

Day 0, Monday, May 5, 2025

I woke up around 8:30 AM after a light night of sleep. I was intentionally trying to stay tired for my flight the next morning (A little after midnight that evening). I went for a bike ride to Simpson Street and then up to St. Johns, covering 20.03 miles. Afterward, I spent most of the day finishing up my packing and cleaning the house. At the Rosa Parks MAX stop, I loaded money onto my Hop Fastpass card for the first time. The only other time I had tried to use it, I didn't do it correctly and ended up riding without paying. That was the night I got a flat tire and had to take the MAX home. I had expected to pay like I used to, but the system had changed. You now need a Hop FastPass that you load with funds for taking the public transit and then tap the Hop Fastpass on a pole before boarding the max to pay your fare. I went home and got my luggage and walked over to the Rosa Parks Max station. This was my first time properly using the Hop Fastpass, and it was not clear at first what I needed to do. Once at the airport, I had several hours before my flight, so I walked around and spent some time typing up parts of my journal.

(Daily bike miles 0 miles; Total trip bike miles 0 miles)

Day 1, Tuesday, May 6, 2025

I boarded my flight to Minneapolis and gradually fell asleep. By the time we landed, I was finally in a deep sleep, only to be woken up to get off the plane. I slept through most of the next flight to Pittsburgh as well. After landing, I took a bus into downtown and arrived around 1:00 PM, where I met up with Jay at the Westin Hotel. We went for a walk and had Thai food for lunch. Afterward, we strolled to Fort Duquesne and the three-river merge (Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio). We tried to find Market Square, which had been recommended by the hotel staff, but we ended up at the Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG) Plaza instead. From there, we made our way back to the hotel. While Jay took a shower, I went out to explore a bit more. I checked out the lights on the bridges and buildings, especially the Gulf Tower, which has a multi-colored, tiered light display on its roof. The lights change color to indicate the weather forecast, each layer corresponds to a different factor like temperature, precipitation, humidity, or wind speed. Later, I returned to the hotel, and we enjoyed the complimentary dinner and a drink that came with our hotel.

(Daily bike miles 0 miles; Total trip bike miles 0 miles)

Day 2, Wednesday, May 7, 2025

I initially woke up around 5:45 AM to the hotel alarm and turned it off. We did not set the alarm, it was already set when we checked into the hotel, I was not ready to wake up. So, I went back to sleep. I officially got up around 7:00 AM and we went to get breakfast. After enjoying the complimentary hotel breakfast, we headed to The Bike Burgh shop to pick up our rental bikes and join the "Beauty of the Burgh" bike tour. At the shop, one of the staff members explained that "yinz" is the local Pittsburgh way of saying "you all." We joined two local riders for the tour and our guide. The guide took us through several interesting parts of the city while sharing its rich history. One memorable stop was a small park at 7th Street and Penn Avenue, where we saw two identical magnolia trees. At first glance, they looked real, but they had no leaves. They were actually artificial and considered artwork. We also cycled past the

Heinz Block area, Acrisure Stadium, the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers, the PPG Place, and several historic buildings throughout the city.

After the tour, Jay and I biked over to the Duquesne Incline but found the line too long. Then, we rode to the Monongahela Incline and took that funicular up the hill. We squeezed into the small boxcar with three locals who take the incline daily for their commute. At the top, we stopped for coffee at the Grand Brew coffee shop, where we were welcomed by a very kind owner. We then rode along the ridge of Mt. Washington to the top of the Duquesne Incline, where we took in a spectacular view of the point where the three rivers meet. From there, we continued west along the ridge before descending toward the West End Bridge. At the bridge's south end, the pedestrian light never changed to "walk," so we waited until the traffic light turned red before crossing. After crossing, we had to carry our bikes down a set of stairs to reach the North Shore River Trail. We followed the trail along the river, then crossed the Fort Duquesne Bridge back into downtown. Once back at the hotel, I worked on some computer tasks before we had our complimentary hotel dinner and began getting ready for the next day.

Later that evening, I went out for another walk and revisited some of the city's nighttime sights. I admired the lights on the bridges and buildings, especially the Gulf Tower with its colorful, tiered lighting system. The lights on the roof change colors to reflect the weather forecast. The colors represented different elements such as temperature, precipitation, humidity, and wind speed. I returned to the hotel, watched some TV and went to sleep around midnight.

