
Chapter 1 - Branson, Missouri - June, 2005



Figure 1, Len and Diana with their 'new' 2000 Roadtrek 200 Popular.

Preface

Len and Diana have not done much camping lately, but in previous lifetimes spent quite a bit of time in different types of camping vehicles. The first was a 1962 Chevy II that provided a few cramped nights of sleeping in the Colorado mountains. We once borrowed an umbrella tent and toured parts of the Mountain West. 'The Beast,' a 1960 Chevy Suburban Carryall that was bought for \$350 served as a camper for a number of years. It did not have room for kids, so we traded it in on an abused 8 foot slide-in cab-over camper on a pickup truck. This camper served us well and made several trips from Colorado back east to visit relatives, and was a great way to explore the Rocky Mountain West. After moving to Ohio in 1980, we had for a short time an old 1973 VW camper bus that we used to travel to the west coast and back one summer. Mostly, however, since we have been in Ohio, camping trips have not been high on our agenda.

Now, with Len retired and Diana occasionally thinking about retirement, the idea of the freedom of a self contained camping vehicle seemed attractive. So, after several months of mostly Internet research, we bought a used 2000 *Roadtrek 200 Popular* Class B motor home. We bought it on Ebay, but Len first took a ride to Michigan and spent a couple of hours with the owners checking it out before doing any bidding. The interior and exterior were almost like new, and the van had just over 30,000 miles, not bad for a year 2000 model.

Class B motor homes are built on a cargo van chassis. The Roadtrek contains most everything two people need for a home-away-from-home. The rear section can be set up as either a dining area or a sleeping area. For sleeping, you can choose between twin beds or a big queen size bed.

Big Turtle Adventures



The center of the camper provides a kitchen area. It includes a two burner propane stove, a microwave, a refrigerator (that can be powered by either 110v, 12v or propane), and a sink. The electrical system includes two 'house' batteries (separate from the van battery) and a heavy duty cable that can be plugged into a 110 volt AC supply. (Many campgrounds provide electrical hook ups.) The Roadtrek also has a built-in gasoline powered generator that can supply 110 volt power to the camper. There is a 43 gallon fresh water tank and both black water and grey water storage tanks.

For warm or cold weather comfort, the Roadtrek includes a 110 volt powered air conditioner and a propane fueled furnace. There is a roof vent with a thermostatically controlled 12 volt fan that, together with screened windows, provides good ventilation.

A door opens in the aisle to reveal a marine style toilet. There is a floor drain in the aisle and a pull around curtain provides for a stand-up shower. There is plenty of storage space both inside and out. The front captain's chairs can swivel 180 degrees to provide comfortable lounge type seating while camping. One storage area has a pull down tambour door (similar to a roll type desk) that hides a pull out shelf that can hold a TV. Wiring is provided for both a built in TV antenna or connection to external cable. In our case, we have added a TV tuner card to a laptop computer that allows us to watch TV (as well as DVD discs) on the computer display.



Exterior storage compartments include a space for the electrical hookup cable, and lots of space for storing folding chairs. The driver-side running board lifts up to reveal the sewer hose and black and grey water tank release valves. Dumping stations can be found at most camp grounds. We have also discovered that the Flying J and Pilot Truck Stops have RV dumping stations, and also allow for overnight RV parking.

Our Roadtrek is built on a one ton Chevy 3500 cargo van with a 5.7 liter eight cylinder engine. This provides enough power to handle the hills and keep the van rolling along with the cruise control set near the speed limit. In the first 2,000 miles, our fuel consumption has varied between 13 and 15 miles per gallon of gas.





We have a nice pole barn at Woodhaven, our weekend country place, to use for storing the Roadtrek. The bad news was that the pole barn doors were 8 feet high but the Roadtrek is 8 feet six inches. Also, the path to the pole barn was long and not good enough to drive the Roadtrek on except after a long period of dry weather. So, we had our local contractor replace the doors with nine foot high doors, and create an all weather driveway by dumping and spreading a dozen loads of crushed rock.

