

# ALASKA 2007

## JOURNAL

2 August 2007

Kathy and I pulled out of the yard at 2:30 p.m. EDT en route to Alaska. She is a little stressed because of so much she wants/has to do at home, but I think after a couple of days on the road, she'll be fine. The odometer read 23,624. I'm going to make up a daily calendar to record the highlights of each day. The weather is a bit glum, raining slightly as we leave. We have accumulated a 20-inch rainfall deficit through about a week ago, but three days ago the skies opened up and Tallahassee got about 5 to 7 inches of rain, which seems to be continuing. I noticed that Lake Iamonia was bone dry, however, when we passed it. Our plan today is simply to make it to the Atlanta house of Mary Alice Steinheimer, Kathy's Mom.

We drove up Georgia 300 to I-75 and then made it to Kathy's Mom's house in Sandy Springs (just north of downtown Atlanta) at about 8:45 p.m. En route my doctor called me and said I had Giardia. He called in a prescription to a Walgreen Pharmacy on Roswell Drive and we picked it up at just before 10:00 p.m. Across the street Kathy, her Mom, and I had a good, but late, supper at the Landmark Diner. The ladies had matzo ball soup and I had eggplant Parmesan with a nice little Greek salad side dish. Kathy and I dropped into bed at about 11:30 p.m. We were both pretty tired.

3 August 2007

I got up about 7:00 a.m. and then peeled and cut up some fresh peaches that Kathy and I had purchased on the way up I-75. We had these for breakfast with scrambled eggs, cheese grits, and toast. Mary Alice (Kathy's Mom) showed me an article in the Atlanta newspaper about a European film team coming to the Atlanta Botanical Garden to film frogs on display there. This interested me, so we drove to the Botanical Garden to see the frogs. Was I disappointed! They had only 3 glass cages dedicated to frogs, and only a few species at that. Most of what they had on display were colorful dendrobatids such as *Dendrobates auratus* and *D. azureus*, the blue species from Suriname. There was one small cf. atelopodid whose scientific name I could not find. The gardens enclosed in the conservatory are quite beautiful, featuring some plants from Madagascar and New Caledonia. I saw lots of *Nepenthes* species, too, that I like, AND some rare *Torreya taxifolia* trees in fruit. We didn't stay more than an hour and a half and then left.

We purchased lunch materials at Goldberg's Delicatessen (and I got some tacos next door at a taco place), and we went home and had lunch with John, Kathy's bro. Later, at about 5:00 p.m., John drove us across town to Fernbank Museum where we were intent on seeing an IMAX feature entitled, "Coral Reef." We had quite a busy time getting to Fernbank because we were going with late Friday afternoon traffic. That reminded me one of the many reasons why I hate big cities. There were hundreds (if not thousands) of people driving stop-and-go traffic, one person to a vehicle, guzzling gasoline and spewing CO2 into the atmosphere like mad. At least we four were all in one vehicle. The film about coral reefs, which are disappearing from the planet, did not address the ultimate causes: too damned many people and global warming due to human excessive production of wastes. They showed some Fijian and Tahitian reefs that were threatened by warming waters AND siltation from logging. Underwater IMAX is not so spectacular because the wide-angle lens cannot get a large bite of underwater landscape to view. This is an intrinsic problem of being underwater. An IMAX coming out about the Alps can show huge landscapes and make the viewer dizzy from the panorama. Not possible underwater.

While in the Fernbank lobby, I was preoccupied with viewing the two large dinosaur displays. A huge herbivore, *Argentinasaurus*, dominated the huge lobby, rising to 30 or more feet high. I marveled at such a fantastic beast, studying its large bones and wondering just how in hell the earth could have produced such monstrous bodies. I counted 12 cervical vertebrae and >60 caudal vertebrae in the giant skeleton. The *Gigantosaurus* predator next to it was dwarfed by the herbivore. It had only 9 cervical vertebrae and <50 caudals. As large as the predator was, I wondered if it would have been able to take down the *Argentinasaurus*—probably not alone. I stood under the gigantic herbivore and looked up into its belly. Gawd, it was high up. I think the people who put this gigantic skeleton together had the legs splayed out a bit more than probably occurred naturally. All that weight must have had to be held up on legs like columns, not by legs splayed out laterally.

After Fernbank we drove back to Roswell Road and had supper at a Thai restaurant near Mary Alice's house where Kathy and I have eaten before. I had Pad Voon Sen, which is clear noodles, heated. Yum Voon Sen, which I really like, is only served at room temperature. Home and to bed again at 11:00 p.m. I checked my emails and was frustrated because I couldn't answer emails, only receive them!

4 August 2007

I got up again at about 7:00 a.m. and peeled and cut up all the rest of the peaches for our breakfast. Mary Alice left for Torah study at 8:30 a.m. and Kathy and I took our showers and were on the road about 10:00 a.m. We are now en route to Alaska, via two stops to visit family and friends. We intend to visit my Mom's first cousin, Snooky, in Batesville, Arkansas, this evening. We took I-20 west to Birmingham and veered northwest onto US 78 W. We cut off of 78 just south of Memphis and got on I-55 via a

little 9-mile connector road, MS Rd 302. We left I-55 at Marion and traveled west on US 64 to Bald Knob, passing Crowley's Ridge at Levesque, one of my salamander stomping grounds. We got pretty tired of miles and miles of rice and soybeans. We turned onto US 167 N at Bald Knob and made our way to Batesville where Snooky and Pat live about 6 or 7 miles east of town. We got there at 7:00 p.m. after driving 538 miles. Kathy drove most of the way. Snooky is my beloved mother's first cousin and one of the only people remaining in her generation. I haven't seen her for about 10 years. The four of us stayed up talking until about 1:00 a.m. EDT and then went to bed tired again.

5 August 2007

We spent the morning with Snooky and Pat, having a nice breakfast that Snooky made for us. Her grandson, Taylor, the youngest grandchild at 21, stopped and spent the morning with us, too. I talked with Rosie, their youngest daughter and Taylor's Mom, via phone. She was unable to stop by since she was up in Branson, MO. Snooky gave me a little card that Claudia and I had given her on one of her birthdays in the early 1940s (that Mom bought and inscribed to her from us little kids). The card looked like new. Snooky said that she has the same habit as Mom of saving every card ever given her.



**Left to right: Kathy, Bruce, Snooky, Pat**

Kathy and I got on the road about 11:30 a.m. and went west on Ark #5 to Mountain View. Then the road turned north and we drove to Mountain Home and eventually out of Arkansas into Missouri in the Ozark Mountains. The drive wasn't as scenic as I had hoped. Lots of trailers and development along the way.

The day was quite hot, in the upper 90s. We stopped under some shade trees next to a small graveyard for about half an hour with the windows down so we could get a nap. Both of us were sleepy after our midday meal in a small Mom and Pop restaurant called Country Time in Mountain View. The most scenic place on our short drive today was the village of Calico Bluffs. It was located on the top of a high cliff over the White River. The bluffs consisted of numerous horizontal bedding planes of limestone of different colors, thus the name Calico. The village was quaint and out of the 1800s in ambience.

We turned west onto US 160 and drove through a winding road towards Kissee Mills. We reached Dave and Eleanor Wagner's house on Wagner Bottom Road at about 5:00 p.m. CDT. Dave and Eleanor were neighbors in Alaska when I was a kid, living across a deep and forested ravine from the log home Dad built. Mom, Dad, and I have kept in touch with the Wagner's over the decades. They are loved family friends.

Dave and Eleanor were great hosts. Eleanor made us a great meal with the entrée of chicken in mushroom soup covered with stovetop dressing. We also had vegetables out of their garden. They live in a very nice house that Dave designed and built, with a spacious living room overlooking their property along a small creek. We talked until 9:30 p.m. and then Kathy and I retired to their guest cottage across the creek. We turned in at 9:40 because we were pretty tired, once again.

