Fun in the Sun
True RV Pioneers
Battery State of Charge
Safe Holiday Travel Tips

PLUS
Is your Computer Safe using Public Wi-Fi?

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The laptop we would’ve used to keep in touch with the kids.

The guy from Ed’s Towing. Spent three hours with him.

Cook’s Field, the week after we missed the Bluegrass Festival.

Not all insurance is equal. Just because you have your RV insured, doesn’t mean your whole RV experience is covered. Things like personal effects coverage, vacation liability, and towing expenses are frequently left out of other carriers’ policies. But at Explorer RV, we believe it’s more than just your RV we’re covering. It’s the travels, the good times, the memories. Visit us online to learn more or to get a quote.

PROTECTING YOUR RV. PROTECTING YOUR MEMORIES.
Hello Fellow Campers,

Happy Fourth of July! Have a great time celebrating our Independence Day, but it’s important to keep in mind that this is one of the most heavily traveled holidays of the entire year.

Before heading out on a auto or RV trip make sure the vehicle is prepared for the trip by conducting some simple pre-trip checks. Always drive defensively and if you want to enjoy your favorite adult beverage let somebody who isn’t drinking drive the vehicle.

And don’t forget getting there is half the fun! JUST RV IT this 4th of July.

For now, sit back, relax and enjoy this edition of RV Consumer E-magazine. Happy RV Learning,

Mark
www.rveducation101.com
www.rvconsumer.com
www.rvuniversity.com
RV Education 101 has a brand new RV video site designed to help educate you on RV how-to topics, RV products, RV tips and much more.

With over 50 informative RV videos RV101.TV is your #1 RV video source on the web. The videos are grouped by category covering every RV topic imaginable, so it’s easy to find what you are looking for or what you want to learn more about.

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Go where the road takes you

**JUST RV IT!**

[Photo by Tyler Polk](http://www.rvconsumer.com)
This this time of year lots of folks planning and taking their summer camping trips. Traffic on our highways increases dramatically before, during and after major holidays like the 4th of July. I thought this would be a good time to discuss some safe holiday travel tips so you arrive at your summer RV travel destination safely. Getting there can be half the fun, as the saying goes, if you take a few precautions to make your trip safe.

**Tip #1:** The first step is to plan the trip you are taking. Travel guides, magazines, state tourism boards and Internet sites offer valuable information to help you plan your trip. Route your trip on a map or from an Internet trip planning site. Always keep an atlas or maps in the RV as well. Driving or towing an RV can be stressful, especially if you don’t know the route you will be traveling. Using a Global Positioning System (GPS) can make traveling much less stressful.

**Tip #2:** Complete a “Pre-Trip Checklist” before you head out on the road. Simple checks like checking your tires, lights, fluid levels, tow bar set-up and other items all contribute to a safer trip. You should make these checks everyday before traveling.

**Tip #3:** Take plenty of breaks when you’re traveling. Stopping, stretching out and taking brief walks can revitalize you. Do not rush to get to your vacation destination. Driving too fast and for long periods of time can result in fatigue and falling asleep at the wheel. If you feel tired you should pull over and rest or change drivers. It’s a good idea to switch drivers every few hours.

**Tip #4:** Avoid driving or towing your RV during inclement weather and in high winds. Because of the size and mass of many RVs it can be extremely dangerous to travel during periods of high winds. It’s better to get to your destination one day later than risk traveling in bad weather conditions.

**Tip #5:** Limit your driving time to 5 or 6 hours a day (300 to 350 miles). Not only will you be more alert, but you will arrive at the campground with plenty of day light to get set up and settled in before it gets dark outside. This gives you a chance to unwind and get rested for another day of travel, and to enjoy some of the amenities the campground has to offer.

**Tip #6:** Always leave plenty of room between you and the vehicle in front of you. An RV is much heavier than an automobile and requires more braking distance to come to a stop.
This alone can prevent accidents, especially during emergency braking situations. Driving at a safe speed also lowers your braking distance. Always use a supplemental braking system on the vehicle you are towing behind a motorhome.

**Tip #7:** Drive defensively! Stay alert and monitor what is going on around you at all times. Adjust and use your mirrors.

**Note:** Cell phones are nice to have for emergencies, but they can distract the driver. Do not talk or text if you are driving. If you must make a call have someone that is not driving do it for you.

Never drink and drive!

Plan your trip, travel safe and smart and enjoy your RV experiences. Remember, getting there is half the fun!

