

Melvan's March on Washington

This is the story of the trip taken by Janet & Bill Colville. They were the couple from New Mexico with the 1962 Camper that were at Three Bugs in a Barrel.



Janet & Bill Colville at Three Bugs in a Barrel

Melvan, our trusty '62 VW camper (type 215) traveling companion, is finally back on the road after having a transmission replacement, an IRS conversion, and developing head and other problems. The trip had been in planning stages for better than 6 months when we first learned of the March for Women's Lives in Washington, DC on April 25, 2004. We even had to get Capt. Kirk, our '88 Vanagon ready as back-up, putting in a new radiator to solve his overheating problems. Just 2 days before we were to leave we still didn't know which vehicle would be called upon to take us cross country. For the 5th and final time, Bill, who had developed a terrible upper respiratory cold, pulled Mel's engine. He took it to Competition Motors in El Paso to balance the Kadron carbs and upon start up we knew Mel would be the one to take us back east. We packed lightly as we would be doing more traveling than camping and staying with family and friends along the way. Being retired, with our home remodeling project almost done, we planned to take in more than the march on Washington. We left Las Cruces, NM on Wed., April 14 (our taxes in the mail) without ever having taken a test drive.

As is our custom when we leave for a long trip Janet began driving. She'd not driven Melvan for well over a year. Taking it slow she made it through traffic and then stayed on "US 70" letting Mel do his new thing. The new transmission took some getting used to as the gearing was very different. The IRS also took some getting used to, the old

swing axle suspension system had a sway bar which kept Mel pretty stable but now it seemed the gusts from wind and trucks made it more difficult to stay in control. Our motto for the first several days was "hurtling uncontrollably" until we decided that going 70-75 mph on not quite adequate brakes was a foolish thing to do. At one point in Tennessee, Janet was coming down a hill when she realized there were a crossroad and a stop sign at the bottom. Luckily no cops or other vehicles were about when she drove through it all!

The first day, changing drivers every 2 hours, we made it 600 miles to Vernon, TX. Bill was still really sick and was going to be up a lot during the night so we stayed in a motel. The second day was a repeat of the first, another 600 miles, and another motel in Forest City, AR. just outside Memphis on "I 40". We'd taken "US 70" all the way to Little Rock, then up to "I 40" to make some time. On Friday the 16th we woke very early, about 5AM, had a quick breakfast by the interstate and then went through Memphis. That city seems to be rebuilding its interstate system every time we go through. At this point, Janet was just starting to feel ill. Onto "US 64," the slow road to Chattanooga, luckily this time on this road we did not have an encounter with the police outside of Fayetteville. As a matter of fact, probably because of the Iraq situation with many National Guardsmen and police people away, we'd seen very few law enforcement vehicles on the road. We made it to Chattanooga, on "I 24", early enough to not encounter too much rush hour

traffic. We found Camp Jordan in East Ridge, TN, just south of the city and the BUG-A-PALOOZA VW SHOW put on by the Scenic City VW Club of Chattanooga. Can't go traveling without a VW show somewhere down the road! With camping for 2 nights and lots of VW people around we were bound to feel better.

Mel was running very well except for a click we kept hearing in the IRS which started the afternoon of the 2nd day. Bill had checked that night at the motel and found that the boots had ripped on both axles. Seemed like the IRS would need some work! At Bug-a-Palooza we found German boots for replacement. There were so many great, helpful vendors and attendees there that we were overwhelmed with help, though we didn't do any maintenance until Knoxville.

The show was terrific...the cars fabulous. This year was dedicated to the Type III with many coming out to exhibit. It's always a treat to see so many well restored vehicles. Mel won longest distance and the "You got here in THAT" award! The club had used a gutted bus as a shower bus. One of the club members is a plumber and he was able to hook up the whole thing with an electric hot water heater and all. Great idea.

The show ended Sunday and we ended up in a motel down from the camping area. By this time Bill was just about healthy and Janet was in the throws of the cold. We had a much needed shower, good nights sleep, and then were off to Knoxville to visit with Bill's sister, Anne, the next day.

Knoxville is a really neat old college town and like many cities in America it's growing. Anne had just bought a new house and was getting ready to move. We took Mel to Dean's Foreign Auto Repair in the old section of Knoxville. He'd done an oil change on Mel several years ago on the recommendation of Jeralyn (the lady who makes caricature VW's who'd we met at Circle Your Wagons and since run into at Jerome). He did a bit of magic on the axles and put on the new boots. This proved to eliminate the clanking of the axles, but the lower boots ripped again after about 1000 miles or so, but upper boots stayed together. We spent 4 days visiting and helping Anne with some moving projects. We left Friday, hoping we hadn't given Anne the crud. At this point Bill was fully recovered and Janet was putting on a good front!

