



Things to Think About!

Exploring Wheelchair Accessible Restrooms in Four States OR The Annual Family Vacation By Linda Jorgensen

Family vacations are never boring for this household. This year we had a guest from Australia. A long time girlfriend of mine come to the States for her very own trip of a lifetime. And does she choose New York and the Statue of Liberty? Nope. After a week in the Deep South Kay chose to visit us in Northern Utah for a week! Hey, there's a lot to see up here! Not everything in Utah is in Moab you know. We chose to do day trips so we'd be close to home. We could sleep in our own beds at night (and spare the expense of motels), and meal planning would be simple. NO FISH FRYS! The visit was on.

Day 1

After loading the van with extra water, grab and go bags and anything else we thought might be needed on a day trip in the car we were off to...the bathroom! Our mandatory pit stop for everyone prior to leaving the house. Our restroom works well. It's not the roomiest of facilities but accessible nonetheless. Then it was off to the airport to pick up Kay and her assorted luggage (nope, the airline didn't lose it!). We were ready for the day's adventure. To the bathroom! Didn't even leave the airport and my child needed "to go". Ok. I did too but restrooms are not nearly so problematic for me as they are for my child, who uses a power wheelchair to move around.

Now, given current ADA building requirements I would have thought all public restrooms are created equal. Where have I been? Obviously NOT spending time in the Salt Lake International Airport ladies rest room nor any other public restrooms, for that matter. The stall itself, while a tight fit for a junior sized power wheelchair, was ok. Not great, but ok. The pathway between the row of stalls and the bank of sinks was sure narrow. Since the wheelchair accessible stall is clear at the back of the room anyone standing at the sink, drying hands or entering or leaving any of the other stalls at the same time a power wheelchair is motoring through the space runs the risk of getting tire marks on their toes. Passing is a real trick, especially if someone brings her luggage cart into the restroom with her. Plan on waiting until the owner of the luggage cart is ready to leave the room because there's no

way you'll get past it. If the cart is between you and the door you're stuck for the duration. The cart owner will have to exit, with the cart, first.

Our next destination for the day was the Bonneville Salt Flats. Did you know there is only one rest stop between Salt Lake City and Wendover, Utah/Nevada? It sits on the westbound side of I-80 about 10 miles out of Wendover and is NOT wheelchair accessible. Drive all the way into Wendover, Nevada, as you'll need to find an open casino with a public restroom off the main lobby. There are no casinos in Wendover, Utah.

Once leaving Wendover, Nevada, if you are eastbound on I-80, there are no rest stops until you get into Salt Lake City proper. Plan on stopping at one of the truck stops in Tooele County. There are two. I can't tell you what their restrooms are like because, even though the space between the isles is plenty wide, the proprietors have seen fit to fill the space with racks of post cards, various and sundry semi tractor-trailer parts and neat stacks of bottled window washing fluid and crank case oil. Can you say, "No passing zone?". Plan on waiting for a restroom break once you get home.

Day 3

Ok. Today's trip proves we are certifiable. We drove to Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park via Grand Teton National park, and back, all in one day. Well, Kay gave up the Statue of Liberty so the least we could do was head to Old Faithful. The next closest patriotic tourist attraction.

Be sure to make restroom stops at any FLYING J Truck Stops you run across. Clear isles and large restrooms are standard features. Perfect for wheelchairs. Be sure to stop at the one in Brigham City on I-15 northbound as the next rest stop is at the summit of Logan Canyon just outside Garden City, Utah. This will be the last accessible restroom you will find for the rest of the day.

Rest areas on main thoroughfares in Idaho are generally pretty accessible. However. Plan on being detoured away from main roads where those rest rooms are located and on to country roads where NOTHING is available. Road Construction can be a real hassle. Not a convenience store or bush in sight. The next possible rest area is in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Gas stations, when you finally spot one, are not an option. Can't get a wheelchair into the restroom and close the door. You'll have to get creative to use one of these. Be sure to disengage all motor clutches when leaving the wheelchair outside the restroom door. An unattended child will most likely try to drive away with it. Or at least steer it into the nearest beer cooler.

