

Treffen Vermont **By Rich Corbeille**

Vermont is beautiful. The Porsche Club of America is a first-class organization. If I were a person of few words like say, Col. Fowler, this would be the end of this article, but I am not and this is not.

Treffen is a German word that has several widely divergent English translations; the one that is used in the context of a PCA event is “meeting” or “encounter.” In the United States, Treffens are held twice a year in the transition seasons of spring and autumn, one in the East and the other in the West. This year the Spring Treffen was in Santa Barbara, California, and the almost-Autumn event was in Woodstock, Vermont. Nancy and I have now attended three Treffens and thoroughly enjoyed them all.

A Treffen is about one-quarter the size of a Porsche Parade and is non-competitive, unless you consider maximizing the amount of food on your plate in a buffet line as competitive. If that were the case, I venture that I would have taken home a trophy. As it is, my award is on my hips. The main events are touring, socializing and, as mentioned, dining. The venue has been a luxury inn capable of accommodating 250 or so PCAers. The increasing popularity of Treffens was demonstrated by the Vermont Treffen being sold out in 8 minutes after registration opened. As it was, we were not able to participate in our first choices of tours. No matter, because they were all excellent and the staff provided driving instructions for non-guided touring for anyone interested.

Nancy and I have traveled I-81 now for over forty years and about the only thing that has been a constant is the beauty of the mountains of the Shenandoah Valley. Now that we begin our trek by heading north, our routine is to stop at the Nickajack rest area and have our breakfast of pastry and coffee. It is almost a ritual for me to take the first photo of the trip at this stop. This is the cleanest and shiniest that the Porsche will be on the entire trip so it is the subject, although I attempt not to be too blatant and get Nancy in the view also.



We encountered the usual heavy traffic in Chattanooga and Knoxville with no major delays. Between these cities and until the Virginia border, I was able to relax, use cruise control and work a crossword puzzle with Nancy. Not to be concerned, she did the reading and writing. We have found this an enjoyable way to pass the time. Once we reached Virginia, this all changed. For the remainder of the first day's trip all the way to Harrisburg, PA, there was constant heavy traffic and most annoyingly, truck after truck after truck in the left lane. We saw no state troopers and why would we, no one could speed except for very short stretches. We had planned to knock off the majority of the 1200 miles of this trip on the first day and have a leisurely drive into Vermont on the second day, arriving with time to spare for the 4:00 PM check in.

All went as planned with one big exception. The GPS in our Porsche is probably not unique in that it provides two options for route guidance, fast and short. From a previous disaster I knew better than to select shortest, but it happened anyway. If you have a keen interest in architecture or history and love to see every courthouse square in every hamlet, village and town, then this is the option for you. If not, you may lose your cool, which is a very large understatement. I recognized Nancy's mistake (just kidding) pretty quickly, changed options and all was well again.

We traveled north through New York and entered Vermont from the west. Woodstock is a small town located on the east side of Vermont, with the result that we crossed the state laterally and admired the lush greenery and quaint towns. The Woodstock Inn is set on a small green with a large, beautifully landscaped lawn in front. Upon entering the Inn, we noticed that there was no check-in counter;

instead there were several large wooden desks located to one side. Seated at them were the friendly registrars. It seemed a more relaxed and civil way to welcome one to the Inn. PCA was able to negotiate a nightly rate of \$195 plus taxes for us.



The Treffen fee from PCA included three excellent buffet breakfasts and one dinner with hors d'oeuvres every night. Lunches were included in the tour fee. Thursday and Friday were the guided tours and Saturday was a free day to explore on our own, with many activities such as golfing, fly fishing classes, spa, and touring. At our check-in, the Inn provided us with a free pass to the Billings Farm which is associated with the Inn. This is the same Billings who has a Montana town named after him. It was a half-mile walk and we were happy for the opportunity to have a little exercise, which we would do on Saturday, our free day. The weather could not have been any better for the entire visit, with morning lows in the high 40s, quickly warming to the mid-70s during the day and vibrantly clear blue skies.

We were not able to register for our top choices of tours due to the demand, but it did not matter because the tours we attended were super. The first day was a trip and guided tour of Fort Ticonderoga. For anyone interested in cannons, this fort is claimed to have the nicest collection in the U.S. There was not enough space at the Inn to stage for the tours which meant that we drove 3 miles to a ski lift and lodge with a large parking lot for the start of all tours. The place had an interesting name, Suicide Six. I am curious to know if their business plan includes repeat customers.



