



Camping in the Time of Covid

Needless to say 2020 has been a most challenging year! We have traditionally been on the road for the best part of 8 months a year for the last five years. Since March we have been in self imposed isolation and yet managed to contrive several trips to brighten our spirits and prove that our Airstream Adventure is still alive and well!

Little did we know what was in store for us! In early March we joined the South Carolina Coastal Airstream Club for a very successful Silver on the Street rally in Georgetown SC. We gathered as a group several times and hosted an afternoon open house session with dozen of folks in very close proximity inside our Flying Cloud 25. Arriving home in Virginia on March 10 the alarm bells were beginning to ring worldwide.



Last days of innocence at the Georgetown SC Silver on the Street rally with crowds and open house.

Our first action was to cancel our Spring trip to China (the epicenter!), Japan, Indonesia and South Korea! Then we also cancelled our fall trip to Sicily and Andalusia. When the Canadian border closed, we canceled our summer Airstream trip to Newfoundland. Back to basics! Five years of deferred house maintenance and Airstream projects beckoned!

Our rigorous isolationism made full use of home delivery and curbside pickup, Walmart for basics, Wegmans for special treats, farmers market and seafood market, along with deliveries from Amazon, Alaskan Wild Fish and Naked Wines. Anything coming into our household was either washed, wiped down with alcohol or left to age for a few days. Local Covid outbreaks were reported from several retail and business locations but we rigorously avoided all public venues. After 3 months of this regime we were ready to breakout!

We assembled a rough list of the criteria for our trips: one day six hour maximum travel distance, one fuel stop for the round trip, spacious and distanced campground layout, most likely dry camping location, allow contactless existence for a week to 10 days, be self-contained with all supplies, food and beverages for the entire trip, no restaurant visits, good cellular signal strength to maintain business connectivity, a location that was calm, beautiful and a fun place to enjoy and lift our spirits. Sounds like we had high expectations but really we did find a couple of perfect spots!

Two other important planning issues then become evident. Reservations for the best weather windows and pre trip food planning. With reasonable two week weather forecasting we could avoid high heat periods (as for dry camping we would not have any air conditioning) and multiple rain days, which needed a last minute opportunity to juggle reservations. Once our departure date had been set, we launched into curbside acquisition and kitchen prep mode.

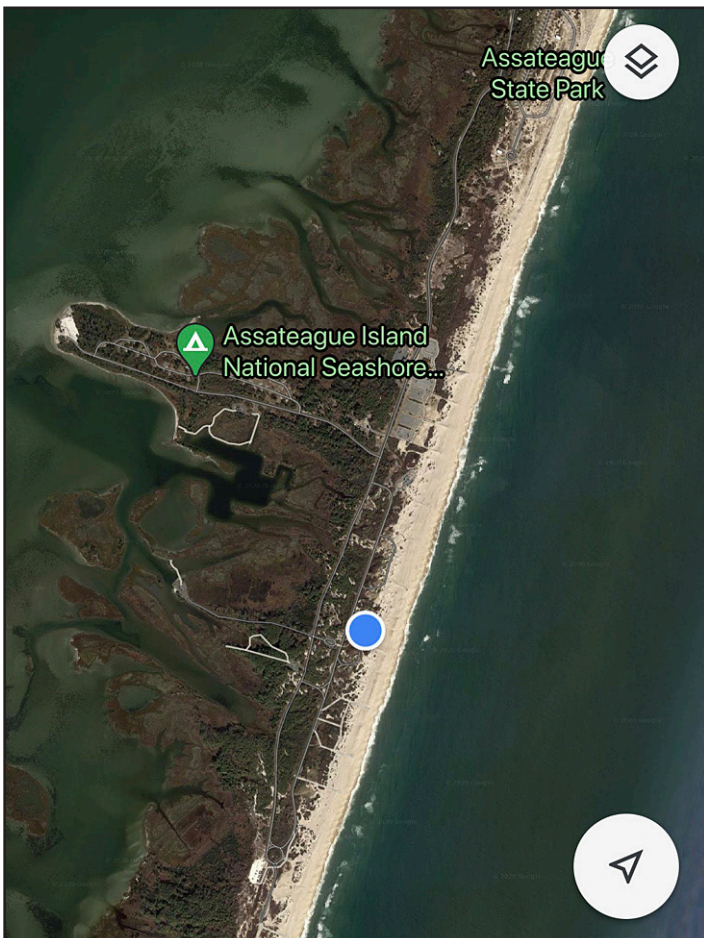
We selected two locations that fit most of our wish list. Assateague National Seashore (not the State Park) in Maryland and the Outer Banks Hatteras National Seashore at Frisco NC. We loved Hatteras so much we went there again in the fall as temperatures were a good 10 degrees higher than at our Virginia home on the Rappahannock. The NPS reservation system is quite flexible and allows days to be added to an existing reservation providing there is availability and likewise days can be removed. We found this highly useful to avoid periodic bands of the East Coast weather systems. Careful use of Google Earth and camp site maps made it possible to