Monday, August 6, 2007

We got up about 8:00 a.m. and packed up, then had a nice breakfast with Eleanor, who fixed it for us. Dave came in at 9:00 and we chatted until 10:00 when we left. They looked a bit forlorn standing in their driveway waving as we drove off. It's probably the last time we will see them. Dave is 85+ and Eleanor is 78 years old. They have done a remarkable job of keeping themselves fit.

Our drive today was less than spectacular, going up the west side of Missouri and Iowa. Along the entire roadway, I was interested in seeing outcrops of limestone of an ancient inland sea for miles and miles north into Missouri. Eventually, when we got into the Missouri River valley, there were loess bluffs all along our east side of the highway, and I presume also on the far bluffs across the river in Nebraska. Loess is wind-blown silt that had to have come from the huge epicontinental glacier that once stood on North America.

We traveled to Council Bluffs, ate supper at a Golden Corral, and then found the cheapest hotel in Council Bluffs, off the beaten track, called Super 7 Inn. There we had wireless access to the Internet and used it. I wrote my BBC contact and am negotiating a trip to Venezuela next April to film pebble toads of the genus *Oreophrynella* on top of Kukenan tepui.

Tuesday, August 7, 2007

We worked on the Internet most of the early morning and didn't leave the motel until 10:00 a.m. We had brekky up I-29 at a restaurant we spotted from the road, then continued north to Sioux Falls. We turned west onto I-90 at Sioux Falls and drove about 300 miles to Kadoka just east of Badlands National Park. We then drove the Badlands National Park Loop Road about 5:30 p.m. Alas, they were having a thundershower, which made the light not so great for photography. We stopped in the Visitor Center just before closing and purchased some books about the Black Hills. We drove in the rain

and saw some nice views of the badlands, including several mule deer, but again the light was crappy.

We came to rest at the Redwood Motel in Wasta about 7:30. When we first entered South Dakota miles back, we were advised that this week is the Harley-Davidson rally in Sturgis, S. D., in the Black Hills where we are going. The bikers have all the hotel rooms and places to stay all booked up. She advised we call ahead to the Redwood to reserve a room, and one of the cheapest rooms available. Most motels and other service room providers have jacked up their room charges to \$200/night or so! I did call ahead, and it was a good thing, too. When we checked in to the Redwood, she was renting out the last room. We got it for \$55. We had supper in a little café near the motel and retired for the night without wireless or a TV!

Wednesday, August 8, 2007

Today was a great day, with the only distraction being the thousands of bikers everywhere! We drove to our first visitation spot, the Reptile Gardens just south of Rapid City. I was anticipating a mediocre, roadside animal zoo, but was very surprised at the quality of the place and exhibits. The snakes are mainly maintained in a large, round, building with a huge, clear sunlight dome. The snakes are kept in nice cages built into the circular walls around the building. I was also surprised to see so many Australian snakes including the fierce snake, eastern and western brown snakes, Collette's snake, tiger snake, death adder, and, of all things, a pair of rough-scaled pythons! These latter they had to have obtained from John Weigl at the Australian Reptile Park. At the end of the visit, I asked to meet the manager, Terry Phillips. He is a young man in his 30s and quite friendly. He told me that the Aussies have loosened up on letting some of their animals go overseas for zoo display. David Wright had told me about Terry because David filmed Terry on the Caribbean island of Santa Lucia when catching the Santa Lucia lancehead for National Geographic TV quite recently.

After Reptile Gardens, Kathy and I visited Mt. Rushmore. Egad, what a commercial enterprise. This is definitely not my favorite national park or monument. And we had to endure the motorcycles by the hundreds. We did walk the long loop from the main viewing area to the base of the carvings and back to the sculptor's studio. That was a nicely built and maintained boardwalk through the Ponderosa pine slopes of the mountain. Of course we saw chipmunks and squirrels, but to my amazement, a Billy Mountain goat and a couple of females were within 100 feet of the boardwalk feeding on grass.



Next, in my opinion, was the worst of all our commercial visitations...the statue of Crazy Horse. This is purely a commercial enterprise in the name of Amerindians. It is still in progress of being carved—since 1948!!!! Only the 500-ft high face is completed. There is much more to do, and they are soaking the stupid public to go and see it. In addition to our \$20 entrance fee to the park, we paid an additional \$8 to be driven by bus close to the base of Thunder Mountain where all the carving is going on. But to get a ride to the top to see the face the charge is an outrageous \$150. I was glad to be out of the Crazy Horse site, elbowing with hundreds of bikers all dressed in their macho digs and stomping around in their motorcycle boots. Most are very rotund men in their 40s and 50s with graying beards and pony tails. And about half of them have a scroungy, cigarette-smoking woman in tow who sits on the bike behind her grungy, macho man.

The day ended on a better note. We drove into Custer State Park and splurged on a very good dinner at the Sylvan Lake Lodge restaurant. It was expensive (total bill \$61 incl. tip), but Kathy had delicious buffalo tornadoes (filets wrapped in bacon) and I had some wild game I have never had before: elk. It was a steak also wrapped in bacon and it was wonderful. Very tender and not gamey at all, but more palatable than beef, I thought. While sitting on a lovely, stone veranda facing the setting sun in a Ponderosa

pine forest, we were visited by a cute little chipmunk that kept coming and going searching for dropped food. The outdoor ambience of our meal was almost as good as the meal, itself.

We had been fighting motorcycles all afternoon, and were not looking forward to the drive over the Pinnacles road into Custer State Park because of dozens of them in long lines meandering up and down the winding back roads. Fortunately, by 7:30 p.m. most of the biker traffic had ceased, so we had a wonderful ride in late afternoon light over this scenic highway passing through two narrow, one-lane tunnels. When we got to Legion Lake Campground before dark, we drove in and claimed one of the last camping spots there and had to pay \$15 for it! Nuts! But we turned in about 9:00 p.m. and had a nice, long, comfortable sleep on our cushy air mattresses.

Thursday, 9 August 2007

We got up early at 6:00 a.m., broke camp, and ate a great breakfast of trout and eggs in the BlueBelle Lodge restaurant, a log building with lots of “up-north” ambience. The fish was superb and we got the day off to a great start there. Next, at about 8:00 a.m., we drove the wildlife loop in Custer State Park and saw old male buffaloes coming down from the ponderosa pine forests into the small creek valleys in the early morning to feed. We also found a large valley bottom, across which we watched a large male pronghorn chasing some of the females (or was it a young male?) across a prairie-dog town. We stopped in the wildlife center and bought a book or two, then continued to the northeastern end of the loop where we got to see some magnificent buffaloes coming down from the hills through ponderosa pines into the valley bottom to feed and drink. Alas, this herd of maybe 150 animals streamed across the junction of highways 36 and 16A, and some of the human vehicular traffic didn’t pay the respects to the herd that I thought they should have. Some idiot motorcyclists blared their pipes in passing members of the herd, scaring them.

We exited the Black Hills east and traveled south to Hot Springs on the four-laned US 79. In Hot Springs we spent a lovely hour and a half at the mammoth site, a great sinkhole deposit where flat-footed Columbian mammoths (and a few woolly mammoths) had wandered in for a drink and then couldn’t walk back up the steep, slippery slopes. Apparently the hooped animals such as bison and pronghorns, deer, elk and others could get a better purchase on the slippery, muddy sidewalls and get out, since there are very few remains of these animals in the beds. It was a great, indoor, site to visit and VERY educational, if you like paleontology as I do. I got lots of photos.

