how big California is by the fact that the exit numbers here are all in the 700s. The hotel I'd stay at in Arcata tonight, for instance, is 716 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. Highway 101 ends in L.A., but it's another 135 miles south of there to the Mexican border.

I put my destination into Google Maps, and—unlike on some trips I've taken—the directions were spot on. I followed 101 south through McKinleyville and Arcata and then through the “mid-cities” suburban development and on into Eureka. I then took various side streets until I got to a municipal complex that included a school, a recreation center, government offices, and my destination: the Sequoia Park Zoo. This is a small zoo operated by the city of Eureka. Unsurprisingly they specialize in local wildlife. (They're very proud of their bears, for instance.) There's an especially large collection of birds, both native and exotic. I must say it's kind of weird to see bald eagles and flamingos together.



Redwoods Skywalk – Eureka, California

The real highlight of Sequoia Park Zoo has nothing to do with animals, but rather is the point of the zoo's name. The zoo is interesting, but the true attraction is the Redwood Skywalk, a suspended bridge that lets visitors hike among the treetops. Most of this park is what they call “second growth”—still incredibly tall trees, but not quite as massive as their more famous old-growth cousins. I don't think I'd ever seen redwoods up close before, and they are fascinating plants. They're conifers, but up close they look almost like ferns, with soft needles coming off the branches in fan-like formations.

I spent an hour or so at the zoo. Then I programmed my next destination into Google Maps. I couldn't begin to tell you the route I took. I seemed to hit every conceivable neighborhood in Eureka—including passing by the local high school, whose sports teams are the Loggers. I must have made a dozen turns, but eventually I made it to Fort Humboldt State Historic Site.

Fort Humboldt was built in the early 1800s to mediate conflicts between white settlers and native people. There were dozens of forts built for the same purpose, but this one stood out because Ulysses Grant served as the quartermaster there. The fort stood on a cliff overlooking Humboldt Bay. I use the past tense there, because it was entirely abandoned in the mid 19th Century, and almost none of it remains. Today it's mostly a grassy area on top of a cliff where people walk their dogs. The ocean view is obstructed by the Bayshore Mall. The only building from the era that still stands is an old farmhouse that was used as the fort's hospital. They also have a recreation of an officer's home that looks like pretty much any other 19th Century house you've ever seen. The state park department also put up a large exhibit on the history of logging in the area. They justify that because the settlers the fort was protecting mostly came here for logging (from places as diverse as Nova Scotia and New Zealand). While I certainly didn't dawdle at the fort, it was free and not uninteresting.



Old hospital at Ft. Humboldt

I slipped on some mossy grass by the logging exhibit and had a bad fall. I didn't really injure anything but my pride, but my pants looked like a little kid had been playing baseball in them. I sometimes forget that I am getting older, and I need to watch my step more carefully than I did in the past.



“Steam donkey” used in logging – Ft. Humboldt

Since it was across the street I stopped briefly at the Bayshore Mall. My intent was to visit the Wal-Mart there, which stood out because their sign was yellow and green, rather than the company's standard blue. The Bayshore Mall appears to have long been declining, though. Wal-Mart had entrance to the mall itself, but it has been sealed off. I didn't want to hike clear around to the back to find the outdoor entrance that presumably is the only one in use today. I walked past the few remaining small shops and also an enormous Ross Dress for Less and then just made my way back to the car. The only shopping I did was at a Walgreen's in downtown Eureka.

I headed back north and drove through the awkward double-roundabout at Exit 716. Around 4:45 I arrived at the Hampton Inn—Humboldt/Arcata. While I'd tried to check in online, I got a message that I needed to stop by the desk. A pleasant college kid was working

there, and he checked me in efficiently. I even got two free bottles of water for being a member of Hilton Honors. The guy told me I was in a recently renovated room. "It's basically brand new," he said. They apparently are just finishing renovations on the entire second floor. The downside to that is that the entire floor smells like carpet glue. Once I got used to that, though, it really was very pleasant.

I'd considered many different places for dinner, but I ended up in a strip mall right next to the hotel. Mostly I patronized a place called Kebab Café. They were doing a very brisk business on a Thursday night, almost all of it takeaway orders. I ate in, and my food was literally served on a silver platter. I had fried halloumi cheese and a chicken kebab, both of which were excellent.

While I waited for my food I thumbed through the North Coast, which is the sort of free paper you'd expect in a college town. They also had brochures from the local tourism board that included things like the Humboldt Cannabis Trail. While I don't plan to do the tour, I was amused by the pamphlet. Apparently the same weather that makes the trees grow so well also helps grow weed. Even before marijuana was legal in California, Humboldt County was the biggest cannabis-growing center in America.

After enjoying my kebab and cheese, I stopped by a Carl's Jr. restaurant (the western cousin of Hardee's), where I picked up a pack of jalapeno poppers. They came with what they called "diablo sauce", and they were indeed quite tasty. I then came back to the hotel and worked on updating this journal.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

Redwood Country, California (and Brookings, Oregon)

The bed here was **MUCH** better than the one in Des Moines, and I got a good night's sleep. Breakfast, on the other hand, was a weak point of this hotel. I had scrambled eggs, hash browns, and some unmemorable coffee. That was it. I passed on blond sausage patties and the standard waffle bar. Something that piqued my interest—but not in a good way—was lactose-free vegan yogurt. It appeared that was the only yogurt they served, so traditional dairy wasn't even a choice.

I made a brief stop at the McDonalds across the street from the hotel, where I bought a large coffee that I nursed much of the day. While others may argue, I do think McD's has pretty decent coffee—certainly better than the Hampton Inn in Arcata.

I drove northward on U.S. 101. While in most places this is literally the only road for many miles in any direction, it varies a lot in quality. Much of the route north of Humboldt Bay is a four-lane undivided highway, like a big street cutting through the redwoods. The speed limit is 65 on the four-lane sections, but the curves are generally too tight to do that speed consistently. It occurred to me that perhaps it was good that the car I rented didn't have cruise control.



