

Caravan Happy

by Stephanie Bernhagen

We all love a good party and being RVers, that often amounts to a rolling party. Whether you like to go on commercial caravans, club caravans or travel with several friends, your travel style will be affected. Preparing for this in advance makes your trip more rewarding. Here is some of what we learned about caravans when traveling with several friends.

Two Rules to Start

During the summer of 1999 we set off for the Canadian Maritimes with four other Escapee couples. Three of the couples were old friends and we quickly made friends with the fourth. As a group we laid down two important rules:

- If something is bothering you, speak up. Awareness of problems makes it possible for the group to overcome frustrations together.
- Regardless of what happens on the trip, our friendships are more important than traveling together. No one will take offense if you decide to leave the group.
- We also shared emergency information, like who to contact in an emergency, any special medical requirements, insurance information, etc. Everyone's emergency information was kept in the glove compartment of each of the tow or toad vehicles. This way it was always with us, even if we were out sightseeing in someone else's vehicle.

Our rules became golden as we discovered how differently each couple travels. The first challenge came with the merging of everyone's desired sights to see. Some had done extensive research, some a little research and one person did not want to force people to see what they wanted to see. One person was known for her ability to uncover sights tourists miss. Most of the group looked to her as the leader and expected her to tell us what we were doing. She, on the other hand, did not want to be put in those shoes and expected everyone to have input.

Another point of discussion that we would recommend early on is how far in advance the itinerary needs to be discussed. Some of our group were comfortable with deciding what we would do the same day, others wanted to know several days in advance and others needed to plan out the entire trip to make sure they saw everything. We were fortunate, as everyone in our group was flexible to changes. Not all traveling companions will feel this way. Also, knowing what others are doing, such as laundry, sightseeing or just kicking back helps everyone plan their day.

We'll Travel Together

The group agreed that all five rigs would travel together. This caused everyone to adjust their travel schedule to accommodate the group. Some found themselves waiting on the group, while others were rolling earlier than normal.

We used our position in line, (1, 2, 3), instead of our names, when talking on the CB radio. This way communication was quicker and more effective when dealing with bumps in the road and traffic problems ahead.

Another adjustment came with the discovery that some liked to stop for coffee or for sightseeing along the way, while others just wanted to get there.

Each of our RVs handled the narrow, rough roads differently. It did not take long to decide the motorhomes should be leading over rough roads, as their visibility was better. They also had a better idea of what was happening in the rigs when we hit bumps.

Ok to Split Up

Two weeks into the trip we split into two groups for a night. Most of us were disappointed in the campground we were at and were ready to move on. One person was exhausted and wanted to stay another day. Three couples moved on and two stayed behind, catching up the next day. Everyone now knew it was truly okay to split up.

Every day we learned something new about each other. Another discovery was that some were comfortable with boondocking while others preferred a campground umbilical cord. One couple was uncomfortable leaving their rig unattended in some boondocking spots as a previous rig had been broken into.

Our first campsite in Newfoundland forced this camping issue. Do we drive 15 miles out of town, away from the sights we plan to see, so we have hook-ups? Or do we boondock in the provincial park near town? The hook-ups won out.

Traveling Styles and Interests Took Charge

Finally our travel styles and interests took charge. Two couples would get up in the morning and decide if they would move that day. Ultimately they would spend eight weeks touring Newfoundland and Labrador.

The other three couples scheduled their return ferry trip for three and a half weeks later, then split into two groups. Two couples were willing to put on a lot of miles, in a couple of days, to see icebergs. They headed north together. Paul and I chose to see icebergs at another location and took off on our own. It would be a week and a half before we would return to our gravel pit (a typical camping spot in Newfoundland) and find these couples sharing it with us.

Regardless of the challenges we had as a group, having our community with us was a wonderful experience. And it didn't hurt to have friends along when we got into trouble. Like the foggy day we tried to pull into a gravel pit and the first motorhome in got hung up in the driveway's dip. The toad was blocking one side of the road and the other RVs blocked the far side. Two of us headed out to signal traffic of the danger ahead and the other four went to work to get the motorhome back on the road. The fifth-wheel's leveling boards sure came in handy! The driver of the motorhome calmly suggested to his wife that she get the video camera out, which she would have no part of.

A half-hour later, a little shook-up, but with no damage, we were again rolling down the road. Yes, it is wonderful to travel with friends!

What We Learned

We learned a lot by traveling together for so long. And the best news is that our friendships survived! Would we do it again? Probably, although we now know what things to consider and what questions to ask before we take to the road with others—friends or strangers. Here are some questions to ask yourself and your friends or the caravan company.

- How big will the group be?
- Will we travel as a single group, several groups or individually?
- How fast will we travel?
- What time of day will we travel and how far will we go?
- Will there be sightseeing along the way?
- Is the schedule set in concrete or is it flexible?
- Will we be boondocking or camping in campgrounds? What type of hook-ups will we have?
- How much time does each participant have to make this trip?
- What are everyone's interests, history, natural, scenic, cities, etc.?
- Once parked, will sightseeing be done by carpool? If so, will everyone share in the driving? If not, how will those driving be compensated?

It can be fun to travel in a caravan. Spend a little time figuring out how you fit in and your trip will be more rewarding. When something comes up that you have not planned for, remain flexible, you might be pleasantly surprised! Be Caravan Happy!