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The Trans-Americas Journey

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Names: Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl

Home Town: New York City, United States

Road trip destination: North America, Central America and South America

Date left home: April 2006

Anticipated Length of Trip: 3 or 4 years

Anticipated date of entry into Mexico to start driving south:

November 2008

Miles driven to date: Almost 85,000

Money spent on gas so far: \$18,900 USD

Motivation for taking trip: We came back from four years of backpacking through South Asia from 1995-1999 and immediately began plans for this trip with the intention of being much more organized about making it a WORKING trip with strong ties and contacts within travel publishing.

We originally had our eye on the African continent, but following the devastating events of 9/11 and Bush's re-election we rethought and decided to make it a road trip through our own backyard—The Americas—in part as a way to try and understand the US and our fellow Americans. Living in NYC we really felt isolated from the rest of the country and didn't really understand how other Americans were acting/voting/feeling.

We also wanted to stop bitching about how too many travel writers seem to just phone it in from a press release and a web site at some desk in the city instead of actually getting out there and spending time in the National Park or hotel or whatever else they're writing about.

Oh, and we just love to travel.



First Vehicle: Chevy 1500 Gas (April 2006 to May 2007) **Second Vehicle:** Chevy 2500HD Diesel (October 2007 to Present)

Top 2 essential truck modifications/improvements:

Transfer Flow: their auxiliary fuel tank has allowed us to go longer between fill ups which is a convenience and will be key when a longer range is required in Central and South America AND it helps us take advantage of cheaper diesel when we find it since we can take on more gallons at a time.

Amsoil: switching to synthetic motor oil and transmission fluid and their oil bypass system is better for our engine, especially while towing, and lets us go much, much longer between fluid changes. We also have their Injen air intake system which boosts mileage and increases power/performance.

BF Goodrich: our new larger all-terrain TA/KO tires are key to getting us over many of the roads in our future.

Superchips: they've given us a Cortex Programmer which also boosts power/performance and mileage PLUS it lets us self-diagnose engine warning codes which will be increasingly key as we head into Central and South America where mechanics will be scarce.

Type of Airstream Trailer: 23 ft Safari SE, provided by Airstream in June 2008 for the remainder of the US/Canada leg of the trip.

Best feature(s) of your Airstream trailer: In general the best thing has been the overall convenience and cost/time saving miracle of having what amounts to a small apartment with us at all times. It's meant that we can stop and work or play whenever and wherever we want or need to. This makes us more efficient and happier. Having a kitchen is also really awesome because it's way cheaper and way healthier to cook for ourselves. We can roll out of bed and brew a pot of Silver Joes' Coffee (yes, there IS an official Airstream coffee) and get on with our day whether that means working or playing or both.

We can also just stop and stay in a place that takes our fancy on a whim. We recently parked it in the middle of the Alabama Hills outside Lone Pine in Cali amongst classic Wild West rock formations and spent the night working,

relaxing and shooting the great sunset and sunlight colors on the terrain. And it was free!

Most challenging aspect of living out of a trailer: It makes navigating cities and parking in cities a challenge. We're in Las Vegas right now at The Flamingo hotel (btw: they're newly renovated GO rooms are so cool and smart) and we had to work with the hotel to let us drop the trailer in their oversize lot, then valet our truck separately.

Backing up was also a challenge at first (see this entry in our Airstream Adventures blog about what happens when it all goes wrong: <http://transamerica.airstream.com/?p=140>), but we've managed to work all of those tricky situations out somehow so none of those challenges stops us from doing what we want or going where we want. Even backwards!

Average daily living expenses: Impossible to nail down. We live as frugally as possible—which is MUCH, MUCH easier with the Airstream. But “frugal” means different things under different circumstances—ie, cities vs. parks. We do expect our living expenses to drop dramatically once we enter Mexico and then Central and South America.

We can tell you that our main expenditures are fuel, food and accommodation — the latter two have been lowered a lot by the Airstream and even fuel was not affected as much by the trailer as we had anticipated as our mileage didn't go down as much as we'd expected.

Top 2 essential travel gadgets purchased: The only classic travel gadget is our Magellan Maestro 4220 GPS unit which is the only one we know of that actually has maps of Mexico.

Other gadgets that we love include our Celestron SkyScout

We're hoping to add a Spot and a Trackstick and an Iridium phone to the Journey soon...

The gadgets that we rely on are mainly for work such as our Verizon Wireless cards which we use every day to get internet access, our tiny and portable Cannon ip100 printer and our Dell computers (duh).

Many of these gadgets were not purchased, however, as many of these companies are sponsors. We don't, actually, purchase much which is how we can stay on the road for so long.

Mainly vacation or mainly work: It's panned out to be mostly work. Just keeping a road trip like ours out on the road takes a lot of day to day planning and research. Finding and pitching stories takes even more planning and

research. Then there's the time and effort it takes to write the assigned stories and take the assigned photos not to mention trying to keep our web site vibrant. Sadly, our web site is always low man on the totem pole since satisfying editors and keeping our road trip tripping have to take priority.

Freedom or a new set of responsibilities: Both. See above for the "new set of responsibilities" aspects. But there is freedom as well in terms of when and how we work. With the Airstream we can really be free to do things like work on stories in the middle of the Black Rock Desert, which sure as hell beats a desk in Manhattan.

Easy or difficult to write stories on the road: Again, both. It's easy in the sense that we're really out there in the midst of what we want to write about, actually doing the things and having the experiences and getting to know the people, places and things of interest first hand. It's hard in terms of finding the time while still maintaining the logistics of the trip as a whole. You still have to find the cheapest gas and fill the cooler and ensure we have a reliable internet signal and we have to do all that over and over again in new places under ever changing conditions.

If we start to sound like we're whining slap us! We are very lucky and we know it.

Best piece(s) of practical advice for someone following in your footsteps: Really want to do it. We can't tell you how many people say "I wish I could do what you're doing." Our answer is: "You have to want to do it, not just wish to do it." This "dream" lifestyle entails a lot of sacrifices.

Be able to shift gears and change plans practically moment by moment.

Understand that it's going to be more work than you think. Yes, even more than that. This is NOT a vacation and there's a ton of work involved even if you're not trying to conduct careers from the road as we are.

Estimated Co2 emissions produced so far: 29 tons (As of July 2008)
Offsetting carbon credits purchased on the Chicago Climate Exchange: \$216.50 (As of July 2008)