"Big Tree"
(Separate photos
of top and bottom)

world's tallest tree), but at 87 meters it is indeed a big tree. It has a 24-foot diameter and is estimated to be about 1,500 years old.

Where it's not four lanes, 101 (invariably called "the one-oh-one" by Californians) is a steep and winding mountain road. In most of northern California the mountains really do go all the way to the coast. That's beautiful, but it doesn't make for easy road construction. As we wound through the jungle of redwoods on this twisting two-lane road, I couldn't help but wonder how the early settlers or the natives before them managed to find their way through the dense forest and rugged mountains.

One other annoying quirk of the rental was that every time the temperature went below 40° it chimed and flashed a warning that "ice is possible". The school vehicles also make that warning, but when I've seen it on them the mercury is actually near the freezing point—not eight degrees above it. Going up and down mountains, the temperature fluctuated a lot, so that chime kept sounding over and over again.

Much of my route passed through the public land known as Redwood National and State Parks. This is administered in several units by both the National Park Service and California Division of State Parks. The public land is interspersed with privately owned land (particularly in the areas near the coast) and several Indian reservations. The parks were mostly created in the 1960s in an attempt to preserve the remnants of a vast forest that once lined the coast from just north of San Francisco clear up to central Oregon. Only about 5% of the forest remains, and even large parts of it are "second growth". Lady Bird Johnson made a big push to get this land protected, and it was she who officially opened the national park in 1968.

I tried to stop at the national park visitors center, but their gate was locked. I'd find out later they wouldn't open until 9am. I did exit onto the Newton B. Drury Scenic Highway. This is the old route of 101. It's narrower, but actually straighter than the current route, and it's one of the main scenic drives through the redwoods.

I stopped to hike the short Big Tree Trail. This leads to a tree that over a century ago was labeled with a sign saying "big tree". The sign has been updated, but its size is still highlighted today. It's not the tallest tree in the park (that would be a tree named Hyperion that is actually the

Big Tree is surrounded by numerous other giant redwoods, and I learned that they are all essentially the same tree. Sequoias (which is just the genus for all redwoods) are like cypress trees. They grow in groves that have interconnected roots. Genetically all the trees in a grove are clones of each other.

The other direction from Big Tree is a circle trail that supposedly leads through a pasture area frequented by elk. I phrase things that way, because while I started hiking it, I soon had another fall. The grass was very wet this morning, and my shoes did not have good traction. Combined with the stiff knee I've had for several years now, it's not really surprising that I fell. Perhaps most annoying, it was my "good" knee that gave way this time. I did manage to pick myself up, and while it's still a bit painful, I'm pretty sure there's no real damage done.



LEFT: Rented Kia parked along highway 101, showing the scale of the giant trees
RIGHT: Tour-Thru Tree – Klamath, California

I continued north to the town of Klamath, which lies at the mouth of a river that has its source in central Oregon. I stopped there to see a classic tourist attraction, the Tour-Thru Tree. There are actually three different trees you can drive through in the redwood country, all of which have been operating for nearly a century. Today it would be illegal to cut a tunnel through a giant tree. Environmental laws were different in the depression era, though, and creating a roadside attraction was way for people to survive in this remote area. Apparently all the drive-through trees are similar, and you can tell they date to an era when cars were smaller than they are today. I'm sure a Model T would fit through fine, but it's a bit of a squeeze for most 21st Century cars. I was glad that the mirror on my Kia folded in when bumped and then snapped back. It fit, but just barely. A family before me had a small SUV, and I think they were wise to just park and take their picture standing in front of the tunnel rather than attempting to drive through. By the way, it costs fifteen bucks to drive through the tree. It's definitely not worth that, but it was fun.

My next stop was in Crescent City, which with 6,500 people is the largest thing north of the Humboldt Bay metroplex on the California coast. Crescent City is named after its harbor, and that was my destination this morning. The most distinctive feature of the harbor is a lighthouse that looks quite different from the cylindrical shape of most lighthouses I've seen. It looks quite stately standing on a rocky peninsula that apparently becomes an island at high tide.

Aside from the lighthouse, Crescent City is a rather dumpy town. It reminded me quite a lot of places I've been in Mississippi. It feels similar to that, too—full of pawn shops, shooting ranges, and dollar stores. Del Norte County (of which Crescent City is the seat) is one of the few places in California that reliably votes "red". While California was solidly Republican in the Eisenhower and Nixon years, that changed dramatically after Reagan left office. A few inland counties are Republican today, but along the coast every county from Humboldt down to San Diego has voted "blue" throughout the 21st Century. Del Norte county isn't very religious at all, nor is much of anywhere in California. They are very libertarian, though, and they seem to resent



Crescent City lighthouse

They are very libertarian, though, and they seem to resent



Tsunami sign on U.S. 101

being dominated by the big cities to the south. That's made them vote reliably for right-wing candidates.

All around Crescent City and along the coast in general there are tsunami warning signs. That reminded me that Crescent City had an evacuation order last summer from the same tsunami that delayed my trip up to Sapporo, Japan. The whole town apparently gathered at the local high school overnight, because it is on the highest ground in the area. In the end the waves were much lower than they were in Japan, and no serious damage occurred. It's certainly better safe than sorry, though.

There was a construction zone on highway 101 north of Crescent City, one of three I went through today. California signs their construction zones far in advance—almost too far, in my opinion. By the time I finally got to the flagman and pilot car, I'd practically forgotten there was construction.

Before long I reached the border where the "Welcome to Oregon" sign is overshadowed by an enormous store called State Line Cannabis that looks like it took over an old K-Mart. Marijuana and related products are fully legal in all the west coast states, so I'm not really sure what the advantage would be for a Californian to cross the border to buy their dope.

I'd driven this far north mostly for a point of personal pride. By crossing past State Line Cannabis, I could now say that I'd driven in all fifty states. It's kind of weird that Oregon is the last one on that list. I've driven in both Alaska and Hawaii, though, and more recently Connecticut and Rhode Island became the 48th and 49th states where I'd taken the wheel. I've been to Oregon multiple times, but I'd either flown there or taken the train, and once in Oregon I got around by public transit. It was kind of cool to cross the border and know that I'd now driven in every U.S. state.

