

Ormand Family Activity

October 2010: David's Portland and Maryland Trips

My company has sent me on business travel to two rivers on the opposite side of the nation - Portland, Oregon, on the Columbia River, and Blossom Point, Maryland, on the Potomac River. Unfortunately, being business trips in the company of several other people for a company which is intent on cutting costs to the bone (supposedly), there was little time or opportunity to see anything (outside of restaurants), but I always try my best.

So while the Raytheon people and the Northrop Grumman people (working together to put a new TOW launcher on the Cobra attack helicopter) were standing on the verandah of our hotel, I got a picture of the Columbia River in Oregon. The other side is actually an island in the river, so this is a channel (the narrower one) of the Columbia. Presently we will depart for our restaurant in Vancouver, Washington, and see the main part of the river from the bridge. I didn't get a shot of that.



The airport is also right on the riverfront, and as we made our approach, I could see many sailboats on the river. Later that night I stepped down from this verandah and over the grassy berm and stood on the bank of the river with the lights gleaming from the dark water. While the chiggers climbed out of the high weeds and up my socks, and nibbled on my legs.

The next day we went down Highway 5 to FLIR Systems, the other partner we were meeting with, which is some distance south of the downtown. On the way we passed Downtown Portland, which is quite a large city built on the side of the river canyon, and looks well worth exploring. But it will have to be later on a family trip to the Pacific Northwest!

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A few weeks later, I was sent with another team to Maryland, for a "slug" test of the new TOW motor system. Our arrangements were made for us to stay at National Harbor, which is less than an hour from Reagan National Airport. To reach National Harbor from the airport,

we drove through historic Alexandria, Virginia, but didn't really see anything (business trips are aggravatingly tantalizing), so that, too, will have to be reserved for a family trip. Maybe next year! But after we arrived at National Harbor and had some time before our dinner in an expensive seafood restaurant, I took the opportunity to look around a bit.

National Harbor is an upscale marina and shopping center with several convention hotels not far from DC. So there's a flavour of fakiness about it. Like this little park with a "wrecked ship" and a "lighthouse" at the entrance to the shopping district.





Kind of like the fake lighthouse on Hilton Head. The top level is an observation platform, and it looks like there might be a touristy gift shop at street level. No, it was closed when we got there, so I didn't see more than this.

A view of the marina from the east bank. Pretty small. I'm guessing that, given the ritzy environment, it costs a lot to moor here. The bridge opposite crosses the Potomac to Alexandria on the Virginia side.



There are three massive concrete quays out into the harbor, and these floating wood piers out to the boats. Mostly motor cruisers and large sailboats. And a jetski.



There were also several river cruise boats, like the *Patriot* here. On the other side of the quay was one of several "water taxis" with service to Alexandria. Tickets for sale at a booth at the marina plaza. I didn't see any boats coming or going, and I didn't check the price or schedule at the booth, and I wouldn't have been able to do anything with it if I had. Regrets. Future intentions.



Well, except that we *did* see this paddle-wheeler cruise ship as we arrived, and here it is just coming to the Gaylord Hotel dock. Apparently a large group had chartered it from the Hotel, as later I observed them debarked and standing under the pavilion all talking together.



You know it's more than just a marina when they have titanic sculptures of titans. Even weird ones.



Sunset on the Potomac. This is after a really heavy rainy spell that just drenched much of the northeast, particularly around Annapolis, where my buddy Bill Beaver and his family live. It's still cloudy, and windy, and cold. Fortunately, it doesn't rain while we're there, so our test comes off without interference.



The Gaylord Resort Hotel is at the south end of the National Harbor complex, and is apparently the anchor for it (the road into National Harbor is actually the Gaylord's driveway). If I had had the time for it, I would have walked through the enormous terrarium of the hotel, similar but not as magnificent as the Gaylord near Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. But I did check out this automated fountain (embedded control!) - the jets swivel up and down, and the volume of water changes. Nice.



It's "National"
Harbor because there
are flags of the 50
states all over it.
Here's to my sister
and her family in Fort
Collins, Colorado!