*RV 101*
Get your **JUST RV IT** Gear *Here*

**Hot off the Press!**

**JUST RV IT** Tee shirts now available

Three styles to choose from and all tee shirts are light gray in color. Shirts are available in SM/MED/LG/XLG. Sizes run small so it is recommended you order one size larger.

Join the **JUST RV IT** campaign. Bumpers stickers are available for $2.95  **BUY NOW**
Heat Kills

Hot temperatures and overcharging kill batteries. During hot weather or during high usage check the batteries frequently. Checking the electrolyte levels and adding distilled water as required can save your lead acid batteries.

Charging

Properly charging your batteries needs to be done in stages. A bulk charge should be performed to return the battery to 90% of a full charge in the first few hours. An absorption charge is used for the remaining 10 percent to prevent any battery gassing and loss of water, and then a float charge to keep the battery fully charged.

Parasitic Loads

RV’s have parasitic loads that will discharge the battery over time. Some but not all of these loads are LP gas leak detectors, the TV antenna power booster, clocks, stereos and appliance circuit boards. If your RV is equipped with a battery disconnect switch make sure it is in the OFF position when you are not using the RV or when it is in storage. If your RV is not equipped with a battery disconnect switch you can purchase a battery disconnect that installs directly to the battery.

Discharging

Never let a battery discharge below 10.5 volts. You can measure the voltage with a digital voltmeter. Measuring the voltage gives you a quick picture of the batteries depth of discharge so you know when they need to be recharged.

Watering

Batteries should only be watered after charging, unless the plates are exposed prior to charging. When you add water to a battery, use mineral free water. Distilled water is best. Regular tap water can cause calcium sulfation.

Recycling

The lead and plastic used to construct batteries can be recycled. More than 97% of all battery lead is recycled. Be sure and recycle your old batteries.

Applying these simple tips can increase the life of your RV batteries. RV 101
**Q&A with Mark**

**Question:**
We are getting ready to purchase a travel trailer and our truck is rated to tow 6,000 pounds. Should the trailer tongue weight be subtracted from the truck's tow rating?

**Answer:**
That's a good question. The easy answer is yes, any weight added in or on the tow vehicle takes away from the vehicle's tow rating. But it gets a little more detailed than that. The amount of tongue weight will depend on the hitch system you use. If you hook the trailer up and don't use a weight distribution hitch all of the tongue weight would be subtracted from the vehicle's tow rating. If you use a weight distribution hitch the tongue weight is distributed to the axles on the trailer and the front and rear axle of the tow vehicle, so the actual tongue weight on the hitch itself is less. The only way to know exactly how much tongue weight to subtract is to weigh the tow vehicle separately, then weigh the tow vehicle with the trailer hooked up to the type of hitch you plan to use and see how much weight is added to the tow vehicle.

To stay current with what's happening in the world of RVs between magazine issues visit our [Blog](#). We post informative RV tips and information a couple times per week. There is also an option to follow the [Blog](#) via email. Just look on the right sidebar and when you sign up you'll be notified each time we make a post.

**RV Quick Tip**
Every single component in a towing system has a weight rating. This includes the vehicle, the receiver on the vehicle, the hitch, hitch ball, ball mount and safety chains and cables. Never exceed the lowest rated component in the towing system. This applies to a truck towing a trailer and a motorhome towing a dinghy.
The only way to know the condition of your RV batteries is to test the state of charge. All batteries lose charge over time, not to mention the parasitic loads that can drain RV batteries while in storage. You should test the battery state of charge every month and charge any battery that is at or below an 80% state of charge.

**Note:** An 80% state of charge for a 12-volt battery is 12.5 volts, and 6.25 volts for a 6-volt battery.

Testing the battery state of charge is not difficult to do. There are basically three ways to test the condition of your RV batteries.

1) You can use the monitor panel in the RV.
2) You can measure the voltage with a digital voltmeter.
3) You can test the specific gravity with a hydrometer.

The least accurate of the three testing methods is the RV monitor panel, but if this is your only means for checking the batteries it will give you a general idea of the condition. When you check the condition of your battery using the monitor panel make sure the RV is not plugged in to shore power, if it is you will get a false fully-charged reading. To get a more accurate reading of the battery’s condition check the monitor panel when the RV is not plugged in and turn a couple of overhead lights on to place a small load on the battery.