select the most appealing sites throughout the campgrounds. Golden age pass kept the nightly rate around \$18 so it's incredibly good value!

Pre trip planning starts with a daily meal plan for the time away. We have always enjoyed eating at fine dining restaurants but that's no longer desirable so we focus on gourmet cooking on the road. We started a FaceBook group earlier this year called Gourmet Camping to share ideas (feel free to join us!) and it's been very inspiring. We're also fortunate to be able to harvest our crab pots in the Rappahannock River and have an inventory of frozen crab cakes to last all winter. A selection of our main meals includes crab cakes, fresh Carolina shrimp, oysters, cod, halibut, shepherds pie, moussaka, curry sauce to combine with shrimp or chicken, lamb, tenderloin steaks and duck breasts. For variety we carry two grills, a Weber Q propane grill and a Yakatori charcoal and wood grill.

For our first venture out in early June we agreed to meet the Raleigh NC friends we had originally planned to travel to China with at a half way point which sent our Airstreams to Davis Lakes campground in Suffolk Virginia. We both trusted each other's pre trip two week quarantine but cautiously maintained our distance. We alternated hors d'oeuvres and dinner preparation spending many hours on opposite ends of the benches! For recreation we took long hikes around the former quarry lakes, maintaining distancing but close enough to easily carry on a conversation.

Encouraged by the success of our mobile camping bubble we next planned a week in Assateague National Seashore campground just on the border of Virginia and Maryland. Check in was safe and easy and the sites were spaced 100 to 150 ft apart. We selected a site on the Oceanside loop which gave us direct access to the sand dunes and beach in bare feet straight out of our camper door. Our daily exercise routine is usually two to three miles walking which is perfect on the hard sand and the endless beach. Mid week the beach was lightly populated with mainly fishermen and we felt very comfortable with our camping set up.





Assateague is renown for free roaming wild ponies and sure enough during the day the Airstream was from time to time surrounded by dozens of these gentle creatures as they moved through the grass and grazed! The low constant roar of the surf gave us a very tranquil and relaxing week and we were lucky with moderate August temperatures tolerable without air conditioning.

Moving into September we wanted to take advantage of the higher temperatures in the Outer Banks and Frisco campground provided all the elements of sun, beach, great camp sites, beach access by 4WD, secluded sites in the dunes located and selected using Google Earth, beautiful views of the ocean, no sounds except the ocean surf.

Part of the magic of Frisco is purchasing an ORV (off road vehicle) permit which allows you to drive on 50 miles of beach, pack all your beach gear into the truck: table, chairs, coolers, grill, awnings and really install yourself on your own 100 ft wide beach front space and make a day of it! Lunch with a tablecloth, cutlery, salads, seafood and chilled wine makes for a special occasion as well as a good book and a short siesta under the awning!