The southwestern-most town in Oregon is Brookings, and I spent a while exploring the place. My ultimate destination was Harris Beach State Park, just north of Brookings. I only snapped a few pictures and turned around. I might have stayed longer, but you have to pay to park in the state park, and it uses a weird QR code system that I couldn't get to work. I must say, though, the views were beautiful. I remember visiting the Oregon coast on one of our trips out to Seattle when I was a child. I don't think we ever made it to Brookings, but the rocky shore there definitely brought back memories.

I made a stop at the Brookings location of Fred Meyer, a chain that is essentially the Target of the Pacific Northwest. I spent quite a while there, but in the end all I bought absolutely nothing. I'd hoped I might find shoes to replace the slippery-soled ones I was wearing, but everything they had in stock was way more expensive than what I cared to pay. I also browsed through clothing, but their offerings were both pricey and ugly. So I just used their restroom and moved on.



Harris Beach State Park – Brookings, Oregon

I bought gas at a Union 76 station in Brookings. I'd only used about a quarter of a tank, but the price difference between the two states was enough to make it worth my while to fill up—even though if I compared the Oregon price with anywhere other than California, I'd have found it expensive. I actually paid \$5.13⁹ a gallon, and if I'd paid cash I could have gotten the price down to \$5.03⁹. In California the only stations with prices close to that were on Indian reservations—and those were in the \$5.50 range. Around Humboldt Bay prices were all over the place. The cheapest I saw for regular gas was \$6.29⁹, and prices went as high as \$7.50 a gallon for premium or diesel.

The whole west coast has higher gas prices than anywhere else in America (which is why Oregon was a buck fifty higher than Iowa). Part of that is taxes (with California and Washington having the highest in the country), but much of it is also because the refineries and pipelines that move oil in the eastern part of the country don't move it over the Rockies. West Coast oil mostly comes from Alaska, and it's all refined in Los Angeles. With a narrower market, there's less to lower the prices than there is in the rest of the country. Of course, those California prices are right in line with what most of the world pays for fuel, but they're pretty steep compared to what I'm used to.

My final destination in Brookings was the town's public library, and—odd as it sounds—that was probably the most interesting thing I saw in Oregon. Something I didn't know until researching before this trip was that Brookings, Oregon was the only place on the U.S. mainland to be bombed during World War II. Nobuo Fujita was a Japanese fighter pilot who flew a seaplane from a submarine off the Oregon coast. He dropped incendiary bombs that the Empire hoped would start a massive forest fire. (I'd find out later that redwoods are among the trees most resistant to fire, which is probably why the mission largely failed.) After the war Fujita felt called to become an ambassador for peace. He sponsored an exchange program that let students from the high school in Brookings visit Japan, and he also

visited Brookings several times himself. On one of his visits he was named king of the Oregon Azalea Festival, and on another he presented the city with a 400-year-old sword that he had been instructed to use to take his life had he been arrested for war crimes. The sword is one of several displays about Fujita at the library, and it was fascinating to see. There's supposedly a state historic marker somewhere in town, but I never did manage to locate it. I was glad to see the sword, though, and it was fascinating to learn the story behind it.



**Fujita sword at Chetco River Community Library
Brookings, Oregon**

I left Brookings and headed back south. I had to stop briefly at the California border for the state's agricultural inspection station. I can remember when I was a kid and we came back from Seattle through California. My dad had bought a huge amount of Bing cherries in Washington, and the inspectors made us eat them all before we could enter the Golden State. Today the officer didn't even ask if I had any agricultural products with me (which I didn't). She just said "drive safely" and waved me on my way.

I stopped for lunch at a hole-in-the-wall Mexican place in Crescent City that looked like it was originally built to be a doughnut shop. Rialberto's (apparently a chain with locations across far north California) was far from the best Mexican food I've ever had, but their enchilada platter did fill my stomach. Their menu board brought back memories, too. It's no secret that inflation is rampant these days. At Rialberto's they'd covered over the prices of every item with stickers (sometimes more than one) that presumably raised the price from what they used to charge. It reminded me of when my mother was in the hospital in Burlington. I'd often stop at Mark's Big Boy when I visited her there. They had laminated menus with stickers just like the ones Rialberto's used, and it seemed like each time I ate there the prices had gone up again.

I slowly made my way back down highway 101, stopping at many "vista points" along the way. Each time I saw a sign for one of the pullouts, I was reminded of the movie *White Men Can't Jump*, which is still among my favorites. Some of the characters in that film live at a place called the Vista View Apartments, and one of the residents of that complex describes the place by saying "there ain't no vista, and there ain't no view—and no vista of no view". The pull-offs along 101 generally did have some nice views, both of the ocean and the forest. The "selfie" I'm incorporating here, though, is of a bridge. At each entrance to the bridge, where two golden bear statues guard the entrances in each direction. When I saw the Garrigan mascot (which is, of course, also the mascot for the University of California), I knew I had to pull off and snap a picture. Apparently the current bridge pays homage to an older bridge with a similar design on the original routing of the highway that was washed away (along with much of the town of Klamath) in a flood.



**"Selfie" with a Golden Bear
Klamath River Bridge on U.S. 101**

I stopped again at the national park visitors' center, and in the afternoon it was open. I can't say it was the most interesting of visitors' centers, but I did learn a few things about redwoods (like their fire resistant properties). I also picked up a couple of souvenirs in their gift shop.

Eventually I made my way back to Arcata and the motel strip on West Valley Boulevard. The Hilton points promotion was the same whether a place was booked for one night or multiple nights, and since the Hampton Inn was on the pricey side, tonight I switched to the Comfort Inn right next door. It's two-thirds the cost of the Hampton, and it seems every bit as nice. As a bonus, it doesn't reek of carpet glue.