Measuring voltage with a voltmeter has its advantages. If you have sealed batteries your only choice is to use a voltmeter, and measuring voltage can give you a quick picture of the batteries depth of discharge, so you know when they need to be recharged. To measure the voltage you need a good digital voltmeter. Set the meter on DC voltage and connect the red lead to the positive terminal and the black lead to the negative terminal. A 12-volt battery that is charged should read 12.5 to 12.7 volts. Readings less than 12.5 indicate the battery state of charge is below 80% and the battery needs to be charged.
A 6-volt battery that is charged should read 6.25 to 6.37 volts. Readings below 6.25 indicate the battery state of charge is below 80% and the battery needs to be charged.

**Note:** To get an accurate reading the battery should not be tested if it has been charged or discharged in the last 12 hours and preferably 24 hours.

The preferred method for testing the battery’s state of charge is to check the specific gravity reading of each cell. You can purchase a hydrometer at an auto parts store for about ten dollars. The electrolyte in the battery cells is a solution of acid and water so you need to wear safety glasses and gloves and avoid any contact with your skin. The first step is to remove the vent caps and check the electrolyte levels. There has to be enough in the cells for the hydrometer to pick up a sample. If you have to add any water prior to testing you will have to charge the battery and let it sit for 12 hours before testing the condition of the battery.

Next, fill and drain the hydrometer at least twice in each cell before taking a sample. Take the reading and record it and drain the electrolyte back into the cell you are testing. Test all of the cells and replace the vent caps when you are finished.

Specific gravity readings for a charged battery should read between 1.235 and 1.277. Specific gravity readings below 1.235 indicate the battery state of charge is less than 80% and the battery needs to be charged. If there is a .050 or more difference in the specific gravity reading between the highest and lowest cell, you have a weak or dead cell in the battery.

**Note:** If your hydrometer does not compensate for temperature you must correct the readings to 80 degrees F. Add .004 for every 10 degrees above 80 degrees F and subtract .004 for every 10 degrees below 80 degrees F.

If you put your RV in long term storage it’s a good idea to remove the batteries and put them in storage too. This is quite simple to do. When you remove a battery always remember to remove the negative terminal first and then the positive terminal. Label the battery cables so you remember how to make the connections. Knowing the battery state of charge and re-charging a discharged in a timely manner will extend the life of the battery. **RV 101**
Today we’re going to talk to our good friend Rob Cochran. Rob is the owner of Camping Connection, a RV parts and service center with locations in Kissimmee, FL and Myrtle Beach, SC.

Rob started in the RV business in 1983 as a service and installation technician. He rose through the ranks while attending night college and held positions as shop foreman, service manager and parts and service manager prior to starting Camping Connection in 1996. He is a RVIA Master Certified Technician. Rob assisted the Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA) with their training and is featured in technician training videos currently used nationwide. Let’s see what else Rob is up to.

MP: Hi Rob. Thanks for taking some time out to talk with us.

RC: Hi Mark. Thanks you, I appreciate the opportunity.

MP: I guess a good place to start would be how you got started in the RV business?

RC: Well, I grew up on a farm where we learned to fix everything that broke. I got into auto mechanics in high school and began repairing vehicles at an early age. My brother was working at Camping World and he called me one day and said he was going into the Air Force. He said a job was opening up and I might want to apply. He said “It’s kind of like auto mechanics except you don’t get as dirty”. I said “That sounds great!” and the rest is history.

MP: What was it that you liked about the RV business?

RC: I liked that I didn’t get as dirty, of course, but I also loved that you didn’t have to do the same thing all of the time. There was such a variety of things to do. You have to be a carpenter, a plumber, an auto mechanic or an electrician at any given time. Plus, there is always new product coming out to learn about, so it never gets boring.

MP: Those are some of the same things I enjoy. I know you worked for a dealership for several years, what made you decide to start your own business?

RC: My dad owned a gas station for a couple of years when I was 10 or 11. The whole family worked there.
and it made me feel like I was a part owner. Ever since then I wanted to own my own business and I worked toward that goal until I felt I was ready.

**MP:** What do you like best about operating a business?

**RC:** There are several things. Having great employees and getting to know them and their families and watching their kids grow up, knowing you helped in some way, is pretty awesome. Constantly being able to grow and learn and having potential that is only limited by our effort and ability keeps it challenging and fun.