After the Mammoth Site we drove south about 20 minutes to Hell’s Canyon on the Cheyenne River and visited the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary. This turned out to be one of the best activities of all in the Black Hills. The ranch is 11,000 acres owned by a man who purchases horses from wild lands in the western US and lets the stocks roam free. He has lots of varieties that seem to breed true, having a stallion that chooses his

own breed to form his herd. One of the most interesting breeds I saw was horses that are



the closest bloodline to the horses released in the US by the early Spaniards. These tough little horses were mostly gray (the stallion was bay) with a streak of black color down the midline of the back joining the mane and the tail. We paid \$45 each to be driven around in a bus for 2.5 hours and told all about the horses and the history of the ranchland. Apparently the ranch straddles the old Cheyenne to Deadwood Stagecoach Trail. We got to see some of the stagecoach road, river bottom, cliffs with petroglyphs, and the best of all, besides the horses, was the active Sundance Festival site of the Lakota Sioux. They are “allowed” to practice their Sundance rituals (piercing the chest with bone or wood and hanging from a long rope by the chest until the skin bursts and frees the men--and sometimes women). I suppose it is an entry to manhood ritual, or tribal entry ritual. Whatever, we saw and I was allowed to photograph the site with its tall central tree and the prayer flags flying from it of every color. But we couldn’t step off the bus. Pretty neat.

Kathy and I needed to access wireless to do some emails, so we checked in to an expensive little motel in Newcastle, Wyoming, paying >\$100 for the night. Kathy demurred and let me have a meal at a Mexican Restaurant and I tell you...it was superb. I really enjoyed the rich, maroon mole they used on my shredded beef enchiladas AND, the rice was the best I have ever eaten. Usually, I can’t stand Mexican rice, but this was tiny grained and seasoned superbly and I ate it all. We stayed up until midnight and then hit the hay after nice, hot showers.

Friday, August 10, 2007

We got up fairly early (6:30 a.m.) and each did more work using the Internet. Kathy paid many of our monthly bills via the Internet and I answered emails about potential future work, especially on tepuis on Mt. Roraima in April 2008. I have been communicating with BBC television about filming pebble toads on Mt. Roraima and elsewhere. We left the hotel just after 9:00 a.m., had brekky at the same Mexican

restaurant we ate at last night, and hit the road north at just before 10:00 a.m. We had one more natural site to visit.

About 11:45 we arrived at Devil's Tower National Monument and drove to the visitor center—FREE!! I purchased for \$10 back at the entrance to the Badlands National Park a senior pass for all national parks and national recreation areas. It has already paid for itself in the free passage into Devil's Tower. I was pretty chagrined about all the god dam motorcycles that were there, literally hundreds. The park officials had to work special details to park all the bikes and accommodate the hundreds of leather-clothed bikers and their girls. And the noise was outlandish. Kathy and I walked the 1.3-mile trail around the base of Devil's Tower and enjoyed the walk and the scenery. I got quite a few good photographs of the tower at different compass points and was pleased to view a lovely ponderosa pine forest surrounding the base of the tower. We briefly watched two pairs of rock climbers negotiating the rock face, too.



So, at 1:00 we finally left the park, glad to get away from all the motorcycles, but with good memories of the walk around the tower. We next drove north and entered the very SE corner of Montana at Alzada at the junction of US 212 and Wyoming State Road 112. We had lunch at a classic western roadside café called Wagon Wheel Grill and 5-cent-beer bar. It was full of stuffed animals, but had pretty good food. I had a double hamburger and Kathy had their special, popcorn chicken salad (with Chex for croutons—true Western style). We purchased the most expensive gas to date (\$3.49/gal) at the junction gas station and headed west-northwest up US 212 towards Billings at 3:00 p.m., passing through Crow and Sioux Indian reservations

We drove through Billings in the Yellowstone River Valley and then for some distance beyond. The drive was through gently rolling landscape and wheat farms. We passed through where a thunderstorm had dropped quite a lot of rain and thought that wouldn't make for comfortable camping. Eventually, we came to a crossroads town

called Harlowton, and we grabbed the last available room for \$53. The room was quite large and airy, with a large king-size bed and wireless. We ate a nice supper in a fantastically built, round log structure, with a vaulted ceiling held up with logs radiating out from a central post like the spokes on an umbrella. The ambience was likeable, definitely western frontier. When we walked back to the motel room, it was windy and the temperature had dropped into the chilly 50s. I might soon have to start wearing long jeans and shirts. We worked on our laptops until just before midnight and then retired.

Saturday, August 11, 2007

We got up about 7:00 a.m. and worked on our laptops. I downloaded all the photos we have taken using Kathy's new Panasonic and my Nikon D200.

We left Harlowton at about 10:15 a.m. and drove through Montana wheat fields to Canada. We passed by Montana's first windmill electric generating "farm." The windmills were the typically 100 feet tall monsters and there must have been 50 to 100 of them sitting on a ridge in the pass between the Big Snowy Mountains on the east and Little Belt Mountains on the west. There is not much to record about passing through horizon-to-horizon wheat fields. We passed through Shelby, Montana, and entered Canada at the Sweetgrass border crossing. It required about 30 minutes to get through the Canadian Immigrations. We had to pull over and answer questions about our stay in Canada. When asked how long, we said we weren't sure since we were traveling without a rigorous itinerary. It could be five days or more, depending on what we decide to do. The immigrations people were not very happy with this, but they stamped 5 – 7 days on the papers.

It is my desire to visit the Royal Terrell Museum of Paleontology tomorrow, so we drove on less-traveled roads east of the main route to Calgary until we reached Brooks, Alberta. The terrain seemed to have richer soils, maybe wetter, also, but was even bleaker with horizon-to-horizon agriculture. Some wheat fields seemed to go the edge of the earth! We booked a room at a motel in Brooks and had a rather mediocre meal at what seemed to be the most popular restaurant there.

Sunday, August 12, 2007

We left Brooks at 8:45 a.m. and drove through those Alberta wheat fields until we came to badlands in the valley of the Red River at a town called Drumheller. Alberta is famous for its multitudes of dinosaur fossil remains, maybe more than any other place in the world. The Royal Terrell Museum of Paleontology is the best dinosaur museum in Canada, and possibly in the world. And Drumheller has capitalized on it in spades. It is a heavily touristed place. We first came to the world's largest dinosaur, an 84-foot high monster at the information stop in Drumheller. We paid \$3.00 apiece to walk up into the

mouth of the stupid tourist attraction, then discovered that the Royal Terrell Museum was several miles away down a special road through the river valley sidewall badlands.



I wasn't disappointed at the Royal Terrell Museum. It was a huge, modern facility chock full of dinosaur-loving kids of all ages. The crush of people was overshadowed by the wonderful displays of mounted skeletal remains of dinosaurs and—as one enters the main display area—several life-sized *Albertosaurus* carnivores. These were in a huge room with what were thought to be the native trees and plants of that part of the Cretaceous. They did such a good job of the reconstructions that I returned to that part of the museum three times to take in the ambience of that time period with realistic dinosaurs. That part of the museum alone was enough to justify the \$10 entry fee, I thought. Anyway, we spent three hours marveling at all there was to see. They had wonderful displays of everything from Burgess Shale invertebrates all the way through the evolution of all life to the present, even having a large area dedicated to the Pleistocene. I took a couple hundred photos and we left with a satisfied dinosaur fan in our car.

When we left the Royal Tyrell Museum, we drove north up highway 56 until we came to Edmonton, which we passed through as fast as possible. Edmonton is a large, metropolitan center with all the trappings of modernity that we get in most cities in the US. One thing, however, of note is that for about 50 miles east of Edmonton we passed through pothole lake country, which I assume is leftover from the melting of the continental glacier that once stood here 10,000+ years ago. Then, quite obvious, as we drove west of Edmonton, we passed out of the prairie country and into the boreal forest, the largest forest association in the world. White spruce and quaking aspen were now

common all along the highway and would be right through into Alaska. Very soon we spotted the first fireweed, which is a key species in the boreal forest that colonizes disturbed soil (from fire or mechanical processes such as roadside rights-of-way).