Well, the Roadtrek is a far cry from camping in our 1962 Chevy II or The Beast, and is several classes above the old VW camper van. The only thing left, now that we have made the RV plunge, is to pick a name for this thing and try it out. After some thought, we settled on the **Big Turtle** as a name for our new mini motor home. After a brief test at nearby Burr Oak State Park, we were ready for a more extensive **Big Turtle** trip.





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In the past, Diana has been involved in special ESL (English as a Second Language) summer programs at Ohio State. Because these programs run separately from the regular University class schedule, she has had a lot of flexibility during the summer for planning trips to Poland, Romania, or wherever. Due to visa and security changes for international students entering the country (resulting from new Homeland Security regulations), a large number of international students are no longer coming to the USA to study English. In particular, a program for Japanese teachers that Diana had been involved with for many years was cancelled because of new government red tape. This means that Diana now has a less flexible summer schedule. This year, she had 10 days available between the Spring and Summer university sessions. We decided that a trip to Branson would fit this schedule and would be our first **Big Turtle** experience.



Figure 2, Columbus to Branson as guided by DeLorme.

I added the DeLorme mapping software to my laptop for US \$130. The version I got includes detailed maps of the USA and also includes a GPS module that plugs into a USB port on the computer. It is possible to program a route and have the computer constantly update your position on the map using the GPS data, and even tell you (using a simulated voice) how far it is to the next turn.



You can zoom in and see a remarkable level of detail; however, it must be a challenge to keep these maps up-to-date. I found a few errors on locations of restaurants. (And recently when visiting friends in Athens, OH, the DeLorme map put their house on the wrong side of a highway a mile from where it actually was located.)

On The Road Again

We had reservations at the KOA campground, so we were pretty much committed to head directly there. Then, we planned to make our way back home as time and mood dictated. The route took us west on Interstate 70 to St. Louis, and then Southwest on Interstate 44 to Springfield, MO. We fought a strong headwind most of the way across Illinois and into Missouri.



We parked at a Flying J Truck stop in Sullivan, MO and, as very black ominous clouds blew in from the south, we settled in for the night. It turns out that a number of truck stops allow over night campers. Although the truck stop is open 24 hours and there is quite a bit of coming and going, it was surprisingly quiet in the **Big Turtle**.

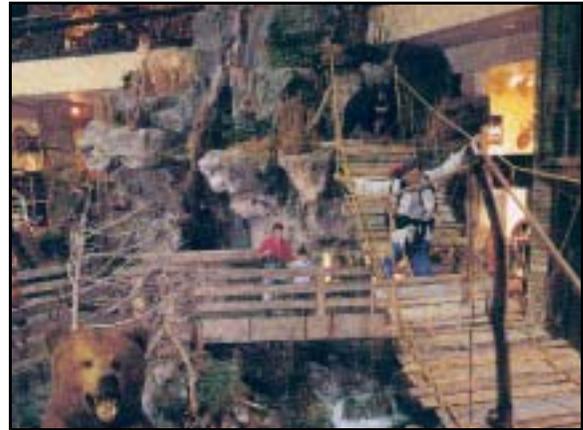
The next morning we enjoyed the breakfast buffet featured at most Flying Js, and then headed out. We did not have too much further to go to make out KOA reservation, so we decided to start playing tourists by visiting the widely advertised 'The Original Walnut Bowl Factory' and Wine Tasting store. It turned out to be a big store where they sell walnut bowls and a variety of other tourist trap junk, but they were also connected to a factory where they make oak barrels for wine and whisky producers.

The factory has an extensive display of exhibits describing the work of Coopers, the artisans who traditionally craft wooden barrels. Illustrations of traditional processes are displayed along with many antique coopers tools. You can look through windows overlooking the factory floor and observe folks in the assembly line manufacture of large oak barrels. The barrels are shipped to wine and whisky producers all over, and you can see the company names burned into the barrel heads. In one room of the building they have a place set up for wine tasting. Although you can try the local St. James winery wines, they also have wines from every winery that buys barrels from them. It is an amazing collection, but we resisted stocking up on their offerings.

