

Review of 1999 LCLA Fun Badge Tour

Allan Hurst 7/23/1999

The *Lights, Camera, Linear Action!* Fun Badge Tour took place the Monday immediately following Convention, and featured some amazing stops. Having been through the Fun Badge Tours for the San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Portland Conventions, as well as the tours for San Diego's and Los Angeles' respective fly-ins, I consider myself at least a minimally hardened veteran.

Each Fun Badge Tour seems to consist, more or less, of the following:

- one really cool stop: typically something public that's been closed off just for the tour,
- one boring stop: for eating,
- one historically important spot: to provide background on the hosting club's area,
- one waterfront stop: to ogle luscious bodies at the beach, and
- one fountain stop: just so people can get wet dancing.

San Francisco set a very high standard for "cool stop" when they closed off half of Castro Street.

Las Vegas, of course, didn't have a waterfront spot. They made up for it with the Ethel M. candy factory, which had a lush oasis. It wasn't as visually attractive as a beach, but sure smelled and tasted great! (I wish more FBT committees would include "chocolate stops" on their Fun Badge Tours.)

I can't imagine anyone ever besting Portland for "best fountain stop"! (I'm still seeing pictures of people racing through the middle of the Rose Garden's computerized fountain.)

San Diego always seems to find a gorgeous museum to dance in front of! (How DO they do it year after year?)

Los Angeles' 1999 fly-in had a terrific set of stops showing off the historic downtown district. (Yes, there really *is* a downtown LA, and some gorgeous older buildings and architecture.) I couldn't figure out what they could do to top it, especially since we were told none of the LCLA FBT stops would duplicate the fly-in's stops.

I'm pleased to report that the LCLA Fun Badge Tour exceeded my expectations and raised the bar on some of the above standards for future conventions and fly-ins.

The tour started out at 8:00 AM with seven buses, each bus named after one of the Seven Dwarves. (There may have been eight buses; I only recall the first seven due to the nomenclature; my apologies to the LCLA FBT committee if I'm mistaken.)

I chose a bus more or less at random, and was delighted to discover that our Bus Host[ess] was none other than Ben-Andy Hein, who wrote this year's FBT script. The tour actually departed the Westin Bonaventure Hotel about 8:30 AM...more than reasonable, historically.

Our first stop – the Santa Monica Beach, right on Highway 1, the Pacific Coast Highway! A few out of towners wondered where all the muscleboys were (“No, dear, that’s *Venice Beach.*”), but the weather was delightful, and the beach nearly deserted at that ghost–uh, early–hour. (I’m not a morning person.) We danced a couple of tips with the famous Santa Monica Amusement Pier clearly visible just a few blocks away, then got back into the buses for our next stop. (Yes, this qualified as the required “Waterfront Stop”.)

Next up – breakfast! We ended up having a lovely catered meal in the middle of the Quad at UCLA’s main campus. There were some glitches in terms of moving people through the food line quickly, but the dancing was lively, and the food delicious.

In between stops, Ben-Andy gave us a terrific overview of the histories of the areas we were seeing and traveling through, as well as some of the dirt on which sites DIDN’T get selected, and why. (Note to FBT virgins; if you like good dish, make certain to pick the bus run by the script writer! This is also a good way to find out what logistics were involved in putting the tour together!) Andy also filled us in on a number of fascinating and funny stories regarding West Hollywood as we passed through on the way to our next stop.

In Las Vegas in 1997, the FBT took over Fremont Street. In San Francisco in 1996, it was Castro Street. Los Angeles raised the “Close off the Street Stop” bar several notches by plopping us down squarely in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, right in front of the famous Chinese Theatre!

Half the street (the half closest to the theatre, naturally) was closed off, and it was difficult to tell who was having a better time, the FBT dancers, or the huge crowds of tourists gawking from the sidelines. “Are you filming a movie?” one woman asked us. “Is this a publicity stunt for a new picture?” another tourist inquired. Paul Waters, who called the entire tour, told the crowds of watching people that this was the IAGSDC’s annual convention of gay and lesbian square dancers, and solemnly assured the onlookers that we closed down Hollywood Boulevard *every* Monday morning to do this, *every* single week.

When we were done dancing and back on the bus, everyone figured that Hollywood Boulevard was the high point of the FBT, and that the remaining stops would both be of the “historically important” or “boring stop” genre.

We were wrong.

As our bus ascended the hills surrounding Universal Studios, we became certain that we were going to dance inside the Universal Studios Tour.

We were even more wrong.

We ended up winding through a series what appeared to be different studio installations, before passing through a guarded gate to ... Warner Brothers, and directly into one of their working Western backlot sets! This was *way* better than a public studio tour. We danced in the dusty streets of the Old West. Some people took a moment to rest in the shade, up on the wooden sidewalks,

some explored the interiors of some of the sets, but most of us danced in the middle of the street, and it wasn't difficult to squint your eyes just a bit and imagine we were making a real movie!

(As it turned out, there was a video crew taping the entire FBT, including a remote crew on our bus, for inclusion in the convention memory video package.)

After the dusty streets of the backlot, we drove back to downtown Los Angeles, and ended up at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, where we danced in and around the famous fountain that's been seen on oh, so many Academy Awards broadcasts. (Keeping up the tradition of the obligatory "FBT Fountain Spot".) I was a little disappointed in this particular stop, as it was a repeat from the LA fly-in's Fun Badge Tour just five months previous. However, the sparkling waters of the fountain were a refreshing and invigorating way to wash off the Dust of the Old West!

We made it back to the hotel a little after 12:30 PM, none the worse for wear, and ready for Mr. DeMille to take our close-ups!

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