

Meet Bruce Bente - June 2012

By Bobbi Powers



Meet Bruce Bente – the uncensored, up-close, and personal interview with CMC’s All-day Weekend Hike Scheduler, a man whose early interest in trains led to his career choice and whose middle name is “Travel.” You’ll have to ask Bruce for the story behind the flag photo.

It’s difficult to pin Bruce down about his interests. Most of us would put hiking, trains, and travel on the list, but what about world history, current events, modern architecture, modern art that uses computer images, and spelunking? Bruce is a complex man.

Bruce developed an interest in trains at age 15 which led him to Villanova University (near Philadelphia) and a degree in electrical engineering, followed by a career designing railroad passenger cars.

Here we must take a short detour. Bruce was drafted into the Army right out of college and stationed in Alabama. What to do on those hot sultry ‘Bama days? According to Bruce - go spelunking! Bruce regaled me with one particular caving adventure where the passage was so tight (i.e. coffinlike) that he had to deflate his lungs in order to pull himself through.

After Bruce’s stint in the Army, his career took him to Chicago and Montreal, but always travel was a key interest. Bruce has vacationed in 38 countries on 5 continents. You need to read that again – 38 countries! He loved every trip, but two seem to stand out. He and his wife visited Siberia in 1991, soon after the Soviet Union opened itself to the world. They were on the 10th excursion offered from the U.S. When the plane landed in Magadan, Siberia, the townspeople pressed against the airport fence to get a glimpse of the outside world. A 16-day excursion to Patagonia last winter was another peak experience. He said, “I loved the culture, the food, the scenery – just being so far south – the extremes of the Poles.”

Coming up – an autumn trip to Utah to hike in Bryce and Zion National Parks, with side trips to Portland, OR, and Salt Lake City. Why go to Salt Lake City? To see their light rail system, of course!

Bruce loves to share his trips through travelogues. He has given slide shows on Glacier and Rocky Mountains National Parks, Machu Picchu, and in July will share slides and hiking opportunities in Argentina and Chile with the Nantahala Hiking Club.

Bruce joined CMC in 1996 when there was an interesting membership requirement. One had to successfully complete three hikes and have the OK of those three hike leaders before joining. We're happy he passed because he has been a very active member of the club ever since. Bruce was the first Councilor for Hiking, a position created when the Council reorganized after an influx of new members necessitated an expanded Council.

Bruce helped Don Walton create the hike database and numbering system, a big step forward for the club. Bruce schedules the all-day weekend hikes, and he proofreads and formats all hikes for *Let's Go*. Bruce is currently one of three CMC representatives on the steering committee for the ATC Conference in July 2013.

Bruce would like me to put in a plug for hike leaders. There will be 130 hikes offered during the conference, necessitating 260 leaders (a co-leader is needed for each hike). Currently there are 102 leaders, so please make Bruce happy and contact him to be a hike leader.

One more plug for help:

Bruce says, "If I had a back-up hike scheduler, it would give me time to devote to finding people for theme hikes which I would enjoy doing." You know who to call if you're interested.

Bruce is a strong hiker who is known for leading the annual New Years Day hike, as well as 5-6 other hikes each year. He often helps scout hikes. A recent half-day hike he led, Vineyard Gap Loop, was a learning experience. After starting with 28 hikers, he finished with 20, the other 8 straggling in later. "I learned to slow down and pay attention," he said. His favorite hike is Roan Mountain in the spring because of the rhododendrons and Gray's Lilies. Bruce also enjoys trying to identify wildflowers on hikes.

Before the interview I had a picture of Bruce as very intense and serious. Bruce agreed with these adjectives but also added loyal, hard-working, and enthusiastic. After our chat at the Arboretum, I would certainly agree, especially about enthusiastic. Bruce's eyes light up when he is talking about travel adventures, layouts of transit systems of big cities across the U.S., the unpredictable weather on Roan, whimsical art he has enjoyed, and the list could go on and on.

Thanks, Bruce, for a highly entertaining and enlightening afternoon.