EXCLUSIVE EXCEL WINSLOW:
FIRST SLIDEOUT ENTRY DOOR!

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Fun in the Sun Valley
EverGreen RV's Family Plan

Savoring Washington's San Juan Islands

Exploring New Market, VA, Above and Below Ground

On the Trail of the Ancients in CO and UT

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ALL-NEW CHEVY SILVERADO  INTRODUCING THE BEST AVAILABLE TOWING IN A FULL-SIZE PICKUP: 11,500 LBS*
FEATURES

16 200 Years of History
Golden Gate National Recreation Area, California

18 Civil War Sites and Spelunking in New Market, Virginia
Exploring the diverse museums and stunning geologic formations of the Shenandoah Valley

22 Lush Landscapes & Steaming Lattes
A short ferry ride from bustling Seattle gets you to the San Juans, where each island has its own charm and the pace is slower

20 Trail of the Ancients
This National Scenic Byway in Utah and Colorado offers new mysteries of a vanished civilization at every turn

30 Keeping an RV Roof in Tiptop Shape
A little TLC will go a long way in preventing leaks and expensive repairs

40 Cabinet Companion
Add-a-Drawer allows RVers to utilize otherwise wasted space to stash items that usually end up as clutter

44 Excel Winslow 375DF
Peterson Industries introduces the first-ever fifth-wheel with a slideout entryway using a unique folding step system.

46 EverGreen RV Sun Valley 300BHSL
This family bunkhouse encompasses three very distinct living zones, one expressly designed for the kids

52 Cover Me
Selecting the proper cover helps keep an RV looking nice for a long time and cuts cleaning time

Monument Valley has been used as a backdrop for dozens of movies from Stagecoach to Forrest Gump. Page 30

DEPARTMENTS

6 Driver’s Seat
Fresh Ideas

8 Letters
Readers respond loud and clear

10 Around the Bend
News, events, places and trends

14 RV Action Line
Trailer Life is your referee

20 New Products
Goodies to improve the RV lifestyle

40 Hands On
Shurhold’s Dual Action Polisher takes the pain out of waxing an RV

44 RV Clinic
Answers from the Trailer Life tech team

50 10-Minute Tech
Now why didn’t I think of that?

52 America’s Outback
Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin

On the cover: Peterson Industries pioneers an industry first with the Excel Winslow’s slideout entryway. Photo by Scott Hirko
Instant Power Wherever You Are.

People on the go like to go in style, with efficient, reliable, portable power from a Honda EU Series Generator. Whether you’re camping, tailgating or RVing, you can rely on Honda power for your coffee maker, electric lights, TV, rooftop RV AC units† and just about anything else that’ll make you feel right at home. EU Series Generators are easy to start, produce fewer emissions and are remarkably quiet. And with 17 generators in our lineup to choose from, Honda has a model that’ll be the right match for your needs. Plus, they’re covered by our Honda 3-Year Warranty*. So next time you go on a trip, don’t forget to pack the power.

†Requires two parallel-linked EU2000i generators. *Warranty applies to all Honda GX Series Engines and GX Series-powered Honda Power Equipment, 100cc or larger, purchased or put into rental service since January 1, 2009. Exceptions apply. See full warranty details at honda.com. Does not apply to EU1000 models. Please read the owner’s manual before operating your Honda Power Equipment and never use in a closed or partly enclosed area where you could be exposed to poisonous carbon monoxide. Connection of a generator to house power requires a transfer device to avoid possible injury to power company personnel. Consult a qualified electrician. ©2013 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

Honda, Circle 106 on Reader Service Card
Fresh Ideas
Are we looking at new trends?

A while back when Bryan Tillett told me about a new roof he was working on for his Excel line of fifth-wheels, my curiosity piqued big time. Most trailers are fitted with EPDM or TPO roofs, which is a rubber membrane that covers a wood substrate. The benefits of rubber seemed obvious, spearheaded by the ability to completely seal the roof without seams — helping to prevent leaks.

Rubber roofs have proven to be reliable, and for some owners, preferred when it rains since the inside stays a lot quieter. Using the same idea as rubber, Tillett worked with the Rhino Linings people to develop his Eco-Coat roof. This is the roof system that’s on the Excel Winslow featured on page 44. The Eco-Coat is sprayed on, leaving no seams or gaps. It’s thick, durable (with a proven track record as a roof covering) and it reduces the level of maintenance. For me, maintaining a rubber roof is a necessary evil, although I appreciate the fact that RVs stay dry. But cleaning a roof is not a favorite activity. Nevertheless I have perfected my own process, which is parallel to the procedures presented by Emily and Mark Fagan in the article on page 36.

The Eco-Coat roof is more expensive — it adds $3,750 to the price tag of the Excel Winslow — but when amortized over the life of a fifth-wheel, it’s a good deal. And your back will thank you. Nevertheless, the jury will be out for a while on whether the industry adapts Rhino Linings as a viable alternative to existing roofing material. The process is more complicated and requires assembly line adjustments.

The bigger news, of course, is the first-ever entryway in a slideout, described in the exclusive article on the Excel. The “why-didn’t-I-think-of-that idea” allows for exceptional floorplan creativity, which is really a big deal when producing trailers that are used for long-term livability. The concept is interesting; I’m guessing we’ll see more show up at the annual industry trade show in December.

Circling back to roof maintenance, once it’s clean, the best way to keep it — and the entire rig — that way is to cover the RV when in storage. Most of us don’t have the luxury of enclosed storage, so using a cover makes a lot of sense. As you’ll learn on page 52, there is a plethora of covers on the market, all designed to fit nicely on — and protect — any RV from the elements.

Beats frequent washing.

— Bob Livingston, publisher

ENHANCE YOUR TOWING EXPERIENCE

“I can’t believe how much nicer it is towing that trailer. It almost drives like I don’t have the trailer back there. This is something I should have done years ago.” – Karl

CENTER LINE™ Active Sway Control... New Technology in Weight Distribution Towing.

Weight distribution hitches were introduced more than forty years ago, and not much has changed until now. CENTER LINE, the industry’s first self-centering sway control system, employs compression cylinder technology to counteract trailer sway before it ever begins. The result is the smoothest, safest towing system on the market today. So bring on the cross winds, truck traffic, ruts and curves... Husky may be an old dog, but CENTER LINE is his new trick.

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Husky Towing Systems, Circle 128 on Reader Service Card
Attention-Getting Redwood

After returning from a 2½-week, 3,883-mile trip from Texas to Niagara Falls, Canada, I was thrilled to see a Redwood 36RL on the cover of your July issue. We purchased our 2013 Redwood last December and have already put almost 8,000 miles on it.

I agree with Chris Hemer’s assessment of the unit, especially the comments on the light switches and the quartz sink/stove covers. We discovered the hard way not to travel with the covers in place: The weight and bounce during travel caused our sink to come loose from the countertop. Our dealership, ExploreUSA, remounted the sink and we have not experienced any other major issues. After talking with other Redwood owners we realized it is a common experience with solid-surface sink/stove covers.

My husband loves the shelves and netting in the outside forward storage. The only change we made was the addition of the MOR/ryde sliding cargo tray. The Redwood paint scheme is very different from most RVs (we have the black and burgundy version) and we find ourselves making a lot of new friends because of all the attention it gets.

Thanks for the good review. It reaffirmed our choice to purchase our Redwood.

Dawn and Terry Adamson
Grapevine, Texas

Useful Information

Because my wife and I have a camper (a Fleetwood pop-up) that we love traveling in, I read every issue of Trailer Life from cover to cover searching for useful information that we can use now or in the future. And in almost every issue I find some. Then I scan the useful pages into a special folder on my computer, labeled by subject, for future reference. If we need to buy tires, have battery issues or our Fleetwood’s solar-power system is not working for us, I now have that trusted and expert information in the folder for easy access.

Speaking of solar energy, I propose, since the term “solar system” is already taken, that we use the term “solar-power system,” just for clarity. The solar system that we are all familiar with will not sit on our camper or go camping with us — instead, we go camping somewhere on a planet within our solar system, and we use “solar power” as a utility.

William and Kim Kremer
Santa Cruz, California

Climbing Mountains

In the August issue, regarding Ernie Carlson’s letter, he (among others) seems to think that you need a ¾-ton pickup with a diesel engine to pull anything heavier than, say, a 2,000-4,000-pound trailer. I have a 2003 half-ton Dodge Ram Quad Cab with the Hemi engine and have pulled a 31-foot 1978 Airstream through all 49 continental states. The trailer weighs 8,000-9,000 pounds. My truck has more than 100,000 miles on it. Although it only gets 9-11 MPG, it can climb mountains with no problem. On an interstate, I can set the cruise control at the speed limit and drive all day. I’m amazed how many RVers think they need the cost of a big diesel to do the job.

Ron Schafer, Indianapolis, Indiana

Spot-On Historical Reporting

The article by Steven B. Waite in the July issue regarding the Gettysburg National Military Park is one of the best ever featured in your magazine. The historical reporting and current recommendations are spot on.

My family’s connection to Gettysburg dates back to 1863, when my great-great-grandfather Michael Jacobs was a professor and acting president of Gettysburg College when the battle was fought there. His home is now a cherished landmark smack in the middle of the village. He is the one who escorted the Union generals to the top of the Lutheran Library building so they could observe the “lay of the land” and station their troops accordingly.

During one of many family visits to Gettysburg when I was a child, we engaged the services of a professional guide to ride with us as we toured the battlefield. This gentleman had already served more than 50 years as a guide, and he had met veterans from both sides during the 50th and 75th Annual Reunions of the battle. When I asked him what they thought about the condition of the battlefield, he said they all replied the same. “The trees are much thicker now. We’d have had much better cover!”

Ralph Paul Jacobs, Long Beach, California

What is your primary RVing/camping method?

47% Fifth-Wheel
42% Travel Trailer
8% Motorhome
3% Toy Hauler

Write to: Trailer Life, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, California 93001 or email info@trailerlife.com. Please include your full name and location.
YOUR RV ISN’T A CAR. DON’T INSURE IT LIKE ONE.
Progressive covers your RV in ways auto policies don’t. So if you ever get in an accident and need to leave your RV at the shop for repairs, we’ll cover the cost of your hotel. Keeping family trips on the road, now that’s Progressive.
Georgia On My Mind

RVers will delight in Atlanta’s multitude of attractions

by Laura Michaels

Atlanta has grown from a tiny Georgia settlement into a metropolitan destination of more than 5 million people and plentiful attractions showcasing its history, beauty, culture and urban environment.

Begin by exploring the 33 acres of the Atlanta History Center, located in the historic Buckhead neighborhood. Not only is the center home to Atlanta’s renowned history museum, it also gives visitors a look at life in the 1860s at the Tullie Smith Farm. Costumed interpreters lead tours of the house, which is surrounded by a blacksmith shop, corncrib, dairy, smokehouse, barn and slave cabin. One of Atlanta’s most recognizable landmarks, the Swan House, built in 1928, is also on the grounds. Walk through the many rooms of this elegant, beautifully restored mansion before strolling around the grounds to enjoy garden views and cascading fountains. The Centennial Olympic Games Museum opened at the center in 2006 and boasts a collection of artifacts, interactive displays and multimedia presentations showcasing the 1996 Games. Tickets are $16.50 and also include the three-story, Tudor Revival Margaret Mitchell House in Midtown, where the author wrote Gone With the Wind.

Also in the Midtown area is the Atlanta Botanical Garden, an urban oasis that hosts many exhibitions, events and classes. Wildflower trails and gardens cover 30 acres and include the newest addition to the Storza Woods — a 40-foot-high suspension bridge dubbed the Canopy Walk. Take in the heady fragrance of orchids from Madagascar, Asia and Ecuador in the 10,000-square-foot Fuqua Orchid Center, and don’t miss the conservation gardens and amphibian displays that highlight carnivorous plant bogs from the Southeast and endangered frog species from around the world. Daily admission is $18.95.

A trip to Atlanta isn’t complete without a stop to explore Underground Atlanta, six city blocks of retail, specialty and gift shops, plus dozens of restaurants. The Underground takes advantage of the viaducts first built in the 1920s over the city’s many railroad tracks. Guided walking tours showcase the area’s original architecture and rich history.

Don’t forget, Atlanta plays host to the Camping World/Good Sam Rally October 17-20. Call 877-749-7122 or visit www.therally.com.

Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau

A fireworks display is part of the nightly entertainment at The Rally in Atlanta.
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Your adventures unfold at Garmin.com/RV

Garmin Corporation, Circle 107 on Reader Service Card
EverGreen’s Focus on the Family

If the kitchen is your focal point in an RV, the new Bay Hill 340RK from EverGreen will get your attention. This fifth-wheel’s rear-kitchen floorplan features a full breakfast bar with raised seating, a corner range with copper hood, full-sized pantry with etched glass and pullout cabinet trays. Sidel up to the centerpiece bar where there’s lots of room to slice and dice and prepare meals. Mark Boessler, Ever-Green’s president, said, “Our newest Bay Hill rear kitchen floorplan has all the cooking and entertainment amenities for those families who always end up in the kitchen.”

A dining table that seats four is next to the fireplace/heater with entertainment center above. A banister staircase leads to the slideout master bedroom with a queen bed, a 60-inch dresser, a large wardrobe prepped for a washer and dryer, a sliding glass wardrobe and two corner shelves.

And families are what EverGreen is targeting. The company claims that the 340RK can easily sleep five with the optional king bed, hide-a-bed and sleeper sofa. The standard model includes two theater reclining seats in the living room slideout as well as a single oversized swivel recliner or an optional dual recliner (shown in photo).

Base MSRP: $55,100

574-825-4298, www.goevergreenrv.com

Travel Plans Unaffected by Rising Fuel Prices

According to a recent survey by Coach-Net of its members, RV owners are not letting elevated fuel prices dampen their enthusiasm for travel and adventure. More than 72 percent of members of Coach-Net, a provider of RV roadside and technical assistance, indicated that rising fuel prices would have no effect on their upcoming travel plans. RV owners also indicated their continuing preference for longer road trips. Almost 50 percent said they generally travel more than 1,000 miles when taking a trip in their RV; closer-to-home road trips of 100-499 miles ranked second and midrange trips of 500-1,000 miles ranked third.