I got settled into Room 224 and rested up a bit. I also spent quite a bit of time trying to refill the data on my Tracfone (the main cell phone I use). I'd gotten a notice that I'd run out of data, which would mean things like Google Maps wouldn't be available without Wi-Fi. I attempted to buy extra data through both the Tracfone app and their website. Both times it let me theoretically buy 3 gigabytes of data, but when it came time to check out, an error came up before I could even enter a credit card. So I called their customer service number but got trapped in an A.I. voicemail system that wouldn't seem to let me access a real human. I went round and round with the voicemail for fifteen minutes, and it took me literally swearing at it to open up the option to speak with an actual agent. A woman almost immediately answered, and she was able to solve the problem quickly. Apparently the website and app problems are due to a transition with Tracfone being bought out by a different company. She'd obviously heard complaints about the A.I. system before, too, but she couldn't do anything but record my complaint about it. I did manage to add the data, but it took about four times as long as it should have.

I went out to dinner at a place just the other side of highway 101. It was an easy drive (though I had to cross the double-roundabout at the freeway exit), but it would have been absolutely impossible to walk there. It's kind of sad that even in a college town they don't prioritize pedestrians.

Toni's Restaurant boasts that they have been "proudly serving Arcata" since 1976. There's not a lot of restaurants that last fifty years, so that is something they should be proud of. In California parlance they're a coffee shop, what out east people would call a diner. Toni's functions a bit differently than most such restaurants, though. You order at a counter by the entrance and then take a seat in one of their multiple dining rooms. Once the food is cooked, an employee wanders around calling out the name of whoever ordered it. While they had a tip jar by the register, I didn't feel compelled to put anything in it.

Doing a bit of research, I don't feel guilty at all about my decision. I'd noticed that food prices were on the high side in California. It turns out that that's because all employees in the state—tipped or not—have to earn a wage of at least \$16.90 an hour. In fact all the west coast states have eliminated the sub-minimum wage that most other states pay waitstaff. That means a waitress in the Golden State earns nearly eight times what she would in the Hawkeye State—and that's before any tips are left. I said the food was pricey, but it's definitely nowhere near eight times the price I'd pay back home. That makes me suspect that it's the restaurant owners in Iowa who are the greedy ones. I've always thought we should just pay people a fair wage and let tipping go the way of the dinosaur.

My meal at Toni's was excellent. I had a grilled ham and cheese sandwich (with choice of bread and choice of cheese) and an enormous side salad with assorted greens, cucumbers, carrots, celery, peppers, onion, cabbage, and kidney beans. The salad came with a house-made apple cider vinaigrette that was one of the best dressings I've ever had.

I was sad to get an e-mail from Paul tonight with the news that his fiancée's son Aaron had died. I'd thought of Aaron while driving on those narrow roads earlier today, since it was a head-on accident that put him in the hospital and ultimately killed him. I know things will be tough for Vickie, and I certainly wish her the best.

I basically frittered away the evening. Amusingly there was a feature on the news about the trend of "sleep-cations", where people do nothing on vacation other than relaxing at hotels. I suppose you could say that's what I was doing tonight.

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

Redwood Country, California

I slept pretty decently last night and was up around 6:30. It was weird to go to the Algona radio station's website and hear them playing "Bulldog Edition" (Algona High's weekly show) while I was dressing. Garrigan's show (the "Bear Facts") didn't air this week because of Easter vacation.

There were lots of choices at breakfast, but I can't say the food was the best. They had soggy eggs, cold potato chunks, and barely cooked sausage. I ended up having two mini waffles with butter as the main part of my breakfast.



I set off shortly before eight, and the first part of my day could not have been more different than yesterday. I drove a couple exits south and went west on California highway 255 (Samoa Boulevard, named after a coastal town rather than the Pacific islands). My destination was a Bureau of Land Management property called Ma-le'i Dunes. This is located on the Arcata Spit, which acts as a breakwater for the north end of Humboldt Bay. This area was a sacred site for the Wiyot people who inhabited Humboldt Bay before white people arrived. Much of it is bare sand, and other parts are covered with various scrubby grasses, pretty much the exact opposite of the towering trees just a little ways inland.



Ma-Le'i Dunes – Arcata, California

I spent about twenty minutes hiking on the main trail through the dunes. It's not surprising that the spit is in a tsunami danger zone. What did surprise me is that the evacuation route just led to the top of the highest of the dunes rather than away from the spit.

There was no tsunami today, but I did drive away to higher land anyway. I'd gone north yesterday, and today I headed southward. I went south through Eureka again and south of there exited to more federal land in the coastal plain, the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The land around here looked nothing at all like what I'd driven through yesterday. Much of it reminded me of Louisiana, with scrubby trees draped in Spanish moss. Other parts looked like they could be meadows in the Midwest; indeed the trail I hiked looked a lot like one that goes around an ox-bow lake at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska.

The refuge is mostly designed to protect birds. I didn't really see many of them, but I certainly heard them. There was squawking and cooing everywhere I went. The

main bit of wildlife I saw was a young deer. It stood on the trail no more than fifty feet in front of me and just stared for a minute or more before eventually running off into the woods. I've never been so close to a deer before, and it was really kind of cool.

I made my way back to highway 101. South of Eureka this is called a freeway, but it's really an undivided four-lane highway that sometimes has exits and sometimes has crossroads. It also curves constantly through the mountains. The speed limit is theoretically 65mph, but traffic seems to alternate between 55 and 65. They rarely go any faster, probably because there seem to be speed traps everywhere. I don't think I've ever seen so many cops parked at the side of the road as along U.S. 101 in California.