**MP:** What do you like the least?

**RC:** Probably not being able to solve every problem a customer has. We sometimes have to refer to others because we don’t have a particular skill set or we are just so busy due to the seasonality of the business. Also, I started my business when my son was 3 years old, so I missed a lot of time with him growing up that I’ll never get back. He’s 19 now and we have a great relationship but if I had to do it all again I would have balanced my priorities a lot better.

**MP:** What are your goals for the future of Camping Connection?

**RC:** We opened up our 2nd location in Myrtle Beach, SC in 2010 and things are going well there. I would like to continue to grow the current locations, open new stores and expand our offerings. It’s important that we can give our employees an opportunity to grow. My goal was to have 10 stores by 2020, but it’s more important to me that we maintain our quality of service rather than try to hit a number goal. I will also continue to expand our internet offering and connect with our customers through both our website and newsletters. We will continue to earn our place as America’s most trusted source for RV parts, accessories and service.

**MP:** What exactly do you mean when you say “Connect with our customers?”

**RC:** Our main objective is to truly understand what our customers really need. What’s working for them and what’s not. We are designing our website to give them information that will help them install and properly use what they purchase and quick access to a Camping Connection representative that can help. But beyond that, we want their feedback. Did the product work to their expectations? How long did it last? What product do you wish existed that currently doesn’t? That’s the information that will help us serve them better. We are going to gather that information and share it through our website and newsletter.

**MP:** You mentioned a newsletter, how can folks get on your newsletter list to connect with you and what can they expect in return?
There is a newsletter link on our website at www.campingconnection.com or they can call our website department at 866-576-8171 and provide us with their information. We designed the newsletter so that it is very easy to read too. Not every subject pertains to every customer so we give a short paragraph as to the topic and allow you to expand it if the topic interests the reader. The newsletter comes out monthly and it contains new products, discounts, recall information, featured campgrounds, employee spotlight and other useful information. As things get rolling, we are going to start looking at matching emails to the consumers specific needs. We want to avoid sending travel trailer information to motor home owners for instance. We will be giving the customer an option to “opt in” to targeted information that fits their specific needs. We’re very excited about this project and we think the customers will appreciate the fact we are not sending them irrelevant information.

That sounds great and it sounds like you have your hands full. Is there anything else you would like to add before we wrap it up?

Just that each of us at Camping Connection want to make sure that every customer has an excellent experience. Each employee has the authority to do whatever they can to resolve any customer issue. I still maintain an “open door” policy and welcome any direct feedback.
The Showerhead Choice for RVers

With limited water storage tanks and reduced pressure, a RV showerhead’s performance cannot hide behind an unlimited, high-flow municipal water supply. Oxygenics’ BodySpa® showerhead has been passing the test with RV owners for years — delivering the type of cleansing, massaging showers you expect at home, while conserving the RV’s water supply.

Oxygenics designed three features of their showerhead specifically with the RV owner in mind:

- **Installation in Seconds**: It’s nearly as simple as screwing in a new light bulb. A couple turns of a crescent wrench, a piece of Teflon tape, and a little hand tightening will complete the job.

- **Water Savings**: The Oxygenics showerhead increases the oxygen content of the shower stream by up to 10 times, saving water and energy by up to 70 percent compared to other showerheads, while delivering a soft and cleansing shower experience.

- **Water Pressure**: Oxygenics’ self-pressurizing showerheads increase the strength of the shower stream within the showerhead without stressing the RV’s plumbing. More Info

More Info
I am a big fan of Western Pennsylvania. It’s home of the Pittsburg Steelers and the Meadville KOA Campground. This year marks the 34th year of this campground serving camping families. Staying in the campground business for 34 years means two things, you know how to run a campground and how to treat customers. Owners Tim & Robin Childers keep families coming back with the large campsites and serene setting in the heart of the Great Lakes area. Other reasons campers keep coming back to the Meadville KOA are the themed weekend events and award-winning planned activities. Kids and grown-ups alike can hike and explore nature on this 63 acre camping facility. Whether you’re looking for a weekend getaway, a week-long vacation or an entire season of leisurely camping and enjoyment this.
The Meadville KOA Campground has you covered. The Meadville KOA can accommodate everything from tents to big rigs, and there is a well-stocked camp store, free Wi-Fi internet, swimming pool, license-free fishing in seven well-stocked ponds, horseshoes, volleyball court, basketball court, soccer, softball, a new playground and much more for the entire family to enjoy.

The Meadville KOA Campground is centrally located in the heart of Western Pa., just 10 miles off I-79. It’s makes a perfect base camp to explore the Great Lakes Area of Northwestern Pa and all it has to offer.