(Daily bike miles 15.6 miles; Total trip bike miles 15.6 miles)

Day 3, Thursday, May 8, 2025

On this day we cycled from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to West Newton, Pennsylvania. We woke up around 7:30 AM and had our included hotel breakfast around 8:00 AM. After packing up, we left the hotel around 9:00 AM and headed for the Pittsburgh starting point of the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Trail.

Along the way, we encountered construction on the path, and the detour wasn't marked. I quickly took to the road to reconnect with the river trail. There was no shoulder and quite a bit of traffic, but the detour was short and got me back on track quickly. Jay chose a smarter route, though he had a bit of trouble finding his way back to the trail. Eventually, he rejoined the river trail, and we made our way to mile 148.8 of the GAP Trail, marking mile zero at the Pittsburgh end.

We crossed the Smithfield Street Bridge and rode the Three Rivers Heritage Trail, which had been recommended by the bike shop. It runs parallel to the GAP Trail on the opposite side of the Monongahela River, following the riverbank instead of the highway. Just before leaving Pittsburgh, the trail merged with the official GAP trail.

We passed the historic Homestead Steel Works stacks and rode through the River of Steel National Heritage Area, crossing several impressive steel bridges over railroad lines. To our surprise, the trail was fully paved all the way to McKeesport, Pennsylvania. We had expected the entire trail to be dirt.

After McKeesport, the trail turned into well-maintained crushed limestone, perfect for riding. We stopped in the town of Boston for coffee at a trail-side visitor center and later visited the Dravo Cemetery in Elizabeth Township. In Sutersville, I treated myself to a delicious Muddy Trail Sundae from The Big Twist ice cream shop.

The trail was in excellent condition and made for a smooth, enjoyable ride. We arrived in West Newton around 4:00 PM and easily located our Airbnb. I spent about an hour updating my trip journal before we headed out to the weekly food court event near the Bloom Brewpub. We had to cross the bridge over the river to get from our Airbnb to the Bloom Brewpub. It had a charming small-town vibe with live music, wine and spirits, and local artwork. However, dinner options were limited. They had just a taco stand and one other food truck. So, we went back over the river and decided to eat at The Trailside restaurant instead. I had a great chicken sandwich and a pear cider. After dinner, we returned to our Airbnb where I spent some time working on my journal, catching up on emails, and posting to Facebook. I went to bed around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 37.2 miles; Total trip bike miles 52.8 miles)

Day 4, Friday, May 9, 2025

Today we biked from West Newton, Pennsylvania to Ohiopyle, Maryland. I woke up around 7:00 AM, and we went to breakfast at about 7:30 AM. Most, if not all of the guests at the Airbnb were also riding the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail. Over breakfast, we chatted with several of them; most were from Pennsylvania, though we did meet two women from Kentucky. Interestingly, we ended up leapfrogging with the Kentucky pair throughout the day on the trail, and they happened to be staying at the same hotel as us in Ohiopyle.

Along the route, we came across a sign pointing to a series of historic Coke ovens just off the GAP trail. These small, dug-out ovens were built into the hillside and stretched for nearly a mile. A fascinating glimpse into the region's industrial past.

We also kept running into two retired engineers from Washington, D.C., and had a few good conversations with them as we crossed paths throughout the day. At one point, we stopped for coffee at the Blue Canoe RV Park, a well-kept park with cabins located right along the trail with mineral panning (like gold panning).

Near mile marker 75.5, close to the Mitchell Field area, we hiked a short distance off the trail to see a waterfall. The GAP trail was in excellent condition all day, smooth crushed limestone with numerous scenic bridge crossings. The GAP trail is very well maintained. We arrived in Ohiopyle around 2:00 PM and had a delicious burger at Falls Market before cycling over to see the town's iconic waterfall. Later, I strolled through the town, picking up a pair of earrings for Mia and a T-shirt for myself.

In the evening, we had dinner at Falls City Pub, where we enjoyed live music with our meal. Back at the hotel, I spent some time writing in my journal before calling it a night around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 43.8 miles; Total trip bike miles 96.6 miles)

Day 5, Saturday, May 10, 2025

Today we biked from Ohiopyle, Pennsylvania to Meyersdale, Maryland. I woke up around 7:00 AM, and we had the hotel's continental breakfast. It was pretty minimal, frozen microwaveable sandwiches (like waffles) and various packaged items. Clearly a budget breakfast for the hotel.