Big Turtle Adventures



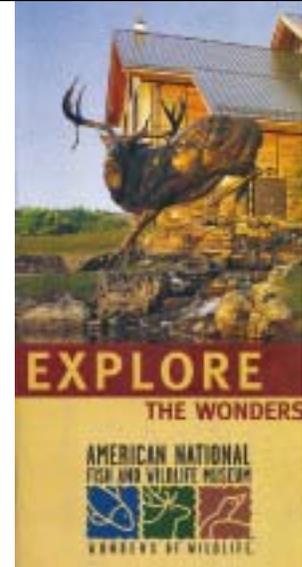
To get to Branson from the north, you exit Interstate 44 at Springfield, MO. Springfield is the home of possibly the largest sportsman supply center, Bass Pro Shops, with about seven acres under one roof. We had lunch at Mc Donalds on the fourth floor, overlooking a three story waterfall and hundreds of mounted animals and fish. If you have more time for eating, there is also a Hemmingway restaurant there for a fancy sit down dining experience.



Next door to Bass Pro Shops is the American Wildlife Museum. Here we found very well done exhibits on all kinds of wildlife. There are waterfalls and big pools with beavers, ducks, and other live animals. We found it well worth the stop.

Branson

After exploring the wonders of the wildlife museum, we headed south to Branson. Close to Branson, we found lots of construction projects under way. Although I am not convinced, Branson's PR people claim that it is second only to Orlando, FL in the number of visitors to any city in the USA. Although folks complain about the traffic, I think that Orlando is many times worse.



We found our way to the KOA campground and checked in. Our camping site was only a short distance from the office. As soon as we were parked, we went to the office to find out about show reservations. Because it was the middle of the week, and was not in the prime tourist season, we were able to get tickets that night for the popular Shoji Tabuchi show.





On The Road Again

If you can imagine a classically trained Japanese violinist playing and singing country music, you probably still cannot imagine the ***Shoji Tabuchi Show***. Shoji claims to have been impressed at an early age by a country western group that was touring Japan. At the age of 19, he came to the USA with \$500 in his pocket. His show displays his remarkable talent, includes other talented performers, and state-of-the art special effects. One effect has Shoji playing a musical duel with laser generated cartoon figures projected on the screen behind him. This is a first class production all the way to the rest rooms. How many places have you visited where they sell post cards featuring their rest rooms? At any rate, we agree that this show is a must see for Branson visitors.



The next day we decided to do a double: first take in an afternoon show and then follow it up with a dinner cruise. Many theaters specialize in country or gospel performers we are not acquainted with, so we chose more familiar tunes for our selections. Our afternoon show was a song and dance review featuring music from Broadway shows. The very talented cast packed an amazing number and variety of songs and dances into their fast paced production. There were so many different songs in the show everyone was bound to find something they liked. Being a mid-week afternoon presentation, the theater was less than half full. I would guess the crowd was several hundred, mostly of retirement age. Since the tickets were sold to keep the audience seated close together, and because the audience enjoyed the performances, the crowd seemed bigger than it was.

These performers gave the impression that they could compete with anything Broadway has to offer. Great vocalists and amazing dancers.





In the evening our free KOA shuttle took us to board the *Branson Belle Showboat*. The Branson theaters are quite spread out, and the narrow crowded roads made me glad that we used the shuttle option. The Showboat, however, was only a 5 minute drive from the campground.

The boat itself is supposed to be the largest landlocked ship in the country. It carries 700 passengers at a top speed of 11 miles per hour on Table Rock Lake. It traveled faster than this when it slid down the launching ramp. Then, it hit a speed of 14 miles per hour thanks in part to the fact that the skids were greased with bananas!