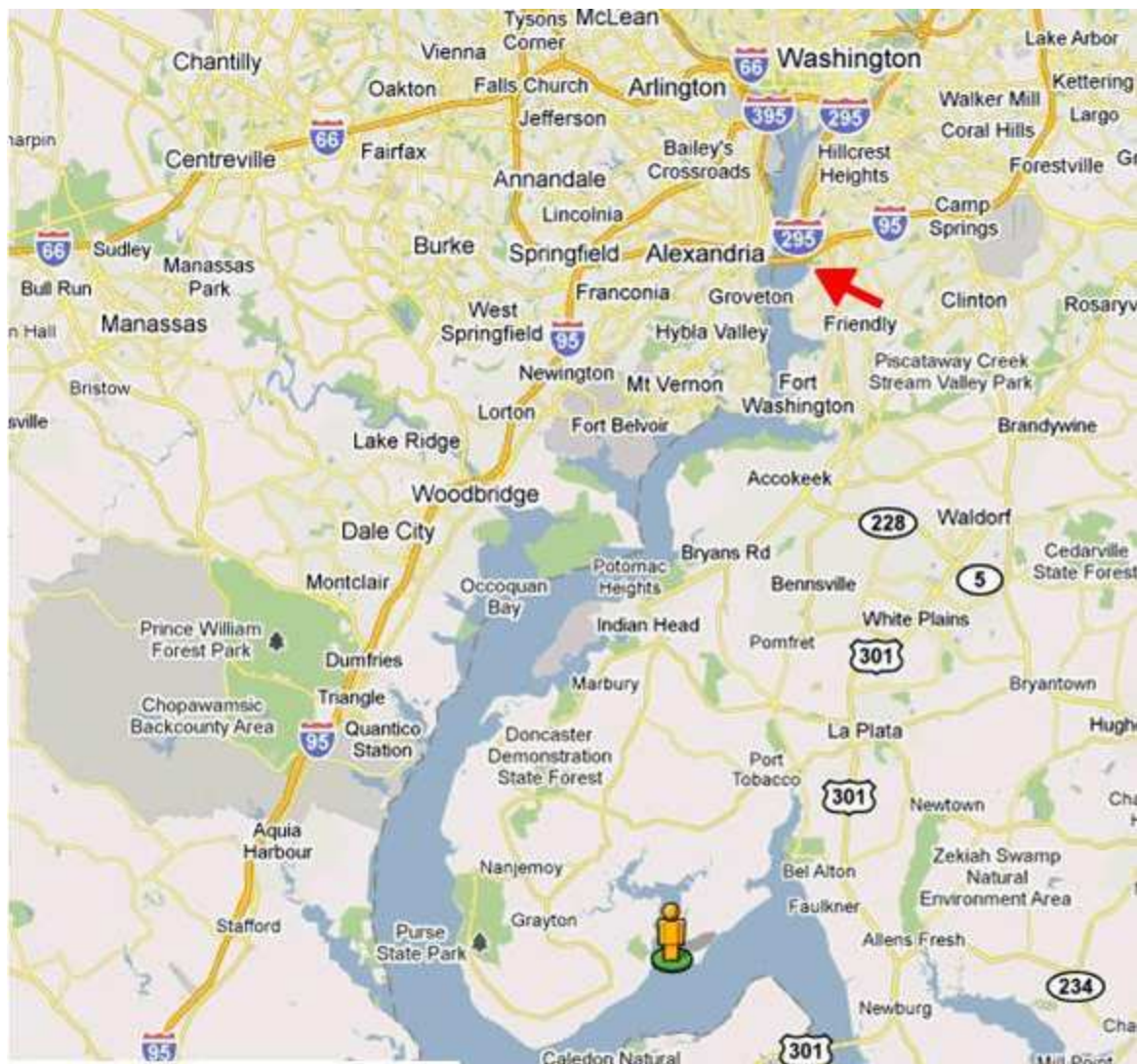
The Copper Star over the Potomac River!

The next day, we get our car out of the pay garage and try to make our way down south to Blossom Point. Per the map (itouchmap.com/?d=583297&s=MD&f=cape), National Harbor is where the arrow is, and the little man is standing on Blossom Point. The roads in the DC area are poorly marked and really, *really* confusing, so we get lost from our Mapquest-generated route and have to resort to maps. Eventually we get there. Since we are told that there are no food places near the base, we get some sandwiches from a WaWa store (corresponds to our Seven-Eleven or Quik Trip gas station/convenience stores).