Hershey, Pennsylvania, RV Show, September 11-15

The 45th annual Hershey Show, sponsored by the Pennsylvania RV & Camping Association, is set to run September 11-15, 2013. The event will be held at the Giant Center in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and features more than 21 acres of RVs on display and dozens of RV-related seminars. This year’s attendees will have a chance to win a new 2014 Rockwood Pop-Up Tent Camper courtesy of Rockwood RV and Camping World of Hanover. The giveaway is sponsored by WGAL-TV, Camping World of Hanover and Rockwood. See website for $1 off coupon for one adult admission. 888-303-2887, www.prvca.org

Three new brand segments for KOA

Kampgrounds of America (KOA) is in the process of rebranding each of its 485 campgrounds into one of three segments: a KOA Journey, a KOA Holiday or a KOA Resort. The Journey-designated campgrounds will be close to major highways and include long pull-through sites. Holiday campgrounds will be designed for getaways or short vacations, and include family activities, deluxe cabins and additional amenities. Campgrounds identified as Resorts will offer luxurious pools, patio RV sites, deluxe cabin linen service and a specially trained activities and recreation staff.

www.koa.com
Coachmen’s Golden Anniversary

Coachmen RV, a division of Forest River, is celebrating 50 years of business with a new Brookstone fifth-wheel. Five floorplans ranging in 34 to 39 feet are currently in the lineup, with more to come. The first golden anniversary fifth-wheel to roll off the line was the 37-foot triple slide with a base MSRP of $55,000. Fred Hershberger, general manager of Coachmen RV’s fifth-wheel division said, “Our design and product team has been deliberate in building the most user-friendly and functional luxury fifth-wheel available.”

The company has streamlined the new fifth-wheel into one product that replaces all prior Brookstone products. Floorplans have been designed around convenience and maximum usability for storage. There’s dedicated storage for a full-sized kitchen trash can and drawers for silverware, long utensils, a lay-down spice rack, and pots and pans. There’s also a wine rack, a broom closet, dual full-sized clothes-basket storage, a cabinet that stores a mini step-ladder and a hide-away pet-feeding station. A dishwasher is optional. Other features include a 50-inch LED Smart TV, MCD roller shades and an optional powered inclining bed. Hershberger says, “The 50th Anniversary Brookstone combines ‘best in class’ aerodynamics with the LCI Correct Track Alignment System, Dexter Axles and MOR/ryde suspension.”

574-825-5821  www.coachmenrv.com

Outdoor Fun for Kids

Camp ABC: A Place for Outdoor Fun by Zora and David Aiken is a wonderful book to pique a kid’s interest in camping, whether it’s enjoying a full-service RV resort or pitching a tent in the middle of a forest. The book’s simple rhymes and colorful illustrations encourage a child’s interest in nature, including the importance of conserving natural habitats, birdwatching, kayaking, hiking and enjoying other outdoor activities. The 32-page hardcover book offers 26 camping-related activities for children up to 6 years of age.


RV Dealer Helps Paws and Stripes

Kay’s RV in Moriarty, New Mexico, raised $6,000 in June for Paws and Stripes, a nonprofit organization that assists veterans in adopting shelter dogs and training them as service dogs. The dogs help wounded veterans address post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. The event consisted of a rummage sale and white elephant auction in which guests made bids on prizes donated by area businesses. Additionally, Kay’s RV invited customers to Hidden Valley RV Park in Tijeras, New Mexico, for Camp With A Cause where a portion of the fee was donated to Paws and Stripes. Veteran and Paws and Stripes cofounder Jim Stanek joined campers to speak about how the organization is helping veterans.

The event was inspired by Kay’s RV’s annual tradition of hosting a summer campout with its customers. “We wanted to find a way to give back to the veterans who have so bravely served our country. The outpouring of support for the event was a powerful example of the RVing community’s support of our nation’s veterans, generosity and eagerness to help others,” said Kay Wilks, owner of the dealership.

Paws and Stripes, www.pawsandstripes.com
Kay’s RV, www.kaysrv.com
Better Late Than Never

Hoping to receive compensation for damage done to their RV while it was being towed, two readers asked RV Action Line for help. They wrote:

» In December, we had a mechanical breakdown with our motorhome while traveling through Collins, Mississippi. We called our roadside assistance company, Coach-Net, to be towed to a nearby Freightliner dealer. We had never had our motorhome towed before, so we were worried about possible damage from being towed. The Coach-Net representative we spoke with assured us that if any damage occurred by the wrecker they sent, it would be covered.

As the wrecker driver was hooking up our motorhome, I told him we should probably slide the hitch ball assembly out of the receiver so there would be no possibility of hitting the rear gravel guard and damaging it. He said it would be OK, that he towed all the time and he knew what he was doing.

He only went 100 yards before hitting a dip in the road that tore an 8-inch-long, 3-inch-wide gash in the rear gravel deflector. The deflector, at that time, had a very small hole in it where the end of the ball punched through it. The repair cost was $718.

The driver said it would be OK, that he towed all the time and he knew what he was doing.

We have made repeated attempts to get this resolved with Coach-Net. During the past three months, we called more than a dozen times and each time were told that someone would get right back with us, but so far no one has. We think we have been more than patient. Any help would be appreciated.

Shirley and Leo Bradley, Yukon, Oklahoma

RV Action Line contacted Coach-Net on the Bradleys’ behalf. Soon afterward, we received the following response from the company:

THE COMPANY RESPONDED

We appreciate receiving a copy of the letter RV Action Line received from the Bradleys so we have the chance to resolve the situation to our members’ satisfaction. Upon review, because the damage to the rear gravel deflector was obviously not pre-existing, Coach-Net has reimbursed the Bradleys for the full amount of their claim. We have spoken to Mrs. Bradley, apologized for the delay and let her know her check was in the mail. She indicated that she is pleased with the reimbursement for the damages.

We are happy we were able to reach a favorable outcome and look forward to serving the Bradleys in the future.

Lisa Davis
Chief Operating Officer
Coach-Net
Irving, Texas

Wheelie Impressed

A happy reader wrote the following letter to RV Action Line about a positive experience he recently had with a company:

» With people having a lot of not-so-good experiences dealing with RV service companies, I had to write about a company that exceeded all of my expectations. While washing my 2008 Keystone fifth-wheel, I found a crack in one of the wheels. I contacted Tredit Tire & Wheel Co. in Elkhart, Indiana. After emailing pictures of the wheel cracks to Adam Deak at Tredit, I received the following reply:

“The Tredit wheel from your Keystone Montana is a discontinued product. So in order to warrant your cracked wheel, I’d like to send you four of the newer replacement-style wheels, at no charge to you, of course. I have attached a photo of the replacement wheels. If these are OK, just give me the go ahead and I’ll get them ready and sent out to you. Also, I will likely ask for the other wheels in return. The new wheels will come with call tags so all you’ll need to do is put them in our boxes and take them to a UPS facility. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thanks!”

As you can imagine, I was shocked. All I had to pay for was the dismount and remount of the tires. So I am glad to say, there are good guys still out there. Thank you, Tredit Tire!

Edward McGrory
New Braunfels, Texas

Keystone Montana is a discontinued product. So in order to warrant your cracked wheel, I’d like to send you four of the newer replacement-style wheels, at no charge to you, of course. I have attached a photo of the replacement wheels. If these are OK, just give me the go ahead and I’ll get them ready and sent out to you. Also, I will likely ask for the other wheels in return. The new wheels will come with call tags so all you’ll need to do is put them in our boxes and take them to a UPS facility. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thanks!”
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200 Years of History

Camping, hiking, scenic views, Nike Missile Site and Alcatraz Island — all in a national park that hugs the California coastline for nearly 60 miles.

The most recognizable and iconic manmade structure in the Western United States is indisputably California’s Golden Gate Bridge. This engineering marvel has been featured in songs, movies, television shows and countless family snapshots. Driving across its impressive span — or better yet, walking across it — heading to or from the culturally rich city of San Francisco, grants travelers an appreciation of the opportunities, the ambition and the promise of the Golden State. The bridge is, of course, essential to commerce, and its red-orange hue complements the sunlight that settles nightly beyond the Pacific, reminding residents and travelers that the Golden Gate effectively represents the Western edge of the United States. Yet as quintessentially American as the Golden Gate Bridge is, it is only one small aspect of the unbelievably inviting and enormous Golden Gate National Recreation Area that surrounds the bridge.

Traversing the California coast for nearly 60 miles in and around San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area is one of the world’s largest urban national parks. Included in this expanse are 739 historic structures, including five national historic landmarks, nine documented cultural landscapes (including dairy ranches), 61 recorded archaeological sites and more than 3 million historic objects and artifacts. Inquisitive visitors can learn about the area’s Spanish and Mexican periods, about the Coast Miwok and the Ohlone people who once made their homes here, and about the country’s largest collection of military installations and fortifications.

Within the recreation area also sits Alcatraz, an island in the middle of San Francisco Bay famous for its notorious federal prison. And yet The Rock, as Alcatraz has been dubbed, has a far more complex history than having once housed Al Capone and other famous prisoners: Alcatraz was home to the first lighthouse on the West Coast, at one time had 110 cannons mounted on its soil as part of the first U.S. fort on the West Coast and was the birthplace of the American Indian Red Power Movement.

So numerous and diverse are the historic and outdoor activities within Golden Gate National Recreation Area that 17 million people annually partake of them.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area
415-561-4700, www.nps.gov/goga

DID YOU KNOW?

Golden Gate National Recreation Area has the fourth largest number of federally protected or endangered species of all 401 units with the NPS.
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User Guide
Contents
CIVIL WAR SITES AND SPELUNKING IN
NEW MARKET, VIRGINIA

Founded in 1796, New Market lies in the heart of Virginia’s scenic Shenandoah Valley. This small, peaceful town with a mere 1,700 residents boasts lovely tree-lined streets, quaint shops, historic buildings and numerous caverns in and around the area. However, New Market wasn’t always peaceful. It was once the site of a bloody battle.

That battle is memorialized at the New Market Battlefield State Historical Park. All sites within the park — a historic farm, walking trails, picnic areas and the magnificent Hall of Valor Civil War Museum — are within easy walking distance over mostly flat terrain. With a map obtained at the museum, we opted for the self-guided battlefield tour that provided us with an opportunity to reflect upon the social and military struggle that had taken place in New Market.

The museum is a memorial to the Virginia Military Institute cadets and all soldiers who fought during the Battle of 1864. It houses fascinating artifacts and dioramas conveying the story of Virginia during the Civil War. The unique stained-glass window mural, depicting the war in the Shenandoah Valley, is awesome. An award-winning film, Field of Lost Shoes, plays every hour and dramatically describes the battle and...
why 257 young cadets from the Virginia Military Institute joined the Confederate forces to help defend the Valley and, miraculously, won.

After spending some time inside, we roamed the grounds examining displays that made history come alive once again. Along the 1-mile numbered path, we found key points of the final Confederate assault of the Union line, which helped to visualize what the Cadet Corps had to contend with. Included is the Bushong Farm where several generations of Bushongs lived before the orchard became a battlefield and the family’s house was turned into a hospital. The lower floor replicates what the hospital looked like when it was used to care for wounded soldiers. Be forewarned: If children are with you or you get queasy seeing blood, skip this room because imagining the soldiers’ suffering is upsetting while looking down at the 10-12 inches of straw. The straw wasn’t used to protect the flooring, but to absorb oozing blood and give the doctors traction while operating — without antiseptic or anesthesia to block the pain.

Located outside the house is farm equipment from that period — the typical semi-cylindrical oven used by Valley families, a large hanging bell next to the oven used to summon the family to dinner or as a warning signal, a summer kitchen, wash house, and blacksmith and wheelwright shops.

After their victory, New Market’s citizens helped the Confederate States Army bury the dead (including 10 cadets), care for the wounded and search for abandoned Federal supplies. While this battle was a success for New Market, it was also the last of major Southern victories.

In addition, we explored numerous caverns near New Market. We started with Endless Caverns, a limestone solution cave, adjacent to the NASCAR RV Resort. The RV resort is a deluxe campground with exceptionally large, wooded, pull-through sites offering full hookups, clean restrooms and hiking trails. One moderately strenuous trail leads to the largest lighted sign in the nation, where the name, “Endless Caverns” is spelled out in letters 70 feet high! The sign can also be reached by automobile.

Two boys who were chasing a rabbit across their grandfather’s farm discovered the caverns in 1879. Just when they thought they had cornered the rabbit between two boulders, it disappeared into a hole and, instead of finding the rabbit when they crawled in after it, they found the caverns.

During our 75-minute guided tour 145 feet below ground, we learned that the temperature in the cavern remains at 55 degrees year-round. Walking can be a bit tricky, as the trail is uneven and wet in spots, so use the handrails. Many explorers have attempted to reach the end of the caverns but, to this day, no one has been successful in finding the end — thus its name, Endless Caverns.

We admired the striking colors and shapes of hundreds of formations, learning that the white coloring is from calcite deposits, green from iron oxide and blue from manganese. Since the acid in water only dissolves a tenth of an inch of limestone per year, it’s easy to understand why it took centuries for these caverns to form.

Highlights of the cavern include the huge Ballroom where weddings are held, seeing formations known as “Draperies” that hang freestyle and those that cling against the wall, called...
“Curtains.” The scariest part was when our tour guide turned off the lights and we stood in total darkness for a couple of minutes. Without light, we realized we’d never be able to find our way out!

From New Market we traveled a few miles west to the famous Luray Caverns for a different perspective. Designated a U.S. Natural Landmark by the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service in 1974, Luray was discovered in 1878 by a tinsmith who felt a draft of cool air rising from a hole in the ground. He and a companion carefully widened the opening, climbed down and found the caverns.

The Cathedral Room houses the “Great Stalacpipe Organ,” reputed to be the world’s largest musical instrument. Covering 3.5 acres, it produces tones of symphonic quality when electronically tapped by rubber-tipped mallets. Leland Sprinkle, the mathematician and electronic scientist who began the monumental three-year project, searched the vast chambers of the caverns selecting stalactites to precisely match a musical scale. Ultimately, in 1954, he invented this one-of-a-kind instrument.

Like other visitors, we couldn’t resist tossing a coin into the large subterranean pool of water that’s more than 6 feet deep and known as the Wishing Well. When the pool is drained, once a year, the coins are removed, counted, bagged and deposited in a special bank account for future distribution to charitable organizations. So far more than $450,000 has been donated.

Included in the admission is entry to the adjacent Car and Carriage Caravan Museum, which traces the history of America in an exhibit featuring more than 140 items relating to transportation dating back to 1725. The rare 1892 Benz, one of the oldest cars in the country, is still in operating condition.

Also on-site is the Luray Valley Museum, which celebrates the region’s Shenandoah culture. It features numerous displays of the area’s artifacts from the 1750s to the 1920s, including a German Bible dating from 1536. Here, the history of the early settlers is told, from their decorative arts to their search for religious freedom. In addition, a collection of historic local buildings have been moved to this site and restored to represent a small 19th-century farming community.

Luckily, we were in time to hear the bells at the Luray Singing Tower opposite Luray Caverns. Erected in 1937, at 117 feet high, it contains a carillon of 47 bells, with the largest weighing 7,640 pounds and 6 feet in diameter, and the smallest weighing 12½ pounds.