After breakfast, we walked around town for a bit before returning to pack up. We hit the trail around 9:00 AM. The ride through Ohiopyle State Park was beautiful, miles of forest lining the Youghiogheny River made for a peaceful and scenic experience, interrupted only occasionally by the sound of distant trains.

We passed through the town of Confluence and stopped for coffee at Tissue Farm. The shop was a bit tricky to find but worth the detour, it had a unique atmosphere and even featured a small, free museum inside.

Continuing on, we crossed the Pinkerton High Bridge and rode through the Pinkerton Tunnel, which was a tunnel repaired by lining it with a giant culvert. In Rockwood, we stopped at Rock City Express looking for coffee, only to find they didn't sell any. However, they were hosting a customer appreciation day, so we got free chicken, hotdogs, cookies, and bought some sodas.

Right before reaching the Salisbury Viaduct, we visited the Meyers Burial Ground. It was a somber stop, 24 of the 38 graves were for infants or young children, many of whom died from diseases now preventable with vaccines.

We then crossed the Salisbury Viaduct and arrived in Meyersdale. There was a bit of confusion at our lodging as we figured out which room was ours. It was a large house with several rentable rooms, run by a friendly owner who lived on-site. He offered to cook spaghetti for dinner for a fee, but he also recommended the local restaurant, The White House.

We opted to eat at The White House, which was about a 3-mile round-trip walk. After returning to the lodging, I spent the rest of the evening working on my journal and going to sleep around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 42.1 miles; Total trip bike miles 138.7 miles)

Day 6, Sunday, May 11, 2025

Today we rode from Meyersdale, Pennsylvania to Cumberland, Maryland. I woke up around 7:00 AM, and we had breakfast at 8:00 AM. After packing up, we hit the trail around 9:00 AM.

One of the first highlights was crossing a beautifully designed metal bridge built in 1871 by the Wendel Bollman Company of Baltimore. Not long after, we crossed the Keystone Viaduct, which featured a long, scenic walkway.

Soon after, we reached the Eastern Continental Divide. The point where water flows either toward the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean, depending on which side of the divide the river is located. From there, we began a 25-mile downhill ride to Cumberland.

Along the way, we passed through the Big Savage Tunnel. On the far side, we were treated to a panoramic view where three states (Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia) are all visible. A short while later, we crossed into Maryland.

When we reached Frostburg, we opted not to detour into town. I wanted to tackle the steep hill, but in the end, skipping the climb was probably the right call. A few miles past the Frostburg turnoff, we saw a narrow-gauge tourist train running along the tracks beside us. It was very cool to see so close.

Further down the trail, we passed through Brush Tunnel, which is shared by the train and the bike path. Outside the tunnel, we even saw a jeep with train wheels pulling a line of pedal-powered rail carts on the tracks.

We also made a stop at Bone Cave, which I initially hoped would be an accessible cave with stalagmites and stalactites.

Unfortunately, it was just a small, fenced-off rock cave where fossils had once been discovered. It was still interesting, but not quite what I had expected.

We arrived in Cumberland around 1:30 PM and initially planned to eat at The Crabby Pig, but the line was too long. Instead, we found a nearby café and had coffee and sandwiches. After lunch, we visited the local visitor center, which had displays on coal mining and canal life, and I picked up a walking map of the town.

Later, we checked into our hotel and I worked on my journal before heading out again to explore using the walking map. We strolled through historic downtown along Baltimore Street, then continued on to see the old homes lining Washington Street. It was hot and humid, so Jay turned back early, but I continued to explore. I saw several large, 19th-century homes and even found the George Washington Quarters (a tiny historic log house).

I met up with Jay by the bridge and we returned to The Crabby Pig, this time just for drinks and a snack. I enjoyed Angry Orchard cider and clam strips. After that, we headed back to the hotel, watched a bit of TV, and went to bed around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 32.4 miles; Total trip bike miles 171.1 miles)

Day 7, Monday, May 12, 2025

Today we cycled from Cumberland, Maryland, to Little Orleans, Maryland. I woke up around 7:00 AM, and we had breakfast at about 7:45 AM. After packing up our gear, we started biking around 8:15 AM.

Having completed the GAP Trail yesterday, we began the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal (C&O Canal) Trail today. We had expected the C&O to be rougher than the GAP, but to our surprise, the trail quality was just as good. It was a beautiful ride following the canals.