And, the temperature began to drop. We had been in 90-100 °F weather for most of the trip to this date, but after Edmonton, the temp began to drop. We drove to Fox Creek and stayed at the Fox Creek Inn for the night.

Monday, August 13, 2007

We left Fox Creek at 10:15 a.m., having slept in because we were tired from yesterday's activities and driving nearly 450 miles. The drive was through boreal forest but not very notable until we passed into British Columbia.

We arrived in Dawson Creek at 1:00 p.m. and celebrated the beginning of Milepost "0" of the Alaska Highway. We took photos of the milepost, what seemed to be the very same one that my family photographed in 1950 when I first went up the Alcan



Highway! The daytime temperature was continuing to take a strong nosedive. Kathy and I changed into long pants and long-sleeved shirts, plus shoes instead of sandals because the weather was getting so cold. Then Kathy and I spent about 45 minutes in the Dawson Creek library searching microfilm copies of the three newspapers that were published in June 1950 so see if we could find that article and photo that was supposed to be published about Mom and Dad's trip in 1950 in our half-bus that Dad converted to what is probably

the first motor home ever made! We found no articles, so if one ever got published I will have to search for it in Edmonton or Calgary newspapers—someday.

Past Dawson Creek one really enters wilderness Canada, with deep, dark boreal coniferous forests along the highway and no people! We got out of Dawson Creek about 3:00 p.m. and drove all the way to a roadhouse called Sasquatch where we book a quaint room for the night. We really feel we are in the frontier of British Columbia now, muddy roadsides (although the highway is paved), log trucks, construction workers staying in widespread lodges, rough construction at lodges, and the cold! Damn, the daytime temperature today dropped to about 53°F. Yuk!

Most of the animal life we see on the road is large, black ravens. They are all over the place, probably scavenging animals that are killed on the road by vehicles.

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Today we got up early and were on the road at 7:20 a.m. We are now excited to be in the wilderness of British Columbia and are aware that today will be one really good day because the Milepost says we will be passing through the most scenic part of the Alaska Highway.

While driving down the highway, we came to yet another raven, flying toward us, and passed it. Within a couple hundred yards of it, I encountered a flock of White-winged Crossbills feeding on gravel or something on the highway. The flock flew up tardily (as this species seems to do—we encountered other flocks and some of the birds did not fly up into the air at all as the car passed!) and I hit one of the birds, which the car tossed high into the air and it came straight down and landed on the pavement. I quickly hit the brakes and made a U-turn to go fetch the bird for identification. I suppose it took me 100 yards to make the turn. As I approached the bird on the pavement, I noticed what must have been the same raven flying straight toward the same target as I was. It was obvious that we were in a race to reach the bird. The raven got there just before I did and swooped down, picked up the bird in its bill, and flew off at right angles to the pavement to my left-hand side. Normally, a raven would have not approached so close to a speeding car heading right for it (with horn honking), but this bird was dead set on getting that morsel. Another raven behind me was also gaining on the bird, both ravens having seen—from a great distance—the little bird being hit and falling to the pavement. I was totally amazed at this behavior. It was no surprise that ravens hunt along the road for killed animals, especially road-killed White-winged Crossbills which frequent the pavement along this stretch of highway, BUT to have seen the little bird killed from more than 200 yards away and then flying like a bat out of hell to get it before I got back to it after having made a U-turn, was quite an avian feat of cold calculation!



And the day was no disappointment for viewing nature. We were totally immersed all day in the Central Canadian Rockies and had large, rocky mountains looming up along both sides of the highway all day. We did not see the Stone Sheep, which is a subspecies endemic to this part of the Rockies, but we did see much else. We also drove along and crossed many beautiful rivers, mostly clear water and not glacial. The most amazing of which was the mighty Liard River. I took lots of digital photos.

Just beyond the Liard River bridge we came to the undeveloped Liard Hot Springs, nestled in a nicely kept provincial park. Water >120 °F comes out of a spring at the base of a hill and flows through a wonderful marsh, alongside of which the government has built a very nice boardwalk. For the first couple of hundred feet, the spring runs over a gravel-bottomed stream alongside of which is a long deck and bathhouses. One can walk down steps from the deck into the stream at different distances from the hot springs, and the water is commensurately cooler the further downstream you choose. The reason for the water cooling so fast is that some coldwater springs also emanate from the hillside along the other side of the stream and mix as the water flows. The hot water emerging from the hot springs is too hot for the skin to tolerate, but soon the water cools to 110 or less and is tolerable—and quite delicious. We bathed with other folks for 30-minutes to an hour and had a fine time.

While walking the long boardwalk to the hot spring through a lovely, sulfurous marsh, I was surprised to spot what I thought was a familiar plant. I got down on my hands and knees and verified that I was, indeed, seeing a species of lime-green-leaved *Pinguicula*, a butterwort. These are carnivorous plants, which I was surprised to see this far north. Then I got an idea. If butterworts grow this far north, surely there will also be sundews of the genus *Drosera*. When I looked closely as I walked, sure enough, I saw a *Drosera*, too. Two carnivorous plants grow in this marsh. And the signs said that there were also a couple dozen or more orchids that grow in the marsh. Amazing!

We saw about 100 buffalo along a 73-mile stretch of the Alaska Highway between Muncho Lake and Watson Lake. Some were in singles (big bulls lying down on bare patches of dust), and one group of ~40 walking right down the road.



We were thrilled to see a black bear to really good advantage as it walked along the top of an escarpment over a river valley. It paralleled our car for about 5 minutes and I was able to get some so-so photos of it. We also saw two mule deer in different places. Kathy saw some kind of grouse on the road shoulder and I saw a red fox standing on top of a long stretch of concrete side-rail.



Muncho Lake was beautiful with its blue waters and high cliffs along the eastern side of the highway.

We spent the night in Watson Lake at the Gateway Inn. It cost us \$115!

Wednesday, 15 August 2007

We left Watson Lake at 10:20 a.m. after spending about 30 minutes at the famous signpost garden. We saw literally thousands of signs that people had placed on upright poles put there by the Watson Lake government for the purpose. We found a very nice sign for Tallahassee and even one for Carnesville, Georgia. Carnesville is important to me because both sets of my maternal and paternal great grandparents are buried in this tiny rural crossroads of a town in northeast Georgia.

Today was rather less interesting than yesterday because we were in the Canadian interior, some distance away from the Rockies. However, we did see some mountains in the distance as we entered the lake country. We passed Teslin and Marsh lakes and came to the Yukon River at the end of a long lake. It was spectacular and I got photos. We arrived in Whitehorse about 5:00 p.m., too late for us to visit the river steamboat moored on the riverbank for tourists.

We visited the nice visitor center for a while, getting directions and travel information, and then we drove around and found a room at the Stop-in Motel. Down 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue we found what is probably the best restaurant in Whitehorse called Klondike Rib and Salmon Bar-be-cue. I had musk-ox stroganoff. The meat was just fine, no different from beef as far as I could tell. Kathy had grilled Arctic Char. We did not see any animals all day except for the ever-present ravens.

Thursday, 16 August 2007

We woke at 6:30 a.m. after a good night's sleep, which we sorely needed. Kathy and I were quite tired from going to bed late the night before and getting up early this morning, and then driving. We were unable to access the Internet last night or this morning, even though wireless was supposed to be a feature of the Stop-In Family Hotel on Ray Street in downtown Whitehorse.

