

VILLAGE VIEW

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Rainy days in summer on Cape Cod can be traumatic, especially if house guests come, and you're expected to provide entertainment. You know (even though they may not) traffic is going to be horrendous, especially on Routes 28, 132, 6-A and 6. Yet, here are these visitors.

They want to see the sights, rain or no rain. They have come all the way from Wherever and must leave tonight or tomorrow morning. They don't want to spend their last day here watching raindrops making rivulets down the panes of your living room windows.

Exactly such a situation faced me when a pair of Californians arrived recently for a two-day interlude. It rained; the wind blew; it was chilly. What to do?

Before day-break I awoke to find my mind busy with solutions to the fun-and-games-in-the-rain problems. At breakfast the radio weatherman confirmed my forecast: "Rain today with strong southeast winds. Clearing tonight. Fair tomorrow." I nodded. Wind from the southeast: short storm.

"How would you like to see something of the Cape Cod Seashore Park?" I offered. "We all have rain gear and even in wet weather, the park is worth a visit. En route you'll get an idea of what the Cape villages are like. There are good stopping places, some of historical interest..."

"Fine," they said. Little did they know most of the roads between the Towns of Barnstable and Eastham would be wall-to-wall parking lots, filled with bumper-to-bumper traffic.

By ten that morning we were headed north on Route 132 between Phinney's Lane and the Mid-Cape highway. Traffic going our way was heavy, but moving. On-coming cars were backed up and creeping towards Hyannis. "Where is everyone going?" they wondered.

"Shopping. When the weather is like this, nobody goes to the beach, plays golf or tennis, or sails. Sitting around a motel room is not fun, so they all head for the stores and shops," Our car mounted the ramp to Route 6, eastbound. The highway was busy, but rolling freely.

At Route 134 I left the Mid-Cape thinking perhaps traffic might be lighter on Route 28, east to West Dennis. I knew immediately that had been a miscalculation. We braked to a halt in the jam of cars.

At the next light, we swung left, then left again onto the old Great Western, a road best known to local people and most used by those living on or near it. Without the slightest delay, we rode pleasantly into Harwich Center where I could tell them about the Brooks Library which houses a collection of Rogers' Groups statuary.

Taking Route 39 until we hit Route 137 that crosses the Cape from Brewster to Chatham, we encountered no difficulty. With Chatham Light our first destination, we soon reached Route 28, bucked our way along for a few miles, then turned off toward the light, skirting Stage Harbor. Even in a pouring rain, Chatham is lovely.

At the overlook, the tip of Nauset Beach was visible across the inlet. Chatham Light was recorded on film one more time. (I'd like a dime for every time that structure has been photographed!)

On we went, following 28 as it edged around Pleasant Bay, through the back side of Orleans to the rotary, and onto Route 6, headed for Eastham. The traffic, from Orleans on, demanded all my attention and concentration. At the Salt Pond Visitors' Center of the Seashore, we left our car for the walk-through display; in the little theatre, we watched a ten-minute movie of how beaches are created. Our guests were fascinated for the film had been made on the California coast near Santa Barbara, not far from their own home.

From the Visitors' Center we drove to Coast Guard Beach, passing Doane's rock; then we paid a dollar to park at Nauset Light Beach where a second lighthouse was duly recorded by camera. The beacon was operating; its white and red signal revolved steadily. The wind was increasing in velocity, now, but the rain had eased.

A watch-check confirmed lunch-time had come and gone; we scouted and found a good hamburger place, and the lady from California consumed a huge sundae for dessert while the rest of us cheered. We doubted, when it came to the table, she could finish it, but she certainly did it justice.

Leaving the restaurant and opting for Route 6-A, we inched along through Orleans Center, as busy as Hyannis would have been. But smaller. Once beyond the thriving town, our westward path was relatively clear. After passing through Brewster, we swung left to visit the Brewster Grist Mill at Stony Brook, one of my favorite spots to take visitors. Out again came the cameras. By now, although the wind still blew, the rain had stopped.

We were lucky to find the mill open, operating and manned by a miller. The little museum was open, too, with friendly ladies' hostessing. We bought stone-ground corn meal, enjoyed the museum, walked the paths along the brook to the mill pond, told how the herring come to spawn in the spring, and listened to the rhythmic chunk-ker-chunk of the turning millwheel, a sound musical as well as mechanical.

With these frequent stops, we didn't get stiff sitting and riding. Further along, at Dennis, we drove up Scargo Hill to climb the little stone tower. Just as we emerged at its summit, the sun came out. We couldn't see Provincetown Monument; the mist was too thick. But we could see the Rooster Church steeple in West Barnstable, Cape Cod Bay to the north, Nantucket Sound to the south, and the broad forearm of pine and oak forests spreading east and west. Three of us, all sporting yellow slicker jackets, huddled together so the fourth could take our picture atop Scargo Hill Tower.

Descending, our feet struck their own musical notes on the steel steps of the spiral staircase inside the tower. The sound echoed against its walls and bounced back to our ears in friendly tones.

Resuming our westward way, we watched the sun, lowering now, disappear into more clouds. At Yarmouth Port we followed Union Street back to Route 6, ran the Mid-Cape highway to the second exit, and returned home over Clay Hill.

With the exception of five or six miles of travel on main highways, we had avoided the heavy traffic, seen half-a-dozen "sights", and given our California visitors an idea of what Cape Cod really is like. The narrow by-ways through stretches of woodlands, the fields and kettle hole ponds, the small villages and occasional busy centers, all were part of our trip. It wasn't monotonous, nobody felt stressed, and although we were wearied, our Californians had had opportunities to absorb flavors of Cape Cod many tourists miss. Even a rainy day couldn't spoil its special features.

Home again, we loaded their luggage into their car, guided them across the Cape again to Route 6 and, with a wave, sped them on their way. They planned to stop in Plymouth, en route to Boston, to see **The Mayflower** and **The Rock**.

Ah, youth! I went early to bed that night.