



MONTHLY MEETING - DIAMOND JACK'S @ 7031 S. ZURICH IN TULSA!! 6:45 PM!!!

SPRING FLING 2011: JAUNICE WRIGHT



Once upon a sunny spring Saturday morning, 24 eager Miatas lined up ready to enjoy the NEO Miata Club Spring Fling, hosted by our much adored Wild Thang, Earl Larkin. (We greatly missed Wild Child. Get well soon Dorothy!)

After greeting old friends and receiving drive instructions, our drivers and co-pilots were looking forward to another of Earl's unique and exciting drives. Earl gave our seven first time drive attendees a memorable example of how a tense grip on the steering wheel can cause sore shoulders, sore neck, and a headache. James and Sara Smith were sweep and tasked with keeping all us troublemakers in line.

Because of time constraints, we needed to quickly cover as many miles as possible; so we took our usual 412 route out of Tulsa, then the Cherokee Turnpike to Siloam Springs. We made a quick stop at the Siloam Springs Visitors Center

where three more cars joined the drive. Earl gave us no time to lolly-gag around. We were in and out in fifteen minutes flat and on our way to Springdale where our line of 27 cars attracted the attention of a local yokel. Earl warned us about the land of the stoplights and sure enough, our fearless band was split apart by traffic and red lights. We persevered and eventually were all back together, through town, and on our way to Huntsville.

The pastoral countryside from Springdale to Huntsville beckoned with its lush green pastures and blankets of pink, white, red and yellow wild flowers along the roadside. By 10am, we made a stop to relieve and refuel at Huntsville. Following Highway 412 East we drove through the quaint town of Alpena. Built in 1908 on top of a graveyard, the town lived up to it's unique origin with unusual (what we think were) mannequins, flags, and art. Continuing seven miles to the junction of 412E and 65N, we took the super highway connecting East Texas and Louisiana to Branson. Surviving the Autobahn, we turned east just prior to the Missouri State Line onto "Fabulous 14E". Earl described this road as "48 miles of endless curves, most of them big wide-open sweepers". Earl also mentioned this type of road encourages timid drivers because they can see through the curves.

Ending this leg of our drive in Yellville, we lunched at a picturesque restaurant called The Front Porch. This restaurant has been featured in Southern Living and is famous for their catfish. The majority of our drivers preferred inside dining; but some of us dined alfresco where we could enjoy the view of Crooked Creek as it rippled over the rocks in a dance with sunbeams. We were well received by the staff, and everyone enjoyed lunch. Earl later mentioned that our group impressed the restaurant staff with our congeniality and generosity; and that the parking lot had been under water only five days ago! After another drivers meeting to prepare us for the afternoon, we dragged Earl back on the road...Can you believe it we had to wait on Earl!.. and headed back on 14E. We began with the tops down, but before we were out of Yellville, it began to sprinkle and we had to pull over while we had an opportunity to find a stopping place and go top-up.

Earl mentioned curves on this stretch of the road would become "tighter" and more difficult to "read". The sprinkles turned into light rain but our cars hugged the curves as we zoomed our way to a city called Fiftysix; named after the number of the local school district. About 2:30, we reached Blanchard Springs Caverns where Earl had reserved a guided tour for our group. Earl mentioned he has been to many caverns but told us this was "the most beautiful cave I have ever toured". Too true! We split into three groups. One group went on the walking cave tour, another went on an 80 mile drive, and a remaining few relaxed in the visitors center.

Prior to the walking tour, we had an opportunity to wander through the exhibit exhibit room where we learned about the history of the area, the cavern, and the animals that live in the cavern. Beginning our tour, an elevator dropped us 250 feet into the cavern below. The tour was a .4 mile walk on paved walkways cut through through the tumbled waste in the cave. Metal rails kept the cave and the tourist safe. Those of us who went through the cavern were speechless. The cave is alive and still forming. Our tour wound around a variety of crystalline formations of flow-stone ribbons, columns, delicate soda straws, massive calcite deposits, and lime extrusions. Our guide mentioned that in about a month, the bats would be active and flying overhead.