From hiking & biking trails in Meadville to the Erie Wildlife Refuge (with American Bald Eagles), there is truly something for everyone. Take some time to enjoy Presque Isle State Park and Beaches, Waldameer Amusement Park (ask about discount tickets), Pymatuning Lake and Spillway, Conneaut Lake Park, Drake Well & Oil Museum (featured on the History Channel), The Oil Creek Rail Road, John Brown Tannery Museum (Civil War), Grove City Outlets, and much more.

For more information on the Meadville KOA visit Tim & Robins website

JUST RV IT!
Are the Bad Guys in your RV Park?

The first thing to understand about a Public Wi-Fi hotspot is that it is only accessible by someone in close physical proximity to that Wi-Fi hotspot. So, if you are connected to a public Wi-Fi hotspot in an RV park, the only danger of intruders is from the other people at the same RV park. The technology that handles this is called Network Address Translation or NAT for short. It refers to the router that runs the hotspot. The router is the only device which is connected to the public Internet, all the computers in the hotspot are connected to the router … a private network. Someone on the outside Internet cannot discover computers on the other side of a router with Network Address Translation.

I guess it’s possible that some bad guys are in your RV park but the odds are very small. The odds are higher in an airport or coffee shop, but you’re still not at risk to the world. You know why Willie Sutton robbed banks, right? Because that’s where the money is!

Choose ‘Public’ as Your Network Location

Consider the US Mail and imagine that you’re afraid that the mail deliverer will have access to the belongings in your house when she delivers and picks up your mail. She clearly has access to anything in your mailbox, but she’ll only get in your house if you leave your front door wide open! The same is true for connecting to a Wi-Fi hotspot. Anyone else who is connected to the same Wi-Fi hotspot can gain access to anything on your computer that you have set to share on a network – the equivalent of a mailbox. So don’t share anything! Lock it down.

It helps to remember a bit of history here, a Wi-Fi hotspot is a network. Networks were originally developed for the express purpose of sharing files and printers among different computers on the same network.
Networks are still used for sharing files on a Home or a Work network – just not on a Public network like a Wi-Fi hotspot in an RV park or airport. A public Wi-Fi hotspot is intended to share the Internet connection and nothing more.

Most modern Wi-Fi hotspots will already be configured with an Internet Firewall so that computers on the network cannot see each other. But you can’t count on that – maybe it’s an older hotspot or it was installed by non-professionals who don’t understand this step. So, the important thing you need to do is to specify that this is a Public network when you connect to it. For more detail on this option see the Microsoft article on Choosing a Network Location. With Windows Vista and Windows 7, the choice is quite clear with the following dialog box – Public Network is the correct choice.

“Treat all future networks that I connect to as public, and don’t ask me again.” This would be a good option for travelers who are often connecting to different hotspots.”

If you don’t use Windows Vista or Windows 7: See this article for Turn off File and Printer Sharing with Windows XP.

On the Mac it is System Preferences/ File Sharing – turn it on when you’re on your home network and off when you’re on a public network. Here’s a Macworld article on securing your Macintosh while traveling.

All Bets are Off if Your Computer is Already Infected

Proper maintenance of your computer is required to keep it clean. If your computer has a virus or other malware already active when you connect to the Internet, then the security steps discussed in these articles are meaningless. Your computer will do the bidding of the malware. So, what is proper maintenance? I’m glad you asked!

1) Updates for your Operating System (OS): Windows, Mac OS, Linux, all release updates most every month, sometimes multiple times a month. These updates patch security holes as soon as they are discovered. If you have not installed the Updates for your Operating System, then there are holes in your...
computer’s security that can be exploited by malware (software from the ‘bad guys’).

2) **Anti-Malware Software**: This includes anti-virus and anti-spyware, you must have this installed and running on your computer. There are many products out there. Cnet.com is a good source of reviews. Many of the best options are free – like Microsoft Security Essentials.

3) **Updates for your Anti-Malware Software**: Just because you installed Anti-Malware software doesn’t mean you’re protected. It needs to be up to date and running properly. Most software today updates itself automatically and performs the scans automatically as well. Just be sure yours is doing so. If you installed it 4 years ago, and it hasn’t been updated, it is doing you no good. New viruses are born every day.

4) **Firewall**: Every computer needs an active firewall, but don’t go too crazy. The firewall that comes with your computer is fine. If you buy extra firewalls, you need to learn how to properly configure them. We’ve seen firewalls configured so tight that the computer’s owner couldn’t use the Internet at all!

