

Thursday, 21 October 2010

Pork Pie Immigration, Ottawa & Montreal, Cats, Trees, Secret Magic Doors, Banned from USA & why the hell am I here again?



On my way in to Ottawa, Canada I was detained by the north American immigration border police for what would be the first of two experiences with these wonderful, fascist assholes. This first experience involved a Walls' pork pie that I had in my bag for my lunch but forgot to eat before reaching the airport. And, because I didn't eat it, I discovered that bringing "meat products" from the UK to Canada is not allowed. I was searched and interviewed for half an hour before the authorities believed I wasn't a meat smuggler.

They detained my pork pie indefinitely at the border, but eventually let me through.

Following this incident, I went on to have a fantastic few days with my friends Chris and Britta who both live in Ottawa with their cute cat (who has a pink nose and is actually Sylvester from the cartoons). They showed me around Canada's capital and I saw the magnificent Parliament building, the vibrant market area and the stunning Gatineau Park in Quebec.

Gatineau was full of the beautiful orange, brown, yellow, red, green and purple leaves of the Maple trees changing from their summer to autumn colours. The place used to be the official residence of Canada's longest-serving Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, who stayed in power for over 22 years. In that time he put an extraordinary amount of effort into creating a magical



landscape and home where he could live, away from the stresses of everyday politics. Part of the land includes some ruins of an abbey and a free-standing arched stone doorway that, with the yellow trees in the background, looked like a magical doorway to another world. If I'd walked through it I would have ended up somewhere very *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

This walk in Gatineau Park gave me some real creative rumblings; it was very good. We visited Gatineau's beautiful Pink Lake (which is actually green) and I learnt that it's a "meromictic lake", which means a body of still water that has layers to it that do not mix with each other for thousands of years.

I spent a day out in Montreal and, even though everyone speaks French here - and my worldly experiences with the French usually leaves me thinking they're a bunch of grumpy, aloof wotsits - I still had a wonderful day. There were hundreds of boutique shops, cafes with scrump-didlee-umptious pastries in them and a picturesque old port. Mont Royal at the city's top (and where the city's name comes from, Montreal) provides a beautiful walk and views across the whole of Montreal and its surrounding water.



If you're going to Canada, a trip to the romantic Montreal is a must (ideally with a girl or boyfriend if you have one). And make sure you try a "Beaver Tail" whilst you're there too. These are not real beaver's tails - I think they'd probably be quite gristly and chewy - but flat, deep-fried donut-like pastries with any kind of sugary topping thrown on them you want. It's a heart attack in your hand, but it tastes bloody lovely.



After catching up with Chris, which was great to do so (and discussing life, the universe, women and why climate change deniers are uneducated numpties) I left for the airport and my onward journey to Sacramento, USA.

And my second experience with the border police.

Except, this time, there were no pork pies and it wasn't even a remotely funny experience.

I was interrogated for almost three hours by three different officials, all of whom asked the same questions about why I was returning to America for such a long period (they didn't water-board torture me or stick a lamp in my face, but they may as well have done). They searched every inch of my bag, cutting open my notepads, envelopes and several gifts I'd bought and got me to explain my life history three times over. They were rude, obnoxious, treated me like I was a terrorist and I felt more uncomfortable than when I'd visited the ex-communist state of Romania ten years ago and had guards point guns at me before they let me in the country.



The immigration knobheads kept me detained until three minutes before my flight was about to leave and then told me I had to run to get it. I was stressed, angry and my first thought at entering the USA this time was: fuck the lot of you, I don't want to be here now, how dare you treat me like this?

Fascist wankers. Clearly there is no "special relationship" between America and British citizens when it comes to immigration.

Nonetheless, perhaps I had the experience for a reason. Maybe I was *meant* to feel like an alien imposter for some future purpose? Whether that's to let me know I shouldn't really be in America or for some other

reason, I'm not sure yet. Either way, the immigration police's final words to me were: "If you come back to the USA after this trip within 18 months we won't let you in the country".

Nice. An all-round hearty welcome to a country I thought I loved.

But I'm here now and need to figure out what the hell it is I'm doing this time. Any ideas?

To see all the pictures I took in Canada, click [here](#).