I drove south about twenty miles and then exited onto the old route of 101, which they now call Avenue of the Giants. It goes past a lot of tacky tourist-oriented business (including two more drive-through trees), but it also provides a scenic route through Humboldt Redwoods



Deer at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge



**Avenue of the Giants
Humboldt County, California**

State Park. I took the picture here on one of the flattest, straightest stretches of the road, and I wouldn't have wanted to use my camera on most of the route. While it was fun to drive, it was also more than a bit challenging. In most places there's no shoulder, and the trees sometimes intrude to narrow the lane. I had to be aware of drop-offs at the edge of the road and also the reflectors that California always uses to divide the lanes. Like many modern cars, my rental had sensors that judged whether the car was properly centered in the lane. They didn't like that I preferred to hug the center rather than being near the drop-offs. Multiple times the sensors buzzed at me, and at one point it flashed a cup of coffee on the screen and told me I should take a break. It would be interesting to see how an actual self-driving car negotiated this route.

I followed Avenue of the Giants about twenty miles south to the town of Myers Flat, which is little more than a small strip of false-fronted western-style businesses that mostly sell souvenirs. I did take a break there, stopping at a surprisingly large grocery store where I bought some low-sugar Mexican grapefruit soda and a blueberry Danish (which easily made up for the lack of sugar in the pop).

I got back on highway 101 and drove back north. The main road is also very scenic, though the trees are more distant. They also seem lower, mostly because in many places the highway is raised up so it's not right at their base. It reminds me a lot of some of the freeways through the Appalachians—particularly I-68 in the Maryland panhandle and I-80 across Pennsylvania. It's a different type of trees, of course (the ones out east are mostly deciduous), but the look is quite similar.

I turned off at the town of Fernbridge, which is named after an enormous and honestly rather scary bridge. The Fernbridge bridge was opened in 1911, and today it is still the world's longest poured concrete bridge. Like the drive-through trees, it was designed when vehicles were smaller than they are today. I battled against pick-ups and jeeps on one side and the walls of the shoulderless bridge on the other, and I was very grateful when I made it to the other side.

The Fernbridge bridge lies between the towns of Fortuna and Ferndale. I was heading to Ferndale, which bills itself as "the Victorian capital of California". I knew it was a big tourist town, and I was expecting it to be full of homes that looked like the famous "painted ladies" on the hills of San Francisco. What I wasn't expecting was a town that looked like it could be a county seat in the Midwest. Of the places I've been, Ferndale looks most like Lanesboro, Minnesota. It has some old Victorians, but there's modern housing as well. There's also quite a bit of nondescript industrial buildings. The biggest difference from Lanesboro is that there's no brick in Ferndale. Everything is wood; in fact the town is mostly built of old-growth redwood. It's not an unattractive place, but there are plenty of homes in Algona that look like the ones I was supposed to gawk at in Ferndale.

The main thing I visited in Ferndale was their community museum, which—like many institutional buildings in California—is housed in a stucco building. I found out there that there's a reason Ferndale looks Midwestern. It's a farm town that was founded in the late 1800s. Both then and now the biggest part of the economy is dairy farming. They also grow a lot of specialty crops here. For instance, Humboldt County is the nation's largest producer of quinoa.

The Ferndale Museum was small, but really quite interesting. Much of it is the sort of stuff I've seen at Old Threshers and Living History Farms. There were some things of particular local interest—like equipment from sawmills and oil wells. The thing I found most interesting was an old operator's switchboard that came from the local Pacific Bell office. There were fascinating features like lights that

showed when callers from pay phones had deposited coins and a complex card system that was forwarded to accounting to bill people for long-distance calls.

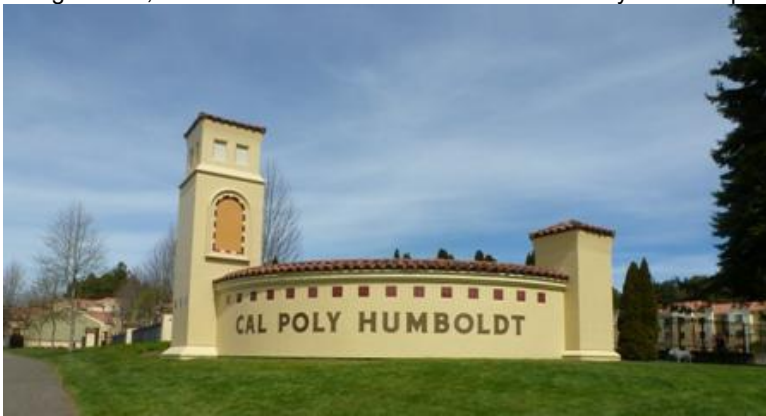
I spent a little over half an hour at the museum. Then I made my way past some dairy farms, back across the bridge, and on up highway 101. I drove back up to Eureka and had lunch at the California institution, In and Out. While I think their burgers are a bit overhyped, I do have to say this lunch was the cheapest meal I had on this trip—so I can't fault their prices. The building itself was also immaculate, which is more than I can say for Raliberto's yesterday.

There were several homeless people begging in the parking lot around Inn and Out. Eureka seems to have quite a lot of homeless people. The problem seems less pronounced in Arcata, though I did see what looked like the remnants of a camp in back of the Hampton Inn. It's understandable that homeless people tend to gravitate towards places with good climates, and almost all of California qualifies in that regard. To my mind the north coast has a lot of the rest of the state beat because it rarely gets very hot. The highs were around 70 on this trip, and apparently they're not much higher in summer.

I drove back through downtown Eureka, where a "no kings" protest was going on outside the courthouse. It intrigued me to see a "black lives matter" poster held by a very blonde woman. This part of California is one of the whitest places I've been. The percentage of white people has to be about the same as it is in Algona. There's a handful of Asian and Hispanic people, but pretty much no blacks at all. Most of California is a true melting pot, but on the north coast even the university has a surprising lack of diversity.

I drove up to Arcata. Since I'm an "alumnus" (with all of three hours of credit), I figured I'd check out a bit of Cal Poly—Humboldt. I had Google Maps direct me to the university's natural history museum. The directions attempted to route me down a one-way street, but eventually I did find the place. I parked at a laundromat next door and went inside. The clerk at the desk seemed surprised that I wanted to pay to get in, but she did accept my three bucks.