Everyone met back in the parking lot a little after 4pm for another motivational "pep talk" in preparation for the last leg of our day's journey. The rain had become light sprinkles just in time for us to get to our cars; but as we drove in a reverse route back to junction 14W and 341N, it became a heavier rain. Earl called 341N, aka Push Mountain Road, "motorcycle and sports car heaven with 25 miles of glorious curves"; and that the Ducati Club calls it Arkansas Number One road. It truly was a fun drive even in the rain. After about half an hour, the rain lessened and fog formed a gossamer veil above the trees and road. What a spectacular vista.

Still on schedule, we ended our day in Mountain Home with a six pm dinner at Colton's Steak House. Our last instructions of the day were to eat, be out of the restaurant by seven; refuel, find the Motel 8, and be at a drivers meeting 7am Sunday morning. We calculated about 328 driving miles for the first day.

If you want a fun story, ask Earl about the gas pump!

Sunday morning dawned sunny and a cool 53 degrees with massive storms forming to the southwest of us. As we packed our cars and checked out, we had a wonderful time visiting and listening to the banter between Tom Jones and Joe Bohannon until Earl corralled us for a drivers meeting. Everyone helped to ensure that all drivers who had been on Saturday's drive, and were not present at the drivers meeting, had informed someone they were not returning with us.

At 7:45, tops down...brrrr... we followed 62E for a 36 mile scenic drive past Norfolk Lake, through the city of Viola, arriving at Salem, where we noticed the temperature had climbed to a balmy 55 degrees. Turning north on Highway 9, we drove another lovely 20 miles to visit Mammoth Springs. Before Earl turned us loose to explore, he provided us with some history of the Springs.



Looking at the calm surface of the largest pool, one would not realize there is a spring more than 80 feet below the water level where water flows at 9.78 million gallons per hour and has a constant temperature of 58 degrees. Mammoth Springs is part of an underground river system that is created from rainfall over southern Missouri. Water flows along a vast system of interconnected cavities eventually converging into a main channel and emerging as Mammoth Springs. Water from the Spring flows onward to form the trout haven of Spring River. Earl said "On all of planet earth, it ranks at Number 10 for its output of spring water". The dam forming the pool was constructed in 1888. Adjacent to the dam is the hydro-electric plant constructed in 1925 by the Arkansas-Missouri power Company. This facility provided electricity to the area until 1972.

Earl mentioned he wanted to take us to Thayer, Missouri, six miles northeast of Mammoth Springs. Home of Grand Gulf State Park and known as Missouri's Little Grand Canyon, two giant sink-holes occurred as a result of the collapse of a 3/4 mile cave roof leaving a steep-walled, 130 foot chasm. The surviving cavern roof forms a natural bridge 250 feet long. Part of the tunnels that feed Mammoth Springs are visible. Unfortunately we could not visit because there were only twelve places to park.

Leaving Mammoth Springs via Highway 9 South, we returned to Salem and followed more curvy roads 25 miles through Oxford and Melbourne. Continuing 20 miles to Sylamore on Highway 9 South is the road Earl called "Motorcycle Nirvana". He said some Arkansas

bikers say it is the best road in the state and it is the narrowest road we traveled on our weekend. Earl counseled caution because this highway has almost no guard-rails and no shoulders. Five of our cars split off and continued ahead on a "scouting mission". Shortly after, a light rain began and we were fortunate in finding a tiny church on a hill with a gravel parking lot where we could pull off and put tops up. Despite the light rain, we enjoyed the most amazing drive and I understand the "scouting mission" was a Zoomin' success.

At the Junction of Highway 9 South with Highway 5 South, we turned north to Mountain View for a fuel stop and to meet up with our brave scouts. We discovered Earl had a little problem telling the difference between a Hardy's and McDonalds. Leaving Mountain View, Highway 9 South twisted and turned, gaining in elevation for the next 27 miles to Shirley. Earl had us count how many 90 degree turns we encountered going through Shirley, a town of less than 400 people. I counted seven!