I was keen to see the Beringia Museum, which opened at 9:00 a.m., so we didn't check out until 8:45. We hurried to the Beringia Museum and were the first people there. It is a wonderful Pleistocene paleontological museum with a large, modern floor space and a large theatre in which they showed some very nice videos of Beringia and the Yukon, which lies at the eastern end of Beringia. A really good video was produced by BBC entitled Land of the Mammoth. I should get a copy. Beringia is a US-sized area including eastern Siberia, Alaska, Yukon and the continental shelf between Alaska and Siberia. The museum does a great job of highlighting the megafauna and grassland aspects of Beringia. Apparently, during the Pleistocene, Beringia was mostly a grassland and now it is a tundra, muskeg, and forest-dominated landscape. Most of the megafauna (Woolly Mammoth, horses, camels, bison, saiga, caribou, etc.) were grass eaters who would not flourish in today's vegetation. The latest theory for what happened to the

grassland is that during the Pleistocene it was dry and windy, favoring hard ground vegetated with grasses. Today it is wet with tundra, vast muskeg bogs, and boreal forest that have developed where grassland once occurred. And the reason that megafauna flourished in the dry, cold environment was that glacial loess was blown across the landscape and deposited regularly. Loess is supposed to be rich in nutrients, and fertilized a rich grassland for herbivores. Most of the herbivores were protected from the cold by thick hair and wool (saiga, mammoths, musk-ox, ground sloths, bison, etc.). I took a lot of photos of fossil reconstructions in the museum and learned a lot about the Pleistocene of Beringia. In fact, I learned about how biogeographers are thinking these days about the geography of Beringia, a distinct region now recognized.

It would be great to create an awareness of the southeastern US Gulf Coastal Plain and its megafauna. We need a name that rings distinct like Beringia does. The Coastal Plain, itself, is not distinctive enough since the world has lots of coastal plains. It probably included lands from east Texas to the Carolinas, and lots of megafauna might have migrated north to south or east to west. The Florida Gulf Coastal offshore shelf was no doubt a very important part of that Pleistocene grassland. Lots of thought should go into developing this.

We ate a late brekky/early lunch (=brunch) at a motel restaurant on the Alaska Highway bypass around Whitehorse, and then set off about noon down the highway. Ironically, we had good intentions of getting on the road early this morning, but the Beringia Museum set us back about 3 hours and we got a later start than we have any morning!

We arrived at Kluane Lake about 2:30 p.m. and saw some great mountain scenes along the south side of the highway. I got a good photo of the boundary between gray glacial water and the deep blue waters of most of the lake where the two kinds of water come together and don't mix right away. Moreover, I noticed lots of loess in road cuts all along the highway until Kluane Lake. This is very important stuff, which used to blow from the montane glaciers down the braided river channels and build up the topsoils of the interior.



From Haines Junction to beyond Burwash Landing on Kluane Lake I was teased by glimpses of the tall, glacier-clad Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains that support the largest continental glaciers in North America and have some of North America's highest mountains (Logan = second highest after McKinley) and St. Elias, itself, at 18,008 feet. There is a line of low mountains (5,000 to 7,000 feet elev) in front (NE) of the larger mountains that make seeing the really high ones difficult. But I did get occasional glimpses and took a couple of photos. The best view was up the Donjek River as we crossed the bridge. I don't know which peaks I was seeing, but they were monsters above 10,000 feet and totally clad in white glaciers. At Burwash Landing there is an airstrip from which it might be possible to charter a small plane for an overflight of this wonderful wilderness. Maybe someday!

We reached the Alaska border at 5:15 p.m. Alaska daylight time. The border is a long, straight line that has been cut north and south from the highway. You can see for miles in each direction down the survey line. I took a photo of Kathy sitting on a concrete bench that straddles the border. One cheek was on the Yukon Territory side and the other in Alaska. Alas, when we passed by the Tetlin NWR Visitor Center, it was closed. My beloved son, Ryan, worked there summers while going to graduate school.

We made it to Tok about 7:30 p.m. and checked-in to Young's Motel. We walked to the Salmon Bake Barbecue Restaurant and had grilled salmon and I had a combo plate of salmon, halibut, and reindeer sausage. The meal was great. We dropped into bed about 9:30 p.m. and I slept until 3:30 when I got up to write in the journal and couldn't get back to sleep. We are excited to be in Alaska and looking forward to the days to come.

Friday, 17 August 2007

We left Tok at 9:20 a.m. and had a leisurely drive to Fairbanks, arriving about 3:30 p.m. En route I stopped a number of times to take photos of different landscapes and other natural history items that took our fancy. The Alaska Highway along this route lies in the bottom of the huge glacial Tanana River valley, making seeing out of the low terrain through trees and low foothills difficult. This was particularly frustrating because occasionally we got a glimpse of some spectacular, glacier-clad mountains beyond a front range of ~5000 feet high mountains. These mountains make up the central Alaska Range, but the highway does very little to give the traveler any decent views. There are no observation pullouts nor any signs telling the traveler what wonderful mountains are on the southern horizon. Nevertheless, knowing that we was occasionally getting fleeting glimpses of two beauties, Mt. Hayes (13,832 ft) and Mt. Deborah (12,688 ft), we searched and searched for a vantage point allowing good photographs. We pulled off the highway and drove down a two-mile long road trying to get a better view once, and later found another road that we sneaked onto and discovered that it led to an airstrip. Huzzah! We had the only unobstructed view of the two mountain beauties that I found on the whole highway to Delta Junction, the official end of the Alaska Highway.



About 40 miles out of Delta Junction, we were driving along and Kathy shouted, “Was that a moose, or was it a fake silhouette of one?” It was in shadows on the south side of the highway and I totally missed seeing it even though I was driving. I turned around and sure enough, there was an adult cow moose standing still in the road-right-of-way. Kathy whipped out her new Panasonic digital and got a great side view of the moose just before it darted off into the bushes. It stopped, turned to us, and gave us a stare and also looked to its left as though it was checking on the safety of its calf, which I imagine it was doing. It was our first moose, and Kathy let me know me know who spotted it first! At Delta Junction, we stopped and visited the Visitor Information center for 30 minutes and then took photos of the 1422 milepost, the official end of the Alaska Highway.

The drive from Delta Junction to Fairbanks was not the wilderness drive that all the rest of the Alaska Highway has been. There were hundreds of homes, cabins, agriculture, and development of private land along that road, very much like most of the US. I let Kathy drive and I slept. When we got to Fairbanks we spent several hours familiarizing ourselves with the layout of the city. Our first objective was to find out if and how we might get ourselves up the Dalton Road (=Haul Road) to Prudhoe Bay. Kathy refused to take her car so our options are to rent a car for the purpose (Dalton Autos rents them at \$129/day for 4 days, but when we called, they don't have one available until the 20<sup>th</sup>) or to take a package tour. We stopped in at the Northern Alaska Tour Company office at the airport and investigated package tours. Alas, we were told of one trip leaving on the 19<sup>th</sup>, but they said there was no guarantee of a room for us in Prudhoe Bay. After about 30 minutes talking about all our options with Ed, a great asset for the company, we were about to leave when it dawned on me that not having a room in Prudhoe Bay was no problem for us because we are happy to camp out there. When I mentioned this to Ed Robinson, he consulted with his higher-ups and came back with the good news that we can buy into that package tour. If no room is available in Prudhoe Bay, we will simply camp out somewhere there and they will deduct \$200 from our total tour package. If a room is available, then we will pay the total price. That sounded great too us. We will have an escorted tour up the Dalton Highway for two days and two nights, and then be flown back to Fairbanks over the Brooks Range on the third day. This also will enable us to go to the Arctic Ocean, which is not allowed motorists who are on their own.

So we drove around and located the University of Alaska Museum, which we will visit tomorrow, and then we toured downtown Fairbanks, stopping at the Visitor Center. There I learned that, although summer is waning, there will be 16 hrs and 23 minutes of

daylight today. Sunrise is at 5:42 a.m. and sunset is at 10:05 p.m., but each day 6 minutes and 52 seconds are lost as the equinox approaches.