After the tour, we stopped at The Garden Maze 100 yards past Luray Caverns. Said to be the largest one of its kind in the Middle Atlantic states, it was one of the highlights of our trip. When we tried to find our way out of this lovely 1-acre ornamental garden, we kept going back and forth until “rescued” by one of the attendants. She described the trick to getting through, and noted that mazes have existed for centuries in scores of cultures in countless forms around the world. This half-mile-long maze consists of more than 1,500 8-foot-tall, 4-foot-wide dark American arborvitae. To make our journey more complicated, and baffling, a misting fog was set off at various locations to provide cooling and special effects. We had to laugh when it began raining during the fog! Fountains and various adornments are tucked into nooks and crannies and an elevated platform provides a good view of the maze below.

On another day, we drove to Shenandoah Caverns where several attractions await visitors for one admission fee. Discovered in 1884 while building a division of the Southern Railway, it opened to visitors in 1922. This was the easiest cavern to explore with paved passageways, no steps to climb and hardly any grades — and an elevator that takes visitors from the main center to 60 feet below.

The one-hour, 1-mile guided tour was unforgettable, especially Bacon Hall, named for the formations...
that resemble huge strips of bacon suspended in air. Many large areas were profusely decorated with thick coatings of flowstone and giant drapery stalactites, while a narrow passageway led into a pretty alcove containing an array of small stalactites and columns.

At Goat Head Rock, the deepest point in the caverns at 220 feet, we admired additional sheets of bacon formations, more stalactites, stalagmites and beautiful flowstone formed by calcium carbonate masses covering the walls.

One of the delightful attractions at Shenandoah Caverns is Main Street of Yesteryear — a collection of animated window displays that had once graced the windows of many department stores. Winding our way through displays more than 50 years old, we delighted in the family of growling gigantic stuffed bears originally featured in the 1993 Rose Bowl Parade, a working circus under the big top, Cinderella at the Ball and many more.

We also enjoyed seeing the smallest working post office in the United States. When the caverns first opened, the post office was in operation 24 hours a day for hotel guests, but it closed during World War II and reopened in 1966.

Another on-site attraction is the American Celebration on Parade, a 40,000-square-foot building housing parade floats, props and sets from major national celebrations. We admired the Statue of Liberty, a 40-foot-tall, 1,700-pound statue greeting visitors at the entrance. Some of the most impressive floats are the American Eagle theme float built for the 2001 Inaugural Parade, the huge American flag designed for President Reagan’s second inauguration in 1985 and the Four Native Americans Exhibit, outlining the history of the Shenandoah Valley. The sculptured Native American Indian head was built around a tractor that towed a large Thanksgiving float in the Philadelphia Thanksgiving Parade. Later, it was also used in President Clinton’s inaugural parade.

Our visit to New Market proved to be a fun and educational experience above and below ground. Whether you’re an American history buff, or have an interest in geology, you’ll find something to enjoy at New Market.

Luray Caverns 540-743-6551, www.luraycaverns.com (Garden Maze, 540-843-0769)
New Market Battlefield State Historical Park 866-515-1864, www2.vmi.edu/museum/nm
Shenandoah Caverns 888-422-8376, www.shenandoahcaverns.com
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September 2013 TRAILERLIFE 21
Lime Kiln Lighthouse is on the west side of San Juan Island. The name is derived from the lime kilns built nearby in the 1860s. It’s a good place to spot orcas that make the waters of Haro Strait their summer home.

LUSH LANDSCAPES & STEAMING LATTES

From bustling Seattle a short ferry ride gets you to the San Juans, where each island has its own charm and the pace is slower.

It’s a misty, gray morning in my hometown in Colorado and I’m actually glad — because it feels like Seattle. I’d just spent six days in the gloriously green, vibrant Pacific Northwest city and the nearby, blissfully tranquil San Juan Islands, part of the state of Washington. Indeed, my mind is now filled with memories of enormous rhododendron, steaming lattes, tidal pools, and hikes and bicycle rides through woods so dense that our eyes had to adjust to the light. We met some of the friendliest people anywhere — we’d stop for a moment with a map in hand and locals would rush over, offering to help! We did and saw so much in our short stay, yet we felt we had just touched the surface. We had originally planned our trip to the area to see the Olympic Mountains, and ended up visiting the three major islands of the San Juan Islands, a 172-island archipelago north of Seattle. No wonder Lonely Planet named the San Juan Islands No. 3 on its list for the “Top 10 U.S. Destinations for 2013” — they are spectacularly beautiful. The islands, varying in size from 57 square miles to the area of a city lot, are mostly famed for the three we visited — Orcas, San Juan and Lopez. Each has its own personality and draw, but all enjoy daylight until 9:30 or even 10 p.m. during the summer, have splendid forests with wildlife galore (bald eagles, sea otters, seals, sea lions, deer, turkeys and ospreys) exquisite beaches, as well as freshwater lakes, waterfalls and rivers, and whale-watching tours. Each also has fresh farmers markets and restaurants ranging from upscale to fast food (although never a chain, thankfully!) and at least one large grocery store. San Juan and Lopez islands’ local wineries are pleasant stops for tastings and purchases. The climate here is temperate, with average lows not getting below the mid-30s and average highs topping out at 69 degrees in August. The heaviest rain months are

PHOTO BY ROBIN JACOBSON

Lime Kiln Lighthouse is on the west side of San Juan Island. The name is derived from the lime kilns built nearby in the 1860s. It’s a good place to spot orcas that make the waters of Haro Strait their summer home.
October through January.

Driving two hours (80 miles) north from Seattle to the Washington state ferry port of Anacortes (fueled by superb coffee from locally owned Penguin Coffee) we took the 40-minute ferry trip to horseshoe-shaped Orcas Island, known as the largest (57 square miles) of the San Juans. Orcas is known for 2,409-foot Mount Constitution, affording the most spectacular views in the islands, located within the 5,252-acre incredibly lush Moran State Park. Strolling around Eastsound Village, an enchanting little area of shops, bistros and flower-bedecked, porch-wrapped homes, we meandered past the Oddfellows Hall. From there, we visited Orcas Island Pottery, the oldest pottery in the Northwest, and then ate at Madrona Bar & Grill, a casual and friendly restaurant with a lovely waterfront view and juicy burgers.

Next, we took the ferry to 55-square-mile San Juan Island with about 2,000 year-round residents, and docked in the lively 1-square-mile town of Friday Harbor. San Juan is the island that gets the action — with a “real” county seat town that sports many 19th-century wooden fishing village homes, art galleries (check out Arctic Raven Gallery for fine Pacific Northwest Native American arts), boutiques, museums (including The Whale Museum) and many dining spots. Rumor Mill specializes in live music almost every night, with outdoor seating, tasty food and a good happy hour.

San Juan Island features splendid hikes and beaches and unusual delights such as the Krystal Acres Alpaca Farm, a pastoral paradise where the adorable South American animals graze. The gift shop has exquisite creations made of the supremely soft, warm wool from the alpacas. It’s pricey, but true quality that lasts forever. We enjoyed visiting and learning about the so-called Pig War at the English and American Camps — a fascinating history of a time in the 1800s when this island was manned by the two nations’ militaries due to a bureaucratic snafu. Best of all, Lime Kiln State Park (aka Whale Watch Park) is probably the best place anywhere to see orcas from the shore, particularly from June to August.

A short ferry ride took us to Lopez Island, with about 2,400 residents, nicknamed the “Friendly Island.” Agricultural and peaceful (with grazing lambs, horses, cows, goats and pigs), it’s ideal for bicycling. The 29.5-square-mile island is famed for its organic farms, lovely hikes and Lopez Island Creamery (we decadently ate a whole pint of its Coffee Toffee Crunch ice cream while lazing on the green grass outside the shop). Some of the most beautiful sites are Agate Beach County Park with its tidal pools (check for low tide for best sightings), Shark Reef Sanctuary (sea lions and seals are at the farthest point), secluded Watmough Bay and Spencer Spit State Park. Be

(Below left) Seals bask in the sun at Shark Reef Point on Lopez Island. If you’re lucky, you may spot gray whales as well. (Below right) At Seattle Aquarium’s exhibit, Life on the Edge, you can touch some of the many fascinating creatures that dwell in the tide pools.
sure to get specific directions to these places as they are not so easy to find. The island is dotted with meadows interspersed with old-growth cedar and fir forests leading to rocky shores and cliffs. A not-to-be-missed night out is the lovely and surprisingly reasonable Bay Café with its incredible sunset view, exquisite cuisine and great wine list.

SEATTLE HERE WE COME

Seattle was now our destination, so we took the 40-minute ferry back to Anacortes and rushed in to get another Penguin latte. We bought City Passes, a coupon book that gave us entry to six attractions at about half the normal price. Leave your vehicle at the RV park, as Seattle provides good public transportation, and the Emerald City Trolley takes you on a hop-on/hop-off tour of the major tourist attractions. We also walked between many of the sites.

The iconic Space Needle, a futuristic 520-foot-tall observation tower, whisks you up to 360-degree views of Seattle and beyond, way beyond. Come early or late (open until midnight) to avoid the crowds — it’s especially pretty right before dusk. Just in front of the Needle, you’ll find the EMP (Experience Music Project/Science Fiction Museum), a fantastical bloblike mass designed by Frank Gehry. EMP pays homage to local boy Jimi Hendrix, with extensive exhibits and a large interactive area where visitors can try out their own music. My photographer made his own jam session with an electric guitar.

(continued on page 28)
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User Guide
Contents
On the same block lies the Pacific Science Center with interactive areas focusing on dinosaurs, insects and marine life — and an outdoor water park where adults play along with kids. Another gem is the Chihuly Garden and Glass Museum, with room after room of Seattle-glass artisan Dale Chihuly’s incredible work, as well as the surrounding gorgeous natural flower gardens. Seattle’s waterfront was the original Skid Road, but the historic district now thrives with gorgeously restored buildings, unique boutiques and inviting cafés, and backs up to the delightful Pike Place Market, an enormous, mostly indoor farmers market that sells everything under the sun. The seafood and fish shops are famed for their showy antics where employees toss large fish to each other to the crowd’s cheers. This fishmonger is serious, however, about only selling sustainable seafood — no endangered fish or farm-raised salmon is allowed. To experience the Market coming to life, arrive at opening time at 9 a.m., and by 11 a.m. or so, the crowds will have filled in. You’ll find many coffee shops, including the original Starbucks, still with its logo out front with its truly topless mermaid. You’ll also find The Crumpet Shop, Piroshky Russian Bakery, Fran’s Chocolates, and dozens and dozens of other venues in which to sample. Check out Ventures Gifts for Good, a shop that sells beautiful and intriguing products made by local artisans as well as by developmentally disabled people.

Moving on, the nearby Seattle Aquarium is a joy, with fine exhibits depicting a salmon’s lifecycle and a large sea otter area (eliciting endless “Aw, how cute — I want one” exclamations from the crowd), a fabulous underwater dome filled with local sea life where I could sit transfixed for hours and a mesmerizing exhibit of the brilliant-orange giant Pacific octopus, the largest in the world — and this one’s a showoff! After seeing all of that live sea life, we strolled to Pier 57 next door and feasted on cooked seafood at The Crab Pot, a wildly popular Seattle tradition that serves up seafeasts of mussels, clams, crab, shrimp, andouille.
sausage, salmon, corn and potatoes. I ordered a succulent filet of Copper River salmon.

Ballard Locks, more properly known as the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks, built in 1911, is a fascinating landmark. Its adjoining museum draws onlookers daily as it shows how Seattle’s freshwater lake system is protected from the saltwater of Puget Sound. The locks also have a fish ladder that is designed to help the migrating salmon jump up the levels to enter the fresh water of Salmon Bay. A glorious arboretum lies in front of the locks, filled with exquisite trees and flowers.

Beyond the locks, take a stroll in the charming Ballard neighborhood, which was once a bastion of Scandinavian immigrants and is now a hip enclave of cafés and shops with brick streets. Seattle is full of these pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods — others are Belltown (where we happened upon the delicious and inexpensive Sarajevo Lounge with Bosnian food and entertainment), Fremont (find the troll — everyone will know what you mean), Madison Park and Magnolia, to name just a few.

Despite the Seattle drizzle, everyone seems to be outside, but on a sunny day, they are basking. The area is chock-full of cyclists, and a special way to get your Seattle sightseeing in while having a bit of exercise is with the Seattle Sampler bike tours, led by the very well-run Bicycle Adventures. The operator is willing to work with those who don’t need hotel rooms, such as RVers, and those who want a shorter tour than the standard four-day one. The tour includes three city days and one in the magnificent Cascade Mountains, cycling through an old railroad tunnel to head down into waterfalls, thick forests, rock walls, lakes and tumbling rivers.

There’s so much to see and do — museums, parks, shops, cultural offerings, beautiful landscapes — that we couldn’t fit it all into one trip. Memories of lattes in hand, layers on our bodies to shield against the drizzle, salmon in our bellies — it was all part of a rich experience that we plan to repeat.

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In an age where scientists have been able to explain the workings of everything from the smallest subatomic particles to the movements of distant galaxies, I’m happy to report there’s a place where age-old mysteries still linger like the intoxicating scent of purple sage after an afternoon thunderstorm.

Better still is the fact that getting here is as simple — and enjoyable — as following the Trail of the Ancients Scenic Byway as it meanders its way across southeast Utah and southwestern Colorado. From the forces that created its uniquely whimsical rock formations to the unexplained disappearance of the prehistoric people who are its namesake, you might think of this byway as a thread connecting a long string of unanswered questions.

That said, there is one thing of which I am certain. Namely that the Trail of the Ancients is a must-do for any RVer looking to discover the innumerable, and oftentimes surprising, pleasures that await along The Scenic Route.

This National Scenic Byway in Utah and Colorado offers new mysteries of a vanished civilization at every turn.

article and photos by Alan Rider
More Than Scenery

One of the reasons my family and I hit the road last summer for this Trailer Life series (see our last installment on Louisiana’s Great River Road in February’s issue) celebrating the 20th anniversary of the National Scenic Byways program was to seek out stretches of asphalt that have their own unique character.

In the case of the 480-mile Trail of the Ancients, that distinctive quality is defined in part by its remoteness. As a local store clerk I met told me, “This part of the Four Corners region may not be the middle of nowhere, but on a clear day you can see it from here.”

Adding to this byway’s appeal is the mystery of the Anasazi — a name taken from a Navajo word that’s often translated as the “ancient ones” — who once called these rugged canyons and wind-swept plateaus home. Despite the abundant archaeological evidence of their presence here, theirs is a culture that we know precious little about beyond the educated guesses put forth by scientists over the past century.

