

# A Fourth of July Without The Fireworks

by Gary and Kathy Collings

At noon on July 3rd, we started our journey on what was to become a 2,100 mile loop around Lakes Erie and Ontario. As we drove around these large lakes, we were reminded of our fourth grade lesson that the first letter of each of the Great Lakes spells the acronym HOMES. We rolled north on I-69 and spent Wednesday night on the Michigan/Ontario border at Port Huron. The hosts for the Northern Exposure 2002 cautioned registrants to bring passports and leave radar detectors at home. Our hotel was actually at the edge of the international bridge. The desk clerk advised us to cross the bridge before 8:00 AM the next morning. We should have listened; we did not get onto the bridge until 9:00 AM the next morning, the 4th of July. The gridlock was immediate and we spent the next 1.5 hours on the Blue Water Bridge; we finally traveled the two miles span over the St. Clair River to the customs shack across the border. We were only questioned about firearms (not a radar detector) and asked what were our travel purposes in Canada. No sniffing dogs; no mirrors under the car; no fireworks – just zoom zoom the remainder of the trip.

On the 4th of July, we traveled to Toronto and north to Bracebridge to connect with five cars from the Windy City Miata Club at the Inn at the Falls for a relaxing evening near Lake Muskoka Falls. On Friday (July 5th) with CB radios and antennae in place, the caravan of six cars, including a two week old 2002 Mica Yellow, set out on the final leg of the journey through the Algonquin Park for some picturesque roads off of the interstate.

Our caravan arrived at the Chateau Cartier in Ottawa around 5:00 PM that evening to be joined by approximately 185 Miatas from as far away as Texas and California. Our first event was a 7:00 PM buffet dinner in the Chaudiere ballroom. We met other Indy Miata members Sara McBride and Rick Morris (Indianapolis), Norm and Susie Arbuckle (Lafayette), and Barney and Carolyn LaFollette (Sullivan) that evening. Barney and Carolyn were in their motor home with their Miata in tow on a trailer as they were on a two week excursion of the Northeast. The Arbuckles had caravanned with 18 cars, some of which started from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Sara and Rick had roamed the area from Niagara Falls to Montreal and then back back to Ottawa.

The main event on Saturday (July 6th) was a tour to Mt. Tremblant and its ski area. Although the drive was scenic, it turned out to be a 5 hour plus endurance tour. The Northern Exposure gathering was dubbed a European Miata event, which was primarily focused on touring and social aspects of Miata ownership. Although there were no vendors, the event was pleasantly short on ceremony and speeches. Ottawa seemed a perfect setting for a Euro-style event. Ottawa, as the capitol, is a beautiful, historic, bilingual city (although somewhat hazy from the forest fires).

In 1857, Queen Victoria selected Ottawa to be the capital of Canada. The area has had many names over the years and is at the conjunction of the Ottawa, Rideau, and Gatineau Rivers. On the Ontario side of the Ottawa River many towns and villages have been combined the last few years into one large city called Ottawa. On the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, this combining of villages has happened in the last year and now the area is called Gatineau. In 1867, Canada became a country in its own right. It is a constitutional monarchy, based on the British system with an elected prime minister, elected members of parliament and appointed members to the Senate. The Governor General is appointed by the Prime Minister, vetted by the Queen, and serves as the Queen's representative in Canada.

On Sunday morning (July 7th), many of us traveled to the historic section of Ottawa to view the 30 minutes ceremony of the Changing of the Guard. This occasion is very similar to the one played out in London, England. The one big difference is that it's bilingual. The guards march on to Parliament Hill to the beat of drums and instruments including bagpipes. It is said that if the march is timed correctly, the Drum Major's foot will touch the grass on the Hill at the moment the Peace Tower clock strikes 10:00 AM.

Sunday was our final day and in the afternoon all Miatas gathered on the pier at beautiful Britannia Park for a catered BBQ and photo opportunity with sailboats in the bay. About 3:00 PM we joined three other Miatas for a four hour trip to Port Hope across Lake Ontario from Rochester, New York. We spent the night at the Hill and Dale Manor, which is a B&B in a grant old Victorian home. The innkeeper told us that the former ferryboat from Port Hope to Rochester may be revived in the future. On Monday morning (July 8th), the four cars left together with two cars eventually splitting toward Port Huron and the other two cars crossing over at Niagara Falls. Kathy and I were in this latter twosome. The new yellow Miata exited in the Falls area and we elected to finish our 12 hours and 700 plus miles to arrive home in the same day. We should be able to stand up right and walk by the time your read this article!



Gary and Kathy Collings driving the Ottawa River Parkway at NE 2002.