

02/16
Phil Burton

Anatomy of a Road Trip

Day 1

I don't have a lot of clients in Oregon but we've been working there for decades and besides, we'd stopped exhibiting at the Oregon wine show some years ago and I wanted to see if it had changed. I figured a leisurely drive up on Sunday to Medford and start Monday morning visiting winemakers as I headed north to Portland.

I left Pope Valley around 10 and headed up towards Middletown and Lake County where I hit Hwy 20 to Williams. I had to stop along the way, though, to take some pictures of the barn that looks just like a church from the road. From the tapered windows to the steeple, you'd think church but when you come around to the other side, there's just a couple of roll up doors.



The mind rambles on these solo trips. The weather was perfect, the traffic light and as I got over towards Williams, all the almond trees



were in bloom for miles and miles. Sutter Buttes was off to the right while Shasta glistened to the north and I had Rt. 5 to myself. While driving I looked for flocks of Ibis; a bird you can ID just by head shape half a mile away.

I had headed north on the same route a month earlier as far as Weed before turning off to Klamath Falls to visit my mom who was really sick. This time I passed the same rest area where I had picked up an old woman hitchhiking who asked for a ride. It was unclear how she got to the rest stop but I piled all her stuff in the truck including a shopping cart, half a dozen bags of stuff and three cats. Apparently she was known in the area because she knew just the motel to leave her. On the way, she wanted Chicken McNuggets for dinner and I gave her 5 bucks when I let her off. As I was leaving, she gave me an envelope. Inside was a Christmas card and a million-dollar bill.

And what's with this "State of Jefferson" stuff? Several signs along the freeway tell of the coming 51st state as the area secedes from California. I hope they let us keep the freeway.

Day 2

I got a leisurely start at 8 and drove the 10 minutes over to meet Chris at Naumes. Naumes is one of the biggest pear producers and packers in the state and they hired Chris to design and build their custom crush facility. It's a lucky meeting for both and Chris and he's got a lot of freedom to build. When you see an optical sorter in a small facility, you know the owners care. Since I'm in Pinot Country, I pulled out a bottle of Garrett Boekenoogen's Santa Lucia Pinot Noir that's done in our

barrels for us to try. It's a delicious mouth filling wine. I love the stuff and Chris agreed; we might even get some barrels for PN into his program this year. Chris has bought barrels from us for several years; before Naumes he was down at Ruby Hill in Livermore so he knows our stuff. Good meeting.

Next was Linda at Pallet Wine. As always, she was busy; this time bottling Riesling for Harry and David. We chatted for a bit and she showed me how her new tasting room is coming along. No time to taste but I left her a catalog.

On to meet with Fred at Roxy Ann while Kent is in Hungary with one of his winery consulting clients. I've been working with RA for years since John Quinones was winemaker. When I walked in, a salesman from Demptos was visiting and the three of us chatted for 20 minutes. When David left, Fred and I tasted the Pinot Noir and agreed that it was a fine wine. We called John and the three of us went to the local Thai restaurant. The food was excellent but watch out for the hot spicy sauce. Fred liked it so I followed suite and poured a couple of spoonfuls over the whole plate. Wow- I had to rest between bites and must have gulped a quart of water.



From there, I drove north to Cottage Grove to meet Aaron at Iris Vineyards. We hadn't met but had spoken and I was eager to see the winery. After some chatting and tasting my Pinot Noir we headed out into the winery to taste some of Aaron's wines. The chard was delicate and fruity. The Merlot was lighter than I'm used to but refreshing and spicy with a coffee note that I liked. Then we tasted a couple of his PN's. Beautifully fruity, they're again lighter and delicate than the monster I brought. Lighter on the alcohol, too. It didn't occur to me until later that the wines I tasted could be called more feminine and I was again reminded how important it is to get out of the Napa-centric wine world.

I found a motel at half the price I'd paid the night before and pulled in to find my neighbors were a young couple and their daughter living in one of the units. They'd been evicted from their place and were looking but from the amount of stuff they had and the George Forman grill outside the door, it looked like the search wasn't going well. I wished them luck and was reminded once again how lucky I am. The room was clean but Spartan; there wasn't even a cup and the soap bar was the size of a postage stamp. Good thing I filched the soap and shampoo from the Hampton. Finally, and I'm not making this up, a road crew started running a jack hammer right in front of the motel at 2AM and running various pieces of heavy equipment.

Day 3

With a large hole in my schedule, I'm reduced to cold calling which is hard on the ego and not very productive. I have an appointment in McMinneville with Remy at 3 but nothing in between; a lot of people were up at the Trade Show and everyone was really busy. I decided to mosey up towards my meeting and calling on wineries that I hadn't talked to in years. I found a good rock and roll station on the radio and headed north. Benton-Lane was first but the winemaker was up in Portland. Left a catalog and made a note to call later. Next, I went by Broadley Vineyards and saw the owner in the office/tasting room in Monroe. He was polite but obviously busy. Another catalog left.

Now off to Tye Wine Cellars to see Marilee, who last bought barrels from me in 2010. I



had good intentions until I came across the William Finley National Wildlife Refuge. I'm a sucker for these places and this is one of three remnant wet prairie refuges in the

Willamette Valley; less than 1% of these areas remain. I didn't see a single

other visitor (except one guy without binoculars?) but the geese didn't care and the pale winter sun left the air crisp and clear. I can waste hours in these places and moseyed slowly along the driving road since the trails were closed so as not to disturb birds thinking of nesting.

Day 4

I debated; keep visiting wineries or blitz the long drive home. I opted for the latter and had a beautiful drive back, arriving back at the office mid-afternoon, with a final mileage of 1,400 miles. Now I have a day's worth of follow up since I took Friday off to go on a Land Trust Hike studying manzanitas. Gawd, I love my job.