**Conclusion = 98%**

If you follow the guidelines in this article and [last month’s article on HTTPS](link), you will be 98% protected against any unintended use of your data transmissions (outgoing risks) or contents of your computer (incoming risks).

Are there still some risks? Yes. Just like securing your home or car – a professional burglar that really wants in will find a way. I say that’s the 2% risk that I’m willing to take. What I hope you get out of this article is the understanding that a ‘secure’ connection to the Internet is not the answer. Your connection to the Internet does not provide your protection. You do. Your job is to choose.

1) Keep your computer up-to-date and malware-free
2) Specify Public Network/No Sharing in your network settings
3) Use valid HTTPS websites

For shorthand, just remember UPS: **U**pdates, **P**ublic Network setting (no file sharing), and **httpS** / Secure website. If you do that, then you are protected against 98% of the nasties, regardless of how you connect to the Internet.

**About the Author**

Chris owned a computer-training center for 13 years and is a certified instructor specializing in database development. She is a computer Expert Blogger for RV.net’s blog. Chris and her husband Jim own [Geeks on Tour](link). They travel in their RV and conduct seminars at RV Rallies and help RV owners and RV parks with their computer needs. For more information visit [Geeks on Tour](link).
It doesn’t matter if you are new to RVing or a seasoned veteran, we offer a complete line of RV training DVD’s to meet your specific needs. If you prefer an instant download video we have that too.

RV Quick Tip
Inspect the condition of Your windshield wipers prior to each trip. It’s one of those things you don’t think about until you need them. Periodically clean the wiper blades with some windshield washer fluid.

Use Maxx Air vent covers to ventilate your RV rain or shine www.maxxair.com
Tag Axle – A non-drive axle located behind the rear drive axle that is used to help support the weight of the RVs overhang.

Three-Way Refrigerator – An RV refrigerator that operates on 12-volt DC, 120-volt AC and LP gas.

Toad – Another term used for the vehicle being towed behind a motorhome, also called a dinghy.

Tongue Jack – The jack mounted on the A-frame of the trailer that supports the front of the trailer and is used to raise and lower the trailer when hitching and unhitching.

Tongue Weight – Tongue Weight or Hitch Weight is the amount of weight pressing down on the vehicle’s hitch from the coupler of the trailer when the trailer is fully loaded for travel. For trailers that weigh over 2,000 pounds TW should be 10 to 15 percent of the loaded trailer weight.

Tote tank – A portable tank used to dump the contents of a holding tank into, and then transport it to a dump station to be emptied.

Tow Bar – Tow bars are used to tow a vehicle behind a motorhome when the vehicle is towed with all four wheels on the ground.

Tow Dolly – A trailer used to tow a vehicle behind a motorhome when the vehicle cannot be towed with all four wheels on the ground. Two wheels, the drive wheels, are on the tow dolly and two are on the road surface.

Toy Hauler – An RV that has a rear ramp door and cargo space to load motorcycles, ATVs or other toys inside.

Transmission Oil Cooler – A small heat exchanger or radiator designed to protect your transmission from overheating. Automatic transmission fluid circulates through the oil cooler and is cooled by the airflow.

TT – Abbreviation for travel trailer.

TV – Abbreviation for tow vehicle.
I thought it would be interesting to look at where our RV roots really got started, during The Great Migration. Actually we need to start a little before that. In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson sent a message to Congress calling for an expedition into the vast land mass west of the Mississippi River. He wanted to explore the west and chart a course to the Pacific Ocean. This message was kept secret because at the time France owned this territory and any expedition or exploring would not be permissible. Jefferson dispatched Lewis and Clark on a mission with specific instructions: "Explore the Missouri River and such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct and practical water communication across the continent, for the purposes of commerce"

A long history of dispute existed between the United States and Britain, over ownership of the Oregon Territory, at the time. Both had territorial and commercial interests in the territory and both had residual claims from treaties with Russia and Spain. Great Britain claimed ownership of this western territory, comprised of what is now known as Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

In the first couple decades of the 19th century the only people to really venture far to the west were fur traders, trappers and mountain men. By the 3rd decade of the century American pioneers began to venture west of the Mississippi River. Local farmers, shopkeepers, doctors, blacksmiths and everyone in between began to leave their homes in search of new opportunities and a new life. Farmers packed up their belongings and headed to the frontier looking for cheap, and in some cases free land, with rich fertile ground to harvest their crops. Others headed west to homestead, prospect for gold, trap and trade fur pelts, and to discover the magical new land they heard about from other travelers. This was the beginning of the westward expansion; the settlement of the North American continent from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast.