Next restroom stop is the visitor's restroom at the Old Faithful Geyser Basin, Yellowstone National Park. Plan on receiving a bear warning from the ranger at the South entrance gate to Grand Teton. Like we're really going to see a bear in the restroom? I don't think so.

DON'T PLAN ON USING THE RESTROOM FACILITIES AT THE OLD FAITHFUL GEYSER VISITOR'S AREA!

Yes, I'm shouting. Don't let that little blue sign with that funny white stick figure riding a wheel fool you. This is NOT the place to take a wheelchair of ANY size if you want to get back out unscathed. Should you choose to ignore warnings, enter at your own risk.

Should you choose to ignore warnings and enter anyway, you'll need a few tips. Plan on spending at least 45 minutes.

- Back in. Yes, I said BACK in. There is no space to turn the chair around anywhere in the entire restroom. Enter in reverse or not at all. You'll have to trust me on this one.
- Be sure to enter the restroom while Old Faithful is erupting. Be prepared to make a quick dash since the Old gusher is less than "Faithful" any more. The second it looks like it's going to spout open the door and head for the back stall. There's NO space for passing in this restroom. Watch for pedestrians.
- Use caution opening the wheelchair accessible stall door. Again, don't let the sign lull you into a false sense of security. You can't open it all the way as there is an industrial sized U.S. Forest Service issue garbage can blocking the door.
- Squeeze through the stall door carefully. Watch the paint job. If you are in a wheelchair larger than a junior forget the door, watch the chair! You may not be able to squeeze an adult chair through the stall door.
- Once in the stall pull the door closed behind you. Be sure to straddle your child's feet before you do or the door won't close all the way.
- It's a tight squeeze between the commode and the stall sidewall. Plan on removing footplates, hangers, left armrest and side guard from the wheelchair. Stack them partially under the partition. No other place to put them.
- Transfer to the commode. You'll have to hurry. Once the geyser is through erupting there will be a mad dash for the restroom and you'll be stuck in

there until the crowd thins out. Remember. NO PASSING ROOM!

- Reverse the process to transfer back to the chair. Be sure not to kick the armrest or footplates too far out under the partition or you'll have to step out of the stall (or crawl underneath) to retrieve them.
- While the restroom is still relatively empty make a mad dash for the door in forward. Aren't you glad you entered while in reverse? Use hand sanitizer for hand washing. If you stop at the sink you'll be stuck for another 30 minutes waiting for the lineup of women waiting for the facilities to clear out.

If, after surviving the restroom debacle at the Old Faithful Geyser Basin, you still need to go, your next opportunity will be on the southbound side of the John D. Rockefeller Highway at the north entrance to Grand Teton National Park.

A turn out just in front of the *Welcome to Grand Teton National Park* sign has plenty of parking, provides a photo opportunity for a, "See. I was there, I'm standing in front of the sign" picture and a small structure known in Australia as a "Straight Drop Dunny". In the U.S. we call it a single seater out-house. When you're desperate, it looks pretty good! Take a flashlight. This structure is almost as good as the restrooms at Flying J. PLENTY of space to maneuver the wheelchair, the commode is very safe and all you'll need is hand sanitizer (sorry, no sink) and your flashlight. Watch for the bear lurking in the bushes. Remember the Ranger warned us about those? Lucky for us this particular brown bear didn't make his presence known until we were all back in the van ready to merge out into traffic. THEN he waltzed out of the brush and crossed right in front of the van, glaring as he went.

Somehow, I get the feeling that Kay may be thinking she'll plan on meeting us at the Statue of Liberty the next time she comes to the U.S. I wonder what the restrooms will be like?

If there is anything that is not discussed in our newsletters and you would like to see it discussed, or you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please contact us at snrproject@hotmail.com