Along the way, we saw numerous turtles in the canal, and parts of the trail was lined with vibrant purple and white flowers.

The first lock we encountered was Lock 75, which still had its original wooden gates intact. We saw several more locks as we continued, but none had wood gates intact until we neared Washington, DC. At Lock 75, I met some people who had been walking the C&O trail in segments for over four years. They had covered the distance from Washington, DC, to nearly Cumberland, hiking 5 to 10 miles at a time.

At one pond, we heard strange animal sounds (possibly donkeys) and saw a beaver dam. Later, we detoured to Paw Paw, West Virginia, for a snack at the Liberty gas station before rejoining the C&O trail back in Maryland.

We then reached the Paw Paw Tunnel. Unlike the well-lit tunnels on the GAP, this one was dark, with a narrow trail running alongside the canal and a path that was uneven with puddles. We decided to walk our bikes through the 3,000-foot tunnel. It would've been risky to ride. I also climbed the steep steps to the top of the tunnel's entrance for a better view.

We continued to Bill's Place, which we found closed (it was a Monday). We tried calling the Town Hill B&B for a shuttle, but got no response, so we decided to cycle the 7.6 miles there ourselves. Just before leaving Bill's, we found the Western Maryland Rail Trail. Our intended route for the next day.

The ride to the B&B was almost entirely uphill. Jay's e-bike ran out of charge about a mile from the top, shortly after passing an Exxon station, and he had to push his e-bike the rest of the way. When we arrived at Town Hill B&B, we saw a sign showing the elevation as 1,680 feet. The climb covered more than 1,100 vertical feet of elevation gain over just 7.6 miles. At the B&B, the owner greeted us and informed us that the closest food option was the gas station down the hill. She mentioned that another group was arriving, whom she planned to cook for, and offered to prepare dinner for us as well for \$30/ each. We took her up on the offer, and the meal was fantastic. It consisted of cornbread (with real corn), salad, salmon, pork loin, vegetables, and dessert.

The other guests were part of a guided bike tour that had started in Washington, DC, and was heading back there from Cumberland. I ended the long but rewarding day by going to bed around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 53.8 miles; Total trip bike miles 224.9 miles)

Day 8, Tuesday, May 13, 2025

Today, we cycled from Little Orleans to Williamsport, Maryland. We woke around 7:00 AM and enjoyed a fantastic home-cooked breakfast at the Town Hill B&B (cobbler, fruit, quiche, beans, special hash browns, coffee, orange juice and a mystery dish). The meals there were both healthy and delicious.

We took a 9:00 AM shuttle back to the trail and started biking in the rain around 9:30 AM. This turned out to be the only rainy day of the entire trip, and it rained continuously.

We began on the Western Maryland Rail Trail (WMRT), which started as a paved path, but after a couple of miles we crossed a bridge to the dirt C&O trail. A few miles later, we crossed another bridge that reconnected us with the paved WMRT. This all happened within the first few miles of our ride.

Once we were back on the WMRT, the paved trail was excellent. We rode to Hancock and stopped for lunch at Subway. After that, we cycled another 10 miles to Fort Frederick, where we ate our sandwiches. The fort was interesting, and since it was a rainy weekday, we had the whole place to ourselves. Up to that point, most of the day's ride had been on paved trails, primarily the WMRT.

After visiting the fort, we returned to the muddy C&O trail. With the constant rain, the dirt path had become very wet and slick. Near the power plant and Dam No. 5 (Honeywood Dam), we encountered a detour that led us up a steep, slippery wooden staircase with

a ramp to push the bikes along the stairway. I pushed my bike up the ramp beside the stairs and waited briefly at the top near a building, assuming Jay would be right behind me.

Jay had called out for help getting his e-bike up the stairs, but I didn't hear him. When he didn't appear, I returned to check on him and found he had made it up the stairs on his own using his e-bike's walk mode. I probably should have waited at the stairs to make sure he got up safely.

We continued on to C&O mile marker 102, where I texted our B&B to let them know we had arrived that far. They instructed us to meet at Lockhouse 44 near mile marker 99, just past the railroad bridge. Initially, I misunderstood and waited just after passing under the bridge. When I didn't see our host, I rode ahead to scout the area and found Lockhouse 44 about half a mile further along the trail. There, our host was waiting in the parking lot. I rode back to get Jay, and she gave us a ride to her lodging at the Elmwood Farm. She shared some of the property's history: the farmhouse dates back to 1855. Despite the rain, I explored the grounds a bit. The estate was very cool, featuring an 1853 barn used for events, a fire truck, alpacas, a smokehouse, and nicely arranged rooms for guests. Jay and I had separate rooms in the historic farmhouse.