After the informative guided tour of the fort, we were free to roam about and witness a four-pound cannon firing following the 32-step process that the French used. The cannon was aimed out over Lake Champlain where it was not likely to

hit anything besides a fish, and I briefly entertained the fantasy that it would be a live firing. Yeah, sure! At any rate the sound and smoke were thrilling. A box lunch was served outdoors under a large tent and provided another opportunity to meet folks from other regions. As usual with PCA tours, we were on our own after lunch. Our GPS guided us on a scenic and deserted country road to an abrupt end at a river. This was not a complete surprise because we had been informed that there was a ferry ride on the return if we chose to drive that route. It was a Pop-and-Son affair guided across the river by a cable. Once underway, the son collected the \$12 fee. I asked him what happens if someone does not have the cash. Simple, they return them back to shore.

Friday was another invigorating day with an early morning temperature of 45 degrees. The Treffen organizers provided for this by giving each person a wool vest in the swanky, leather-trimmed bag we received at registration. Again, we assembled at Suicide Six to start our tour to Hildene, the ‘ancestral’ home of Robert Lincoln, Abe’s oldest son and his only child who survived to adulthood. On the drive to his estate we visited a farm that specialized in Morgan horses, which were initially bred for the U.S. cavalry. Part of the exhibit was a skeleton of a full- sized horse. You don’t see that every day.

And then it was on to Hildene, which is English for hill and dale, roughly speaking, and a history lesson. Rob was definitely not a log cabin sort of guy. After graduation from Harvard, he practiced law in Chicago, served two Presidents as Secretary of War and U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom. His law career was very successful, making him rich. His law partner was from Vermont and convinced Rob to visit, where he was sufficiently impressed with the tranquility that he purchased land and embarked on building his ‘ancestral’ home. I use quotations here because he had no ancestors here; instead, he hoped that this would be the beginning, and it was.



Another part of his career explains one of the exhibits at Hildene, a wonderfully restored Pullman train car. Rob was an attorney for the Pullman Palace Car Company and became the interim President upon the death of the current President. It was intended that he would serve on an interim basis but in two years, Rob doubled the company's profits. He remained and became the CEO.

Our guide explained to us that a Pullman car was today's equivalent of a private jet. The car would be coupled at the end of the train to prevent the 99 percenters from traversing through. The car on display at his estate was restored through many years of skillful labor and, ironically, transported to its present location by truck. It features highly figured veneers throughout, polished brass fixtures, several suites with baths, and plush upholstery in the lounging area.

After the tour of the house and Pullman, we were on our own to explore the grounds and enjoy the flower garden. Beyond the Tush Garden lay the valley (dale) and the sweeping Green Mountains. Disclaimer – this is not the actual garden's name. I have gotten in trouble with my family on occasion for doing this. However, you may notice the source of my inspiration.



We spent Saturday morning by using the free pass to the Billings farm and gardens. Much of the food served at the Inn is grown here. After the guided walking tour, we were able to select several demonstrations and we chose the “Everything that you always wanted to know about wool” talk. It began with the opportunity to pet a sheep and feel the texture of wool on the hoof. A very enthusiastic young woman gave the presentation. Seated around tables in a pavilion we were able to comb wool and make thread. By the way, Angora wool does not come from sheep, or cats either; it is sheared from a bunny. At the conclusion of the demonstration, we strolled around the picturesque town of Woodstock eating a deli lunch outdoors. Anticipating the feast in store for us that evening, we went somewhat light on lunch and avoided all the ice cream, fudge and Maple syrup products sort of places.

The evening began with a social and excellent hors d’oeuvres but everyone seemed psyched for the main event, the New England Lobster Boil. A few folks we sat with were a bit intimidated by a lobster but they would not go hungry. Just a few items featured at the buffet, besides the 1 ¼ pound lobster, were BBQ Duck,

vegetable fritters, lamb burger sliders, flank steak in sauce, clams, clam chowder, fresh garden salads and vegetables and on and on, not to mention the unbelievable desserts.

The PCA crowd had been enjoying and complimenting the food all week, so when dinner was over and the event coordinator, Harry Seasons, requested the chef and his crew to come and be introduced there was a murmur of approval. This was not the stereotypical chef; this guy was thin and shy. When we all rose to our feet and gave a loud, approving ovation, he may have resolved to hide if we ever show up again but I am confident that he and his staff appreciated the call out. For the crowd younger than us, which was most everyone, there was music afterwards featuring the equipment offered by one of our sponsors, KEF. Cocktails were part of the evening which may explain why everyone had such a good time. For Nancy and me, the Vermont Treffen was over, for we planned to arise early and make the journey home.