Tired of turning in Shirley, we continued on Highway 9, picking up Highway 16 and winding our way ten miles to a potty stop in Clinton. Earl cautioned there would not be another potty stop for 119 miles because we were headed for the "Deep Woods" of the mountain area. Our route was Highway 16 west for 69 miles of endless curves, pines, and scenery. Then, leaving Highway 16 West at Pelsor, we followed Highway 123 South. Up, down, around. Zooming through the sometimes heavy rain, our little cars hugged the curves like the high performance sports cars they are. Mid-way, we began to hear calls for potty stop! A few cars dropped off temporarily to answer the call of nature. Earl slowed the pace and with the assistance of Sara, Sandy, James, Tom, and another voice I didn't recognize, we successfully regrouped on the fly. LOL

Arriving at Clarksville, we stopped at a closed Wendy's facility adjacent to I-40 to say our goodbyes and receive final instructions from Earl on how to get home.

Our weekend journey was approximately 500 miles through the Boston Mountains and the Salem Plateau regions of the Ozark Mountain Range. The Boston area is the highest and most rugged portion of the Ozarks with peaks up to 2,560 and valleys of 500-1,550 deep. Three of the highest peaks in the Bostons are on Highway 16; which was the last part of our journey.

I know that all of us appreciate the effort Earl spends in planning these large drives. Earl doesn't just research and plan the route on paper; he might drive this route five, six, or more times. In addition to planning a route, finding places for bathroom/refueling stops and restaurants that can accommodate 30-40 cars is in itself a monumental task. Then comes negotiating with facilities to obtain the best rate for rooms and meals. Miraculously, Earl finds new routes and surprises each year; and each drive is better than the last. Earl has more spectacular drives than I can find superlatives to describe his drives. Lets also not forget to thank Earl's better half, Dorothy. She is the woman behind the man and his trusted co-pilot; every step of the way. Thank you Earl and Dorothy--Wild Thang and Wild Child.

PREVIOUS MONTH'S MEETING MINUTES: CAROL LAWS

WELCOME TO OUR NEW CLUB MEMBERS

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Our club president, Mike Viseur, quickly called the meeting to order on April 20. He requested that usual round the room introductions and officer reports be skipped. There was far too much to cover about the Spring Fling drive. However, time was taken to introduce all the New Members. There were 10 in all--a club record for one meeting!

Mike's request to shorten the front of the meeting was a tactful way of letting us know that Earl would take over for the rest of the meeting to talk and talk about his and Dorothy's planning for the upcoming drive!

Long (long) ago Earl was Mike's high school history teacher. He was one of the school's favorite teachers. Over the decades Earl has learned how to tailor his "Lesson Plan" to suit the age, social skills, and attention spans of his individual audiences. Anyway, he had our rapt attention as he described in colorful detail all the driving and gastronomical delights that await us. (He certainly had this audience pegged!) Earl emphasized over and over again that we must be prompt at every stage of the drive. If we are late anywhere there goes lunch, our tour and our steak dinners!

Some really big reminders for the drive:

- (1) New mid- relay appointee plus end sweep position
- (2) DON'T double lane at town intersections. (Causes huge problem if making a turn.)
- (3) Stay close to car ahead especially in towns and on turnpikes to keep "outsiders" from interrupting the line.
- (4) Have 2 way radio and plenty of extra batteries.
- (5) Have Pikepass
- (6) DON'T pass your own club member ahead of you. Politely ask first if you might swap positions.

These drives take an enormous amount of Earl and Dorothy's time. They did the drive 4 times. Saturday alone should be around 328 miles. Not only did they do the drive several times, but they had to plan the potty stops, restaurants and negotiate for wonderful rates at the hotel.

Thank you so much Earl and Dorothy!

*****If you haven't gotten your NEO Miata afghan yet, please make plans to pick it up at the May monthly meeting. Cost is \$32.*****

Meeting Adjourned!

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