I think the reason the woman was surprised that I was visiting was because they were having an Easter-related event for kids this afternoon. While I looked around the place I noticed there were Easter eggs hidden among the fossils. Many kids arrived as I was looking around, and because of that I rushed a bit. Honestly it's not a particularly interesting museum, though.



Formal entrance to the main Cal Poly—Humboldt campus

divided into student housing, and they're maintained to minimum standards. I saw a rental sign outside one of the old houses and found that the going rate for a two-bedroom is \$1,400 a month. While that's triple what I pay in Algona, it's similar to the college towns in Iowa and way cheaper than a renter would pay in San Francisco or Los Angeles.

I stopped briefly at a branch of Redwood Capital Bank, where I used their ATM. Then I went into Wildberry's, one of the most pretentious supermarkets I've ever seen. I got a laugh out of browsing the place, though all I bought was a packaged salad for my dinner tonight.

It was just mid-afternoon, but I was feeling tired. I drove up to my third hotel in California, the Holiday Inn Express—Arcata Airport. This place had a good deal on the weekend, but was overpriced during the week, so it was reasonable to make it the last place I'd be staying before flying back to the Midwest. It's a very nice hotel (which is always the case for this chain), but it's located near nothing at all besides the airport. The nearest restaurant is three miles away, which is why I bought the salad before coming here.

I checked in for my flight tomorrow as well as my hotel tomorrow night (since it's too late to cancel it anyway). Then I watched "Redwood News" on NBC 5 from Eureka. For a small-market station, they really do a nice job with their local news. Nothing is sensationalized, nor do they make trivial things seem more important than they are. The weather was particularly interesting. They include the whole north coast region as well as inland points as far east as Interstate 5, and it was fascinating just how different the forecast was around that area. While highs were around 70 in Humboldt Bay, only 60 was expected up in Crescent City and Brookings. They were looking for a high of 85 in the inland plateau, but only 40 in the high mountains.

I enjoyed my dinner salad, watched a bit more TV, and got caught up on this travelogue. Then a bit earlier than usual I headed off to bed.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5

Arcata, California to Norwalk, Iowa

I was up around 6:30 and organized my stuff. When I checked in online I indicated I might check two bags (which was free with another single segment in first class)! However I was easily able to fit everything into one bag (which would qualify as a carry-on, though it wouldn't fit well on a small plane). After showering (with the best shower I'd had on this trip), I hauled everything out to the car. I also spent a few minutes attempting to clean out the pine needs and sand that had accumulated on the floor by the driver's seat. Hopefully I won't be charged a ridiculous cleaning fee for what I couldn't get.

Breakfast was the best I'd had so far on this trip. I enjoyed mini cheese omelettes and the cinnamon rolls that Holiday Inn Express prides themselves on. They also had pretty decent coffee. One weird thing was that there were spoons to eat the breakfast with, but not forks.

After setting out, I stopped to again fill the tank on the rental car. I tried a place (Patriot) that advertised \$6.39⁹ a gallon. Their credit card reader didn't work properly, though, and the station was entirely unmanned. So I went across the street to a Chevron station where the price was \$6.55⁹. That's easily the most I've ever paid for gas, and hopefully it's a record that will remain unbroken.

The Chevron station had the same price for cash or credit, which is unusual in California. Most offer a discount for cash, which can be up to 25¢ a gallon. There are also a lot of stations that have some sort of membership card that gives anywhere from a dime to a quarter off a gallon. With prices pushing seven bucks a gallon, every bit of savings would help.

It was Easter Sunday, and I figured I'd go to church. I'd checked out the websites of a number of churches (including Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ. Perhaps unsurprising in a state with a laid-back reputation, almost all of them had late services—typically 10:30 or 11:00, but some as late as 1pm. I wanted to make sure I had plenty of time to get to the airport, so I'd made a note of the earliest of the options, an 8:30 mass at St. Mary's in Arcata. Around 7:45 I set off and had Google maps direct me through a maze of residential streets the church, which is located right at the northwest corner of town, with farms on the other side of the street.

There was a single car in the lot when showed up. I didn't want to call attention to myself, so I just drove around a while. When I returned around 8:10 there were two other cars there. I saw a woman get out and go up to the door, so I followed her. It turned out the door was locked. She was also a visitor, as were the occupants of the other two cars. The sign in front of the church said mass was at 8:30, and there was no indication there or on the door anything had changed. We tried other doors, but everything was locked. Eventually the woman called the church's phone number. Someone answered and informed her that for easter only they were combining their two services into one, which would be at 10:30. Why they didn't bother putting that on their website or even putting a piece of paper on the door is beyond me. They obviously weren't expecting any visitors, though I'd think on Easter they should.

I was aware of another church in the area (Christ the King in McKinleyville) that had mass at 9am, so I drove up there. The church was on my way to the airport anyway, so it wasn't a difficult change to make. There were a few cars at Christ the King when I got there, and their door was at least unlocked. I joined about half a dozen elderly people who had arrived early.



Setting up before mass

Christ the King Church – McKinleyville, California
(Note the redwood section behind the crucifix.)

natively. This being the biggest feast of the Christian year, he included everything that might otherwise be optional, and of course we sang most of the responses. They even passed out various bells and had people in the congregation ring them during the Gloria. That was a fun touch, and with an Asian priest it reminded me of the bells I'd seen rung at the shrines in Japan.

Christ the King is a very simple, modern church with a sanctuary quite a bit smaller than the chapel at Garrigan. As is often the case at Catholic churches, people showed up quite late. It looked as if it would be quite a small congregation, but in the end they had to open an overflow area where they'd set up for coffee and rolls. I'd bet they had about 150 in attendance. The congregation was more diverse than most of what I'd seen in Humboldt County—still mostly white, but with quite a few Hispanics and even an elderly black woman who was dressed to the nines for Easter.

Much of the pre-service time was filled by an old bat pianist who essentially gave a concert. She played various hymns, and between them she got up and talked about what those hymns meant to her. There was certainly nothing wrong with that, but it was honestly kind of weird.