Just to keep things interesting, seemingly everywhere you turn here you’ll find jaw-dropping views of multihued pinnacles, buttes and arches, often backdropped by snowcapped 14,000-foot peaks, and always set against impossibly brilliant-blue skies. Even so, the Trail of the Ancients’ appeal goes well beyond the scenery of what the local Navajos’ creation stories call this Glittering World.

Into the Valley

We began our latest adventure along The Scenic Route by turning northeast on U.S. 163 out of Kayenta, Arizona. As we left this last remnant of modern life behind, we passed weathered roadside stands where many local Navajos sell their jewelry and crafts, and headed into wide-open country bordered by steep cliffs and dotted with rugged buttes that hint at the grandeur to come.

As if on cue, as soon as we crossed the Utah state line we caught our first glimpse of Monument Valley, a landscape that immediately looked familiar despite the fact that this was our first visit. The cause of this déjà vu moment wasn’t a mystery, however,
given the fact that this area has been used as a backdrop for countless Hollywood films, from director John Ford’s epic 1938 Western Stagecoach to Forrest Gump.

While it’s certainly possible to get a look at Monument Valley from the road, we opted to pay the modest entry fee for the Navajo Tribal Park. At the modern visitors center, spacious outdoor patios afforded us an ever-changing panoramic view of formations like Sentinel Mesa and the aptly named East and West mittens. Inside, a small but well-done museum chronicling the tribe’s history gave us an excuse to linger awhile in the air conditioning.

Heading back out into the midday heat, it was time to get a look at this dramatic landscape up close. Unfortunately, because we had our 37-foot trailer in tow, taking the self-guided driving tour along the park’s 17 miles of dirt road was out of the question.

Undeterred, we headed straight for the small booths across the parking lot from the visitors center where we booked a four-wheel-drive tour. While concerned, the spectacular views made it a much more interesting alternative to the longer route over paved roads, but suffice it to say this drive is not for the faint of heart (or anyone towing a trailer).

When we arrived at Natural Bridges we drove the loop road, stopping to take several short hikes to get a look at the three remarkable sandstone spans that give the park its name. The monument also has the distinction of being the world’s first International Dark Sky Park because its lack of light pollution makes for outstanding stargazing. It’s something to keep in mind if you can manage to time your visit to coincide with the park’s regularly scheduled astronomy programs.

Ruination Galore

Having completed our whirlwind tour of the Utah portion of Trail of the Ancients, it was time to head east to Colorado to explore a very different section of the byway.

Once we’d set up camp at the KOA in the small ranching town of Cortez, we headed out to explore nearby Mesa Verde National Park. The fact that this
one park alone contains more than 4,000 archaeological sites, including 600 cliff dwellings, puts the scope of the Anasazi's civilization into perspective.

Our first order of business was to take one of the ranger-led tours of the massive Cliff Palace ruin. Hiking at the park’s 8,400-foot altitude was a bit of a challenge, but we managed to huff and puff our way down to the site, which is set into a deeply recessed natural alcove.

Though it had suffered from centuries of neglect by the time it was discovered in 1888, this architectural achievement has been restored to something close to what it must have looked like at the height of the Anasazi’s civilization around A.D. 1260. With 150 rooms and 24 ceremonial kivas, archaeologists believe Cliff Palace was once home to around 100 people, surprising stats considering that the vast majority of the cliff dwellings in Mesa Verde consist of less than five rooms.

From Cliff Palace, we pressed on to the park’s Badger House Community. Here we found a well-preserved pit-house, circa A.D. 650, built atop the mesa near where its inhabitants tended their fields of corn, squash and beans. Which brought up yet another of the byway’s mysteries, namely what happened to cause the Anasazi to abandon these simple early homes in favor of the more secure but less practical cliff dwellings.

(Right) The Sun’s Eye is one of Monument Valley’s many unique rock formations that are only accessible by four-wheel-drive tours.
A Towering Mystery

While we could have spent weeks visiting the dozens of accessible ruins in this area, our next destination was Hovenweep National Monument.

Located roughly 40 miles from Cortez, just across the Utah state line, the park’s name is derived from a Ute word that means “deserted valley.” And deserted it is, at least these days, though researchers speculate its many sophisticated structures were once home to more than 2,500 people during the Anasazi’s heyday.

Soon after we set off on the easy trail that begins at the visitors center, we laid eyes on the first of these remarkably well-preserved 700-year-old ruins that sit perched at the head of one of the many canyons that cut through Cajon Mesa. While the construction of buildings in this complex, known as the Square Tower Group, is just as impressive as those in Mesa Verde, their design is quite different.

Along with several unusual D-shaped dwellings, including one curiously built atop a large boulder, these people also built tall stone towers that served some unknown purpose. Ultimately, we decided the lack of a good explanation for these unusual structures was just one more of the Trail of The Ancients’ many mysteries.

Questions Remain

As someone who is curious to a fault, I admit that I would have liked to come away with more definitive answers about the Anasazi people. Even months later, I find myself mulling over the biggest mystery, why they chose to abandon their sturdy homes and well-tended fields en masse by A.D. 1300, never to return.

That said, I also know these mysteries are a big part of what drew us here in the first place. Which makes me think that, when it comes to our stops along The Scenic Route, maybe some questions are best left unanswered. 😊

National Scenic Byways Program, www.byways.org

IF YOU GO

The same things that make the Trail of the Ancients Scenic Byway so appealing also make it a place you don’t want to be caught unprepared. With a little forethought and planning, however, you’ll find your travels along these lonely roads to be memorable for all the right reasons.

Obviously, the most important thing to keep in mind is that, along most of the byway, you’re going to be a good distance from what most of us would consider civilization. With that in mind, make sure fuel and propane are topped off and your pantry and fridge are well stocked before you leave the last good-sized town along your route. While you’ll find gas stations, grocery stores and the like in both Kayenta, Arizona, and Cortez, Colorado, the latter definitely has a wider variety of stores and restaurants than anywhere else along the byway.

Also, this is high-desert country with altitudes ranging from more than a mile-high in Monument Valley to more than 8,000 feet in Mesa Verde National Park. In practical terms, that means you’ll want to avoid strenuous activity until you know how the thin air will affect you. Likewise, you’ll want to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and help stave off altitude sickness. Finally, you should consider a hat and sunscreen mandatory, and a warm jacket is usually a good idea as temperatures can drop quickly after the sun goes down even in the summer.

There are a number of RV parks scattered along the route, including some in tiny towns that seem like little more than wide places in the road. Here are three we can recommend based on personal experience:

- Cadillac Ranch RV Park
  Bluff, Utah, 800-538-6195, www.cadillacranchrv.com

- Cortez/Mesa Verde KOA

- Goulding’s Lodge and Campground

National Scenic Byways Program, www.byways.org
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KEEPING AN RV ROOF IN TIPTOP SHAPE

A little TLC goes a long way in preventing leaks and expensive repairs

One of the great joys of RVing is having a roof over your head, no matter where your travels take you. Sometimes, though, it’s easy to take that RV roof for granted. Unfortunately, if you don’t give it some TLC on occasion, that snug little home on the road may not feel so cozy when it begins to look worn and dirty or even leak!

KEEP IT CLEAN
The best thing you can do for an RV roof is to wash it at least twice a year. If you park or store your rig under trees that drop leaves or sap, or if you travel in areas that are warm and moist with higher chances of producing mold, a thorough roof cleaning four times a year is even better. Better yet, don’t park under trees that drop sap because it’s a pain to remove the sticky substance! Also, periodically climbing up and inspecting the roof for rips, tears, cracks and caulking separations can keep you one step ahead of preventing damaging leaks and expensive repairs. Be sure that the roof is designed to walk on; if not, you’ll need to do cleaning, inspection and repairs from a ladder. Since an RV roof — especially a wet one — can be very slippery, rather than climbing onto

Use caution when climbing onto an RV roof as it’s very slippery, especially when wet. The safest way to wash an RV roof is to set up a stable ladder and wash it from the side.
No matter how far away you roam on your RV adventures, you can still enjoy the comfort and convenience of home. Thanks to an installed Cummins Onan generator, you can have:

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the roof, it’s advised that you set up a stable ladder and wash the roof from the side.

**RV ROOF TYPES**

There are several types of roofs on RVs. The most common are rubber membrane roofs (EPDM/TPO) and fiberglass roofs. Rubber roofs are made of a thin weatherproof membrane that is stretched across a wooden substrate. Fiberglass roofs are molded and it’s best to keep them waxed so anything that lands on the surface will slide right off. Most travel trailers and fifth-wheels have rubber roofs. Some of the higher-end fifth-wheels, small clamshell trailers and a number of motorhomes have fiberglass roofs.

Next, put a healthy splash of Murphy Oil Soap in a bucket, fill it with water and scrub the roof with a long-handled sponge mop or medium-bristled brush. Tackle a small section at a time (3 feet by 3 feet) and use a circular motion. As you move across the roof, look for rips and tears in the roofing material. Rinse as you go, but be careful of slipping and falling on the wet roof! Plus, watch behind you so you don’t trip over a vent or air conditioner. As mentioned earlier, it’s safer to stand on a ladder from the side and use a long handle brush to do the cleaning. Rubber roofs technically don’t need any further protection, but treating the surface with a quality protectant will make subsequent washing easier and provide another layer of protection against the elements.

Fiberglass roofs can be cleaned the same way as rubber roofs. For stubborn stains, FSR Fiberglass Stain Remover may do the trick. Simply wipe on the FSR, let it sit a few minutes (more for tougher stains) and then wipe it off. Repeat if necessary. Many RVers also rely on granular powder products like Bar Keepers Friend and Bon Ami. Also, companies like Protect All offer good cleaning products designed for RVs.

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**FIBERGLASS ROOF OXIDATION**

After cleaning, fiberglass roofs also need a protectant so they don’t oxidize; that is, lose their shine, feel rough to the touch and eventually even slough off white powder. All surface oxidation must be removed before protectant can be applied to the roof.

If there is slight oxidation, an easy one-step process is to apply a cleaner/wax or restorer/wax. These waxes contain a mild to medium abrasive. Working in small 3-foot-by-3-foot areas, apply the product using a circular motion. Let it dry to a haze and then buff it out to a nice shine, and your RV’s roof is done. An orbital buffer makes the job easier.

For a more oxidized roof, use a polish containing a mild abrasive. If the polish can’t make the surface smooth, dab some rubbing compound on the buffer pad. Rubbing compound is very harsh, so go easy with the buffer, and add rubbing compound as needed. Unless you know what you are doing, it’s best to leave any cleaning using a polishing or rubbing compound to the pros.

While the roof may shine after initial cleaning or treatment of a protectant, in reality it’s only providing instant gratification. To prevent further oxidation, it’s best to paint the roof with a good quality epoxy-based paint, like Imron, to make sure the surface remains nice looking and is protected from the sun and other elements.

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oxidation, the roof needs a protectant. Some RV manufacturers recommend using 303 Aerospace Protectant to protect the fiberglass from UV rays, to eliminate black streaks from forming on the walls and to give the roof a shiny luster. Use of a protectant is in lieu of waxing.

An alternative is to put a coat of paste wax on the roof, but beware of walking on a waxed roof, especially when wet, as it can be extremely slippery and dangerous.

Cleaner/waxes, restorer/waxes, polishes, rubbing compounds and paste waxes range from cheap to expensive brands. Meguiar’s and Griot’s Garage from the auto industry and 3M and Collinite from the boating industry are all excellent brands. Many RVers also have great success with liquid acrylic products such as Poli Glow and Zep Wet Look. Higher-quality products, although more expensive, will last longer.

There are several products on the market that go beyond just surface treating such as the MS GelCoat Resto- ration System (which replaced Vertglas). The kit includes a two-step process that removes oxidation and restores a high-gloss shine to fiberglass gelcoat. It’s generally available through marine stores.

RUBBER AND FIBERGLASS ROOF REPAIR

Although most rubber roofs are guaranteed for 10-12 years and can easily last for 20 when well cared for, a snagged tree branch can tear the roofing membrane. Likewise, fiberglass roofs sometimes develop hairline cracks. The roof-to-wall and roof-to-cap transition joints are also susceptible to separation, and problems can crop up around roof vents, TV antennas and other accessories mounted to the RV’s roof.

There are two products that make repairs to both rubber and fiberglass roofs a snap. Eternabond comes on a roll, like tape, and is easy to install. Clean the area thoroughly, roughing it up with a Scotch-Brite pad and clean the area with water. Then cut the tape to allow a 2-inch margin around the tear, press it into place, and use a small wallpaper-type roller to ensure the tape is affixed smoothly without any bubbles.

Eternabond tape (the company claims it will bond to any surface except silicone) can be purchased in many lengths, from 4 feet to 50 feet, for small tears to major roof/wall separations that run the full length of the RV. The tape shelf life, before application, is five years, so if you keep some on hand for emergencies, make a note of when you bought it.

Dicor, one of the manufacturers of EPDM roofing membranes, also makes a roof repair product called DiSeal Patch Sealing Tape. The company claims that this product has superior adhesion and stays flexible. The shelf life of the Dicor repair tape is one year. With the Patchit Roof Repair Kit, you’ll need to do an additional step of outlining the edge of the patch with Dicor Lap Sealant.

If you need to replace the caulking around the vents and other accessories, use Dicor EPDM Lap Sealant. Simply clean the area of all dirt, particles and grease. Let it dry and then run a bead along the damaged area using a caulking gun. The sealant will flow and spread out. If it is cold, warm up the sealant before applying it so it can flow well.

Since 2007, we have been traveling full-time in a 27-foot travel trailer and a 36-foot fifth-wheel throughout the United States, and on a 44-foot sailboat on Mexico’s Pacific Coast. We have diligently and successfully used these inspection and cleaning techniques on rubber roofs and on the sailboat’s gelcoat fiberglass hull and cabin top. Despite being exposed to intense UV rays and nature’s elements 24/7, our three homes have been very cozy and totally leak-free.

The products mentioned in this article can be found at auto parts stores, Walmart, Home Depot, Lowe’s, Camping World and other RV supply stores and/or boating supply stores. Many are also available at www.amazon.com and elsewhere online.
Storage, storage, storage! It seems like RVers universally never have enough places to store stuff in their rigs, regardless of size. The dilemma is finding more storage space without making major modifications, since most owners prefer not to tear into existing cabinetry. While there are countless ideas from owners on how to add storage — and a number of products on the market to help — many times the solution is not easy or cost effective.

Smart Solutions has taken a different approach with its Add-A-Drawer. The Add-A-Drawer offers a quick way to add storage that is very simple and efficient. As the name implies, it adds a drawer to the underside of any cabinet structure and, if you’re creative, you can even find locations inside storage areas where wasted space can be utilized. You can also add one or two drawers under a table. Add-A-Drawer is comprised of nothing more than a strong, high-quality molded plastic enclosure coupled to plastic guide rails for mounting, a small pile of Phillips wood screws, a rubber band and drill template/install instructions, depending on the drawer model.