That evening, we ordered pizza for dinner. I also uploaded photos to Jay's cloud and downloaded a few of his photos for myself. I went to bed around 11:00 PM.

(Daily bike miles 43 miles; Total trip bike miles 267.9 miles)

Day 9, Wednesday, May 14, 2025

Today, we cycled from Williamsport, Maryland, to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Due to the heavy rain the day before, the Potomac River had overflowed its banks, and sections of the C&O trail were flooded, making it mostly impassable for the day. Although the rain had stopped by morning, the river continued to rise.

I woke up around 6:00 AM. We had separate rooms at the B&B. After showering, we had breakfast at 8:00 AM. The hosts served a delicious home-cooked meal. The host and her sister warned us about snapping turtles, telling us they're aggressive enough to bite off fingers. If handled incorrectly, even by the tail, as they can twist their heads far enough to reach your hand.

After breakfast, our host drove us to the C&O trail so we could resume our ride. We started by taking photos of Lock 44 and the old R. Paul Smith Power Plant, built in 1927. Lock 44 was fully restored and set in a picturesque canal setting. The day began well, but the Potomac River was raging. We saw large trees and household items being swept downstream.

At one point, a fallen tree blocked the trail, so we cleared some branches and lifted our bikes over it to continue. Later, we stopped for a break and spoke to a cyclist coming from the opposite direction. He warned us that the trail ahead was severely flooded. He had ridden through knee-deep water before reaching a section where the trail disappeared into the river. He even showed us photos.

A short while later, we came to a section that was officially closed, marked with detour signs. We exited the trail there. Another cyclist approached, initially planning to continue on the flooded trail, but after telling him about the other man's photos, he decided to take the detour too.

When the detour signage ended, we used Google Maps to chart a new route. After figuring that out, the support van from the guided tour group we'd seen at the Town Hill B&B pulled up. We showed the driver our route, and he confirmed it should get us safely to Harpers Ferry.

As we rode, the other cyclist who had considered bypassing the detour passed us again, now following the same route. He soon overtook us and kept going. We didn't see him again, as he was covering more distance than we planned to ride that day.

We stayed mostly on roads instead of the trail due to the flooding. Along the way, we saw a few snapping turtles. Jay nearly ran over a couple turtles that were sitting right in the middle of the C&O trail. They didn't seem the least bit afraid of us.

We stopped for lunch in Sharpsburg, Maryland, at a local bar called Captain Benders. Afterward, we crossed the historic Route 34 bridge and passed the Antietam Iron Furnace. Upon reaching the bridge over the Potomac near Harpers Ferry, we noticed the steep spiral stairs that led up to the bridge deck. We had heard there was an alternative bridge to avoid the stairs, but after searching unsuccessfully, we ended up returning to haul our bikes up the spiral staircase.

The trail beneath the stairs was near the flooding point of the river. The Potomac was still very high and slowly rising. The bridge we crossed is part of the Appalachian Trail. Once across, we were close to our hotel. My maps hadn't been working well, so Jay rode ahead. I passed what I believed was our hotel, but Jay continued uphill with his e-bike. I had to dismount and push my regular bike up the incline. Eventually, I paused and double-checked the hotel's address. I believed I had the right address. We were supposed to be going to 179 High Street, but Jay had mistakenly entered 379 High Street into his google map. We work together on our directions. I am often wrong!

I called him, and once we figured out the mistake, we both headed back downhill and met at the correct hotel. After settling in, we walked around Harpers Ferry. It's a fascinating town full of historic buildings that make up the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. We also checked out the Potomac River. It had clearly flooded, with water well beyond the banks and large trees and debris floating past.

We found a nice restaurant for dinner, then returned to the hotel to catch up on some work. I went to bed around 11:30 PM.
(Daily bike miles 36.2 miles; Total trip bike miles 304.1 miles)

Day 10, Thursday, May 15, 2025

Today, we cycled from Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, to Washington, DC. Due to flooding along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal (C&O Canal) trail, we ended out riding the Washington & Old Dominion Trail (W&OD Trail) instead. I woke up around 6:30 AM and had a market-style breakfast at the Town's Inn. The inn operates a small store where we had a \$14 credit (Part of our Golden Triangle Tour

package) to pick whatever we wanted. I chose yogurt, a frozen Jimmy Dean breakfast sandwich (which I microwaved), orange juice, and a blueberry muffin.

