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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Trip through Montana delivers a lifetime of memories

Campbell Vaughn Augusta Chronicle

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The trip included visits to Livingston, Missoula, and Glacier National Park, where the author was impressed by the scenery and wildlife.

A highlight of the trip was driving the Going-to-the-Sun Road, a scenic route through Glacier National Park.

I am a lucky guy to have traveled and seen so many amazing things in my life. Doorways into these adventures are about finding a way to say yes when the opportunity arises. It sometimes isn't easy to make it happen, but I rarely regret getting a chance to do something that ends up becoming a long-remembered experience.

I have been on a roll the past couple of years starting with a road trip with my buddy Jeff from Denver to Augusta. There is a lot to see in the middle of the United States. This summer, I pulled off one of the best trips ever when I was able to combine a wedding in Livingston, Montana and a work conference in Billings, Montana within 12 days. Livingston, the travel in-between and the work event in Billings were incredible. If you haven't been to Montana and traveled around the state, find a way to do it.

When I was in college, I lived in Alaska for a summer. I didn't think anything could come close to comparing the landscapes I saw when exploring parts of the largest state in the union until Montana.

My wife and I flew into Bozeman, shuttled to Livingston and immediately went to a picnic in the park with a band and a whole-cooked hog directly on the bank of the Yellowstone River. The mountains in the background were incredible. The town of Livingston was an old cowboy town where you could walk to any shop or watering hole.

After three days in Livingston, five of us hit the road for a night in Missoula, which is like Athens, Georgia in the West, and on up to Columbia Falls for the highlight of the trip -- Glacier National Park.

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Glacier National Park was established in 1910 and is home to some of the last remaining glaciers in the continental United States. Nicknamed the "Crown of the Continent," the park is a treasure trove of pristine wilderness, glacially carved valleys, alpine meadows, crystal-clear lakes, and some of the most dramatic scenery in North America.

Campbell Vaughn: [How can you tell if a melon is ripe? Find out here.](#)

We started by taking a boat ride on the 6,800-acre Lake McDonald, which at one time in the mid-1970s hosted the largest concentration of bald eagles in the world. More than 440 bald eagles were observed around Lake McDonald due to the introduction of Kokanee salmon in 1922.

On a side note, to keep the food sources high for the Kokanee salmon, fishery managers introduced Mysis shrimp to the lake about the time of the bald eagle's population peak and an unintended adverse reaction happened. The shrimp thrived so well they outcompeted the young Kokanee for the same food source which is a native zooplankton. Ultimately, the salmon were gone by the late 1980s, and the eagles had to leave to find new food sources. As much as we think we should, this was another reason for us not to play God. Our group did get to see a few eagles, and I did yell, 'Merica', when I saw them.

It would be hard to believe there is a more scenic road in America than the one we traveled on inside Glacier National Park. The *Going-to-the-Sun Road* is a 50-mile engineering marvel that cuts through the heart of the park and crosses the Continental Divide. For those who may have forgotten what the Continental Divide is from 7th grade geography, it is the hydrological feature that separates watersheds of a continent which dictates the direction surface water will flow into different large bodies of water.

Going-to-the-Sun Road was completed in 1933 and offers panoramic views of snowcapped peaks, tons of waterfalls, valleys loaded with wildflowers and plenty of wildlife. We saw lots of park animals including a black bear with cubs and a grizzly grazing along the side of the road. As we watched the grizzly from about 200 yards away, there were a group of folks that followed the bear within 15 yards taking videos and pictures. I watched from a distance expecting there to be a newsworthy bear attack. It really is hard to believe how dumb some people are.

The Going-to-the-Sun Road was so amazing, when we got back to the place we were staying, I went back to see it again that afternoon.

I still need to tell you about the rest of the trip, so I think I will save my column for next week to tell you about some of the other amazing things I saw in Montana. With this heat we are having in Georgia, I caught myself looking for cheap flights wishing I could go back this weekend.

– *Campbell Vaughn is a University of Georgia Extension agent based in Augusta.*

