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## ***Stop 44. Many Glacier***

Arrival datetime: Saturday, June 29, 12:30PM  
Sites visited: Glacier National Park  
Accommodations: Many Glaciers Hotel  
States traveled: Montana

We were at the Avalanche Creek parking area at 8:20AM and it was still raining. The Ranger-led hike started at 8:30. We sipped coffee and debated the pros and cons of hiking in the rain. The cons had it. We found the Ranger in a sport utility vehicle in the same parking lot and asked her what she thought of the weather prospects. Not good, she reported, but she was going on the hike no matter what. We did not have to, so we did not.

We drove over Going to the Sun Road, an engineering feat and national historic landmark that blasted into the side of the Rocky Mountains straight across the park. It had just opened the previous day for the season, the second latest opening ever, due to the unusually heavy winter snowfall. The rain was sometimes very

hard and sometimes just a drizzle, but it was steady. All around us were waterfalls, on the side of the road, across the valleys on opposite ridges, above us on cliffs. Some were hundreds of feet high, most were at least fifty feet, a few were just ten foot holes in snow banks through which we could see rushing water disappear into the same snow bank..

The drive was supposedly famous for scenic mountain views, but we could see very few mountaintops, just low clouds and waterfalls on the steep slopes beneath. Most of these slopes were bare flat rock of the exfoliated type we saw at Zion. Exfoliated is a word we learned in the Visitor Center for rocks full of cracks with rugged, randomly chiseled cuts in



*"Going to the Sun Road" the day after it opened for the season.*

the surface. It apparently gets that way from the water seeping into it and breaking it apart.

We stopped a lot at the pullouts to take pictures of waterfalls and at the overlook areas to read exhibit signs. But most of the time it was raining too hard to get out of the car. Often there were two or three cars lined up at the exhibit signs, and we waited for the car before us to read it before we rolled up to it to see what it said. Often the signs described views we should have been able to see, but could not due to heavy fog. For example, the mountain that flows down to three major US watersheds, the Gulf, the Pacific via the Columbia River, and the Hudson Bay via the Saskatchewan River. Even the Visitor Center at Logan Pass was closed.

Our reservations had been at Glacier Lodge. But the Ranger at Apgar had sold us on the Wonders of the Many Glacier area, so we switched them to the Many Glacier Hotel. We could only get one night, not the two we had at Glacier, but we hoped to change that upon check in. But due to the rain, we knew there would not be much to see at Many Glacier, so we stopped along the way to shop for some sports sandals we had seen others wear at Havasu and that we wanted to make sure we had before our next outdoor water hiking experience. We still got to Many Glacier before 1:00PM.

Our room was not ready to check in so we watched the storm from the restaurant over lunch, then from the snack bar over huckleberry yogurt, then from the lounge over huckleberry daiquiris. The clouds rolled over the mountains and the lake one



*Glaciers melting into waterfalls on the "Going to the Sun" Road between Lake McDonald to Many Glacier and views from Many Glacier upon arrival.*

at a time. The cloud we saw approaching over a nearby mountain would not always necessarily be visible over Swiftcurrent Lake directly in front of us. There was often a large patch of sun between the clouds that would roll over the green hillside across from the lake, or a portion of the lake itself. A mountain peak would be intermittently visible depending on whether its current cloud cover was low or not. Rain streamed in soaking sheets from one cloud, while it would softly patter from the next. We once even saw sleet and snow directly outside the window that obscured even the far end of the lake for a short time.

When our room was still not ready at 3:00PM, Michael went to investigate it himself. He learned from the maids that

the person in our room had not checked out, and he reported this to the front desk. They did not exactly thank him, but gave us another room. It was by then pouring buckets. Michael brought the car from the parking lot to the covered loading area, getting soaked in the process. Then Jennifer waited in the lobby with our luggage while he parked again and ran back. There were drips from the ceiling onto the lobby furniture. Someone had put a few garbage cans in strategic places. But rather than move the furniture, people just sat on the dry side of a couch while cushions on the other side became soaked with rain. Jennifer moved the table where she had set our toiletry bag out of the direct path of a steady drip. She also took a few cushions off one of the couches and



*Grinnel Peak from Many Glacier Hotel*

suggested to a woman sitting on the other side that she move it a few inches so the rain would miss it entirely. The woman ignored the suggestion. None of the staff seemed to care.