Once again we enjoyed a song and dance review, this time with a smaller (but equally talented) cast than the earlier Broadway production. The show also featured an unusual Russian dance couple and a ventriloquist who used live trained dogs instead of wooden dummies. The dogs were trained to open their mouths when he squeezed their neck. Sounds silly, but it was very entertaining.

The meal was good, and our table was on a balcony overlooking the main floor. During the intermission I strolled the deck and checked out the lake view. There I talked a bit with a crew member. He had spent 27 years in the Merchant Marine sailing around the world. Now he was content to float around a calm land locked lake.

The next morning we hiked down the hill from our campsite to the edge of Lake Tanycomo. Actually, this part of Lake Tanycomo looks more like a slow moving river; or, a fast moving river when they are releasing water from the Table Rock Dam. It is just a short distance from here to the spillway of Table Rock Dam and, when we were there, they seemed to release water in the evenings. There is a fish hatchery at the base of the Table Rock Dam and they maintain the water temperature that feeds Lake Tanycomo so that it is cold enough to satisfy the million or so trout that are stocked each year. Visible in both directions along the KOA water frontage were fishermen either wading along the shore, or floating in boats as they cast their flies in hopes of landing a trout.



KOA has a nice building overlooking the water and every morning they serve a pancake breakfast to any campers who are up and about. The pancake grill is located about 30 feet or so above the level of the lake. The cooks have trained the trout to hang around for their own pancake breakfast. When a cook moves from the grill toward the steep bank, the trout start stirring, and when a pancake is thrown like a frisbee sailing over the water, they jump all over each other to grab a bite. I am not sure that this amuses the fly fishermen as much as it amused us. Pancakes that missed the water were grabbed by birds or squirrels.





Across The Wide Missouri

We discovered that most of the KOA staff were what is known as full-time RVers. (RV stands for Recreational Vehicle, and the *Big Turtle* now qualifies us as part-time RVers.) One couple we talked to were originally from Denver, Colorado, but after retiring decided to spend summers around Branson and winters in the south. They are members of a group who call themselves 'escapees.' This group consists of around 60,000 or so full time RVers who maintain a 'domicile' in Livingston, TX. There is an organization there that operate a large RV park, but more importantly, provides a variety of services including mail forwarding. It turns out that since Texas does not have a state income tax, and has relatively low taxes on motor homes, there is a big financial advantage in being an 'escapee.'

Across The Wide Missouri

We left the Branson area on June 10th and headed east across southern Missouri. There are no Interstate or other major highways going in this direction, so we poked along over and around the Ozark mountains at an average speed of probably 45 miles per hour. We saw a lot of cattle and horse ranches, but this part of the country is pretty rural, and in places apparently very poor.

On the eastern edge of Missouri, in the Mississippi River valley, it gets very flat. This is a major agricultural area with many crops, including rice, in evidence. We got onto Interstate 55 for a short distance, and found a Flying J Truck stop at Matthews, MO where we spent the night with rain drops splashing on the roof.

The next day we had a short drive to Cairo, IL. I have heard a lot about this place for many years, but this was the first time I visited the place where the Ohio River, after winding about 1,000 miles from Pittsburgh, PA, joins the Mississippi River. There is a park at the point where the two rivers join and there is a small tower you can climb

and watch the many river barges as they travel up and down the rivers. To be accurate, you rarely see *a* barge. It is more common to see perhaps *a dozen* barges tied together and being pushed along by a tug boat. (I don't know why they call them tug boats instead of push boats.) We observed men connecting and disconnecting barges and moving them around to form new assemblies, apparently to send them off to different destinations.



Big Turtle Adventures



Cairo is a small town that was much more important 150 years ago, when the river was the easiest way to travel. By the way, although it is named after Cairo, Egypt, the locals pronounce it 'Car-row' rather than 'Ky-ro.' We had a guided tour of the Magnolia Manor.

This house was built in 1869 in the Italianate style along a street once known as 'Millionaire's Row.' It's original owner came here from Ohio and made a fortune supplying the army during the Civil War.

