

## FINDING THE ELUSIVE CHARDONNAY

Our time on the prairie has concluded and we head further west – this time to some wine growing country that I have heard about, the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. Our Regina friends take us to the Calgary Airport where we say our sad farewells at the “border control” and then spend some 30 minutes gradually working our way up to the screening area. Then, as always, the check of my pants with zips and my metal hips, all the bells ring and I get a “personal” search! Once again I “pass” and have time for a refreshing coffee.

Predicted bad weather doesn’t eventuate and crossing the mountains we reach our new destination, Kelowna in BC and look anxiously for our friends. They are Rotarians who we came in contact with after their daughter stayed at our RV Park in Napier many years back, saw the Rotary memorabilia in my office and remarked, *“My Dad is a Rotarian!”* We exchanged email then and continued over the years, with them at one stage coming to stay with us in Napier.

Kelowna is a city of around 125,000 however we quickly move through it and down the Okanagan Valley for nearly an hour and reach Peachland (maybe 5000) where our friends live. Their house overlooks the lake - not some little lake but rather something over 100 kilometres long! In keeping with that size, there are more than 100 wineries along the sides of the lake.

We put a day aside to visit as many as we can but in reality barely make about half a dozen. Not all of them make chardonnay but I taste whatever they have and specialize when I can find my favourite tipples. We buy a few bottles to take home for my friend has a wine cellar – though he also clogs up with whisky! We tasted that to.

Back home in the evening, we sample some of the wines and then enjoy a pre-arranged visit with an expatriate New Zealander who has lived in the valley for around 30 years. I learned of him some 12 years ago when we were doing research prior to purchasing a US truck and 5<sup>th</sup> wheeler and at that time he used to write a column in a NZ RV magazine. He described “RV-ing” in the US and Canada and invited queries – many of which came

from me. He was a great help to us when we were starting out and we have exchanged emails over the years but never met. Now we did and what a great experience it was.

A second day in “the valley” was spent admiring our friends extensive garden, picking peas, cherries and berries and then attending their Rotary luncheon meeting speaking to many Rotarians and learning of their community projects (for instance they have bought over 40 “Shelter Boxes” for use in international emergencies) In the evening a number of the Rotarians come to visit our hosts for supper and to drink some wine. I had bought a nice bottle of chardonnay thinking of taking it to NZ but had weighed it and decided it was better to drink it with these Rotary friends. We did!

Departure time approached again and I note that of a total of ten flights in this particular trip, we have now done five. By airplane flight then, we are half way! We leave early for the Kelowna airport because we have an “international” check-in as we are flying to Seattle, US. Our friends leave us at the security check and once again we make our way through the rows of people and finally make our gate. Surprisingly, we are travelling in a Q300 aircraft, just like the smaller of the two types that fly provincial airports in NZ. In reality it is a Q400, so a slightly later model perhaps, than those that fly in and out of Napier, and carries just 50 odd passengers. It seems strange though, flying international in a small turbo prop plane!

Landing at Seattle we debate which aisle to get into at border control and eventually opt for one that handles previous “electronic” visitors – and it is shorter. We automatically record our own fingerprints and photos – and then go to a “human” who does the whole procedure again manually (maybe we are not good at doing our own ones). Anyway, we are readmitted to the US.

We had earlier researched how we would get into the city, debating between taxi, shuttle and light rail. With the latter costing \$3 (as opposed to over \$100) we took that & headed in the direction of the station but we had to abandon the baggage trolley and then drag our cases. Asking an official

if I was heading in the right direction he said to just jump onto the escalator and go up two levels.

You just don't jump onto an escalator with two 23 Kg bags – you find the lift. Eleanor however, had heard his direction, swung around the corner, onto the escalator holding her handbag and our cabin bag. The latter item did not quite make the step and she did a pirouette and then came down – about four steps! The official called paramedics, an air hostess paused to help and load Eleanor into a nearby wheelchair, and the “duty manager” also turned up.

Eventually we were all checked out and the airport presumably absolved from all legal responsibility and a security lady took us to the nearby lift (that we should have been directed to at the beginning) and we ascended two floors which took us to a parking area and the extended golf cart came along and took us to the train station. I managed to buy tickets with my credit card and we soon sped into the city, clutching all our cases and at the end made our way through the large station and out into the streets where a \$5 cab ride got us to our hotel (actually I didn't have any US money so paid him twice as much in Canadian dollars!)

Our hotel is handily placed in “downtown” and while it has no restaurant, there are plenty of eating places in the vicinity. We see the “Hop On – Hop Off” bus and wish we had time to use it, like we do in every other city we visit, but sadly we do not for our main task is to visit the Boeing Aircraft factory tomorrow. We look forward to a quiet night in the hotel but find that is not the case. There are about a dozen apparently “homeless” people living in a bus stop opposite our room, and while we are on the fifth floor, I can hear them laughing and talking all night!