We also called (on our cell phone) several motels and found one with a good rate. Most were charging \$125 – 200 per night...Fairbanks prices, we were told. We drove to the Old Airport Road and booked for two nights a room in the Golden North Motel for \$85/night (with tax = \$92), said to be a real bargain for Fairbanks. We looked into a couple of other “bargains,” but they were pretty crummy. One was only \$69 per night, but we would have had to share a bathroom with about twenty other people! Arrrgh! We could have done it had we been really strapped for funds, AND we always have the option to camp out, which we did investigate at the Chena River RV Park and Campground for \$17. We’ll be camping out more and more as time goes along, we believe. For now we are happy with our room, television, wireless Internet service, toilet, bed, and continental brekky. The room has no air conditioning because, after all, this is Fairbanks, Alaska, but the daytime high today was 82 °F and the room was pretty warm. The desk clerk gave us his fan.

We had a light supper at the Asiana Teriyaki House and turned in at 9:30 p.m. and the sun was still to be up until 10:05 p.m.

Saturday, 18 August 2007

We had a wonderful ALASKA experience this morning as we went downstairs to the postage-stamp-sized lobby to have a cold Danish and a strong cup of coffee for our continental breakfast. We met 75-year old Jim Crisler and his wife who were showing a 2.5-ounce gold nugget they had recently found at a “Dude Mine” he called it. They have been going to Paradise Valley Inc. out of Bettles, Alaska, for some years and finding quite a lot of gold. This trip wasn’t as productive as some, but the 2.5-ounce nugget would bring in a minimum of \$1650 just at the going rate for gold (~\$650/oz). That doesn’t include the mark-up as a nugget. It was a beautiful, stream-rounded, oblong nugget. He said that this mine charges \$125/day for people to come with their metal detector and search for gold. Jim said, however, that the cost of getting there via bush plane was more expensive than a two-week stay.

While we were talking, another man came in and took an interest in our conversation. He turned out to be a two-time US champion gold-panner who is traveling today to Dawson City, Canada, with a party of 7 to enter the annual World Gold Panning Championship, which will be held there in late August. Mr. Robinson (whose first name I didn’t catch) owns a hard-rock mine in northern California and travels to US and World Championship Gold Panning events. The three of us talked gold-mining and prospecting for about 30 minutes, while Kathy talked with Mrs. Crisler. The gold-prospecting fever was at a high pitch in that lobby.

We spent the morning in the room writing and resting. At 1:30 p.m. we drove to the University of Alaska Museum and stayed for about three hours. I was very

disappointed with this museum. It was too modern, with small vignettes of subject matter, not very well organized. I thought that, since Fairbanks was the scene of much hydraulic gold mining in the past, that the museum would feature this AND the wonderful Pleistocene fossils that the miners washed from the goldfields. University of Alaska also has had some of the best Pleistocene geologists/paleontologists working there and yet there were only three isolated and unconnected displays of Pleistocene fossils, a proboscidean display, Blue Babe the frozen bison, and a few other skeletons. They missed an opportunity to feature Beringia and the Pleistocene of Alaska. There also were neither minerals on display nor any geology of Alaska. The featured animals were all small dioramas of stuffed creatures with no ecology mentioned. And no ecosystem displays did I find there. I left quite disgruntled.

At 6:30 p.m. we went to the large 16-stage Regal Theaters and took in the latest Bourne movie, Bourne Ultimatum. When we got back to the motel, we packed our tent, sleeping bags, mattresses, and clothes in a bag for our drive tomorrow. Then to our room and to bed.

Sunday, 19 August 2007

A fantastic day. We drove to the North Alaska Tour Company office next to the Fairbanks airport at 8:00 a.m. and parked the car in the Fairbanks Airport Parking Lot at \$2.00/day (one of the FEW things in Alaska that are not outrageously expensive). We each took one canvas handbag with our miscellaneous belongings (binoculars, camera, books, laptop, change of clothes) and would not have brought any other baggage except that we are not sure we will have a hotel room in Prudhoe Bay, so we packed an additional bag with our tent, air mattresses, and sleeping bags. We boarded a 15-passenger Ford van with 3 other couples and were on the Elliot Highway out of Fairbanks, with a driver/tour leader named Rob Jordan. Rob turned out to be a wonderful fount of knowledge about Alaska and the Dalton Highway, which we would be joining a few miles north of Fairbanks, otherwise called the Haul Road to Prudhoe Bay.

I was quite surprised that the Elliott and Dalton highways passed through small mountains all the way to the Yukon River Valley. The Dalton Highway parallels the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, so we had unrelieved views of it out one or the other side of the van the whole way. It is quite an engineering feat, of course, snaking 800 miles north to south, sometimes buried (where there is no permafrost, usually in mountains) and sometimes on pilings up in the air (across permafrost areas).

Our first big event of the day was our lunch stop on the north side of the mighty Yukon River from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Kathy and I sat in the gravel of the shore watching the big muddy flow by. The Yukon is one of the world's largest rivers, and it sure was impressive. When I was a kid I promised myself that before I died I would float the Yukon from the Canadian border to the ocean. I'm not dead yet, but the task is daunting.

All through the landscape from Fairbanks to the Brooks Range, we passed through hundreds of patches, large and small, of fire-burned vegetation. Fire set by lightning is a normal part of the ecology of the boreal forest, and it sure was evident along our route. Our next treat was crossing the Arctic Circle, the place on the planet (including the Antarctic Circle) above which the sun never sets on at least one day per year. We learned that in Prudhoe Bay they have 84 days when the sun never sets and 67 nights when the sun never rises over the horizon. Anybody know why it isn't 84 and 84? It's an interesting phenomenon. Rob pulled out a ten-foot long piece of red carpet with white dashes bisecting it and placed it in front of the sign that read "Arctic Circle." We stood astride the dashed line and had our photo taken.

We spotted a moose and two calves feeding in a wetland en route, but little other wildlife today. The scenery was beautiful, however. We pulled in to Coldfoot, one of the few places to eat with overnight accommodations at about 6:45 p.m. Rob gave us keys to our rooms and we had a very good buffet supper in the large dining hall. Afterward, we walked across the highway to a very nice USFWS visitor center and perused books, maps, and other information available on the walls. We also purchased about \$60 worth of reading materials, as we are wont to do.

The motel is a huge complex of modular trailer-type construction all strung together with enclosed halls between the lines of modules. The halls are very long, maybe half or more of a city block, with upwards of a hundred rooms down different side passages. Our room was warm enough, with its own bathroom, but single beds. Apparently these facilities "up north" were not built for couples who sleep together.

Monday, 20 August 2007

Wow! If yesterday was great, today beats all. I finally got to see the Brooks Range, North Slopes, and northern Coastal Plain of Alaska—to great advantage. Our first treat was a visit with a man named Jack Reakoff who lives in Weisman a couple of miles north of Coldfoot. Jack hosted us for about 1.5 hours at his home in the wilderness. He has a log cabin, with a hole in the floor to keep refrigerated things in the permafrost under the house. He traps wolves, wolverines, and some other animals during winter to make money, and grows his own produce, which we got to see and photograph. He hunts caribou, moose, and Dall sheep for meat that he and his wife subsist mostly on. Jack talked nonstop for 1.5 hours, a stream of useful and interesting information.

We spent the morning driving through the southern Brooks Range (called Endicott Mountains) and watching the trees get smaller and the broad-leaved plants get yellower and oranger. The landscapes were strikingly beautiful. Some of the mountains were of pure marble. These mountains are only 5,000 to 7,000 feet tall, but the highest in the Brooks Range is over 9,000 feet in elevation. We did not see wildlife except ravens and ground squirrels, but then we were driving and not stopping to glass the hillsides for animals. Eventually, we passed into a different geology, where the mountains were comprised of slate. And then, the climax. We passed over Atigun Pass and stopped for a

few minutes. This pass separates waters flowing south into the Yukon River from those flowing north into the Arctic Ocean. It was windy and cold, and nothing except very short alpine vegetation and bare talus on the mountain slopes.