To further enhance western expansion, in the 1840’s the United States began offering land for homesteading in Oregon, to any American willing to make the trip westward. The British position weakened in the early to mid 1840’s as large numbers of American settlers migrated to this disputed territory. This would become known as The Great Migration. In 1843 The Great Migration westward began on trails like the Oregon Trail and The Santa Fe Trail.
The Oregon Trail, or in reality the Oregon-California trail, was the longest trail in North America. The trail got started by mountain men and fur traders connecting Native American foot paths together until it eventually became the 2,000 mile Oregon Trail.

This promise of free land and fertile soil was enough to entice farmers and settlers to pack up their families and belongings and venture into the unknown. Part of it, I’m sure, was the excitement of a new adventure and to escape daily life as they knew it, but little did they know what to expect on this long and dangerous journey.

What would begin as a dream of plentiful land and wealth often times ended in unbelievable hardship. Keep in mind these were farmers, shopkeepers and doctors traveling with their families on a 2,000 mile trip into the little known westward territories.

The trail and journey westward started for many in “jumping off” towns like Independence, Missouri (known as the gateway to the west) and would hopefully end in Oregon City, Oregon.

As the pioneers bought supplies, traded horses and gathered whatever information they could about their upcoming venture this would be the last trace of civilization before they entered the great unknown western frontier.

From Missouri the trail crisscrossed through Nebraska, the southern part of Wyoming and Idaho and finally ended in Northwest Oregon. There were ships that traveled to Oregon, but many pioneers could not afford the fare and many others lived too far inland, away from any sea port, to make taking a ship a worthwhile proposition. Another disadvantage to traveling by ship was that it could take as long as a year to get to the final destination.

**This brings us to the Recreation Vehicle of the pioneer days.** Our description of an RV is an enclosed piece of equipment dually used as both a vehicle and a temporary travel home.

The wagon or RV of the time had wooden bows over the top of the wagon box covered with a white cotton canvas. This would be home for the pioneer's until they reached their final destination. Very similar to an extended RV trip the pioneers would pack everything in and on the wagon that they would need for this extended journey westward.

**The Conestoga Wagon**

There has been confusion over the pioneer’s mode of travel on some accounts. People were misinformed that the Conestoga wagon was the pioneer’s wagon of choice used during the western migration. Conestoga wagons were designed, built and used for transporting heavy freight over long distances.
Developed in Pennsylvania, the name came from the Conestoga Valley, in that region. They were first used in the eastern United States, primarily in the Appalachian Mountains to haul and deliver freight to mining camps and forts before the railroad was developed. Some early settlers attempted the westward journey in Conestoga wagons, but these wagons proved to be too heavy and too big. They required a team of six or eight strong horses or oxen to pull it, and even the strongest team could not pull these wagons the entire distance.

For pioneers traveling west there were no roads to make traveling easier, just rough heavily rutted trails. Settlers needed a lighter wagon that was easier to maneuver. The wagons of choice were called western wagons and prairie schooners, both descendants of the Conestoga wagon.

The western wagon got its name because of the western migration. The prairie schooner got its name because, from a distance on the open prairie, with its white canvas billowing in the breeze it looked like the sailing schooners of the sea. The schooner was about half the size of the Conestoga wagon. A good wagon maker would design and build a prairie schooner worthy of the 2,000 mile trip.

**The Prairie Schooner**

The wagon box was usually four feet wide and ten to twelve feet long. From the ground to the top of the bows it stood approximately ten feet tall. The wagon box was two to three feet deep and the hardwood sides were designed to slant outward to help when crossing rivers and creeks. The floorboards were usually coated with tar to make the bottom watertight for the same reason. The wagon box was mounted on two sets of wheels. The rear wheels were larger than the front wheels. Smaller front wheels gave the wagon a better turning radius to negotiate sharper turns. The width of the wagon wheels was another important design element. The wider the wheel the better it worked in loose soil, and the narrower the wheel the better it worked for travel over harder surfaces. The wooden wheels were made of hardwood and covered in iron for more durability and to protect the wooden rim.