Like many old houses whose fans like to have a claim to fame, the locals seem proud that General U.S. Grant once slept here. (My home town of Kane, PA has a similar claim since Grant stayed at the Kane Manor while visiting his friend General Thomas L. Kane.) Anyway, the Magnolia Manor contains a large variety of interesting antique furnishings and artifacts. Typical of these small town places, we got closer to a lot of stuff than usual in the fancier big city museums. We even enjoyed the view from the tower room (accessed through some narrow stairs with a loose banister).



On to Kentucky

From Cairo, IL we crossed the Ohio River and entered the far western edge of Kentucky. We stopped at a small local restaurant and had a buffet lunch featuring catfish, a common menu item in these parts.

Within a fairly small radius of this area you are close to five states; Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Major public works projects were built here to help the nation's economy. The most famous of these in this area was the TVA, or Tennessee Valley Authority. A number of large dams were built to supply electrical power and to add to the navigable water ways. One construction project resulted in two long nearly parallel lakes, Kentucky Lake and Barkley Lake. The area between this lakes is called (what else?) *The Land Between The Lakes*.



It was raining quite a bit and the forecast was for the remnants of tropical storm Andrew to pass through, so we decided to get off the highway and camp for the night. The National Park Service operates a number of facilities here and we were able to purchase a Golden Age Passport. The **Golden Eagle Passport** provides free admission to all National Parks, and also provides discounts to campgrounds and other attractions for one year. It is well worth the cost if you plan to visit more than one park in a year. If you are over 62 years old, \$10 will get you a lifetime **Golden Age Passport**, a real bonus for living this long.





We checked into the Hillman Ferry Campground. The way these National Park campgrounds work is that you first stop at the campground entrance and get an assigned campsite. This particular campground is divided into five different areas with a total of several hundred individual campsites spread over hill and vale. They provide you with a fairly detailed map, and each site is well marked and has a post where you clip a sign that shows the date when you will be checking out. You place a copy of the sign on your dashboard to prove that you belong there.



Our site was within a stones' throw of the rest room - shower building, and within another stones' throw from Kentucky Lake. The dark clouds did not drop their torrents on us as we had feared, and we spent some time sitting at the edge of the lake watching the activity on the nearby beach and generally relaxing.

We also sat in the **Big Turtle** for a while and read and amused ourselves by watching a young family at the next campsite. We were reminded about the time in our younger days when we borrowed an umbrella tent and explored some of the western campgrounds. We had a few fights with the tent to decide who was the boss. (It turned out around 4 in the morning at Carlsbad Caverns, New Mexico, that the wind was the boss, and we did a quick collapsing of the tent and shoved it into the car before it headed for Texas. But, I digress...) These thoughts were triggered by the family as they first seemed to do a variation of the old clowns coming out of the VW routine; they moved a seemingly endless number of boxes and pieces of camping equipment from their small car to their site. Then they struggled for about an hour and a half alternating between reading the directions for their apparently brand new tent and assembling various poles and pounding tent pegs in miscellaneous locations. Once this chore was done, after a few mis-starts and start-overs, they had an easier job setting up their little girls' personal Barbie tent (accompanied by a Barbie sleeping bag, Barbie cooler, and I'm not sure about the other stuff except that it was mostly pink).

I'm afraid that we were a little too smug since all we had to do to set up our camp was to back the **Big Turtle** into our spot and plug a fat electrical cord into the 30 amp receptacle. We excuse our smugness with the claim that we paid our initiation fees way back when camping for us was sleeping in the back of a 1962 Chevy II.

The next day we drove most of the width of Kentucky and ended up at Carter's Caves State Park. We didn't know much about the place, but it was on our state highway map and at the right place for an overnight stop.



The campground was organized similar to the National Park campground, but on a little smaller scale. This area has a lot of caves and we saw a number of people heading into the woods carrying flashlights with the look of amateur speleologists about them. At the visitor center - gift shop, we found that a number of guided cave tours were available here. Since caving was not our objective, I did not learn much about the nature of the caves found here.