The “handyman” skill level required to install an Add-A-Drawer is very low. However, logical location determination is necessary in order to ensure that the correct Add-A-Drawer version is selected. One thing to consider when finding a spot is the thickness of the material the Add-A-Drawer is being affixed to. This will judge how much weight the drawer will truly be able to handle, regardless of the capacity rating.

When scouting for a location, you’ll need to determine the strength of the structure. Start by tapping under the cabinet or table where you plan to install the Add-A-Drawer. If you hear a thin, hollow sound, most likely that’s exactly what’s there — thin Add-A-Drawer allows RVers to utilize otherwise wasted space to stash items that usually end up as clutter.

Drawers can be mounted under dinette table (top) for added storage of flat items. Larger drawers are available in two sizes.
and hollow material — usually just a \( \frac{1}{4} \)-inch-thick finish panel. If there’s a thick, dense sound, you probably will find a solid-wood cabinet or framing. Either place will work for installing the drawer, but only the thicker of the two will be practical if heavy items are stored in the drawer.

Once the new drawer location has been selected, the installation can begin. For this project a measuring tape, a drill with a \( \frac{1}{4} \)-inch drill bit and a Phillips screwdriver are the only necessary tools. First, secure the guide rails to the drawer with the supplied rubber band and place in the desired mounting location. Next, grab a pencil, outline the outer edges of the rails and remove the rubber band. At this point, if a paper drill template was included, tape it within the outline that was just made. If there is no template put each rail in the outline separately and mark the center of the slots. Now the pre-drilling can be done, but before starting, keep in mind whether your chosen location to mount the Add-A-Drawer is in a place where there is no framing backup. If so — and again, this is not the preferred way to mount the drawer — take a small piece of masking tape and wrap it around the \( \frac{1}{4} \)-inch drill bit only leaving the amount to be drilled exposed to act as a visual stop; in this case it was \( \frac{1}{4} \) inch. This is a simple step to prevent damaging the inside shelf.

The screws can now be started followed by the temporary mounting of the guide rails and the drawer to adjust for the best fit. If everything is lined up properly and the drawer is functioning smoothly, tighten the screws and it’s done. Although it isn’t mentioned in the installation instructions, I found it best to slightly space the guide rails with a couple of washers per screw to achieve a custom fit and unrestricted operation of the drawer. Yes, I could’ve just used the lower portion of the rails to clear the small lip, but I wanted the drawer to have more sliding drag on it to keep it snugly in place during travel.

It takes only about 30 minutes for a totally custom installation, and the design is so simple, it almost can’t fail. I don’t know of any RVer who couldn’t benefit from a practical product that puts wasted space to good use. I found the longer and narrower Add-A-Drawer to be especially useful in my long, narrow and low-on-space food pantry, where the drawer just happened to fit perfectly under the framing. I was also pleasantly surprised to discover that some of the drawers are interchangeable without changing the guide rails.

The Add-A-Drawer is available in three sizes. The Deep Profile version is \( 4 \times \frac{11}{2} \times 10 \frac{1}{4} \) inches and sells for $24.99. The Low Profile size is \( 2 \times \frac{11}{2} \times 10 \) inches and is $23.99. Models for mounting under a table are \( 8 \times 17 \times 2 \) inches and sell for $19.99 each (not packaged in sets of two as illustrated by some marketing images). Add-A-Drawer is sold by Camping World and other RV parts stores.

Deep Profile drawer was mounted easily below the cabinet structure above a nightstand in the bedroom for convenient easy-to-reach storage.
A GROUNDBREAKER’S GUIDE TO
BREAKING NEW GROUND

No. 14

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Excel-lent Design

Peterson Industries introduces the Winslow 37SDF, the first-ever fifth-wheel with a slideout entryway using a unique folding step system; the new roofing material is icing on the cake.

Throughout RV history, travel trailers and fifth-wheels have been subject to continual change with improvements found in virtually every area, especially those from technology sectors. In the past, the RV world was wowed by the slideout, a feature that could be argued as the most significant development of all time. Not only does the addition of slideouts open up usable living space, but creative placement of these expanding rooms also encourages designers to dream up new and different ideas not considered beforehand. Until now, slideouts were primarily used for housing sofas, galleys, dinettes or bedrooms. Entry doors had to compete with slideout placement so that the trailer could be accessed without slamming into a slideout wall or to prevent access from being too restricted. Peterson Industries, Smith Center, Kansas, has taken multitasking to the next level with the announcement of the RV industry’s first entry door built into the slideout.

It’s no surprise that a manufacturer like Peterson has pushed the boundaries of its Excel line of fifth-wheels to pioneer an RV industry first. The Excel Winslow 37SDF is the first fifth-wheel featuring this game-changing center main entryway built right into the living room slideout, offering unique access to the interior. Along with an entirely new fifth-wheel entry point comes a new approach to designing and implementing folding steps. The company has been catering to discriminating buyers for many years and these buyers typically use the fifth-wheel for long-term travel or full-time living. This exciting approach to floorplanning would not be possible without a well-crafted chassis and sturdy slideout framing.

Getting into the slideout entrance takes you up a small flight of four foldable, cleverly engineered scissorlike steps. Although the steps are a little on the unattractive side in the travel mode, function definitely overtakes form with unparalleled durability and strength. The new steps also have the appearance of being somewhat bulky, but it’s simply an illusion as the steps perform amazingly well with minimal effort. In fact, these steps were so well crafted that I bounced up and down on them as if they were a trampoline and experienced no adverse result from the abusive testing. When in transit, the steps fold against the door using a mechanism that is totally new to the RV industry.

Once aboard the Winslow 37SDF, immense gains in visual space are highlighted by the newly placed entrance. It was quite obvious how blending the...
entryway into the living-room slide greatly benefitted the remainder of the layout, transforming wasted space into useful space and providing a welcoming feeling immediately upon crossing the threshold. You’ve got to love the large window adjacent to the freestanding table and chairs that’s next to the newly placed door. Together they provide exceptional visibility to the outside and work in harmony with the living room/kitchen theme that dominates the rear of the fifth-wheel. From here the floor-plan allows for a half bath tucked into the streetside wall and the steps that lead up to the bedroom and master bathroom. Think “motorhome bath-and-a-half plan” in reverse.

Heading indoors for some home-style R&R you will be welcomed into a warm LED lighted atmosphere, surrounded by the inviting tones of the solid hickory framed and faced cabinetry configured in all the places you’d want and need them. The traditionally styled — and plush — sofa bed and twin leather wrapped recliners make kicking off your shoes and relaxing a no-brainer. This is especially true considering there is a standard 42-inch LCD HD television, complete with the usual cable and dual location satellite pre-wiring (for either roof or ground use) in the entertainment center section of the opposing slideout.

Nestled directly forward of the entertainment area is a portion of the galley that’s supported by the tastefully selected Residential Refrigerator Package option. Included with this package is the refrigerator dressed in stainless steel and offering a whopping 18 cubic feet of chilled space; the optional convection microwave is also trimmed in stainless. Since the optional Samsung house fridge doesn’t offer propane power, those owners who like to boondock will need to consider the optional generator or beef up the battery bank, add the appropriate power inverter/charger and maybe a solar system. The remainder of the kitchen isn’t overdressed with an extravagant stove or oven, just the standard three-burner range and oven combo, which is tied-in subtly using a wood grained center bordered by stainless décor. Top off the kitchen with an ideally placed island structure housing double deep under-mount style sinks coupled to a tall stainless faucet, and any cook will be feeling a little giddy.

Stepping up into the bedroom takes you through a short hallway where a command center is located giving easy access to the monitor panels and the most commonly used switches/controls. Just beyond this point the space opens up into bedroom bliss. The well-laid-out master bedroom offers more than just ample room for movement and a pillow-top mattress. Once past the optional matching wood/glass inlaid door, the remainder of the homelike features really stand out and shine.

A giant closet with a sliding door at the foot of the bed is pushed out with the slideout mechanism and its storage capability is complemented by a linen closet and a drawer structure that houses the bedroom TV. Three surrounding windows accented with handsome valances and day/night shades balance out the bedroom nicely. Another doorway leads to an appropriately sized master bathroom in the
very front of the fifth-wheel. A 6-foot 5-inch ceiling height provides the open space necessary to accommodate a nearly home-sized glass shower enclosure, his-and-hers matching sinks and expansive cabinet space, while allowing plenty of room for the porcelain toilet and requisite maneuverability. The two closets easily afford the space needed for bathroom supplies and the larger enclosure is pre-wired and pre-plumbed for a washer and dryer.

Scrubbing the Winslow 37SDF interior, you’ll learn to expect a certain level of quality that extends to the outside after considering fit and finish and the choice of materials. The official tour of the exterior starts with clean gel-coated fiberglass, which quickly draws your attention to the external storage system. From the 1½-inch-thick insulated compartment doors to the ultra-organized all-in-one utility center, sliding basement trays and a payload capability upward of a full ton of heated storage, the Winslow screams long-term convenience without being seasonally selective.

The user-friendly super storage system is a product of Excel’s exclusive Drop 2 full tube frame structure, encapsulating the entire comfort heating and insulated plumbing systems while lowering the center of gravity. Helping to aid in ride comfort is the optional MOR/ryde suspension tied to Nev-R-Lube axles [maintenance-free bearings] with disc brakes. The chassis rolls on 17.5-inch Goodyear tires mounted on alloy wheels.

The exterior is fitted with frameless Thermopane windows, which look very smooth and offer the necessary utility to give the fifth-wheel a 10-degree below 0 F rating that is guaranteed to be accurate. Peering up toward the roof shines light on yet another industry first. This Excel has an almost indestructible Island structure with double sinks provides most of the counter space in the galley. Residential refrigerator offers 18 cubic feet of food and beverage storage.

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lifelong roof. Excel worked with Rhino Linings, maker of one of the truck aftermarket industry’s leading and most resilient spray-on bed liners to create a one-time permanent roof liner. The new Rhino Eco-Coat roof is a very impressive system that also covers the tops of all four fully hydraulically operated slideouts. It will not streak or chalk and is designed to last so long that the company is looking into the possibility of extending the warranty for this material for life. It does add to the price of the fifth-wheel that carries a base MSRP of $110,745 (as tested) for the 37SDF.

Excel has certainly done a fine job with this fifth-wheel. The Winslow 37SDF utilizes just about every square inch in this floorplan and the entry through the curbside living room slide-out dramatically expands versatility. In fact, due to the new entrance, the Winslow has opened up enough free space in the living area that it’s sometimes downright hard to remember that you’re aboard something on wheels.

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Ultimate Family Bunkhouse

The 2014 EverGreen RV Sun Valley 300BHSL encompasses three very distinct living zones, one expressly designed for the kids.

Promoting a travel trailer as a "half-ton-towable" has meant different things at different times. For years, though, it generally translated into having an RV short on everything from length to creature comforts, both of which add weight. But if the recent recession taught RV manufacturers anything, it was "how to do more with less" — and as the travel trailer market has evolved, builders re-educated themselves and began employing more advanced construction techniques to provide a new wave of lighter-weight towables without sacrificing amenities.

Granted, automakers have also contributed handsomely to the resurgence of towable RVs by dramatically increasing towing capacities of their popular light-duty trucks — but you don't really need a half-ton truck with the ability to pull 11,000 pounds when you can buy a 38-foot travel trailer like the EverGreen RV Sun Valley S300BHSL that hits the scales dry at about 7,600 pounds.

And that's with all the bells and whistles, including an outdoor kitchen. "We use what we call 'DuraLite' construction," noted Doug Lantz, Evergreen's vice president of sales and marketing. "It's a six-sided, double-welded aluminum frame. Not only is it stronger and more durable than wood framing — it eliminates flex and isn't susceptible to rot — but it's a lot lighter."

In fact, Lantz estimates that by using aluminum framing and laminate construction — the roof, side walls, floor, and front and rear walls are all laminated — EverGreen is able to trim the Sun Valley's weight by about 20 percent compared with typical stick-and-tin building methods. In a trailer of this size, that works out to about 1,500 pounds.

But while the weight saving is substantial, it's not unexpected; in today's market nearly every manufacturer is shedding pounds. What really distinguishes the Sun Valley S300BHSL is its floorplan, along with a couple of unique features intended to enhance its use. And, while we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit, one that really stands out is a simple bracket mounted on the exterior, just aft of the centered entry door, to support the unit's flat-panel LCD TV. The TV rides in a similar bracket in the main cabin and can be removed and repositioned outside, where there also are requisite hookups. Additionally, the full-size coat closet immediately inside the unit is a nice touch.

Designed for large families, this bunkhouse model encompasses three very distinct living zones — and one is...
expressly designed for the kids. While the front of the trailer encompasses a fairly typical bedroom suite with walk-around queen bed (ostensibly, mom and dad’s sleeping quarters), the rear of the unit features side-wall-mounted bunk-beds separated by ample storage running across the rear wall. Both bunks are “upper” units: the curbside bunk is built atop yet more storage cavities, while sleeping arrangements streetside — contained in an 8-foot-wide slideout — are mounted above what EverGreen calls “gaming chairs” — oversized, floor-mounted seats that can fold out for additional sleeping positions; the bunk riding above them is hinged and pivots to allow for extra headroom. The counter area above the built-in dresser is pre-wired for an additional TV.

Built with an eye toward entertaining, the main cabin features an open floorplan with an island kitchen and oversize windows that add to the feeling of spaciousness. The curbside galley, fitted with a three-burner cooktop, 6-cubic-foot refrigerator, a microwave and plenty of cupboards space, rides in an 8-foot-wide slideout, while a 12-foot streetside slideout is home to the dining and entertainment, or gathering around the kitchen island. There’s lots of room in the main living area for dining and entertaining, or gathering around the kitchen island. (Above left) There’s lots of room in the main living area for dining and entertaining, or gathering around the kitchen island. (Above right) In addition to the double bunks, the gaming chairs fold out for more sleeping space.

“Those customers have asked for and is extremely popular,” said Lantz. “It helps to clean out the black tank when you’re flushing the tanks and helps maintain the integrity of the monitor panel.”

EverGreen also outfits the Sun Valley with power stabilizer jacks as standard equipment. There are, in fact, few options available on the $34,900 trailer, a short list that includes a power (rather than manual) awning, upgrading the 13,500-Btu A/C to 15,000-Btu, 32-inch LCD TV, hide-a-bed, 50-amp service and a power A-frame jack. You supply the family.