We took "I 81" all the way through Virginia. Around Harrisonburg we ran into torrential rains and decided to hole up for the night at a motel. Had hoped to make it to Manassas but we'd breakfast there the next day. Tried to call Don Haight the parts guy but couldn't get hold of him. Got into DC around noon. The tourists were out in numbers and we weren't able to get a parking spot near the Mall, so we went to the Barcelo Radisson where many from the New Mexico contingent were staying. The response to Melvan was amazing, with much looking and picture

taking, and many of the valets wanting to ride with Bill to the parking area. Finally the head of security came out and took the honors. We got settled into our room and then went out to explore the area around the hotel and meet up with friends from Las Cruces.

Sunday we were up early and had breakfast with the NM delegation of NARAL. Denise Denish, our Lieutenant Governor spoke with us. We then broke into groups and headed for the NARAL DC office where we picked up our signs. This was about 50 minutes walking time from the hotel. We got our signs and proceeded to the Mall. As we walked we could see people on the next streets over doing the same thing from different organizations. There were more and more converging on the Mall, the New Mexico group congregated about 1/32 of the way past the Washington Monument settling in to hear the speakers at about 10:30AM. Like a concert, there were large TV screens with enormous speakers along the Mall so we could see and hear each speaker. There were people with signs and buttons and badges everywhere. People from all the 50 states were participating and many foreigners as well. At about 1 PM we stepped off for the March. At first we barely moved as we shuffled along having to condense ourselves through a funnel of narrow streets. We had not seen the beginning of the March and we never did see the end of it. At two points, first as we headed into the ellipse we could see those who had come before us and then as we rounded the ellipse in front of the White House (which we couldn't see for all the foliage) we could see those coming after us. We were part of one large organism moving our way through the city. Afterwards we learned that this was the largest march in history with 1.15 million people participating. And we were all counted and tagged! After we got back to the hotel, after an adventure on the Metro, we had a quiet evening, a great dinner and lots of ibuprofen for our aching feet.

Monday morning the chief of security again rode with Bill to get Mel so we could pack him up and get out of town. Upon trying to tip him, he said "No. It's been a privilege to have your friendship and a ride in your bus!" What a sweetie he was. We did manage to get to the Lincoln Memorial for a quick tour before leaving town. We have no idea how we managed to leave town, either, but somehow or other we ended up on the road to Baltimore and ultimately to Philadelphia. The weather was cold and drizzly all day and we felt lucky to have made it out of town in one piece.

Janet's college roommate, Marilyn, lives just north of Philly in Elkins Park. She has a great 1930's row house and a spare room for us. We had to park Melvan across the street but we had fun watching the neighborhood people come out and read him...and take photos! On Wednesday we went into Philly as tourists visiting the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, Betsy Ross' house, and the new

Constitution Institute. And Bill did a quick valve adjustment in the alley behind the house the next day. We really had a wonderful visit with our friend and hope she'll make it to the great southwest one day so we can reciprocate the hospitality.

The next day we took off for Atlantic City where we had honeymooned 38 years ago. The old art deco Traymore hotel had been imploded in 1973, but in 1965 it was still going strong and quite grand. The Sands hotel and casino now takes its place. We walked the boardwalk, gambled and won a few dollars, and supplied ourselves with salt water taffy. We camped that night at Bass River State Forest in New Jersey. Janet was almost healthy again and sleeping in Mel in a quiet forest was just what the doctor would have ordered.

Friday took us to New York City and Long Island. We cruised up the Garden State Parkway and were over the Verrazano Narrows Bridge by 11AM. We inched our way for the next 1 _ hours through Brooklyn (saw the Statue of Liberty and the NYC skyline) and Queens until we finally got on the Long Island Expressway. **We had made contact with Kathy and Paul of Huntington Station from the Limbo/Neato travel directory before we had left and made arrangements to stay with them for a couple of days. Their hospitality was greatly appreciated as we were able to change our oil, have a home made meal and warm bed. We all went to the Long Island VW Clubs "3 Bugs in a Barrel" show in Medford the next day. Again, great cars, great people and a great well organized show. And the bad weather held off for the entire day. Mel got 3rd place in the Splitty class, though we felt there were other buses that deserved it far more than he. And though they didn't have a long distance award, they were very grateful for our coming and gave us a club T-shirt and sticker.**

One neat story about "Gary" who we met at the show. He was looking for a bus and had advertised for one in various ways. A man from Queens heard about Gary and offered to give him his low mileage but rusty bus that had been in storage for many years if he promised to fix it up. The man was dying of cancer and so Gary took the challenge and created a fabulous Splitty restoration. Gary kept in touch with the man, sent him pictures as things were done, but unfortunately the man passed away before the bus was finished. This was one of the nicest restoration jobs we'd seen in a long time. Congratulations to Gary.