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Not far from the campground is a nicely appointed Lodge. After checking it out in the evening, we returned there in the morning for a leisurely breakfast at the Lodge restaurant. Then we turned north and crossed the Ohio River at the Greenup Locks and Dam. We have been here in the past and enjoyed watching the river barges being raised and lowered through the locks. This time, however, we could not get past the picnic area. The road to the observation building was fenced and off limits to the public. I don't know if this is part of the Homeland Security program, or why they are preventing folks from getting a view of this interesting river activity.

Now we were on the Ohio side of the river, and it was only a short drive back to Woodhaven. We parked the **Big Turtle** in the pole barn so it could rest up for our next adventure. Now that we have had a taste of RV-ing in modest luxury, we are ready for the next vacation opportunity.

The Big Turtle Experience

Here are a few observations about our first Roadtrek journey. The Roadtrek advertising claims that this is the 'RV that drives like a van.' Well, almost. The Roadtrek Model 200 is 20 feet long, about the size of a lot of full-sized pickup trucks, and is several inches wider than 'Vanna White' our Oldsmobile mini van. The Roadtrek is much *much* heavier. The Chevy V8 engine has plenty of power for pulling out into traffic, or for climbing steep hills. Being heavier, however, it takes more effort and more distance to come to a stop. Since I have driven quite a few large vehicles in the past, including some experiences with U-Haul and Ryder rent-a-trucks, driving the Roadtrek is not too much of a problem for me. I have driven a couple of 3/4 ton pickup trucks with a slide-in camper that rival the Roadtrek in size. The Roadtrek is not as top heavy as the pickup with the camper combination. The designers have gone to a lot of trouble to locate the heavy water tanks low and to streamline the body to keep it stable on curves and in cross winds. I would have to say they succeeded very well. The **Big Turtle** is better than our pickup camper in cross winds and turns. Compared to the old VW camper bus we had for a time, the Roadtrek beats it by far in stability and power on hills. I still have minor nightmares about driving the VW bus across a two lane road in Montana with a 50 mile an hour wind and frequent passing trucks. White knuckle all the way. However, the **Big Turtle** holds the road well in heavy cross winds, and passing trucks are not much of a problem.

In Sweden in 1997, we rented a 24' mini motor home and traveled in it for three weeks. Compared to the Roadtrek it was under-powered, and much harder to get around in.

As far as gas mileage goes, we have so far averaged between 13 and 15 miles per gallon. We need more data, however, since we have only driven the Roadtrek about 2,000 miles and it has a 35 gallon tank. So, we have not had to fill the tank too often yet. We were pushing a pretty good head wind across Indiana and Illinois, and the long drive across southern Missouri was on very narrow hilly roads with many 30 m.p.h. curves. Interestingly enough, that day is when we got 15 miles per gallon. It remains to be seen what kind of mileage we will get on longer trips.

The **Big Turtle** will fit in most shopping center parking places although it is a bit tight in some spots. Since my habit is to always try and find a pull-through slot where I don't have to back out no matter what vehicle I am driving, I usually park where there is extra space in the parking lot anyway. Backing the **Big Turtle** in and out of the Woodhaven pole barn requires some getting used to. There is just a couple of inches clearance between the side mirrors and the garage door. When you are backing out, the inside rear view mirror is not much help. The side mirrors are the 'objects may be closer than you think' variety. The resulting distortion makes it look like there is no way to clear the door (even though you know you got the thing in there without scraping).





The Big Turtle Experience

Another issue we faced with pole barn storage was that the heavy Roadtrek does not go on wet slick mud, even when it's flat. The first time I backed the **Big Turtle** out of the pole barn there had been an inch of rain the day before and the meadow was fairly wet. Although the tires did not sink in, the wheels spun like they were on grease. So, about six more loads of rock were brought in and spread in front of the barn. This seems to have solved the problem. I am, however, not optimistic about driving in the winter on slippery roads.

