

Notes from AL-MON-O January 14th Luncheon Discussion

Topic: Dry Camping Experiences & Tips

Attendees: Bev Clayton, Cindy & Doug Field, Gayle & Denny Gibson, Lia & Bert Gough, Julie & Craig Jansen, Stevie & Dick Kline, Cody Klingler & Matt Moore, Bob Kuszyk, Sandi & Paul Labuda, and Dale & Vinny & Bryon Rossitto

Discussion:

1. [Kline] Initial dry-camping experiences came from staying at full amenities campground and just not hooking up. This approach provided a comfortable way to work out dry camping practices, find the limitations of our Airstream, and gain confidence.
2. [Gough] We have dry camped in our 2018 FC23CB for single nights at Cabela's (Hamburg, PA, lots of space with restaurants and stores in walking distance), Cracker Barrel, and several Harvest Hosts. Harvest Hosts have been the most pleasant though the others are not bad either. We tried stopping at a Walmart, but found them extremely crowded with noisy Trucks. We 'dry' camped for a weekend with 7-amp electricity at Urban Air Logan, OH and a week at Blackwood's Campground in Acadia National Park, ME with one of our adult sons. We have 2-80 AH AGM batteries (80 AH usable capacity). The challenges included limited use of our solar panels due to too many trees, but solved via permitted generator use for few hours at certain times in morning and evening though, though we often ran only one time a day. We did not run both of our fantastic fans all night long, as they tended to drain the battery down. We also were running the refrigerator on propane and using LED lights in addition to our Luci solar lights. We did not run the heat or AC, microwave, TV, radio, but didn't miss them either. Stove ran on propane or we cooked outside over a fire. The key challenge was fluid management as our Airstream has limited tank sizes: fresh water 39 gallons, gray 21 gallons & black tank 19 gallons. We were very careful with water use. For example, washed long hair using water in a bucket and then took "Navy" showers, sometimes used campground restroom but no showers present at campground (though pay for showers were a mile away we didn't use them). We managed fine and enjoyed the wooded, less developed, National Forest-like campground.
3. [Gibson] We now use the Berkey water purification system during our travels. Our model is called the "Traveler" and has a 1 1/2-gallon reservoir with two filters. It sits on the counter by the sink and under the overhead cabinet. We use the Berkey exclusively for drinking and cooking water. It is a purification system and not just a filter. Depending on your usage. Each black filter has a life of 3,000 gallons. That means that if you have 2 filter elements and use 3 gallons a day, they will last over 5 years. (<https://www.berkeyfilters.com>)

4. [Rossitto] Our initial dry-camping experience was over 4 days in hot summer weather in a NY State Park. We used the campground washroom & bathrooms almost 100% of the time and careful tank management worked out well. We were not so careful with battery management, however, and were operating too many 12Vdc services while we were in the Airstream – evenings & nights only (e.g., 2 Fantastic Fans at low/medium speed, hot water heater (propane), refrigerator (propane), LED overhead & reading lighting, bathroom fan, radio, and even the inverter to check out the TV reception and run some small appliances for a short while. We first realized we had an issue after 2 days when the refrigerator “Check” light illuminated and then later stopped working altogether. In diagnosing the refrigerator issue, it became apparent the problem was low DC voltage. The refrigerator “Check” light apparently illuminates at 12.1 Vdc and the refrigerator shuts down at 9.6 Vdc. We had very limited opportunity to use our generator to recharge at this state park, but we were able to boost the DC voltage sufficiently after shedding our 12 Vdc services and running the generator for 1-2 hours/day to resume use of the refrigerator for the remainder of our stay. This experience made us acutely aware that battery capacity is equally restrictive as fluid management for dry camping for more than just a couple of days and we now manage accordingly.
5. [Gibson] Had a positive 7-day dry camping experience in the Southwest with very careful fluid management and running the generator a couple of hours a day to keep the batteries topped off. Limited 12 Vdc services to LED lighting and maybe some very short-term use of other services.
6. [Field] We’ve travelled extensively for many years and dry camp often without issue. We enjoy the ability to stop almost anywhere. Have not had any security issues or concerns.
7. [Moore] Should take advantage of Airstream Courtesy parking offered by some members. Lists of these sites are published in the Annual Membership Directory and online. Some of the courtesy parking is with hook-ups and some without.