The mass was led by an elderly south Asian priest (Father Rashesh) who it was clear did not speak English

The communion process was awkward. The church is designed so there are no side aisles, and it was clear a lot of people didn't know where to go after they'd taken the elements. I ended up going through that coffee room and then back through the entrance

in the back of the sanctuary. A lot of people didn't take communion. Some stayed in their seats, and others folded their arms for a blessing. I'd bet nearly a third of those who went up front didn't actually partake of the elements.

I didn't stick around for the after-church coffee. I went back to the car and made my way back to the airport. I had been instructed to park the rental car in the same space where I found it. That space (#6) was already occupied, though, so I instead parked in space #7. A sign said to note the mileage, so I did (17,384). Then I grabbed my stuff and made my way into the terminal.

It was immediately clear that I needn't have rushed to get to the airport (though a 10:30 church service would have made me too late). Neither security, the car rental desk, nor the United desk was open when I arrived. Indeed the only thing that was open was a coffee bar that sold a small drip coffee for \$6 and sandwiches for between \$12 and \$20. I was glad I'd had a big breakfast and that the hotel had good coffee.

Before too long someone showed up at the Avis counter. I turned in my key and explained that I couldn't get the seat adjustment to work. Then I took a seat and worked on updating this journal.

A long line soon formed at the United desk, though no one was available to deal with anyone. Around 11am an employee showed, and shortly after two others followed. The line moved very slowly. I knew that being in first class on the initial segment meant I could use the priority line, so I went over there. The gentleman who checked me in did a double-take when he looked at my driver's license. Apparently he knows someone named "David Burrow" and was surprised by the name. David is fairly common (especially for older people), but Burrow is a fairly unusual surname. We chatted briefly, and then he checked my bag.

Security had now opened, so I joined the line there. Theoretically first class passengers can join the pre-check line. The regular line wasn't long, though, so that's where I went. Security went quickly, and this time there was no anomaly with my knee sleeve.

While the gate area at ACV is larger than those at many larger airports, it was still a bit crowded with two flights boarding at essentially the same time. I was glad I was one of the first on my flight to go through security so I could find a seat fairly easily.

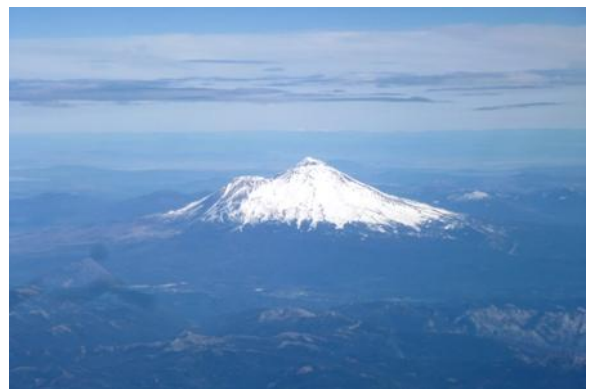
The boarding process was more chaotic than it often is, partly because the agent for flight and the one handling a Breeze flight kept talking over each other. The intercom system was also very archaic, so the announcements kept cutting out. There were a lot of people who requested pre-boarding. Nearly a dozen people pre-boarded. A couple were quite elderly and probably did need extra time. The excuse for the majority, though, was that they were traveling with dogs.

Eventually they called Group 1, and I made my way out to the tarmac, up the ramp, and on to seat 3-A. We were flying on an Embraer 175. This is also a regional jet operated by United Express. It's bigger in every dimension than the Canadair, though. First class is in a 1—2 configuration, so I had a solo seat with both a window and aisle access. In the setback pocket was a boarding pass for a woman who had occupied this seat earlier today. Her flight was from Omaha to San Francisco. I found out this plane started its day with that flight. Then it flew from SFO up to Arcata, then on to Denver, then to Springfield, Missouri, and finally on to Chicago. The flight attendants are based in San Francisco, while the current pilots actually live in Arcata. They replaced the crew that flew up from SFO.

Most of the other passengers boarded relatively quickly, and they even managed to get all their bags on board (though I think some may have been courtesy checked before leaving the terminal). There was a delay before boarding, though. The captain's brother and his family were flying stand-by (I assume for free), and they didn't board until everyone else was settled. The brother actually ended up in a fold-out seat between the captain and first officer up front, while his wife and two kids were dispersed in single seats throughout economy.

Because of the late boarding, they ended up closing the door about ten minutes late. Fortunately the schedule is padded enough that we were told we should still arrive on time.

We took off to the north and then immediately made a 27-degree turn over the Pacific. That provided gorgeous views of the beach and the mountains beyond. Shortly after we reached cruising altitude I had a gorgeous view of Mt. Shasta out the window.



Mount Shasta

Since this flight was a longer flight, we had a better service than on the trip from Des Moines to Denver. The attendant began by taking orders for drinks. I got a rum with Diet Coke. She gave me a glass cup filled with ice and also a can of pop and a little bottle of rum, allowing me to mix the drink as I wanted. The drinks were served with little bowls of warm mixed nuts.

Because the flight was over two hours, we were served boxed lunches. (Had it been a mainline United flight rather than "Express", we would have gotten a plated meal.) I chose the vegetarian option, which included a rice salad presented in a screw-lid metal pot with peas, corn, peppers, and bits of spinach with a delicious tangy dressing. The box also had a pouch of olives in oil, a bag of green olive flavored pita chips, a package of bread sticks with hummus, and a vegan chocolate truffle with hazelnut filling. I finished the last morsel of everything, and it really was quite a nice lunch. The only real issue was that it was a challenge to get the pouch of olives open. (I ended up just biting the corner and ripping.) Those who chose the meat option had a similar problem with packages of salami that seemed to be permanently laminated. In fact the flight attendant spent a good five minutes trying to assist an elderly man who couldn't get his salami

opened. She never was successful, but another passenger offered the man the salami from his box, which he apparently didn't want. Looking at the meat box, I think I made the right choice in choosing vegetarian. It seemed to have more interesting contents.

