

SAN FRANCISCO – part 2

DAY 44 – 5th August 2008

This will probably be my last entry, since tomorrow we start our journey back to the United Kingdom. There may be a few things to add in the morning, but may I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has logged on to read about our travels over the last 44 days. I have been amazed just how many people have been following what we have been doing – an average of over 200 people every day!! Thank you for inspiring me to put these things down in writing!



The above photo does not refer to children who might think of running away – it refers to the way cars should be parked on the streets of San Francisco. If the brakes on cars fail the idea is that cars should not roll away or “runaway” down the hills, but the wheels should hit the curbs and stop the cars altogether!

This morning we followed through on yesterday’s decision to go out for breakfast, and having had a good start to the day, we ploughed on without having to eat until the evening – though we did have to stop to drink from time to time!



Today was mainly a day for the cable car. We bought a one-day pass for all forms of transport in San Francisco and then boarded our first cable car of the day. This took us along the Mason-Powell route from Fisherman’s Wharf over the central hills to Union Square – the downtown centre, noted for its high-rise hotels and main stores – Tiffany’s, Macy’s and Bloomingdales, etc.

We tried visiting the California Academy of Science to visit its exhibit on earthquakes and experience a simulation of a San Francisco earthquake, but it is in the process of moving to the Golden Gate Park, and will not be opened for several months. I just hope that we don't have the real experience of a San Francisco Earthquake!



So, we took the bus out towards Japantown to visit the new Catholic Cathedral of St Mary. The building has been nicknamed the “washing machine” by the locals, but it is quite tastefully done. I dread to think of the costs on the Cathedral parish – their weekly income for 2,400 parishioners will certainly not be enough for the daily running of such a building. I am sure there are arrangements in place!



Afterwards we took the cable car to the main cable car intersection, where there is a museum built around the working machinery (above) that hauls the cables under the streets of San Francisco. The cable car principle is the same as found in the alps, where a car clamps onto a moving cable – but in San Francisco the cable is underground, rather than hanging in the air. These cable cars are extremely popular with tourists (and also the locals) and the queues (lines) stretch for some considerable way. The trick, of course, is to walk on a stop or two – they deliberately leave a few spaces for “pick-ups” along the way, and so the time waiting for a cable car is considerably reduced!

The museum was fascinating, and we spent a long time looking at the exhibits, the explanation as to how the car clamps onto the cable – and how it has to let go at junctions, clamp on to brake the car, etc. The cable runs at a constant 9½ miles per hour, and the risk of a runaway cable car is very rare. I’m told, though have yet to see, that there is an anchor that the brake-man at the back of the car, can throw out in an extreme emergency, hoping that it will catch onto something!!

The museum also pointed out the various lines still in use – including the California line, which I had not been on. So, guess what? We rode the California line in both directions, only stopping at one end for a coffee and ice-cream before setting off again.



We finally took the main Powell-Hyde line, which passed the “crookedest street” in the world – actually it is a combination of turns on a steep slope – but there are worse roads elsewhere – I can think of many in Wales – but perhaps not in such a short space. The photo above does not really do justice – a better photo might have been taken from the bottom of the street – but that would have meant walking down AND back.



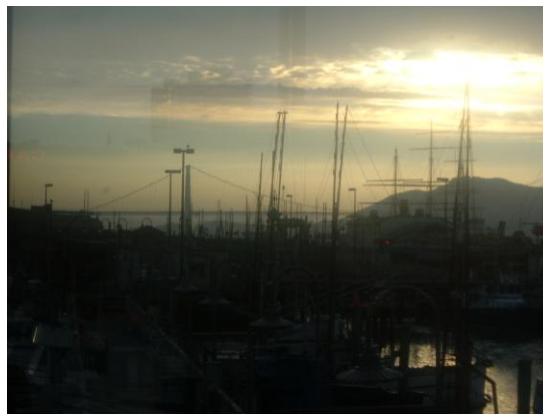
At the end of the line we had a little time before going to dinner, so we went around a mechanical museum, which had many examples of the old coin in the slot machines that were a familiar sight at fair-grounds and the like – the laughing puppets, the fortune tellers, the French Execution, etc. I do actually remember a lot of them myself. Then there were the first electronic games – the ping-pong games and the

first “Space Invaders” that my sister used to cheat at!! There were a few more modern ones, such as driving the racing cars. It was a good one for distant memories.

At the end of the museum we found the USS Pampanito, a submarine that had seen action in the Pacific during the Second World War. We actually went aboard – even though I do not like the idea of such confined spaces – but it was ok with just the two of us going through at a time. It was hard to imagine how 70 submariners could live in such cramped conditions!



Finally we had our final evening meal in the United States, and indeed on our world tour (if you don't count the meal that we will be having on the flight home). As we were eating, the sun finally broke through, the fog lifted and we were afforded a view of the Golden Gate Bridge that was completely clear of fog. After dinner we headed home to prepare for our departure.



DAY 45 – 6th August 2008

Today is our last day. I will be signing off now – there is breakfast ahead and a last wander around before a good lunch. Then we head to the airport – our flight leaves at 4.50 pm (or 12.50 am BST), and we are due home in Swansea sometime on Thursday afternoon. Please allow for some jet-lag over the next few days!