After Atigun Pass, there were no trees. We had passed beyond the tree line. Eventually, as we exited the Brooks Range and got into some foothills, we pulled off onto a side road for lunch and had a lovely, if not sad, nature experience. A Red Fox ran along side the van for several dozen yards and suddenly, it encountered a ground squirrel, accidentally. The squirrel ran a little distance with the surprised fox on its trail, and then it got cornered. We watched the squirrel defend itself for quite some time, the fox trying to grab it by the back of its head or neck and avoid the squirrel's teeth. Eventually the fox got the poor squirrel and dispatched it. I got 120+ photographs of the behaviors. The fox then took the squirrel off into the tundra and buried it. Then it saucily trotted toward the van and passed us without any fear at all.

After leaving the mountains, we followed on its west side the Sagavanirktok (Sag for short) River all the way to Prudhoe Bay. At first, we entered a rolling terrain which was foothills of the Brooks Range, but eventually we got on to a very flat landscape



which was the coastal plain leading to the Arctic Ocean. We did see a few caribou off in the distance, and numerous hunters who were trying to get them. One cannot shoot a rifle, however, within 5 miles (?) of the Dalton Highway (and pipeline), but can only use bows and arrows. Next to the fox/squirrel episode, our next best wildlife experience of the day was an encounter with a herd of about 20 musk ox very near the road. We were so close that I was able to get photos of single musk oxes in half of my photographic frame.



We also saw to the east of our route north a raised landform called the Franklin Hills. It is a block of terrain that was uplifted and the area we drove on was downthrust. The Franklin Hills were bordered on their west side with a 300-foot high escarpment overlooking the Sag River. This large block of land was about 30 or 40 miles long. The Sag River became more and more braided as we progressed to the sea, and wider and wider.

Near Prudhoe Bay we spotted lots of waterfowl (geese, swans, ducks) on ponds but did not stop so I could get any photos. Prudhoe Bay and the settlement called Deadhorse was a nightmare of human activity. It supports 5,000 to 10,000 people and one can see dozens and dozens of buildings all over the landscape. I was shocked to see how large was the human presence here. Huge areas were built up with gravel placed on top of the tundra (to avoid problems with frost heave) and buildings, roads, warehouses, trucks, vehicles, and everything imaginable was stored all over the raised gravel “land.”

We checked-in to the Prudhoe Bay Hotel and were even more stunned at its size. It sprawls over a large area, with at least four wings of modules. I suppose it has at least 100 rooms for workers and visitors. It is one of two or three such large facilities, and they are expensive. We were to pay \$100 per person for a room—and the bathroom and showers were down a hall in another wing! Again, we ate at a buffet line and many tables in a large food service area. Meals were free, however, and all you can eat. I began to feel bad again from a recurrence of my Giardia, so I was only too happy to get to bed about 9:00 p.m. During the night, I had an accident in bed! The temperature was 43 °F with 25-knot wind, somewhat uncomfortable, but warm for this place at this time of year we were told.

Tuesday, 21 August 2007

Whereas the past two days have been banner days, today was not so great although we had one pretty great experience in our flight to Fairbanks. We got up at 6:30 and were ready to be bused to the Arctic Ocean at 7:30. The public is not allowed to drive into Prudhoe Bay facilities to the Arctic Ocean from Deadhorse, even though the distance is only a mile or two. You can only go there in a special bus and with a security officer who works for the petroleum industry. We first were ushered into a conference room at Caribou Inn, where, of all things, the security man called each and every one of us to the front and had us show him a photo ID, whereupon he checked our names off an officious-looking list he had. One poor Mexican couple had to wait until they could dig out their passports. This is taking Big Brother too far, in my opinion. It was said to be part of Home Security, but the truth is that the land on which the petroleum field is located is State of Alaska land that are leased by the oil companies. Technically, any citizen should have access to public lands, but the State looks the other way in this case. The petroleum companies take this too far.

The pro-oil security stooge gave us a ton of pro-oil propaganda. The Prudhoe Bay Oilfield is small, only about 40 by 15 miles in area on top of the ground. About 5,000 workers are present at any one time, with 5,000 others on rotation. They make from \$60,000 to \$150,000 per year depending on their education and job duties. They work a 12-hour day for two weeks and then have two weeks off. Prudhoe Bay is 250 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The oilfield supplies about 20% of the US raw petroleum consumption, but there are billions more cubic feet of natural gas to be exploited. He said, "Developed." 10 billion barrels of petroleum have already been extracted from the Prudhoe Bay oilfield to 2005. There are 11 pump stations along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which cost \$8 billion to construct (is this right?). Thirteen more billion barrels are thought to be recoverable.

After the Prudhoe Bay oilfield propaganda, the security agent bused us down some dirt causeways to the Arctic Ocean. En route we were shown all sorts of "wonderful" things related to oil exploration and extraction. When we reached the Arctic Ocean, however, we were more than insulted. We were not allowed off the bus to dunk our feet in the Arctic Ocean because the security agent said that there had been reports of a polar bear in the area a few days ago. He said that they were worried that a polar bear might be lurking somewhere behind company structures or the berm formed by the causeway and make a beeline for we tourists. He said that a polar bear can be on the run at 35 mph from a dead standing start and that a polar bear would have no compunction about making a try for us. In these cases, they sometimes have a guard posted with the tour group who could protect us, but we were denied one this trip. Grrrrrr. I ask myself why in hell couldn't the vastly rich oil companies put up a polar bear-proof chain-link fence into which the bus could drive and lock a gate and let tourists--who have paid tons of money for the privilege—get out and enjoy the end purpose of their trip to the far north end of North America. All of us in our party of 9 people were pretty disgusted with this denial. Moreover, we never made any stop to photograph wild geese or anything else of natural history interest, although we were allowed to take photos of all the oilfield stuff.

We got back to Deadhorse a bit early. Kathy and I were scheduled to depart by small aircraft at 2:30 and Rob told us he would bus us out to see some waterfowl and other natural history phenomena, but the plane came in very early (having failed to make a stop first in Point Barrow). So we wolfed down our lunch and boarded the plane about 12:00 p.m. The flight out of Deadhorse over the Coastal Plain (=North Slopes) and for the first 1/3 of the Books Range was wonderful. The pilot flew the 10-passenger, twin-engine Piper only about 1,000 feet over the landscape until he reached the mountains. The weather was still clear and I got some great photographs of the landscapes below, including some really good examples of polygon tundra, caused by freezing and thawing. We were too high to see ungulates, but I did notice quite a few colored tents of hunters scattered all over the land.

Just as we reached some of the highest mountains in the Books Range—with glaciers on their summits—we encountered a cloudbank coming in from the south and were unable to see the ground until we reached the Yukon Valley. I got some photos of the Yukon River from the air and other shots of the landscape from there to Fairbanks. These latter shots were quite interesting for displaying the fire ecology of the vegetation. We got to Fairbanks about 2:30 p.m. and quickly departed by our car. I began to have more GI problems related to a relapse of Giardia, dammit. This disease really can get me down. It feels like the onset of the flu.

We drove to Nenana and I was amazed at how the Fairbanks to Nenana Road has changed. In 1966 when I was last here, it was a gravel road, but since then the gravel was paved, I think, but now the road is wholly new, a very large two-lane paved road much straighter and with all the valleys filled in with dirt removed from the hills the road passes through. Nenana did not look anything like I remember it. I couldn't find the roadhouse that we bunked in while I worked for BLM in 1966. We took a room in the Rough Wood Inn and had a wonderful supper of grilled salmon and grilled halibut at a log restaurant on the Nenana River. Sadly, I was able to eat only half of it because I am nauseous from Giardia. We retired to the room early and I got in bed to try to get some rest and fight the Giardia. I began taking Cipro this morning, so let's hope that it kicks in by the morning.