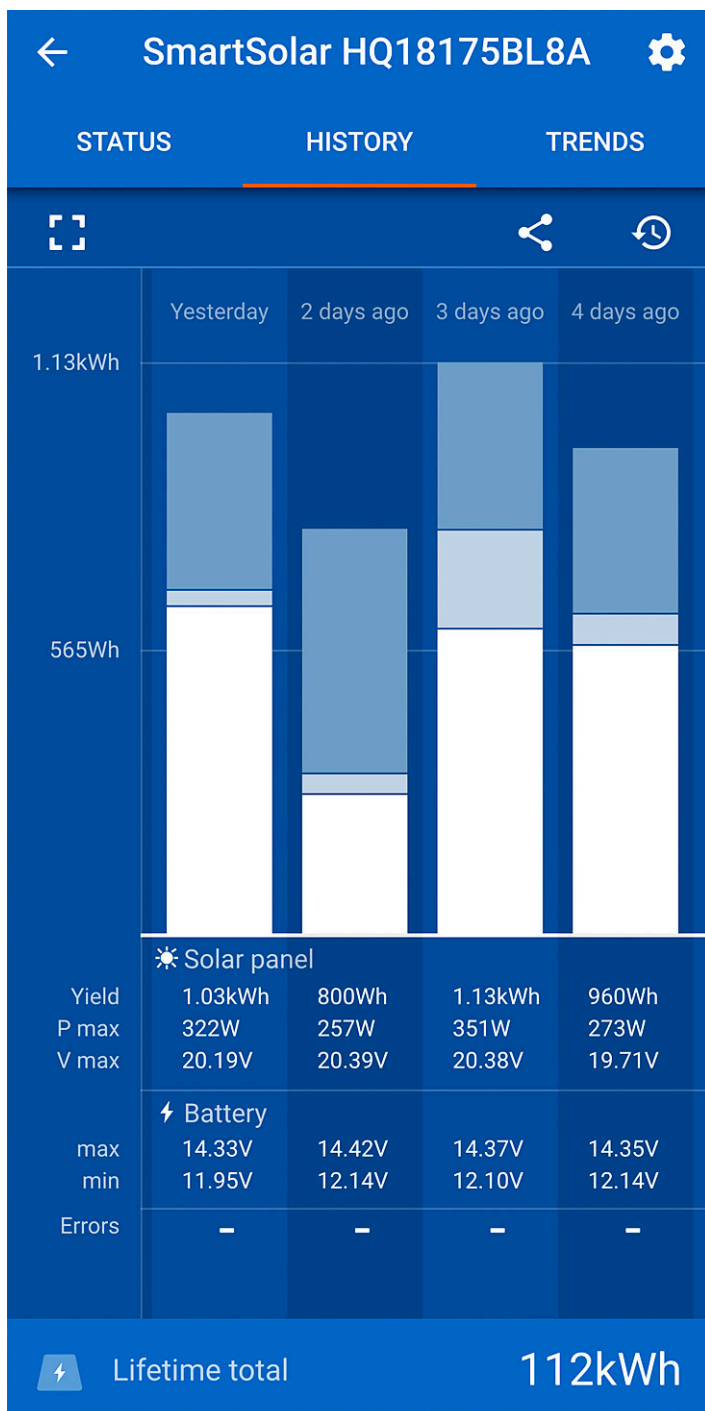
We enjoyed it so much we found another weather window in October and returned for another week of bliss!



These National Park campgrounds had no services whatsoever so being prepared for a week to ten days means serious resource preparation. Our rig has 400 watts of solar and a 2.5 kw inverter which kept us powered with the exception of one rainy day when our propane converted Honda EU2000i boosted our reserves. Water conservation is a top priority with 1.5 gallon showers and washing up water being dispersed to the grass! The inverter kept our lives civilized by powering the microwave, espresso machine, computers, TV, DishTV receiver and DVD player.

Our current adventure may last 3 months until the spring. Leaving Virginia mid-December we made reservations mostly in state parks, some





Solar energy production over four days showing a rainy day which needed augmenting by generator.

national parks or Corps of Engineers parks, and a couple of commercial RV parks we are already familiar with. State parks have the luxury of almost always being well spaced out unlike commercial and independents who under their for-profit business models are obliged to pack you in tight in order to maximize revenue for their acreage.

As we wander around Florida and eventually make our way across the Gulf to Texas, we stead-

fastly maintain our Covid protocol. Plan ahead, order curbside or online, keep our distance, resist temptation of a casual invitation or a tempting but risky activity, wear masks when in proximity with other folks, have a supply of latex gloves for gas pumps and picking up supplies, wait for crowds to dissipate before going into places of business, avoid groups of people by walking around them, come to a stop at least 10 feet away from a person you wish to engage, and yes wash hands and keep a spray dispenser of alcohol close at hand.

We keep reminding ourselves the best isolation quarantine bubble is an Airstream! After all NASA used them to seclude returning lunar astronauts!

Margaret & David Broad (WBCCI #2381) from Tappahannock, Virginia, traveling 8 months of the year (until 2020!) since July 2016 in their 2015 Flying Cloud 25 RB Nuage Volant. We belong to the Virginia Airstream Club #109 and are affiliated with Club Airstream Quebec & Maritimes #125 and with the South Eastern Camping Unit #010. You can email questions or comments to airstream@db26.net Our travel blog is at www.flyingcloud25.blogspot.com and David also publishes an Airstream improvement page at www.facebook.com/airstreamtweaks and for fun created a Gourmet Camping group at <https://m.facebook.com/groups/gourmetcamping>