That morning, I found I had lost my biking gloves. I searched everywhere, even unpacked and repacked all my gear, and asked around the B&B, but no one had seen them. After I returned home, I got an email from Golden Triangle, they had found the gloves, likely somewhere on my rental bike. Oddly, I had already checked the handlebar packs and panniers, which were empty when we returned the bikes.

We headed out without my gloves. Although the forecast had called for overnight rain, it didn't seem like our area had received any. Maybe the rainfall was upstream in the mountains, or it simply took time for the water to travel downstream. The night before, the hosts at Elmwood Farm had said it could take two days for floodwaters to reach us. Overnight, the Potomac River rose another three feet, submerging large portions of the C&O trail and closing it completely. Even the Appalachian Trail access was shut down. The Maryland side of the Harpers Ferry bridge had three feet of water at the base of the spiral stairs, and the gate was locked shut.

There was no access back to the C&O trail from the Harper Ferry bridge.

That left us looking for a route out of Harpers Ferry on the West Virginia side of the river. Some locals, including Forest Service staff, advised us to stay put for another night. We already had lodging reserved in Washington DC, the host of our DC lodging suggested a company with shuttle service to DC. One man suggested crossing the river via the highway, but warned it wasn't safe for cyclists. We wanted to cycle all the way to Washington DC, so we took the highway out of Harpers Ferry. Still hoping to rejoin the C&O, I navigated us toward what I believed was the Potomac River, but it turned out to be the Shenandoah River. My GPS just showed it as a river, and I assumed it was the Potomac River. Once I realized it was not the Potomac River we were even further from the C&O trail. I found my GPS kept trying to reroute us back to the C&O, ignoring our actual path forward. At that point, I gave up trying to get back to the C&O trail. That trail was likely flooded for much of the remaining route anyway.

Jay switched us to using Google Maps for directions to Washington DC. Initially, he had it set to a car route, which led us onto a busy road with no shoulder, not a pleasant ride. However, that was the only choice to stop being routed back to the flooded C&O trail. Also, I figured the bike route option would be hillier. We eventually stopped at Stoneybrook Farm Market, a wonderful spot with fresh preserves, coffee, and snacks. It was a welcome break.

Not long after leaving the market, Jay switched his navigation to bicycle mode, and we found The Washington & Old Dominion Trail (W&OD) near Clarks Gap, Virginia. We joined the trail around mile marker 38 and rode all the way to about mile 5. The path was smoothly paved, gently downhill, and very popular with other cyclists. Though we logged many extra miles avoiding flood zones, the W&OD turned out to be a fantastic route.

Once in DC, a jogger on the Mount Vernon Trail kindly took a great photo of me and Jay with Jay's phone. We then crossed the Potomac River and stopped for photos near the Jefferson Memorial, with views of the Washington Monument in the distance. Afterward, we biked to our VRBO rental and settled in.

That evening, we walked out for Thai food, then called to coordinate leaving our bikes near Mile Zero of the C&O trail. Back at the VRBO, I spent some time working on my journal before heading to bed around midnight.

(Daily bike miles 76.1 miles; Total trip bike miles 380.2 miles)

Day 11, Friday, May 16, 2025

I woke up around 4:00 AM and couldn't get back to sleep for the rest of the night. I finally got out of bed around 6:30 AM and did some journaling. Around 9:00 AM, we got our bikes ready and set off toward the Capitol Building and Library of Congress to take photos. From there, we cycled along the National Mall, stopping to see various landmarks, including several statues, the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, the Washington Monument, the U.S. Treasury Building, the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream, the Renwick Gallery, the American Red Cross-National Headquarters, Memorial Centennial Hall, the White House, the Lightkeeper's House, and the Lincoln Memorial.

Afterward, we needed to return our rental bikes near mile zero of the C&O Canal trail. Jay went off to find the return location while I searched for mile zero, but the trail was detoured about half a mile before the marker, possibly due to flooding. I found Lock 3 at mile 0.5, which had a restored lock and canal boat on display. Eventually, I located the bike return area, but Jay wasn't there yet. We called each other and realized we were just one street apart. We reunited and returned the bikes.