As far as the internal stuff goes, things went pretty well. There is an annoying gurgle from the fresh water tank when driving slow over rough ground. For the first several days on the road the refrigerator would not get very cold. It has three options: 12 volt DC (the so called 'house battery'), 110 volt AC, (for when you are plugged in to a camp site or your home power), and propane. We did not try the propane yet. Most folks agree that the propane tank should be shut off when the vehicle is in motion. Starting the propane burner for the refrigerator requires a spark-lighting sequence that I am not familiar with yet. So, while on the road I kept it on DC, and switched it to AC when we were plugged in at a campground.

I had purchased a wireless thermometer with two remote sending units at Radio Shack before we left. I kept one of the remotes inside the refrigerator so that we could monitor the temperature without opening the door. This worked pretty well. I found, however, that the first few nights on AC the temperature actually got warmer. Finally I noticed that the AC outlet next to the sink and above the refrigerator is a GFI type, and the little push button was popped out. It must be that the refrigerator is wired in the line after that outlet since after I pushed the button properly in, it worked much better on AC. As a matter of fact, I exploded a can of soda by forgetting I had left it in the freezer for a quick chill. On the next trip, I plan to experiment with the propane option. The RV forum has folks warning about damaging the batteries by running them down too far by using the refrigerator while parked overnight without an AC hookup. (The RV slang for camping with no hookups to power or water is 'dry camping.')

While hooked up to camp ground power, we tried the air conditioner a couple of times. Most of the time, opening two side windows and the roof vent, and then turning on the vent fan, kept us comfortable.

At our last campground stop I decided it was time to dump the holding tanks. There is a light panel in the camper and by pushing a test button you can see indicator lights for the fresh water, black water, and grey water tanks. It looked to me like the black water tank had more in it than it should have given how much we had used the system, but my guess is that much of this was from the winterizing fluid that the Michigan owners had used last winter. There was a conveniently located dumping station near our camp site and it was pretty quiet around there so it seemed like a good time to get some new experience with this aspect of RV ownership. After pulling along side the dumping spot and donning some heavy duty rubber gloves, I pulled a three inch extension hose out of a large storage tube that is found by folding up the step below the driver side door. I attached a 90 degree angle quick connect fitting to the end of the extension hose, stuck the fitting in the dump station hole, and pulled the 'T' handle to open the black water tank valve. The process was repeated for the grey water tank. The dumping station has a spray hose available for a quick cleanup... and that was that.



We had an annoying nearly continuous rattle while driving. It sounded sort of like an angry pop corn popper. On a safe stretch of road, Diana got up and wandered a bit in the camper trying to pin point the source of the noise. It was coming from the 'Fantastic Fan' and vent cover. After we got home I did some Internet surfing and located a web page for the Fantastic Vent company. I sent an E-mail to their support staff explaining that we had a year 2000 model camper, were not the original owners, but were experiencing the nasty noise. After an exchange of E-mail to determine whether our vent cover was flat or domed, they sent a new vent cover via UPS at no charge. It was fairly easy to replace the old cover with the new one (except for having to climb on to the



Big Turtle Adventures



top of the camper). As soon as I removed the old vent cover the cause of the noise was obvious. The cover was cracked along the hinge for about 2/3 of the way across. This crack was not possible to see without getting right on top of the camper. Anyway, I suspect that we have solved the pop corn popping noise problem. I also promised to give the Fantastic Fan company positive reviews at every opportunity. It is quite rare these days to find this kind of service.

There is a lot to be said about the convenience of camping in relative luxury in the *Big Turtle*. Compared to any of our previous camping experiences, it is like bringing the comforts of home along with you. The question for most folks is whether it is worth the price to sleep just about anywhere you like in your own bed every night rather than sharing bedding and such with mystery motel travelers. For our part, we are enjoying the independence. We will see how we feel after living for a while with the adventure of being responsible for maintaining a private house on wheels.



Figure 3, The Big Turtle