We know a restaurant next door, the “*Biscuit Bitch*” opens at 8am so go down ten minutes early to get in first. We are 20<sup>th</sup> in the queue! It opens and in 15 minutes we have ordered – our biscuits! I had a feeling they were scones and this proved correct. They dress them up with eggs, gravy, bacon, jam, or pretty much anything, hence the name, and they are served by a “bitch!” Refreshed and recharged we await our pre-arranged tour which arrives right on time. A bus of about 20

seats, it fills from the nearby hotels and we head north for about 30 Kms to the Boeing Aircraft factory. Of course a commentary keeps us entertained as we go along.

Arriving at the factory our driver takes us in and obtains our admission tickets. We wander about for half an hour and take photos. After that we have to lock our cameras and any small gear into a provided locker, not for security they say, but rather so that you don't drop anything while in the factory and it smashes an aircraft below causing serious damage – which has happened.

Soon we move to the theatre area, receive a talk and video and then board buses to the “real” factory nearby. We pass lines of new aircraft that have just been completed. Then we reach the building. The sheer enormity of it is difficult to describe. Under roof cover there are nearly 100 acres (or 40 hectares) of building! It is said to be the largest building in the world, and that is easy to believe. A guide takes us through tunnels and then up to viewing areas and we see aircraft (777, 787 & 747 cargo) in various stages of construction. It is staggering!! Being a Saturday, there is not much activity but that may make it easier for us to see things. It is so huge we bus between some of the areas. After an hour or so we bus back to the starting point and, of course, the obligatory shop. We buy a hat, or something, to remind us we have “been to Boeing!” Recovering our camera we take a few more photos and then catch our tour vehicle back to the city.

After a brief rest, we are met at the hotel door by a Rotarian we have been in touch with by email and who is a member of our “*Rotary Travel & Hosting Fellowship*.” She takes us to the nearby market place where we wander about and then go to a wonderful seafood restaurant and meet up with another Seattle Rotarian who we had linked up with at Convention in Toronto. He and his wife join us for dinner and what a great time we had. He had been to New Zealand and worked with our Rotary Clubs on international projects. I suspect we will meet again – somewhere.

Home weary, we sleep well and then our Rotary friend delivers us to the airport. Again we fly out, seeking more adventure & perhaps more wine!



*Our host's home*



*Picking cherries*



*Picking raspberries*



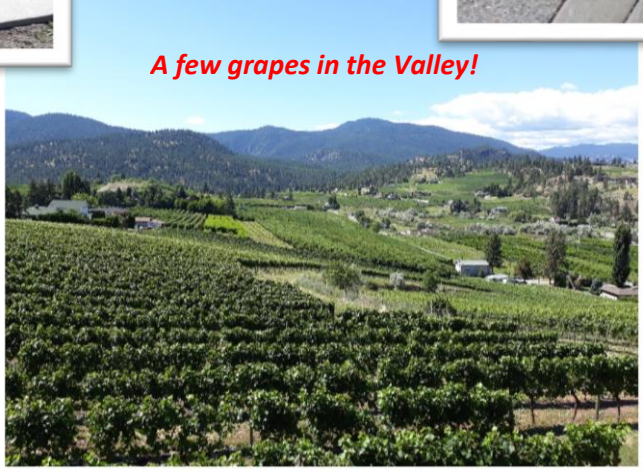
*From our host's deck*



*Peachland Rotary Clock*



*Rotary badging in Peachland*



*A few grapes in the Valley!*



*A few of the wineries in the Valley!*



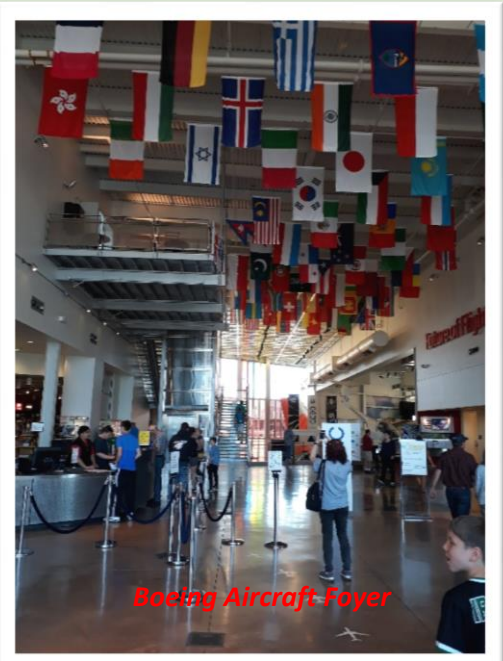
*Seattle, Washington*



*Boeing Aircraft Entry*



*Boeing Giant Aircraft Carrier*



*Boeing Aircraft Foyer*