Next, we walked back to the Lincoln Memorial and continued along the Mall to the National Air and Space Museum. On the way, I realized we needed reservations to get in, so I booked two tickets for 4:00 PM, the earliest available time. While walking, we passed a construction-themed event with trucks and tractors, where I picked up a free baseball cap at one of the booths.

We entered the Air and Space Museum about 4:00 PM and explored until it closed at 5:30 PM. Highlights included the Wright Brothers' bicycle, a 1907 8-cylinder Curtiss motorcycle, Evel Knievel's motorcycle, a Mars rover, various spacecraft, and historic airplanes.

After the museum, we headed to dinner. It started to sprinkle on our way, and by the time we were seated, it was pouring rain, which lasted about 30 minutes. Fortunately, it had stopped by the time we finished dinner, and we took the bus back to our lodging (VBOS).

Back at our accommodation, I found out we wouldn't need timed tickets for the National Museum of Natural History the next day. Since we had to check out and it was about six miles from the museum, I looked for luggage storage options, but the sign-up process for most was confusing or unclear. I gave up after a while, and Jay texted the VBOS host to ask if we could leave our bags in the room while visiting the museums. I spent some time working on my website and finally went to bed around 1:00 AM.

(Daily bike miles 10 miles; Total trip bike miles 390.2 miles)

Day 12, Saturday, May 17, 2025

I woke up around 4:30 AM and couldn't fall back asleep. I stayed in bed until about 6:00 AM, then got up and took a shower. Afterward, I worked on my journal while Jay looked into luggage storage options. He ran into the same issues I had with the standard luggage services, not being able to determine exact drop-off locations and payments. He did find that some Smithsonian museums offered in-building storage. Jay had also messaged the VRBO owner to ask if we could leave our luggage there and pick it up later, but we hadn't received a response yet by the time we left.

We decided to head to the museum with our bags and figure things out on the spot. We arrived at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History about an hour before it opened, so we walked to a nearby coffee shop for breakfast. Afterward, we returned to the museum with our luggage.

As we passed through security, Jay went through with no issues. When it was my turn, I was thoroughly searched, they inspected my carry-on, backpack, hip bag, and passport pouch in detail before letting me in. It seemed like I was the only one being checked so closely, as other guests' bags were scanned more casually.

Once inside, we stored our luggage in the museum lockers and explored for a couple of hours. The museum was excellent. Some highlights included a Tyrannosaurus rex skull, a model of a prehistoric Megatooth shark, fossils, skeletons, human evolution exhibits, gemstones, Egyptian mummies, and a meteorite linked to the largest impact crater in the U.S.

Afterward, we retrieved our bags and headed to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Security there was much quicker and less invasive, they gave both of us only a brief check. We placed our luggage in the lockers and grabbed a snack at the museum cafeteria before exploring.

The American History Museum was packed with fascinating displays, although we didn't explore it as thoroughly as the Natural History Museum. Some standouts included the John Bull steam locomotive, an 1889 Overman women's bicycle, a 1903 Winston touring car, a 1955 Ford Country Squire station wagon, the 1926 Southern Railway train, wagon train exhibits, vintage computers, old kitchen appliances, and many nostalgic household items I remembered from childhood.

I considered staying an extra hour and taking the train to the airport, but ultimately decided to go with Jay, who had ordered an Uber. At the airport, I bought us donuts and a beer, then walked around a bit. My flight to Detroit departed on time. It was a short flight, and though I tried to work on my journal, I didn't make much progress. I was focused on whether I'd make my tight connection. Fortunately, we landed about 10 minutes early in Detroit. After a quick restroom stop, I hurried to my gate and arrived just as they were boarding Zone 7; I was in Zone 5. I made it onboard and found space in the overhead bin for my carry-on, which I had been worried about.

During the flight to Portland, I reviewed the day's photos and worked on both my daily journal and proofreading my website journal. Once in Portland, I took the MAX to the Rose Garden, then transferred to the toward Rosa Parks. However, service was disrupted due to a car that had jumped the median and landed on the MAX tracks. We had to switch to a bus that continued along Interstate Avenue. I finally arrived home a little after midnight and went straight to bed.

(Daily bike miles 0 miles; Total trip bike miles 390.2 miles)