I read a bit more from the Kindle app, but honestly not very much. This flight seemed to go quite a bit quicker than the flight out to California. Mostly once lunch was over I just looked out the window. It was a beautifully clear day, and I just enjoyed the views of the mountains below. Before I knew it we'd reached flat, dry land and the sprawl of suburban Denver came into view.

We landed right at 4pm Mountain Time, and we were at the gate at 4:15—well ahead of our scheduled 4:34 arrival time. Something United does really well at their hubs is displaying connections. A screen outside each arrival gate displays the gates for every connecting passenger on that flight, and the gates also appear on the United mobile app. Once again I had to walk most of the length of the B-concourse to get to my connecting flight. I was thankful for the moving walkways, particularly since my knee was aching after those falls I had earlier in the trip.

It only took about fifteen minutes to find Gate B-27, and that included stopping to use a restroom (much more spacious than the one on the plane). I read through some e-mails and did a bit more updating on this in the half hour or so before the flight to Des Moines boarded.

They began boarding flight 549 at about 5:08pm. This time there were virtually no pre-boarders, and they went through the groups efficiently. Again I was in economy for the second flight of the connection, so I boarded in Group 3. The flight was entirely full (which most flights seem to be these days), and I was glad I didn't have to find room for my main bag.

This was easily the nicest plane on this trip. It was another A-319, but it was newer and nicer than the one I'd flown on from Des Moines to Denver. This one had individual screens at the seats, and I entertained myself watching the moving map and looking at the statistics about the flight. Something I hadn't realized before is that a location's elevation counts into the plane's altitude. Before we even took off from Denver, we were at 5300 feet.

The service included the same free snacks we'd had in economy flying to California. I had a bag of snack mix (basically generic Garden of Eatin's) and one of the stroopwafels, together with a Diet Coke. On a relatively short flight, that's not a bad offering for snacks.

The weather was clear pretty much the whole flight. (Indeed, it was basically clear all the way from California to Iowa.) I could tell we'd crossed from the West to the Midwest when the farms changed to square fields rather than the circles from central pivot irrigation. That happened in central Nebraska. They'd already planted crops there, and it all looked very green.

We crossed the snaking Missouri River just north of Omaha. The most distinct feature of Iowa from the air is all the wind turbines in our state. The President may hate them, but they're often a better source of income for farmers than crops are. There were a few wind turbines in California, but what was far more prominent there were solar panels. Lots of homes had solar panels, and there was a whole field by Arcata airport filled with panels.

We landed in Des Moines at 8:17 and got to the gate at 8:22—twelve minutes before our scheduled arrival. I used the restroom on the way to baggage claim, and that was all the time it took for the bags to get on the carousel. It took me quite a while to find the skywalk to the parking ramp (mostly because the signage wasn't great), but eventually I did. My car started right up, and I didn't even have to scan the QR code I'd gotten on entering. (Their machine recognized my license plate.) I had gotten the refund for the original parking I'd booked, and the amount I paid this time was actually a couple bucks less than that was.

I somehow missed the turn to get onto the westbound beltway at the south edge of Des Moines. (This was probably because it's actually signed northbound, and it took a bit for the correct direction to register.) I had Google Maps direct me to my hotel, and while it followed a rather strange route down to Norwalk, I did eventually get there.

I'm staying at the Tru by Hilton—Des Moines/Norwalk. It's a brand new hotel with elevators that were inspected just before last Thanksgiving. I stayed at this brand out in Pennsylvania a couple years ago, and this is much the same. The room is simple, with plastic surfaces pretty much everywhere. It's reasonably large, and the bed is comfortable, though.

The hotel was a block down from a Kwik Star convenience store. Since I hadn't really had anything but snacks since breakfast (even the "lunch" box was basically assorted snacks) I picked up a packaged salad there for a late dinner. It wasn't nearly as good as the nice salad I got from the pretentious supermarket in Arcata, but then again it was literally half the price.

Since I'd been on Pacific time the past few days, I wasn't really tired at all. So I got caught up on this and watched a bit of TV. Eventually I headed off to sleep.

MONDAY, APRIL 6

Norwalk, Iowa to Algona, Iowa

This was another place with too soft of a bed, though I didn't sleep too badly. I actually slept in until about seven, though of course that would be 5am Pacific time. The shower at the Tru by Hilton was probably the worst of the hotels I was at on this trip. It was one of those "rainfall" showerheads that would only drip, to the point that it was difficult to rinse shampoo out of my hair. Those showers

are trendy, but I really fail to see why anyone would want one. There are plenty of good low-flow showers that aerate the water to provide pressure; just dripping makes no sense to me.

Breakfast was decent. They had a complicated machine that made pancakes to order, and I had one with butter. They also had the same cheese mini-omelettes I'd had yesterday. As a bonus they had nice, crispy bacon.

I left right at 8am, headed around the south and west sides of the Des Moines area and then up highway 169. Traffic was extremely heavy the whole way. Something I couldn't help but notice were all the trucks. There aren't many trucks on U.S. 101, basically just those that are making local deliveries. Presumably the long-distance traffic follows Interstate 5 rather than negotiating the curves through the coastal mountains. A lot of Iowa farmers double as long-haul truckers, though, so even on relatively minor highways you see a lot of trucks.

It was clear they'd gotten a lot of rain while I was gone, presumably starting the day I drove down to Des Moines. Seeing all the ditches full of water reminded me that we'd gotten a couple of e-mails from our superintendent saying that there was flooding at Garrigan over the holiday weekend. I'm not sure how bad it was—hopefully manageable.

My only stop on the way home was at the Casey's in Ogden, where I got a cup of coffee. Once I got to Algona, I bought gas at the Casey's there. The price was \$3.356⁹, a little over half what I paid in California.

I got home right at 11am, and that's where I'll end things for this journal. This was a wonderful trip, one of the nicest long weekend getaways I've done. The redwood country is spectacularly beautiful, and the people in California are some of the nicest you'll find anywhere. I'm glad to have finally made the journey out there.