(Opposite top) Kids will enjoy hanging out in the back bedroom where they can watch TV or play video games from the comfort of oversized seats. (Above left) There’s lots of room in the main living area for dining and entertaining, or gathering around the kitchen island. (Above right) In addition to the double bunks, the gaming chairs fold out for more sleeping space.
At some point, most RVers have to consider putting their rig away for storage. Seasonal changes, employment, family gatherings, etc., all happen, and we can’t always take our RV along for the ride. But when you do decide to store your RV, whether at home in the driveway or in a storage facility, it’s a wise decision to invest in an RV cover.

An RV sitting in the driveway or the side yard is subject to the best (and worst) that Mother Nature has to offer, and not giving it any protection can be a recipe for expensive wear and tear, not to mention the affect on the exterior aesthetics.

“UV degradation is probably one of the biggest problems facing RV owners today,” says Morgan Ein, managing partner at ADCO Products Inc. “The UV light will essentially destroy everything in its path.” And that UV exposure goes beyond simply fading the RV’s color; it can lead to much more expensive repairs. “Not only does covering your RV preserve its appearance, but you must remember that the paint itself is a protective barrier used to keep metal and plastic components from breaking down,” says Lane Wilkinson, merchandise manager at Classic Accessories.

“If an RV’s paint is not protected, the components underneath will eventually be exposed and begin to show signs of damage.”

Paint is not the only subject of damaging exposure. Gel-coated fiberglass can oxidize over time, losing its luster and looking dull and chalky. This damage can greatly affect an RV’s resale value. And since an RV is an investment, it should be protected as such. It’s no secret that, when buying a used RV, the first thing that grabs a buyer’s eye is the overall condition of the exterior surface. Faded decals, chalky front/end caps and sun-damaged roofs can seriously impact the selling price.

But the sun isn’t the only element that’s hard on an RV. “Tree sap can also be very damaging to the paint, causing staining and erosion to the finish,” says Marina Monet, sales manager at CoverQuest.com. RV covers are also designed to protect vehicles from bird droppings and acid-rain situations, and obviously help keep the exterior clean.
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— especially EPDM roofs. “If you use an RV cover, it’s very easy to see that you’ll spend less time washing it and more time enjoying it,” says Ein.

So now that we have established the need for an RV cover, it’s time to do a bit of research. Remember, an RV cover is protection for your investment, so it’s not always wise to pick the cheapest option at the local warehouse store. “If you’re going to get a product, get a brand,” says Skip Mckee, CEO of Eevelle Covers. “We’ve seen an onslaught of overseas covers being produced, and shipped here with the promise of a lifetime warranty. There’s no way you’d get a lifetime warranty on an RV cover.”

Generally, an RV cover is made from polypropylene fabric or polyester, with varying methods of doubling or even tripling the layers for additional protection on the roof section. The fabrics are sometimes treated (or formulated) with different water and UV repellants, and also must allow water and moisture to evaporate to avoid mold and mildew forming beneath. There are, of course, higher-end and custom covers that contain different construction materials (see roundup). Essentially, the more expensive options offer more protection (don’t they always?), and custom covers tend to billow less in the wind than universal covers due to their tighter fit.

Once the covers are in place (see sidebar), they are generally connected with straps beneath the belly of the RV. Good-quality covers will feature vents to reduce billowing, and some offer zippered panels to allow access to the doors and compartments, which come in handy when loading for a trip. Also, the better quality covers may be lighter, which makes handling — and storage while the RV is in use — much easier.

Next comes the decision to buy a universal or a custom-fit cover. Custom covers are indeed more expensive, but their exact fit can mean a longer lifespan for both cover and RV finish. And they fit better, usually requiring fewer tie-downs, if any.

When selecting a cover based on the RV size, measure it yourself; don’t rely on the model numbers or the registration paperwork. “Measure end to end, bike rack to ladder,” says McKee. “That is the key.”

Covering an RV is a wise choice to protect your investment. You likely have a cover on the grill in your backyard; why not your home on wheels?

To help you with your search, we’ve listed some of the top companies in the RV cover field. Many also offer tire covers, which we do recommend you purchase even if the cover appears to conceal most of the tires.

**ADCO**

ADCO RV covers are produced in both universal and custom configurations in a variety of outdoor fabrics. ADCO’s core products are what they refer to as Designer Series Contour-fit RV Covers, available in SFS AquaShed and DuPont TyvekRV product lines. Both lines feature three-ply polypropylene side walls, while the roof of each cover features either the SFS AquaShed or the DuPont TyvekRV fabrics.

The SFS AquaShed is a three-layer fabric, the outer two layers being polypropylene and the middle layer a high-tech film that allows moisture to pass through. It’s intended to be used in moderate climates or for short-term storage. The fabric is gray and very gentle on automotive finishes, according to the company.

DuPont TyvekRV fabric is engineered to block up to 98 percent of dirt and dust particles larger than 3 microns, and also blocks up to 99.8 percent of the sun’s damaging UV rays, according to DuPont. TyvekRV is also resistant to solvents, acids and alkalis, offering the RV improved protection from bird droppings and acid-type rain. This fabric has a two-toned yellow/beige body and a white roof, and is available in contour-fit and custom-fit configurations.

Produced in custom-fit configurations only, Sunbrella fabric by Glen Raven Mills is made from woven acrylic, meaning it is resistant to cold-cracking, and the color of the fabric is placed into the fibers as it is extruded, to make the material fade-resistant. This fabric is offered in tan and gray and is recommended for anyone who plans to own their RV for many years and wants a tailored-fit RV cover.

ADCO products are available at www.campingworld.com. Visit the site for pricing.

**ADCO Products**

800-541-ADCO, www.adcoprod.com

**Camco**

Camco RV Products offers a variety of RV accessories, including RV covers. The UltraGuard is recommended for cold, snowy climates. The triple-layer SFS top panel is formulated to
repel water, allowing for maximum resistance to rainfall and snow. The sides are constructed using heavy-duty polypropylene, and the vented design helps battle mold and mildew. The integrated vent flaps reduce wind lofting and inside moisture.

UltraShield covers are recommended for use in warm, sunny climates. The lightweight woven polyester offers protection from the elements, and vent flaps reduce billowing in the wind. UltraShield covers also feature an integrated self-adjusting hold-down system. Visit the website for more info and pricing.


Covercraft

Covercraft covers are available in three fabrics.

Ultratect Custom covers are made from solution-dyed SaturaMax yarns, offering superior shape retention and water-shedding capabilities. Ultratect covers are recommended for RVs that are subject to prolonged sun exposure and extreme elements, and are available in two colors.

WeatherShield HD covers are woven by Glen Raven Mills using solution-dyed UV-resistant polyester fibers, and then water from penetrating the fabric. The covers carry a four-year warranty.

Classic’s midline cover is called the PolyPRO 3, and is made from polypropylene. The roof features three layers of poly for extra UV-protection, in addition to preventing moisture damage to the RV’s roof. PolyPRO 3 covers feature a three-year warranty.

The entry-level cover is the PolyPRO 1, which is constructed from a single layer of polypropylene. The covers feature a two-year warranty. Visit the website for more info and pricing.

Covering Your RV

Placing a cover on an RV is often looked upon as an all-day event, but it doesn’t have to be. Here are some tips from the pros:

Get a buddy! Anytime you’re on the roof, it’s a good idea to have somebody on the ground helping you.

When the cover is taken out of its packaging, spread it out on a clean surface, such as a lawn. Untie all the clips, zippers, etc., and get a good look at the geography of the cover before you take it to the roof.

Once you’ve stretched it out a bit, apply it inside out so that it falls into place. Some companies even package their covers inside out for this reason.

Installing a cover does not come without necessary precautions. Climbing on the roof can be dangerous and should only be done if you are confident of your footing and balance and the roof is designed to be walked on. A safer way to roll out the cover is to use a ladder on the side of the rig.

Over the years owners have devised methods for installing covers. One method is to roll the cover off the roof, fold the sides neatly into the center and place it in a 55-gallon trashcan for storage. When it comes time to cover the rig, a rope is tied to the end of the material, lifted to the roof and dragged to the front and the sides unfolded as the user walks toward the rear.

Regardless of the method for installing and/or removing a cover make sure any sharp edges — gutter spouts, antennas, accessories, etc. — are prevented from rubbing against the material. Premade insulators for ladders, gutter spouts and other rough edges are available from most cover manufacturers. Owners have also used swim noodles and pipe insulators to protect the covers from sharp edges.

Using a cover to protect an RV may require a little effort but there are tremendous upsides, like spending less time cleaning and protecting the finish. Considering the cost of a nice full-body paint or shiny gel-coated fiberglass, a cover is a good investment in money and time.
finished with an immersion encapsulation process, wherein a finish is placed inside the fabric to bond to each individual thread.

Sunbrella covers are also made by Glen Raven Mills, and are made of the same fabrics used in the marine industry for bimini tops, sail covers and deck enclosures. Sunbrella fabrics provide superior UV blockage while still allowing moisture to evaporate out from the RV. Visit the website for more info and pricing.

Covercraft Industries, 800-426-8377
www.rvcovers4u.com

CoverQuest
CoverQuest.com offers ADCO products (mentioned previously) in addition to Carver covers. Carver covers are made in the USA and are constructed of a woven, 6-ounce polyester material that is significantly lighter than many covers on the market, according to the company. The polyester material is made of 300-denier filament polyester yarns, and is treated with marine-grade water-repellent and UV and mildew inhibitors. Available in two colors, Silver Cloud and Desert Sand, CoverQuest covers carry a five-year warranty.

CoverQuest
888-726-9300, www.coverquest.com

Eevelle
Eevelle offers three universal covers at varying price points designed for the RV market. All covers feature straps every 3-4 feet for securing to the RV, and vents in the fabric work to allow moisture to pass through to help fight mold and mildew. The covers are treated with a No. 8 UV finish to minimize sun damage.

The entry-level Traveler is a lightweight polypropylene cover that doesn’t have any zippers. It is recommended for light use and carries a one-year warranty.

The midline Expedition covers are Eevelle’s most popular selling brand. They are also made of lightweight polypropylene and feature straps and roof vents, but offer the additional feature of a zippered side entry. Expedition covers are designed to be a bit more durable and thus carry a three-year warranty.

The top-of-the-line Goldline covers are made of a marine fabric and offer all the features of the Expedition. Goldline covers are semi-custom in that the sizing pattern comes within 18-24 inches of the actual RV make/model. Visit the website for more info and pricing.

Eevelle, 760-434-2231
www.eevelle.com
Heat Things Up
Aqua-Hot’s 400LP Hydronic Heating system offers continuous hot water (up to 90 gallons per hour at 120 degrees Fahrenheit) and interior heating, according to the company. The unit runs on LP-gas and can also be powered by 120-volt AC, and draws 7 amps per hour. The unit has five separate thermostatic heating zones and features two zone heating circulation loops with a maximum output of 65,600 Btu per hour. The 400LP eliminates the need for multiple systems for heating and hot water. The 400LP allows owners to select AC power for heating to conserve LP-gas, or the two can be combined for use in very cold weather.

MSRP: $5,398.49
800-685-4298, www.aquahot.com
Circle 152 on Reader Service Card.

Table To Go
For RVers on the go, the porTABLE is an 8½-pound low, cocktail-type table that folds into three sections down to 7½ by 1½ inches. The legs are attached via threaded portions that fit into crossbraces. It’s a handy table that holds up to 30 pounds to set up outside your RV in camp or to take along to hold food and drinks at picnics and outdoor concerts. The porTABLE can be transported in the included durable 400-denier carrying bag with a shoulder strap. The table is hand-crafted using solid tongue-and-groove bamboo with an aluminum oxide finish, and opens up to 31 by 21½ inches and is 16 inches high.

MSRP: $89, plus $20 shipping and handling
805-455-3228
www.greenbarreldesigns.com/portable
Circle 153 on Reader Service Card.

Rust Never Sleeps
Keep rust at bay with Rust Blocker, a clear, high-temperature rust preventer that DirectLine Industries claims will protect metal and fiberglass from oxidation for up to seven years. When applied, the product dries in minutes to a clear/tack-free finish. Rust Blocker works on wheel wells, hitches and tow bars, as well as roofs, stairs and most other surfaces. Available in an aerosol or quart container, it can be top coated or applied over oil-based paints. The company claims Rust Blocker has been tested and proven by the military, and provides UV protection to painted surfaces against corrosion, salt spray, pitting and weathering.

MSRP: $29.99 aerosol, $49.99 quart
866-773-6136, www.3xchemistry.com
Circle 154 on Reader Service Card.

Don’t Trip a Breaker
Prevent tripping a circuit breaker by shedding predetermined loads with the Xantrex Freedom Sequence Intelligent Power Manager. The company claims that the system is designed to automatically coordinate the electrical systems within the RV and works on 20-, 30- and 50-amp service. Once installed, the Power Manager can be programmed using a single System Control Panel by giving each device a priority from 1 to 8. If the shorepower connection exceeds its limit, the Xantrex can automatically start the generator and allow it to kick in to power other loads. With a priority system that the owner customizes, the Power Manager automatically sheds and re-engages loads by dropping off noncritical devices if there’s a potential of overloading the breaker or generator, and then powers them back on.

MSRP: $350
Circle 155 on Reader Service Card.
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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.
AEM In-Tank Fuel Pumps for EFI Vehicles

Towing a heavy trailer up a long, steep mountain grade on a hot day is an extreme durability test of the engine and related systems. Everything must perform at its best to avoid a breakdown. Fuel system problems, often related to ethanol-laced gasoline, can have a major impact on engine performance. Ethanol absorbs moisture from the air above the fuel, and corrodes metal in the fuel system, as well as deteriorates plastics and rubber. This clogs fuel filters and often results in premature failure of the stock in-tank fuel pumps, which can be an expensive hassle, especially when the failure leaves you stranded on the side of the road far from home.

Many truck owners ask where they can find a more robust pump that has extra capacity, rather than the marginal capabilities of original equipment pumps. Advanced Engine Management (AEM) Performance Electronics has introduced a reasonably priced electric in-tank fuel pump (Part No. 50-1200, retail $127.28) that is compatible with the new gasoline/ethanol blends up to E85 (85 percent ethanol). This allows flex-fuel vehicles to run E85 fuel.

AEM also sells a similar pump (Part No. 50-1000), which is not designed for high ethanol concentrations. It retails for $105.54. Both fuel pump models are designed for high-performance and hard-working tow vehicles with gasoline fuel injection. The AEM fuel pumps are rated to flow 84 gallons per hour (GPH) at 43 PSI. Flow curves from 35 to 90 PSI and current draw versus fuel pressure charts are available on AEM’s website.

