

The Crickets

By Romana Annette 09/06/2008



This is a picture of an *Anabrus Simplex*, also known as a *Mormon cricket*. This is a descendent of the same insects that attacked the first crops of the Mormon pioneers, the crops that had to be saved by California gulls. There is even a statue, in commemoration of the event, in Temple Square in Salt Lake City. These insects periodically swarm and eat everything in their path, including any of their dead companions. The eggs are laid without having any swarming instinct; so the mothers have to spray the swarming hormone on the clutch after the eggs are laid. The hormone is not added to the clutches during every breeding year. Entomologists are still investigating what factors lead to a year for swarming.

Actually, these insects are not crickets at all, but are closely related to katydids.

The story is not just about these crickets, but also about the journey where we encountered them.

On the first part of our journey, we were off to visit our daughter and her husband near Elko, Nevada. We spent the first night in Baker City, Oregon. In the morning, we entered Idaho and lost an hour of clock time. At Mountain Home, we turned south on Highway 225. This is a shortcut, but a shortcut in distance only, not time of travel. This is one of the slowest 190-mile-or-so segments we have ever driven.

Before leaving Idaho, we crossed the Snake River. The Snake River is aptly named, since we encountered it all over Idaho in our travels.



Soon, we crossed into Nevada. Suddenly, everything was different. There was considerably more trash strewn around, and there was a dumpy-looking casino. Conveniently, our watches and clocks were all correct again, since all of Nevada is in the Pacific Time Zone. Remember, a lot of Nevada is farther west than Los Angeles.

Next we came to the remote towns of Mountain City and Patsville. They were nothing to get excited about. We *did* want to find a restroom soon. Strangely, the chamber of commerce in Mountain City was closed on a weekday at mid-afternoon. Their schedule was not in tune with our needs.

It was strange traveling south on Highway 225. To the right, was the creek-sized Owyhee River. It was flowing the opposite direction that we were traveling, but it looked like we were going downhill. It was disturbing. It was an optical illusion.

Soon, we began to encounter more and more hopping objects on the highway ahead. At first, I thought they might be toads, so we stopped to look. They were inch-long *Mormon crickets*, instead. What had seemed to be a few from our windows turned out to be thousands on the ground.



As we continued our journey, we crushed them on the road by the hundreds; then they vanished. We had reached a new section of the road, where the pavement had imbedded glass. The crickets did not like the glass. We could not figure out why the crickets had such an aversion to the new construction, since the roadway seemed so much better than before.

When I spied the entrance to the *Wild Horse Crossing* campground, I drove in on the premise that there might be toilets. There were permanent chemical-based restrooms, and they were remarkably clean. Nevada was the worst state we visited for having rest stops. Idaho was the best for rest stops, with their modern indoor lobbies and even unisex restrooms.

On the way back to the highway, they were waiting in the gravel. The crickets were trying to block our exit, but I pressed the accelerator and plunged through the horde onto the glassy highway. Soon we reached the *Wild Horse Reservoir* and dam. Despite first impressions, it was quite extensive. We even saw pelicans, which we certainly did not expect.





We left the crickets behind. We thought we were also leaving the slow section of the highway behind, but no such luck. There were two lengthy sections of the highway under construction. Even though the nominal speed limit was 70 MPH, we and others had to traverse these sections of the highway slowly, behind pilot cars, in single file.

We finally arrived in Elko, but it had taken more than the Google Map time of four and a half hours. We had trouble finding our way to the suburb of Spring Creek, to the south of Elko. Our Google Map printout had left out key details. Strangely, our next Google Map printout, in sequence, had correctly shown how to leave Spring Creek for Utah, but I never thought to look there.

Finally, we reached the spacious, but desolate-looking suburb of Spring Creek. When we reached our daughter's house, her husband proclaimed: isn't this area gorgeous? No way!

