

Summer is already one-third over. Have you planned your vacation yet? Here is a green, virtually pollution free vacation idea.

Last summer two friends, Marc Horowitz and Peter Baldes, decided to take a trip together. Marc lives in Los Angeles and Peter in Richmond, Virginia.

What made this trip unique is that they never left their respective homes. They traveled together on a virtual road trip.

For nine straight days, They "virtual drove" across the country by continuously pressing the Google Maps arrow keys eastward. They broadcast the entire experience live on <http://www.googlemapsroadtrip.com>.

This means that anyone was able to not only see and hear them as they traveled, but also join them in a real_time chat room. Several people hopped into their backseat and rode along for part of the adventure.

Horowitz wrote about the experience: "We sung plenty of made_up songs together, made our fair share of stupid noises, got in one memorable argument, visited historical sites and old friends, stopped at crummy motels for the night, and saw Graceland on Elvis's death date.

"Just remember: This is real_time, so when we stopped to eat, we actually ate, and when we stopped to sleep, we actually went to bed, and if someone wanted a visit, we'd actually "drive" to their house, pick em up, and tour their hood.

"This is everything that we'd do on a real road trip, except we didn't have to leave the house, pay for gas, or worry about getting speeding tickets."

I can totally understand how one can get hooked on Google maps. Last week Bing.com had the Golden Gate Bridge as their featured daily page. I couldn't resist and made my way to Vallejo to see our house as if I was driving by. And I noted that particular view was filmed before I had my trees trimmed.

I used Google maps to look for Sierra hiking trails a couple of years ago and found that they had taken photos in the winter when the mountains were covered with snow. So much for following the trail.

New Wind Machines

The BP disaster in the Gulf has given more credibility to engineers working with alternative power ideas. In the May/June Sierra Magazine, one report focused on new wind harvesting machines.

Scientists noted that air currents in Earth's atmosphere have enough energy to meet the world's electricity needs 100 times over. The problem is harvesting that power.

One group of engineers hope to harness winds from 1600 to 40,000 feet above earth with helicopter-type blades, rotating orbs, or kites. If they were stationed in the year-round winds of the jet stream, all we would see from the ground would be power cables extending into the heavens.

A new jet-engine-inspired wind turbine by Massachusetts's Flo Design would suck up all the wind it could and funnel it to a single, fast spinning rotor. The jet pack could harvest up to four times more power than a propeller turbine. With its small foot-print, many more units could be built closer together.

Small vertical-axis wind turbines can capture modest amounts of power while generating under five decibels of noise. These may be more practical for neighborhood use.

A new offshore turbine may be called a giant rotary clothes line. The V-shaped Aerogenerator is a powerhouse that would stand 450 feet above the ocean and make three revolutions per minute cranking out nine megawatts of electricity, enough to power 2700 homes.

This writer hopes that our windy Solano County will be a part of this new energy source.

VALCORE Recycling Board Secretary Jane Bogner's "A Sorted Affair" is published every other week in the Times-Herald. For recycling information call VALCORE Recycling at 645-8258 or visit www.VALCORErecycling.org.

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