

2007 Spring Trip

Twenty Trailblazers and family members enjoyed the Spring Trip to Niagara Falls and Toronto. We left Saturday morning, May 26, in the dark at the early hour of 5 am. The bus was comfortable with plenty of room to spread out.

We arrived at the crowded Niagara Falls State Park visitor's center late morning, where we broke into smaller groups to see the sights. Viewing the falls from the view spots above, of course, was mandatory, but we were able to take in a few other activities, too. Most of us were able to take the elevator down through the rock cliff where we exited and walked through a long tunnel, emerging at the base of the Bridal Veil Falls. From there it was a wet (really wet!) and windy walk around and up the wooden walkways to get a really close-up encounter with the falls—it was as if we were in the middle of a cold, torrential downpour that never let up.

While some members spent the next few hours at the falls, most of the group headed back to the bus for a short ride down along the Niagara River to board the jet boat. This was a high speed, open air ride up the river in a 50-passenger, 1500 horsepower boat. The first portion of the ride consisted of several runs down a section of class 5 rapids, when most of us got soaking wet in the cold water. The second portion was spinning and skating with the boat in the Whirlpool Rapids area of the river. The third portion of the trip was the high speed 60mph return down river to the dock.

Back at the park, we walked across the Rainbow Bridge into Canada, where we had a relaxed dinner atop the Skylon Tower in the revolving restaurant overlooking the falls. Afterwards, we boarded the bus for the one-hour ride to our hotel on the north shore of Lake Ontario.

On Sunday our day began with a behind-the-scenes tour of the Skydome, home to the Toronto BlueJays. We got to tour the press boxes, luxury suites, and spend some time down on center field. After lunch at the Hard Rock Café that overlooks the playing field, the group split up and headed to the Hockey Hall of Fame, the Ontario Science Center, or the Royal Ontario Museum, as their interests determined.

Most members reconvened for an early dinner show at the Toronto Medieval Times restaurants, a jousting exhibition in an enclosed arena surrounded by the long tables for the diners. A utensil-free dinner fit for a king was served, whilst we cheered on our champion knight. Alas, our dashing horseman hero was smote during the competition, but we enjoyed ourselves none-the-less. We finished the day by ascending to the observation level of the CN Tower, the world's tallest building and freestanding structure. There the brave were able to walk, bounce, or lie on the glass floor with nothing but 1122 feet of free-fall beneath them. A few souls ascended even further to the skypod level, 1465 feet above the ground.

Monday morning (Memorial Day), we headed for the drive-through wild animal park, African Lion Safari, at the west end of Lake Ontario. There we drove among the lions, buffalo, white rhino, giraffe, and other exotic animals. The boys found the baboon troop pretty hilarious, particularly when they (the baboons) climbed on top of a visitor's vehicle and proceeded to pee on its roof. A bit further on, a baboon was seen running with a camera, which it had presumably just snatched out of a visitor's hands through an open car window. In the grasslands area, an education-oriented male lion decided to give its





young audience a practical demonstration of procreation in the wild. Once done with the drive through, we were able to see the cow elephants and their babies get their daily baths in the pond, as well as attend arena shows on birds of prey, elephants, and parrots.

The return trip to Pittsburgh was pretty low key, consisting of snoozing on the bus or watching DVD movies on the built-in TV system. We arrived back at the Y, the sky just as dark as when we had left, but with a weekend worth of fun activities and memories under our belts.