

# 2016 Teardrop Gathering

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May/June  
2016

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*and tiny campers*

# TEARDROP <<< >>> TRAIL



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by Jim Kerkhoff and Marilyn McCray

Camping is fun, but the days of tent camping are probably over for us. Setting up, coupled with sleeping on hard ground and dealing with weather argue for something more substantial and convenient. An RV would be nice, but who wants to invest a small fortune? With the recent purchase of a fuel efficient crossover vehicle, a Mazda CX-5, a lightweight camping trailer seemed perfect. We started the search online and prowled the RV lots. As we looked around we were convinced we really wanted our very own teardrop. With retirement

Marylin had started work on a cookbook titled Canning, Pickling and Freezing with Irma Harding a few years earlier. An interesting project featuring Irma Harding, International Harvester's fictional spokesperson. The book combined original recipes, advertising and photos with new recipes. The publisher, Octane Press was going to promote it at the Red Power Roundup in Huron, South Dakota. The 25th annual celebration is where people from all around the world gather to share the history, products, literature and memorabilia of the International Harvester Company. We discussed how much fun it would be to go to the Red Power Round Up in June in our very own teardrop trailer. There were a couple of problems however. Jim certainly wasn't going to have time to build one in the available time and commercial models are quite expensive. We looked all over the internet, but it was the same story everywhere — teardrop trailers are a boutique item and command premium prices. The internet was the next step. It's easy to search a town or geographic region — perfect since shipping a trailer across country isn't easy. There were always a few teardrops listed, but nothing that really spoke to us. Then we noticed a listing from a local small builder.

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We found a builder who had been building a variety of teardrops, one at a time. There was one available, in the right price range. A phone call confirmed he could have a teardrop with a galley ready in time.

We never expected so much curiosity and interest. As we pulled into the gas station in our hometown of Dripping Springs, Texas to fill up on that very first trip, we were approached by our first curious fan. Strangers continue to approach us to ask questions about our teardrop and want to look inside our tiny, streamlined, aluminum-clad home. Our first night in the teardrop, we slept soundly. The birds began to sing as our sleepy eyes opened. We had arrived on a black, star-less night but looking out the tiny window, we caught a glimpse of the breath-taking colors illuminating the canyon walls. What a glorious sunrise. We were IN the canyon looking up at the picturesque formations.

While tooling along in Kansas, travel was filled with the joys of using the old atlas and The Girl for navigation. Paper meets high tech. Hot, Sunny and miles of flat, straight road ahead. The only thing to break up the monotony was a construction zone with very aggressive rumble strips to slow down the traffic. Normally we wouldn't have noticed.



But then, passing cars and trucks began waving and gesturing to us. “Oh, look, more teardrop fans!”, “Isn’t it fun that we seem to be attracting attention with our cool trailer!?” Then Marilyn looked into her rear view mirror and noticed that the galley hatch was up. Hmm. Perhaps we’re not as cool as we thought. Everyone was trying to tell us about the lid. \*quiet chagrin\*. We stopped and corrected the problem, and it became her job to periodically check on the galley hatch.

On our epic trip to Big Bend National Park in Texas we stayed the night in the Seminole Canyon State Park. By now we’ve come to expect a visitor or two inquiring how we like it, how much did it cost, can we see inside, etc, and have learned our teardrop is the best way to meet our campground neighbors. We stopped in Langtry — the home of Judge Roy Bean, the Law West of the Pecos. Interesting place, but while we were touring the adjoining cactus garden (amazing!), I had a conversation with guest who was interested in our teardrop. He was from Minnesota, and had noticed my Case/IH hat. A pleasant encounter with a total stranger.

While driving away, Marilyn commented on what a good ambassador teardrop was — and we realized he’d been named. Shortly after, I realized that the Mazda has been such a good and



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reliably comfortable car on our trips — and not without her own bit of flash — that she was a real lady. So now we have names for them both: The Lady and the Ambassador.

We were recently invited to the Southwest Teardrop & Vintage Trailer meet-up at Krause Springs and I knew that our solar panel would be unique since solar power is not that common on teardrops yet. A couple of years ago, we purchased a little solid-state cooler from The Home Depot. It cost less than \$30, and was shaped like an old Coca-Cola Machine. Best of all, it could run on 120-volt or 12-volt power. Would our solar panel power it for a day?

We've traveled with the little cooler several times, and I routinely use it in my shop. It will hold a 6-pack in cans, or 4 short glass bottles. I've always got it filled with "cool ones". I had never tried it on 12-volt power though. We also have a solid-state ice chest from Igloo, and it's always

in the car — perfect for keeping groceries cool during the hour-long trip out to the ranch. It draws about 6 amps at 13 to 14 volts (car running), so it's not super power efficient. We once drained the car battery by forgetting to unplug it while the car sat in a parking lot for several hours. I guess that's why I hadn't ever tried the beer cooler on solar. Didn't want to drain the battery. This was a different situation. Although the rig would be sitting idle for several hours during the meet-up, we would have sun available, and that might make it practical. I designed the solar panel to be removable, so it can be located in full sun while connected to the trailer electrical system (sitting in the shade) via a 20-foot cable. That should be sufficient to power the cooler and a few other accessories during the day. Well, long story short, it worked. Since we weren't staying for the night, the Lady and the Ambassador stayed hitched and I located the solar panel on her windshield. The extension cable just made it to the normal panel connection on the trailer, and the cooler was plugged into the galley. By the afternoon, I had cold beer. The solar panel kept up just fine in spite of the partially cloudy day and occasional rain.



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