Blossom Point Research Facility (www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/blossom-point.htm) is an Army installation, formerly Blossom Point Proving Grounds, where they tested rocket and cannon munitions, and is still actively used for testing 40-millimeter

ammunition. However, the Army shares it extensively with the Navy, and it is our friends from Indian Head (also in Maryland on the Potomac, directly north of Blossom Point), a Navy development facility, who we are meeting, along with our partner Alliant TechSystems (ATK) from West Virginia, and they have arranged the use of the range.

Also on the map is West Springfield (north of Indian Head, in Virginia), where I lived for three years while my Dad was posted to Bolling Air Force Base in Maryland. We visited DC a lot, saw all the Smithsonian museums and the prominent monuments, but we didn't really see much of Maryland. West of West Springfield is Manassas, the scene of the Battle of Bull Run; we *did* visit there. Long ago. My kids need to see these places.



Satellite photo of Blossom Point ([www.satellite-sightseer.com/id/6171/United States/Maryland/LaPlata/Blossom Point Army facility](http://www.satellite-sightseer.com/id/6171/United_States/Maryland/LaPlata/Blossom_Point_Army_facility/)).

Apparently there is unexploded ammunition ("UXO") all over the place (uxoinfo.com/blogcfc/client/includes/uxopages/sitedata1.cfm?uxoinfo_id=01MD0001); it's too expensive to find and remove it all, so this beautiful land is not usable for anything but an Army test range. The red circle encloses our little test setup. The launcher is set up east of the intersection of the peripheral road and the long straight road running northeast along the main range. The "slug" is a missile with only a launch motor, and a "catcher" filled with cardboard ceiling tiles is fifty feet away. High speed cameras capture the motion of the slug as it emerges from the launcher. During the test, people not directly involved with the firing were sent to the rickety old six-story-tall observation tower, the black dot in the circle near the river bank. From the top room of the tower, I could see river on all three sides of the Point, including a barge running down toward the sea, and a few sailboats.



The tests went very well, and we left for Waldorf with our ATK friends for a celebratory dinner at Olive Garden. Turns out those guys stayed in a Best Western at less than half the cost of the hotel at National Harbor, and had free Internet service - I don't know why, but expensive hotels like the Westin (where we stayed) and the Sheraton and such charge a fee for the use of the Internet. Why expensive places should charge money for something that is free at mid-grade hotels is beyond me. Anyways, as we left the range, we saw four flocks

of wild turkeys and several white-tail does and fauns, all of whom ran back into the forest as we went by. I saw more wildlife in that fifteen minutes of driving than anywhere in Arizona or Utah!

The next morning I get up and take a taxicab back to Reagan (the other guys with the cars are staying on travel through Friday, and don't want to get up at 6:00 (3:00 Tucson time) just to take me to the airport). The flight on Delta from DC to Atlanta is about two hours, and the flight from Atlanta to Tucson is a bit over three hours.

On route over Arkansas, just after flying over the Mississippi River (so I've seen the Columbia, the Potomac, and the Mississippi rivers in two weeks time!), I see these tremendous fires all over the place.



The smoke plume must be *miles* long. It has to be controlled burns, maybe an agricultural practice in the region.

Later on, we fly over Dallas and Fort Worth. I'm listening to the older Georgian people in the seats behind me; they know it's Texas, and they know it's a major city with tall buildings, so they're guessing "Dallas"... "Houston"... "Austin... no, Austin isn't that big"... I can't really tell Dallas from the air so well, but I can see the stadium in Arlington near Six Flags and Hurricane Harbor, so I'm pretty sure I know where this

is. Sure enough, here's Fort Worth on the Trinity, and its unmistakable features.



- A - The dome of the Fort Worth Convention Center
- B - Wells Fargo buildings
- C - Bridge over the Trinity in front of the Tarrant County Courthouse
- D - Road into Fort Worth; 183 past the airport turns into 121 turns into 347 turns into Belnap Road
- E - Highway 30



Portland and Alexandria - places that I want to go back to and explore.
Some time other than time and money constrained business trips!