(Approx. 1427 words)

Tech Travels Times Two

by Greg Skalka, President

Under the Computer Hood User Group

https://uchug.org/

president \*\* uchug.org

2022 was a disaster of a year for me. Most of my vacation time from work was used up in random days taken to solve one life problem or another. (Greg’s dad had recently died, and his mom needed to go into an assisted living facility.) The only bright spot for me was an invitation from my son to join him on a four-day trip to the Great American Beer Fest (GABF) in Denver during the first week of October.

It looked like my wife, and I would not get any trip to celebrate our October anniversary until some other friends invited us to join them at a resort in Newport Beach they had booked for a week. So, we were able to get away for two nights, which was more in the end than we were expecting we could do.

These two recent trips allowed me to put my troubles aside for a time and also allowed me to see technology in new and different ways. Of course, we use a lot of tech in our daily lives, but it sometimes requires a change in the situation to see how it affects and enhances our experiences. Travel can help bring that out.

My trip with my son to the GABF in Colorado was an adventure in tech experiences. In addition to the usual travel tech I've dealt with in the past, I stayed at an Airbnb and rode a Lime e-bike and scooter, all for the first time.

This was also my first trip with my new smartphone, a Samsung Galaxy S22. It was travel that caused me to replace my five-year-old Samsung J3 with this new phone, as my old phone (and its old Android version) could no longer run the Southwest Airlines app. In addition to being more powerful and thus able to run Google Maps and other apps much faster, the phone's new OS version has some neat new features that are handy for travel. One is the ability to turn on the phone in camera mode quickly. My phone is set up to require a password, which can cause a delay when a quick photo opportunity presents itself. I found a rapid double press of the power button bypasses the password and opens the camera app, so you are ready to shoot. I guess it is OK if someone steals my phone and can take photos; they won't be able to get into it to see them, however.

On our Southwest flight from San Diego to Denver, my son and I used our phones to watch movies. I also used the flight tracking display. I used my hands-free corded earbuds, but since my new phone does not have a headphone jack, I used the USB-C headphone adapter I brought.

Though we were staying a 15-minute walk from the downtown convention center where the GABF was held, my son rented a car so we could get to and from the airport and get around on the other non-fest days.

He reserved an economy car, but all they had to give us was a Dodge Caravan minivan loaded with electronic features. My son drove, and I navigated, and when I connected my phone to the minivan's USB, it showed the phone's Google Maps display on the vehicle's dash screen using Google Auto. I may have been doing something wrong, however, as each time I disconnected the phone from the car, the phone would not run  
Google Maps again until I rebooted the phone.

My son doesn't like hotels and prefers Airbnbs, so he booked one for our three-night stay. It was interesting as I'd never stayed in one. When we arrived, my son communicated with the owner through texts and got the combination of the electronic door lock. It was a small house in an older near-downtown neighborhood that was becoming gentrified.

It was comfortable enough, with a small bedroom and a loft, a single bath, and a kitchen where we made breakfast each morning (he cooked, and I cleaned up). The owner provided good password-protected internet access through Wi-Fi. I brought my laptop on the trip and always used my VPN when connecting.

One issue I saw with our Airbnb lodging was ADA access, something I have become more aware of from dealing with my mom. There was no way to get in without going up steps, and the bathroom had a freestanding, high-walled tub shower that even I was a little concerned about safely stepping in and out of. There must be a way to search for accessible accommodations on the Airbnb site, something my son was not concerned with. I do know the chain hotels I usually stay in that my son shuns would all meet at least basic accessibility standards.

The GABF is held in evening sessions; we had tickets for Thursday night, leaving our days free. In addition to myself and my son, some of my son's friends were also attending; they were staying in downtown hotels. We toured the Colorado State capital building on the day of the fest, a free and very good tour. We tried to get tickets to tour the Denver Mint, but the Department of the Treasury requires the free tickets be requested through an email attachment. My son's phone could not open their web pdf application, but mine could, so I filled out the form and was able to email it. Unfortunately, we never got a response, most likely because we requested the tour on short notice that afternoon.

The day after the fest, we decided to try out the Lime e-bikes we saw all around downtown. A very nice, isolated bike/walking path along Cherry Creek in Denver was within easy walking distance. Since Uber sold its e-bike business to Lime and is a major investor, you can use the Uber app (which my son and I already had) to ride Lime bikes. In the app, you first search for bikes nearby. We looked in the neighborhoods around our Airbnb and found some about 10 minutes away. Once you have found bikes, it is  
important to verify that they are charged.

They have a circular display with six pie pieces, indicating the charge level. The bikes we found had five pieces, enough for our adventure. To use, the app prompts you to read the QR code on the bike; you can then accept the rate and ride. We must have gotten an introductory rate, as it was only $0.50 to unlock and $0.02 per minute. We found later that the normal rate in Denver is $0.32 per minute.

The bikes are pedal assist, meaning you must crank the pedals to go. If you pedal less, it assists more; pedaling harder uses less assist (and less battery power). The bikes appear to have regenerative braking, charging the battery when decelerating (hand brakes stop the bike). The bikes are heavier than my street bike, but riding was still fun. Next, we rode to a brewery for lunch; the Lime bike ride only cost me $2.38.

We then walked back downtown, passing through some nice old neighborhoods with parks. Deciding we were too far away to walk back, we looked for more bikes but could only find Lime scooters. So we decided to try those and rode them back to our Airbnb. The scooters rent the same as the bikes, with the same battery display. They have hand brakes and a throttle lever on the right handlebar. To go, kick off with one foot and press the throttle. They feel less safe than a bike, especially in traffic, but we only went a short distance. I'd probably ride Lime e-bikes again; I'm not sure about the scooters.

The week after returning from Denver, my wife and I drove to Newport Beach to stay with friends at a timeshare resort run by a well-known high-end chain. We only stayed two nights but had a more relaxing trip than the Denver one. I again brought my laptop to stay in touch through email, but I was surprised that this resort had completely open guest Wi-Fi. So I again made sure I used my VPN and avoided sensitive online activities.

I was glad I could finally get away from home and my problems, have some fun tech adventures and get a little rest. But, unfortunately, it made me realize I would rather be retired and traveling all the time. Maybe someday.