Sunday found us up early in an effort to make it into Manhattan to drive around and visit a few old favorite spots but about _ million people were expected to bicycle around the 5 boroughs that day so we just made sure the old brownstone we'd lived in was still standing before we headed upstate. The day was rainy and cold again with no ceiling...could not see the skyline or the NY side of the Hudson River as we proceeded up the

Palisades Parkway. Our goal was Monticello and Sackett Lake looking for the Camp Winston of the 1950's where Janet had spent many fun summers. It took us a few hours, but we were successful. The name had changed and the place had changed some with more buildings and many more homes around the lake but it was the same old camp. Then we went on to Scranton, PA and Steamtown National Historical Park. The rain was heavy at this point so we opted for a motel again.

The next day we toured Steamtown and Scranton. Our daughter Becca had spent 6 months there in the '80's with the National Park Service doing some engineering projects to get the place up and running. Pictures of a deteriorating railroad stand in sharp contrast to the magnificent restoration done there. We got to ride a steam train and tour the beautifully setup museum as well as buy some souvenirs in the gift shop. In the afternoon we got on our way again driving a few hundred miles and 350 next day to reach the Earthworks Indian Mounds in Newark, OH. These large mounds are centered in a city park and unfortunately the museum wasn't opened so we holed up again and then went to Dayton to the Air Force Museum on Wright Patterson Air Force Base the next day.

What a lot of airplanes! Our feet were sore from the hard concrete floor and our heads were spinning from the volume of information but we made it out after lunch then headed to Carrillon Historic Center where the most original Wright Flyer is exhibited. This was the most impressive of the exhibits as the plane is situated in a round hall with a walkway above and around it so you look down and in it. Then off to Indiana for a night in an over-priced RV park on the interstate.

The next morning as we gassed up in Bloomington IN. Tom Stone from the Colorado VW Bus Club stopped by to say hello. He lives in Bloomington, but his kids live in CO and got him a membership to the club. We chatted for quite awhile and then were on our way to Galesburg, IL where Bill's great, great grandparents were from. We spent the night in a wonderful city park just north of the city with full camping and recreational facilities. It was a hot and sticky night so the next day we got up early and went searching for signs of the family business (torn down because the bricks were bad, replaced by a small park), and gravesites, which were still intact.

After paying our respects we headed out "US-36" for Hannibal Mo for what we thought would be a quick tour of Mark Twains haunts before continuing west to Colorado. However, signs were everywhere for a Hot Rod and Classic Car show the following day, Saturday the 8th of May. We were looking for a sticker for Melvan and information about the show and found both at the Becky Thatcher Ice Cream Shop where Sara North gave us what we sought plus an invite to stay the night on the quiet street in front of her house if we went to

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the show. She has a sweet '71 Beetle she was exhibiting and her dad a '29 restored Packard. It was too good an offer to pass up, so we stayed. The Loafers Car Club ran the show on 4 closed blocks of downtown Hannibal. Over 400 cars came...what a spectacle! The heartland of America sure knows how to put on a show. We won 2nd in long distance with a prize of a club event jacket and \$50.00 for gas money to get back home! We were starting to run low on cash and with gas prices going up and up this came in real handy.

That night we followed "US-36" to Long Branch State Park and in the days to come we toured the

old sections of St. Joseph, MO, fought the wind traveling across Kansas, stopped in Cawker City to explore the largest ball of twine in the world and the wonderful town devoted to keeping this monument alive, planted ourselves in the geographical center of the USA (tho' the farmer who owned the land said it was really 400 yards NW of our feet and the monument), and experienced tornado like winds at Bonney Lake State Park just inside Colorado, the night before coming into the Denver area.

We spent the week hanging around, doing errands, visiting with our kids and grandson and friends, and enjoying the snowfall before Volkswagens on the Green being held in a new spot

this year. We enjoyed being reunited with the Colorado VW Bus Club members and the others who attended this yearly event. The show was fun but we were showing our tiredness from being on the road continually for 5 weeks and were glad to head home the following day. We spent Monday night at Ojo Caliente in our home state of New Mexico, an old hot springs resort on Hwy 285 soaking our tired bones and camping with the mosquitoes.

We made it home the next day with 99 degrees reading on the thermometer as we turned into our driveway. After 6010 miles and 14 states plus NM, it was good to be home...but if we do some laundry and clean Mel up a bit and change the oil...we could be out the door in a day! Hmmm...