Large hardwood hoops, referred to as bows were used to support the white or brown canvas cover.
The canvas cover was beveled outward at the front and rear for added protection from the elements. The canvas used to cover the bows was usually homespun cotton. They would double the fabric over and treat it with linseed oil in an attempt to waterproof the cotton and keep themselves and their supplies dry from the rain. It worked for awhile but eventually this waterproofing failed, making it difficult to stay dry. The covers were painstakingly secured to the wagon in an effort to prevent damage from the wind and to keep rain and dust out. The cover could be drawn together at both ends to help prevent some of the never-ending trail dust from getting inside too.

Another important consideration in designing these wagons was to keep it simple so the settlers could make repairs. Even the sturdiest wagon would break down or wear out over this difficult terrain. Spare repair parts, supplies and hand tools were stored in a box mounted on the side of the wagon, called a jockey box.

**The Western Wagon** was for the most part a modified farm wagon. They were usually smaller and lighter than a prairie schooner and only required two to four horses to pull them. It wasn’t long before the early pioneers discovered that horses were not the best option for pulling their wagons to the west.

Horses couldn’t live off of prairie grass and sage and needed water more often. Oxen and mules became the choice to power the wagons and more often than not pioneers used oxen rather than mules because they were stronger and easier to work with. The downside was they were much slower.

These modified farm wagons of the 1800s may have looked simple but they were quite advanced for the time. Pioneers were very creative when it came to preparing their farm wagons for the long journey westward. The wagon was built from a hardwood, like oak, hickory or maple. Construction techniques included an undercarriage that was centered on a kingpin. This design allowed the front wheels to pivot for ease of turning and better maneuverability.

Each component of the wagon was designed and constructed to do its job and hold up to the rigorous cross-country trip. The wagons were equipped with hardwood brakes and the pioneers carried tools and supplies, for repairs, on the outside of the wagon. A bucket of grease usually hung from the back axle so they could keep the wagon wheels and axles lubricated. One had to consider the possibility of a broken axle or wheel. If this happened, as it often did, the pioneers could have serious problems. If they were traveling without spare parts or a spare wheel chances are the wagon would have to be left behind, on the trail where it broke down.
The pioneers would abandon all of their possessions that they couldn’t physically carry. It has been noted that the trailside was scattered with travelers possessions; some because the wagon broke down and others because the wagons were grossly overloaded and they had to lighten the load along the way. If possible they would attempt to convert what was left of a broken wagon into a two-wheeled cart so they could continue on the journey.

Every nook and cranny of the wagon box was filled. Modern day RVers return home to their possessions after the trip is over. Pioneers were leaving their homes for good and it was difficult leaving possessions behind, so they attempted to take whatever they could fit in and on the wagon.

Common items packed for the journey included clothing, pots, pans and dishes, a butter churn, washtub and furniture like a table and chairs. Other essential items included extra guns and ammunition and supplies and tools like axes, saws and shovels. They used wooden chests for their clothes and bedding and any treasured items were packed away in trunks. They took advantage of outside space on the wagon too. Tools, milk cans, water pails and weapons were hung and tied anywhere there was room.

It was said that a family of four would need over a thousand pounds of food to sustain them on this 2,000 mile journey by wagon. Food for this long journey might include 150 pounds of bacon, 10 pounds of coffee, 200 pounds of flour, 20 pounds of sugar and 10 pounds of salt. In addition to this they would take yeast for baking, cornmeal, dried meat, bags of rice, beans, dried fruit, and large barrels for water. Any livestock they owned, like horses and cattle, were tied to the wagon and walked behind. Chickens were kept in a chicken coop. If they ran out of food during the trip they would hunt for game so they could eat.

As is the case with many modern day RVers, the pioneers would take too many belongings with them on the journey. With overloaded wagons children and adults would be forced to walk alongside or behind the wagon for most, or in some cases the entire 2,000 mile trail. In a sense the western wagon was the earliest mode of Recreation Vehicle travel in the United States. Pioneer travel in the mid 1800’s may not have been for recreational purposes but it was a way for adventurous Americans to discover what was around the next corner or over the next hill. This still holds true today when adventurous Americans load up the RV and head out to explore modern day America.

RV 101
Since summer is here and camping is in full swing I thought this would be a good time to cover some RV awning accessories.

Some of these products are designed to protect your RV awning and others helps make your camping trips more enjoyable.

In the video below I demonstrate some great RV awning accessories like the RV Twin Trak, Awning Buddy and Happy Hook awning tie-downs.

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