AEM’s E85 fuel pump features robust internal construction that is designed to withstand the low lubricity characteristics of ethanol and methanol fuels, and has been tested to work with all types of gasoline, in addition to ethanol fuels up to E100 (pure ethanol), and methanol fuels up to M100 (pure methanol).

The AEM fuel pump is designed for in-tank mounting and features a compact 39mm diameter body, which fits most popular light truck applications. It features an offset inlet design that eases installation and includes a wiring harness, prefilter, internal fuel hose and clamps, end cap and rubber buffer sleeve. According to the company, every pump is tested before it is packaged for sale.

Power rating is given at 43 PSI, 13.5 volts DC at the pump, assuming a brake specific fuel consumption (BSFC) of 0.5. Flow capability for horsepower support is ultimately dependent on fuel-hose diameter, and system electrical voltage and amperage capabilities. Suffice it to say that these pumps are more than sufficient for stock and moderately modified engines used on the road. Fuel-pressure regulators return excess fuel back to the tank, so additional capacity does not cause flooding or higher fuel consumption.


Protect Yourself While Driving
If an errant driver runs a red light and crashes into you, how do you prove who had the green light? Recently, Genius released its DVR-FHD590 Full HD Vehicle Recorder. This dash camera records full high-definition (1920x1080) video that helps drivers protect themselves with reliable evidence in the case of an unforeseen accident. It features a wide-angle lens, high-power LED for night capture and HDR technology.

Just start your engine and the DVR-FHD590 begins recording automatically. In the case of an accident, the G-sensor in the DVR-FHD590 triggers the device automatically to keep a record of the event, which cannot be overwritten unless you specifically delete it.

The vehicle recorder features a 128-degree wide-angle lens claimed to capture the entire situation. The DVR-FHD590 is designed to work well during bright sunny days and very dark...
The Genius DVR-FHD590 video dash camera can record every moment while driving and provide strong evidence to protect you in case an errant driver causes an accident.

nights. A 600 mAh Li-ion battery means the DVR-FHD590 can record a long time without needing a recharge. The recording can be viewed in real-time or in playback mode on the 2.4-inch LCD screen. The LCD screen rotates 270 degrees so that drivers can view videos from almost every angle. It’s easily mounted to the front windshield using the adjustable mounting unit included.

The DVR-FHD590 records 30 frames per second and uses a 5 megapixel, 1/3.2-inch CMOS sensor. The DVR-FHD590 also comes with a USB cable for transferring data to a computer or charging at home. The DVR-FHD590 has a suggested retail price of $149.99. For more information visit www.geniusnet.com.

2014 Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra V-6 MPG Rivals Ram

The fuel-economy war among pickups seems to be heating up, and the winners are the customers. Both the 2014 Silverado and Sierra pickups powered by the standard 4.3-liter V-6 rated 285 horsepower will have an EPA 18 MPG city rating. That’s identical to the Ram 1500 HFE 8-speed automatic transmission city rating, and GM’s 24 MPG highway rating is just 1 MPG less than Ram’s. (Four-wheel-drive versions are rated 17/22 MPG.)

The Silverado and Sierra pickups with the V-6 engine have a maximum tow rating of 7,200 pounds, which is 700 pounds more than Ram’s V-6 pickup rating. GM also offers an optional 5.3-liter V-8 that has a highway mileage rating of up to 23 MPG.

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Waxing Made Easy

Keeping the exterior of a trailer clean and waxed is a never-ending process. Many of us store our trailers outside, subjecting the exterior to harsh elements including dirt, soot, bird droppings and hours of intense sunshine. Every time I get ready to wash and wax a trailer I think about that famous line in the Karate Kid movie: “Wax on, wax off.” Repetitive motion is something I’m not fond of.

Shurhold Industries feels our pain. The company specializes in RV cleaning products, and its Dual Action Polisher takes the drudgery out of waxing an RV. I’ve always been impressed with the skill of professional detailers. They fling a large rotary buffer with great precision. But a rotary buffer in the hands of an inexperienced user can lead to burns and swirl marks that can ruin the look of a beautiful full-body paint job. Shurhold’s Dual Action Polisher eliminates those concerns by using a 6-inch oscillating head that prevents casual users from making costly mistakes. The polisher uses quick-change pads with hook-and-loop backing and has a 20-foot power cord, which provides good versatility in movement.

Out of the box, the 6-inch head looks pretty small when up against the side wall real estate of a big trailer, but the process actually goes fast, especially when compared to hand waxing. Six speeds allow the polisher to handle different detailing chores: waxing/buffing, polishing/cleaning and removing paint defects and swirls.

Once the surface is clean and dry, wax is applied using a black foam polishing pad that sticks to the backing plate via hook-and-loop material. The reusable pad does a good job of applying the wax, and for this evaluation we used the company’s Pro Polish Wax, which is a polymer-based product that has no talc or fillers. Talc-free means no white powder to wrestle with when buffing off the product. Handling the buffer is comfortable, especially with the D-handle in place.

After the wax is applied to a workable area it’s buffed off to a professional looking shine using the Brite Bonnet Final Polish Pad. This pad is designed to fit over the waxing pad; a vapor barrier inside the polishing pad keeps the wet wax from seeping into the shaggy microfiber “fingers” that remove the excess wax as it buffs the surface to a shine. Stretching the bonnet over the pad takes some finesse and can get a little messy if too much wax is left on the waxing pad.

The Pro Polish Wax ($22.98 for 16 ounces) is formulated to repel water, protect against environmental factors and inhibit UV exposure. While the results are impressive following application, the test of time will prove the wax’s value. The Pro Polish Wax is designed for fiberglass, gelcoat, clear coat (full-body paint) and aluminum.

Included with the Dual Action Polisher in the standard kit are the backing plate, D-handle, side handle, extra carbon brushes for the motor and the tools needed to service the buffer. It sells for $150 but can be found on the Internet for less money. Replacement polishing bonnets are $11.98 and a waxing pad two-pack retails for $23.98.

No doubt this buffer beats the monotony of “Wax on, wax off.”

Shurhold Industries
800-962-6241
www.shurhold.com

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RV CLINIC

AXLE JACK PLACEMENT

Q Where is the proper place to position a bottle or scissor jack to raise a travel trailer? Is it under the axle or on the spring mounting plate? I have been told to never place the jack on the axle tube as that stands a chance of bending an axle.

Warren Roach, Via email

A This is a good question, Warren, and it calls for some personal judgment when considering the answer. First, from an official Dexter Axle publication: “Never use the axle or suspension as a jack point to lift the trailer.” Dexter goes on to state, “Follow the trailer manufacturer’s guidelines for lifting and supporting the trailer when servicing the running gear.” You need to keep in mind that such instructions are largely co-written by corporate lawyers trying to avoid lawsuits. Some RVers have mistakenly and somewhat foolishly placed a jack under the center of the axle tube and tried raising the entire trailer weight using that positioning. This is obviously a bad idea as it could easily bend the axle out of shape. Likewise, placing the jack under the axle near the leaf spring can result in the jack slipping from its position and an unexpected drop in the axle end.

If all else fails, read your owner’s manual for the manufacturer’s recommendation on the job. If you don’t have the manual, contact your RV manu-
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**User Guide**

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Contents
facturer’s local dealer, or contact the manufacturer directly for its advice on the subject.

The usual advice is to place the jack under the trailer frame as close to a suspension point as possible. Use of a pad to help spread out the support point will help avoid having the small jack head create a dent on the frame if the RV manufacturer used a frame that’s a bit on the thin side. The downside to this system is that the frame needs to be lifted farther because you need to take up the suspension droop before the tire comes off the ground. When I do this type of work I place a jack stand, or two, under appropriate points on the object being lifted, and I also place a healthy stack of lumber scraps under the end of the axle near the suspension as an extra safeguard against a support failure.

Many RVers are good with tools and know what they’re doing when they work on their vehicles. Although it’s against the manufacturer’s recom-
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Roof-Access Ladder Restriction

We purchased a new 2012 LaCrosse 303 travel trailer by Prime Time. At the time of purchase we asked the dealer to install a roof-top ladder. The dealer told us it was not possible to do because of restrictions. However, we have seen several units with roof-top ladders. Is there a restriction? — D.D.

A

There is no manufacturer or dealer restriction preventing a fifth-wheel, travel trailer, or motorhome from having a roof access ladder, but the ladder should be designed in a manner that keeps debris from scattering and limits the potential for damage to the trailer. — J.J.

Fifth-Wheel Truck Bed Height

I have a problem I haven’t seen addressed in your magazine. I have a fifth-wheel and want to buy a new truck. All the newer trucks, even half-tons, have gone to higher and deeper beds. I know I can change or raise the receiver hitch a little and also change the pin box height on the fifth-wheel. However, if I do this it will cause my fifth-wheel to ride at an uneven angle and possibly hit in the tailgate area. Short of changing out the axles and raising my trailer approximately 6 inches, are there any other solutions you can suggest?

David Beaty, Douglasville Georgia

A

You listed the practical solution, David. Modify your trailer’s suspension so it rides somewhat higher and creates a more-level towing situation. You still need to maintain at least 6 inches of clearance between the bed rail and the underside of your trailer king pin box area to allow unimpeded movement over rough terrain. You could take the truck to a suspension specialist and try to have its aft end lowered a few inches but as a rule we don’t recommend that course of action. Raising your trailer and choosing a truck with the most compatible ride height are your best solutions to the problem. — J.J.
dealer contacted Prime Time and was told that they don't recommend installation of a ladder on the back of the travel trailer.

We now have solar panels mounted on the roof as we do a lot of year-round dry camping. There are times when lifting the panels to catch more of the available sun would be desirable. The thought of having to haul a ladder around on the back of the trailer is very distasteful. I cannot believe there is not a safe, reliable way to mount a ladder. I have been thinking of using a backing on the inside of the cabinets to span the internal studding and through bolting the ladder mounts with the proper caulking materials.

Chuck Woods, Pioneer, California

Your trailer has no ladder from the factory, which means there are no structural backing members installed in the wall at the factory. Without those backers, there are no solid mounting points inside the wall, and you can’t just hang the ladder from the fiberglass skin or polystyrene insulation. You could do as you suggested, with some type of backing plates inside the trailer spanning across two aluminum frame elements for strength, and that’s about your only option. Careful material and fastener selection would help ensure success, as would a visit to an RV repair facility for a consultation with a technician familiar with your trailer. As they say, measure twice and cut once. Good luck! — J.J.

TV REPLACEMENT

Q We’re thinking of replacing the 32-inch LCD TV in our fifth-wheel trailer with a larger model. Can we purchase a standard TV off the general market to use in the trailer, or must we search for one that is vibration-resistant? Our current TV is wall mounted and there’s nothing in the instructions or manual stating that vibration is an issue.

Bob and CeSanne Schwartz
Republic, Washington

A Go ahead and purchase whatever LED or LCD TV and electronics best suits your purpose, but a plasma TV is not recommended. I don’t believe there’s such a thing as a designated “vibration resistant” TV, DVD player or other hardware, unless you start shopping at a military spec supply source. All such electronics go through a lot of shakin’ and rattlin’ between the factory overseas and your local dealer, and they hold up just fine under those conditions. If you take care of your trailer as most RVers do, any electronics should be fine, assuming they are securely mounted. — J.J.

On the same subject, we also want to add an amplifier/receiver and a Blu-ray DVD player to the trailer’s entertainment center. Again, is vibration an issue? Should we search for units that are resistant to problems created by vibration during traveling?

Bob and CeSanne Schwartz
Republic, Washington

On the same subject, we also want to add an amplifier/receiver and a Blu-ray DVD player to the trailer’s entertainment center. Again, is vibration an issue? Should we search for units that are resistant to problems created by vibration during traveling?
Last year I needed to replace the original tires on my Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel. The fifth-wheel was only a couple of years old the tires were low mileage and still had plenty of tread. The problem was that all four tires had radial cracks in the sidewalls. These tires had “Made in China” on the sidewall and so I insisted to my tire store that I did not want Chinese-made tires. They said that the only thing they had that was “American made” was the Goodyear Marathon. I agreed to pay the extra price for the Goodyears and had them put on. When I got the trailer home and was washing off the tire lube that they had used I noticed that my Goodyear Marathons also had “Made in China” on the sidewall! Are there no trailer tires made in the USA any more? My tire shop said that they could not find any “Made in the USA” trailer tires!

George Nachtsheim, Littleton, Colorado

Tires are still manufactured in the USA, George, but I’m not sure about Special Trailer or ST tires like your Goodyear Marathons. I know Toyo has a plant in Alabama and manufactures light truck, or LT tires, there, for example. You’d need to check around with dealers selling ST tires for a U.S.-made brand. And in truth, it’s not so much the “Made in China” label as it is the care that goes into manufacturing those tires and the quality control applied by the manufacturer. Many “Made in China” tires are really inexpensive and if that’s what you buy you get what you pay for — tires that wear out fast or fail early due to poor quality control and substandard materials. When a responsible tire company makes its tires in China or anywhere else where resources are less expensive, chances are good they take more care in specifying how that product should be made and what it’s made of. It’s all in the quality control. The good company has a brand name reputation to protect on the products it sells in the United States. I’d suggest you stick with a well-known and respectable brand of tire and that would help ensure you have success with your tire purchase. — J.J.
Emergency Medical and Travel Assistance

Once Upon a Time...

I was traveling through Yuma, Arizona with my two Yorkshire Terriers, when I took a nasty fall in my motorhome. I had injured my back and had to be hospitalized. I called Good Sam TravelAssist as soon as I could. Good Sam TravelAssist contacted my son Paul to notify him of my injury, and because I was traveling alone Good Sam TravelAssist arranged and paid for Paul to fly out to Yuma. Paul was there by my side while I was treated, and was able to care for my dogs. Good Sam TravelAssist also kept an eye on my case, having a Medical Director review my medical reports. Once I was deemed fit to travel, my son Paul was there to drive my RV back home. All Paul’s expenses for the trip home were reimbursed. Thanks to Good Sam TravelAssist, I didn’t have to deal with my injury all alone. Happily Ever After.

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WATER HEATER SHUTDOWN

Q I have a GC6AA-8E Atwood Water Heater with Direct Ignition. I’m having problems keeping the water heater lit. It lights as long as it sparkles to ignite, but once the spark quits the flame goes out. I have replaced the ECO switch, the thermostat and the thermal cut off. I have also cleaned everything and checked the voltage at the solenoids, which is almost 11 volts. Any suggestion would be helpful.

Scott Givens, Via email

A “Almost” 11 volts may be enough to operate a solenoid, Scott, but it’s not enough to operate the rest of the system’s electronics. Atwood calls for a minimum of 10.5 volts DC to operate the heater’s electronics when it is running. With any other 12-volt DC loads present in the RV, that “almost 11 volts” can easily drop below the Atwood recommended minimum. There is a low-voltage problem somewhere in your RV’s system, which could mean partially discharged batteries, a converter that’s not adequately charging the batteries when hooked up, or one or more bad electrical connections or grounds between the battery and the water heater. Start by checking the battery voltage and connections and work toward the water heater until you find the cause, which will then allow you to repair the low-voltage problem.