We collapsed on the bed and took a nap. Upon waking, we saw the sun throw full daylight shine on the lake. A peak we had not seen before popped up in our window. But the rain had only abated, not stopped. Soon enough dark clouds floated through again. Thunder crashed outside as rain pelted the window and we watched the sun reflect off the lake. We had experienced many summer sun showers, but this was a sun-thunderstorm. Even after the rain stopped an hour later, a noisy wind continued to draft through the windows. Again, we thought it had abated, but it actually got worse, the whitecaps on the lake forming waves on the shore, the rain pelting our windows. It was cold in the room and the wall-mounted space heater was not keeping up. Michael stuffed towels along the windowsills minimize the impact of the wind. By the time we went down for dinner at 6:30PM, the storm was raging and howling.

After dinner, we tried to see the Ranger program. I say, we tried, because it was no fault of our own that we ended up leaving early. The Ranger started with quotes from Thomas Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark. She tried to get us to find, in the park newsletter, evidence that we could answer some of Jefferson's requirements for the explorers. For example, identify plant life. She emphasized that all Lewis and Clark were doing was seeing things new to them and relating them to their experience with reference to things they knew about from

home. The Indians and pioneers had seen everything first, Lewis and Clark were just making it understandable to those back home. Thus the mockingbird they found on their trip became the "western mockingbird," because theirs was the "eastern." Had Lewis not know about the eastern, he could not have so easily identified the western. She tried to claim that we were no different than Lewis and Clark because we also were experiencing the park through our own filters. But her message was completely obscured by poor delivery. Once she finally got into her real slide program, the slides were all out of order and there was so much technical difficulty, it became too painful to try to follow her train of thought. Many people left within the first twenty minutes. We left only to make sure we had enough time to get coffee and go to the rest room before the next entertainment for the evening.

The next entertainment was David Walburn, in a show named "Lewis and Clark, West for America." David played at the hotel 6 nights a week in 3 different shows, with similar explorer themes. No matter that the Lewis and Clark expedition never set foot in what is now Glacier National Park. It was still better than the Ranger program. He described the expedition, had slides with paintings and sketches, probably famous, depicting the major events. He also had original songs to describe how the men must have felt at certain junctures. Here is a sample of the lyrics from when they first started through the Rocky Mountains:

"How high are the mountains?

How many days are they wide?

How many men will be taken?

Do I have the strength left inside?"

One guitar chord was enough to lend background music to each line of David's vocals. Everyone could follow. It somehow worked enough to hold our attention for the full hour.

Amazingly, it was still light out at 10:00PM. The rain had completely abated. We had a few things to fetch from the car and decided to go together. The wind, however, was at gale force. The parking lot was dozens of steps up and over a hill. We ran up and into the car and closed the doors. We collected what we had sought, then chatted for a bit, building up our resolve to go back. We ran down the steps back to the hotel. Our room was cold, but there were two beds and we combined the blankets onto one. When it got dark, we closed the

curtains against the draft and the wind lulled us to sleep.

When we got up on Sunday, the wind had not abated. The sky was still gray, but we could see all the tops of the mountains around us. It was a beautiful place. The isosceles triangle of Grinnel Peak towered over the Lake. Smaller peaks, even more pointed, flanked to the right, while reddish buttes of horizontal patterns highlighted with snow fanned out to the left. Rocky alpine ridges surrounded us, making every view a photo frame and allure to panorama enthusiasts. For the first time, we understood those who compared Glacier with Yosemite or Zion. We walked outside a bit to decide whether we could go on our planned 10 mile Ranger-led hike up to one of the Glaciers. But the wind chill numbed our fingers, there was no way.

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Miles traveled: 62  
Departure datetime: Sunday, June 30, 8:30AM  
Departure weather: 53° Cloudy and Windy