

## **2017 Boise Golden Spike Rally**

15 Golden Spike rigs journeyed to Boise, ID from all directions! Rich and Sue Dixon came south from the Northwest Territories; Betsy and I came west from a visit with family in Colorado; many came north through Nevada by several different routes; Westerfields and Pooles came southeast from Oregon and Washington. Schaffer's and Pearson's came through Reno and waved to the 'girls' as they passed by Mustang, NV. We were joined by Carnes' son and family for the eclipse, Don and Karen's son and Westerfields had a couple of visitors who spent time with us as well. Lots of us came a day or two early to avoid the crowds and to secure our spot in the RV resort. The Hi-Valley Resort was perfect for us. We were treated like 'honored' guests. The facilities were wonderful and the staff was very friendly and helpful. We had the use of the community room with kitchen and at least one of us was on the treadmill/bicycle in the exercise room.

Our rally agenda was very full. Betsy and I arrived a couple of days early and spent one day driving all the routes, even to Smith Ferry, to clarify the directions and understand the facilities. All spikers were in place by Friday evening for our orientation. Then on Saturday we had two activities: in the Morning we had a wonderful docent led tour of the State Capitol. The Capitol had been renovated a few years earlier and was 'polished' up for our visit. We had two docents and they took us all through the building; explaining Idaho politics, the governorship and the legislature. They got us into rooms that were closed for the day so we could sit in the House chambers as well as the visitor balconies. We all left with a 'potato' souvenir hat pin and a smile on our faces. From there we walked a few blocks to the Piper Pub and Grill, a brew pub recommended by Don Schaffer (who, of course was in Nampa Costco getting new tires on his 'toad')! We all had a great lunch, even Karen who had to pay for her own glass of wine. The beer and wine and other milder libations were tasty and refreshing. From there most of us drove to the Old Idaho State Penitentiary and enjoyed a self-guided tour of the facilities. There was an art exhibit which focused on aspects of prison life. On each cell, there was a story of a prison experience, often an escape attempt, with pictures. There was a 'hanging chamber' for capital punishment although it had only been used once. The prison was closed in the 1970s after a riot and fire; new safer and more humane facilities have been used since. The prison grounds had laundry facilities with the equipment still there and a firearm museum with a detailed history of arms used in wars throughout US history.

Sunday was another full day. We started at the World Center for Birds of Prey. We were able to observe many species of raptors in their cages. The staff also gave lectures with actual birds on their arms. We saw owls, hawks, eagles and falcons. There were condors in a large cage and we were able to watch live video of baby condors being bred in captivity for release in the wild. These baby birds NEVER see a human. They are raised and fed with puppets and robots. The nonprofit is funded by the Peregrine Fund which was started in the 1960s to 'rescue' the peregrine falcon from extinction; they were very successful. The peregrine falcon is now flourishing in almost every country in the world. The current focus of the Peregrine Fund is to 'rescue' the California Condor from the same fate. Let's hope they are successful! We had a 'box lunch' with the birds and then drove to the Old Train Depot in downtown Boise. Our docent at the Depot was amazing. He talked smoothly and seamlessly for over an hour about the train history of Boise – too complicated to summarize here. The depot is not used any longer for passenger traffic, only for weddings and events. The depot was restored several years ago and is in beautiful condition. It was built in the 1920s and is a 'smaller' version of Union Station in Los Angeles. Outside sits 'Old Mike' a beautiful

steam engine with a glorious history told to us by our guide. From the depot we could look over their beautiful gardens down the hill to the Capitol that we had visited the day before. Included in our rally was time for a great pitch-in dinner with roasted chicken from the nearby Winco Deli. Our business meeting (see minutes) was lively and productive. Once again, the use of the community room made this a great experience. I brought my telescope and while in the RV park we could look at sun spots during the day and Jupiter and Saturn at night. We were in Boise so it was not a super dark sky, but it was Idaho so it was 'almost' a dark sky. The moon, of course, was up during the day, so that helped with viewing lots of stars, constellations and even the Milky Way. I did, clumsily drop and break the solar filter for my telescope so I could not use it on the day of the eclipse.

All this led up to the Grand Finale! Monday morning, we hit the road early, some at 4am, some at 5am and some as late at 7 or 8am. The local news had everyone in Idaho worried about the traffic, so the result was that the trip to Smith Ferry was uneventful and traffic was smooth. However, coming home it took us about 4.5 hours to travel the 45 miles. Actually, it took about 4 hours to travel 20 miles and about one half hour to go the last 25 miles! Needless to say, we were STOPPED most of the time. All that aside, everyone had a great time. Since we got there so early in the morning, it was cold and we had to bundle up; this was a contrast to the 90-degree weather we 'enjoyed' in Boise. But, the sun did rise and the moon did also; soon they were 'on top of each other' and we were all amazed at what we were experiencing. As the moon's shadow enveloped us the temperature dropped from a pleasant 82 degrees to a chilly 62 degrees and we were once again looking for our coats. The corona of the sun was mesmerizing and the darkness of the sky surprising. Before the total eclipse we all used our glasses to protect our eyes, but during totality, off came the glasses and the eclipse could be followed for the next two minutes using our 'naked' eyes, unfiltered binoculars and cameras or a friendly neighbor's telescope. What a treat. We celebrated our time in Smith Ferry with Bloody Mary's and the Total Solar Eclipse with champagne. We shared the field where we parked with about 2,000 others who came for the same purpose. They were all friendly and knowledgeable participants in what we all liked to call "The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Woodstock". The parking arrangements were organized perfectly by the Chapel in the Pines Grace Baptist Church. All the parking spots were labeled; volunteers directed us to our spot. There were plenty of portable toilets and the toilet paper was restocked all day long!

After the event the pastor sent an email to thank all of us. In it he stated that they hauled about 2 tons of garbage to the dump, but except for one banana peel, on sales receipt and a tent stake, all the garbage was in the trash containers that were provided. No one thought that was the case at Woodstock! All of our Golden Spikers enjoyed the long day and felt it was all worth it.

One 'new' approach we took at this rally was to have each breakfast hosted by 3 of our camping rigs. This seemed to work well and the breakfasts were wonderful. Thank you all for your help in doing this.

On Tuesday, many of us headed home, but many stayed an extra day or two. Interestingly the Idaho State Fair was happening at the same time as the eclipse, so Boise was a very popular place. Betsy and I drove all day on Tuesday and arrived back in Nevada City by 8pm California time. But, along the way we experienced another significant traffic jam, just outside of Reno. Again we were stopped for a significant part of an hour; but, we now had lots of experience and handled it well.

**Dan StJohn, Conductor**

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