— J.J.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Q Thanks for all your help in the past. You guys sure help a lot of us who tow trailers. I tow a trailer with my 2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee and then do some four-wheeling in the Jeep at various places in the West. Although I have never been stuck while four-wheeling, I know there will be a first time. What kind of communication technology should I have in case I get stranded in some remote area and have no cell-phone coverage? Should I have a satellite phone, a CB radio or something else? What technology is the overall lowest cost solution?

Ted Kazmar, San Diego, California
I used to be on a search and rescue team, have done a lot of four-wheeling in remote Western areas and am a ham radio licensee, so I have some experience with this subject. You really should not go to remote areas by yourself, without at least two people and a second vehicle, but you’ll have to make that decision. CB radios are fine for short-distance communication, particularly between vehicles traveling together, and are inexpensive, but you cannot rely on them for emergency communications. Most radio communications in the frequencies we commonly use propagate mainly by line-of-sight. So if using a CB radio or cellphone, try to get up as high as possible and get in the open, if you can. When you are in canyons and low spots radio/cellphone transmission is very limited. Therefore, the best and most reliable communications are overhead via satellite. I have used and recommend the Spot GPS Messenger (www.findmespot.com, 866-651-7768). The same company also has Spot Connect, which turns your smartphone into a satellite phone, and a new Spot Global Phone that uses satellites. There are also other companies that offer satellite phone service: Use your Web browser to do a search. — Ken Freund

**HITCH WEIGHT QUESTION**

Q We have a 2009 Dodge Ram with a 3.7-liter V-6 engine and the truck was factory equipped with a towing package, but it has 500-pound maximum trailer hitch weight rating on the rear bumper. Two years ago we purchased a 21-foot Flagstaff microlite travel trailer (model 21FBRS) with a base/dry weight of 3,624 pounds and a 369-pound hitch weight, instead of the one we preferred, a 23-foot Flagstaff with Murphy Bed & Couch Option at the front with a 569-pound hitch weight and a dry weight of 3,709 pounds (model 23FB). We are still interested in the 23-footer, but need to know for sure if the hitch weight of 569 pounds would be OK to tow safely with our 500-pound bumper maximum. I have been very pleased with the way my truck tows the 21-footer, but the 23-footer would better suit our needs. Your help with my question would be appreciated.

Bill Deaton, Via email

A No way should you exceed the rear bumper rating. You need to install a proper frame-mounted hitch receiver and use a weight-distributing ball mount. I also suggest you add a sway control. When considering trailer weight, you need to ignore dry weight, which is considerably less than actual loaded weight. You should be using the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) if you haven’t actually weighed the loaded trailer. You’ll need a Class III hitch for up to 5,000 pounds total trailer weight, and a Class IV hitch if the loaded trailer weight exceeds 5,000 pounds but is less than 10,000 pounds. — K.F.
TANK-GAUGE PROBLEMS TIP
I had similar tank monitor accuracy problems as mentioned in “Tank-Gauge Problems Tip” in the July issue, with four trailers that I have owned. All were purchased new and I maintained the tanks as recommended by the manufacturers. With each trailer, after about six months of use, I found inaccurate readings with the gray and black tanks. On my current fifth-wheel, I installed the SeeLevel RV Tank Monitoring Gauges from Garnet Technologies Inc. (www.rvgauge.com) and have had nothing but perfect accuracy. The sensors are installed on the exterior of the tank and are not subject to the crud build up as are most sensors. The monitor reads out tank levels in percentages so the monitoring is precise. The gauges come in many different configurations depending on the number of tanks and tank size, and some include an LP-gas monitor and pump and water-heater switches. I have found the customer service at Garnet Technologies to be excellent. Frankly, I am surprised that manufacturers continue to install the old style gauges that become inaccurate so quickly and become essentially useless. I would like to see tank monitors such as the SeeLevel offered at least as an option.

Bob Haynes, Minden, Nevada

A
Thanks for writing and sharing your experience. Tank monitor problems are very common and one of the most frequent queries from our readers. — K.F.

TRAILER CONNECTOR CORROSION
My questions are in regard to the seven-pin connector (plug and receptacle) that connect the tow vehicle to the trailer’s (1) ground, (2) electric brakes, (3) tail- and running lights, (4) 12-volt DC, (5) left turn signal, (6) right turn signal, and (7) (Aux) back up lights. From time to time I have had problems making good contact with this connector. Either the electric brakes, turn signals, or something else doesn’t work. The remedy has been to wiggle the connector until good contact has been made. I have cleaned the contacts from time to time, but they are not easy to access. In that the contacts are not plated with a noble metal such as gold, they do oxidize and require cleaning.

How many other owners have trouble with this connector? In my 40 years of experience in the electronics equipment industry, I have found that a good, reliable connector requires two things: 1) spring-loaded contact pressure, which is usually designed into the metal pins themselves and 2) pins plated with a noble metal or a wiping action and contact pressure that provides electrical contact equivalent to a plated pin. The pins in the seven-pin plug are single spades that wipe one side of the sturdy pins in the receptacle during insertion, but what provides the needed contact pressure? It appears to just

Bob Haynes, Minden, Nevada

A
Thanks for writing and sharing your experience. Tank monitor problems are very common and one of the most frequent queries from our readers. — K.F.
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be the mechanical dimensions of the plug’s shell, not the metal pins themselves. When looking online for a better connector, I found the Euro seven-pin connector, which is used in Europe. The pin design looks to be similar to the six-pin gooseneck connectors. The Euro seven-pin connector appears to be a more reliable connector.

I have been pulling trailers since 1986 and I am just now getting paranoid about the safety of pulling our 13,000-pound fifth-wheel with an unreliable connector. What are your suggestions for a reliable and practical connector and/or how to clean the pins on the U.S. seven-pin connector?

Curtis Hart, Round Rock, Texas

I don’t have any statistics on how many or what percentage of RVers have experienced corrosion problems with trailer connectors, but most of them are probably in regions with high humidity and plenty of precipitation. The folded-over shape of most metal prongs in the female plugs generally provide some wiping action and tension. I have found that DeoxIT D-Series Contact Cleaner & Rejuvenator (http://store.caig.com) works well on electrical connections such as trailer plugs.

Take a look at the EZ Connector (ezconnector.com). It uses magnetic contact points and is sealed from moisture and the elements. I think you’ll find it to be the best solution on the market at this time. — K.F.

TIRE-PRESSURE CHANGES

We have a GMC Savana 3500 van with a 4.10 gear ratio, rated for 10,000 pounds towing. I tow a 28-foot Springdale travel trailer that’s 7,600 pounds fully loaded. The van tires are Goodyear Wrangler, LT245/75R16, load range E. Tire manufacturer cold inflation is 80 PSI. GMC suggested tire pressures are 50 pounds in front and 80 pounds in back. I guess those specifications are for a fully loaded van carrying heavy cargo. I use a weight distribution hitch and nitrogen to fill the tires.

I put 75 PSI in the front to handle the added weight from the weight distribution hitch, and leave the rear at 80 PSI. When towing, I always go to the same place, California’s High Sierra. It is just about all desert driving until I get there, with the temperatures in the low 100s. Once I get there I unhitch the trailer and drive around to the various lakes. I have noticed in the past that the tire pressure in all of the tires will go up 5 PSI or more, even with the nitrogen, when towing to and from the Sierra. How much pressure can tires hold beyond their manufacturer’s cold pressure without creating a problem?

I have gone to many local tire stores in the past inquiring about this and they all have different ideas.

Lee Wheeler, Huntington Beach, California

As you drive into the mountains, the ambient air pressure drops at
a rate of about 3 percent per thousand feet of elevation gain. However, (assuming that the tires are checked at the same temperature when cold) the amount of air and “absolute” air pressure inside the tire actually remains the same. Tire pressure gauges measure the difference between the air pressure inside the tire and outside the tire (PSIG). They do not measure absolute pressure (using absolute zero pressure, or a vacuum as a baseline reference). If you had a gauge that measured absolute pressure (PSIA) you would find that the tire pressure actually didn’t increase. Nitrogen gas expands at the same rates as dry air does, so don’t expect a significant pressure difference due to using nitrogen.

The tire pressure placard you are using is overly simplistic and doesn’t take into consideration variations in tire loadings. To properly determine tire pressure, tire manufacturers recommend that you weigh each axle on a truck scale. Then inflate the tires according to the actual weight they are carrying, using a load-inflation table provided by the tire manufacturer for that particular tire (available on their websites and tire dealers). Tire manufacturers allow a 10 PSI over-pressure margin above the recommended pressure at maximum load. That’s because if you were running the maximum load, the slightest air loss would cause the tire to be underinflated. — K.F.

DUAL-PANE WINDOWS

There is quite a bit of controversy out there whether to have dual-pane windows in a fifth-wheel. We plan on living full time in a fiver and want to know whether we should get dual-pane windows. Is the fogging up of dual-pane windows really an issue and, if so, how hard is it to replace a window, and what kind of expense are we talking? Also, is condensation on single-pane windows an issue?

Bob Furniss, Trevose, Pennsylvania

Where you intend to live full time is a major factor in this decision. Dual-pane windows are more expensive, but provide very

(continued on page 80)
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significant insulation in hot and cold weather. They also provide greater sound reduction from outside sources when closed. Unless you plan to stay in a place where the weather is very mild, you’d be well advised to use dual-pane windows. There are a number of companies that repair the windows if the seal between the panes leaks, and there are also DIY instructions online. See E. Don Smith’s article on Trailer Life’s website: www.trailerlife.com/rv-trailer-news/ replacing-dual-pane-rv-windows. In cold weather, single pane glass will fog up and moisture droplets will form unless you ventilate the interior extensively and limit hot showers and cooking with water, etc. — K.F.
**Low-Profile Bucket**

At first glance this looks like the typical Bucket Boss tool carrier. I have tried many toolboxes of various sizes and shapes and have always preferred the old bucket for ease of use and ample storage. I found a half-height 2½-gallon bucket that has the same footprint and diameter of the 5-gallon size at my local lumber company. The Bucket Boss fits perfectly. Now I have a low-profile bucket that can be stored in any of my compartments, offers easy access to any tool and a handy bucket should I need to transport water or anything else that would fit.

**Danny Lindstrom, Salinas, California**

**Picnic Table Weights**

We’ve read several suggestions in 10-Minute Tech about using PVC pipe and slicing it so it springs open to hold down tablecloths. We’ve tried that but found that we still had trouble with thick concrete tables in some campgrounds so we came up with soda can weights.

Remove the top from four soda cans and punch two holes through the upper part of each can. Cut a wire clothes hanger at the base, insert each end through the can and twist together. Fill the can with sand and glue on a disk on the top of each can (we cut out pieces of plastic). Hang the cans from each corner of the tablecloth. If your tablecloth doesn’t have grommets, you can use flat washers glued onto the corner ends of the tablecloth for reinforcement.

**Dorothy Chappell, Gilbertsville, Kentucky**

**Cream Those Stains**

Here’s a simple and cheap way to clean most dirt and stains from the window shades. You will find it also works on most fabrics. Buy the least-expensive shaving cream you can find and apply the cream to the shade or material. Then brush firmly into the stain (use a soft brush on soft materials and a stiff brush on heavier materials, like carpets), let it set and, once dry, vacuum away the residue. On older stains a second treatment might be necessary.

— Harold Moran, Bluefield, West Virginia

To send your submission, write to: 10-Minute Tech, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, California 93001 or email: 10minutetech@trailerlife.com. Please include an illustration or photo if applicable. Trailer Life will pay you $35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas.
Land of 15,000 Lakes

Elkhart Lake offers plenty of pure fun, whether you’re into relaxing or activities

Growing up in Minnesota, I always thought that the slogan about the “Land of 10,000 Lakes” was a big deal, making my home state something special — we had more lakes than anybody. Today, I am next door in Wisconsin. They tell me here that they’ve got more than 15,000 lakes, and always have. What a letdown.

I am at one, Elkhart Lake. It’s 20 miles west of Sheboygan. This place took on the eminence of an upscale lake resort in the late 1800s. And it still has that vintage feel and look.

The three hotels at the north end of the lake were built back then. One of them, the Osthoff Resort, now sprawls over a couple of city blocks. It could easily keep a painter employed full-time just keeping its wood siding white.

In 1872 the railroad pushed north. Elkhart Lake was added to the route. That track is still here, as is the passenger depot in the village. During the summer, folks from Milwaukee and Chicago, with steamer trunks in tow, poured in here at the rate of 2,000 a week. They found relief from the heat and dust of the big city here beside the clear, spring-fed waters of Elkhart Lake.

Gambling was popular, especially with the Chicago crowd. It was illegal, but that didn’t seem to matter. Men, women and children all crowded around the roulette wheels. Access to the gambling tables was as easy as going to the soda fountain in a drugstore. The sheriff didn’t concern himself with it, saying it was “just a summer thing.” Finally in 1946, the last gambling location was shut down.

I arrived at the lake for Labor Day weekend, the official end of summer in this part of the country. I was fishing from a boat early in the morning. The lake is deep — maximum depth is more than 100 feet — and spreads over hundreds of acres. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, it is among the 10 healthiest lakes in the state for fish and wildlife. (That’s out of 15,000, lest we forget.)

The morning began quietly and fishing was good. Nobody else was on the lake. At a little before 10 a.m., powerboats began easing out from docks all along the shore, which is dense with cottages. And then, as if a race official had fired his pistol, the lake took on a new life. Boats went to full throttle as water-skiers and wakeboarders rose out of the water behind them. The last day of a Wisconsin summer was underway, and right on schedule.

Boating rules here are strict: A speed of “slow, no wake” is always in effect except between 10 a.m. and 7:30 in the evening. That’s when the aquatic acrobats and the speed boaters have their fun. On Sunday, no motorboats are allowed at all, unless using an electric trolling motor.

The Tuesday after Labor Day was like the Florida coast when a hurricane is coming. The beaches were all but empty and I saw only one water-skier.

At the south end of the lake is a beautiful, tree-shaded campground at Broughton Sheboygan Marsh Park. This is a 14,000-acre wildlife preserve with 30 acres developed for campers and is a recreational haven for outdoor enthusiasts.

The county built an 80-foot observation tower here. A climb to the top allows you to pick where in the park you want to explore. I discovered that you can skip the climb and still get the view — albeit on a TV monitor — by going into the lodge and getting on the joy-stick that controls a video camera on the top of the tower.

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