Wednesday, 22 August 2007

Today was a down day. We left Nenana at 11:30 a.m. The malaise I was feeling yesterday seemed to be gone, but I still felt queasy about eating at breakfast. We drove only 60 miles and checked in to the Denali RV Park and Motel about 10 miles north of the entrance to Denali Park. En route we stopped in Healy and I was unable to find the section house where I stayed in 1968 when I was surveying hereabouts. Healey has changed a lot, however, but Jumbo and Walker domes from which I surveyed all the Nenana Valley and north boundary of McKinley Park in 1968 are pristine still, so far as I could see from the road.

When I was last here in 1966 and '68, the main road here from Fairbanks was gravel, but today it is a super-wide, two-lane paved road with huge, paved road shoulders. And in 1968, the highway was not yet connected through Healy Canyon with the road up from Talkeetna. I learned today that the Parks Highway was not punched through Healy Canyon until 1975. Now it is a main thoroughfare full of RVs, campers, buses, and tourists.

We drove to Denali Park and were blown away with the garish touristic development just north of the entrance called Denali Park. It has two stoplights for all the tourists to cross from one side of the touristic shops to the other. YUK! The entrance to Denali Park was not developed, thank goodness, and the park visitor center and other amenities are quite nicely blended into nature. We purchased bus tickets for an 11-hour tour of the Park tomorrow to Mirror Lake, and then we walked around in the Visitor Center. At 3:20 p.m. we took a bus to the sled dog facility and enjoyed the dogs and the program. I also reminisced by looking east to the high hills overlooking the Nenana Valley. From these small mountaintops I also surveyed the entire valley along the Alaska Railroad and along the eastern boundary of Denali Park from Healy to Cantwell. I did this by helicopter and we dropped the iron pipes that mark the cadastral survey (township, range, section) of the region so that local surveys could be tied to a pre-surveyed grid.

We killed most of the day at the facilities at the Denali Park entrance and had to leave because everything shut down at 6:00 p.m. My Giardia has flared up again, in spite of my taking the antibiotic, Cipro, and I don't feel very good. Dammit! I need to get rid of this GI-tract parasite. It keeps me from enjoying every minute because some of the symptoms are flu-like, with achy muscles and joints, general malaise (ill-feeling), and weakness. Also, today I experienced a slight nausea and weakness of muscles.

Thursday, 23 August 2007

Definitely one of the best days of our trip, so far, if not THE best. We boarded a shuttle bus for Wonder Lake at 9:15 a.m. and headed west into Denali National Park. At first the drive goes through boreal forest, but then it climbs and climbs and eventually emerges above tree line. There was a slight touch of autumn in the air, with dwarf birch already having become red and brown. Aspen were beginning to turn, but were mostly still green. We saw only a snowshoe hare jump across the road in the boreal forest, but soon after getting above tree line, we started seeing caribou. In the higher mountain passes, we saw flocks of Dall Sheep grazing on hillsides above us. The driver said that they rarely come down to the level of the road in summer, but do so early and late in the visiting season.



Visiting season is four months from the middle of May until the middle of September. Our driver is already slated to leave in 7 days at the end of August. Fortunately for us, the season is already winding down as evidenced by fewer tourists, so said all the workers at Denali Park. Most of the families with kids are already back in school or traveling home so that the kids can start school.

The tour today is scheduled for 11 hours. That is to drive slowly from the headquarters area only 84 miles to Wonder Lake! The road is gravel and narrow, and has some dangerous, one-lane passages on steep, winding, cliff-sides. There are five stops along the way before Wonder Lake that the bus makes for toilet purposes, about 15 minutes each: Savage River, Sanctuary River, Teklanika River, Polychrome Overlook, and Toklat River. And we stopped at least 20 times to view wildlife that we saw out the windows. Each of the scheduled stops displayed some spectacular scenery and was well worth it. I shot off 500 photographs for the day, about half scenery and half wildlife. We saw about a dozen grizzly bears eating berries like mad. We saw about 30 or more caribou in groups of 1 to 6, and two bull moose. I also noticed the State of Alaska bird, Willow Ptarmigan, and about half a dozen snowshoe hares. While watching a grizzly across a canyon, we noticed two bull caribou running directly in the bear's direction. I focused my camera on the caribou and soon got three images of the two species in the same frame. The bear looked up only briefly when it first noticed the caribou, which veered off from it when they noticed the bear. I was hoping for an interesting encounter, but both species went about their business without much ado.

Not long after rising up into the high country, I spotted Mt. McKinley showing through some scattered clouds. McKinley was clear, but the clouds were coming from the south and fingering their way through the Alaska Range between McKinley and us. I got a couple of pretty good photos of McKinley before the clouds totally obscured it, so by the time that we got to places (between Eielson Visitor Center and Wonder Lake) where the mountain is really clear and spectacular to see and photograph, it was entirely enshrouded in clouds.



Probably the most enchanting thing about this drive is that one gets spectacular views of mountains on both sides of the road. The tundra is full of wildlife, bears and caribou, especially, and is quite beautiful. We got out a few times and discovered huge amounts of blueberries and other berries. At Wonder Lake I ate several handfuls in just a couple of minutes of picking. Grizzlies, we were told, eat about 40 pounds of berries each day and we sure did see them munching busily.

We got back as scheduled, at 8:15 p.m., and drove about 30 miles to Cantwell, the last place I stayed in 1968 when I was surveying the Nenana Valley. On the map I saw many USGS triangulation stations that I occupied such as Montana, Cantwell, Slime, and others. Kathy had phoned ahead to Cantwell and made reservations for us tonight at the Cantwell Lodge. We had to drive two miles off the Parks Highway to get to it. Cantwell looked quite different from what I remember. Then I talked with some locals and learned that Cantwell Lodge had been completely changed. Part of it burned down, but some of it was also torn down and new structures built in its place. This was definitely where I stayed 39 years ago, but has changed a lot. The rustic atmosphere was still here, however, since it is off the road and mostly locals who work on the railroad or highway live here. We had a pretty good 12-oz New York strip steak for supper and I satisfied a meat craving that I had built up a yearning for. The motel room was the lousiest one we have stayed in on the whole trip. It had no television and, of course, no wireless for Internet. It was a dingy room with inadequate heat, but the cheapest thing we could find at \$95 for the night! YUK!

Friday, 24 August 2007

I got up about 6:30 a.m. and fooled around downloading images from Kathy's and my digital cameras. We took about 500 photographs yesterday. After downloading them, I picked about a dozen and made them suitable for sending out over the Internet so we could send our family some pics of what we have been up to. We had breakfast at the Cantwell Lodge, and then hit the road south for Anchorage at 9:30 a.m. The drive to Anchorage got less and less interesting as the valley widened and the forest got taller.

Eventually one just drives through a corridor of tall birch and spruce trees, periodically interrupted by bridges across streams. I slept for 45 minutes until we got to the Talkeetna cutoff and we took it to see that town.

Talkeetna was disgusting for me. Tour buses disgorged dozens if not hundreds of tourists who walk the town and shop for souvenirs. The little town is strictly a tourist trap. I was also surprised at the development along the 14-mile road to Talkeetna. Dozens and dozens of private parcels of land had driveways and houses all along the road. Only 40 years ago there was nothing here. Then the drive from Willow to Knik Arm was outrageous with strip malls and businesses and all sorts of development along the road. It was disgusting, in comparison with the pristine wilderness that the development has replaced. I expect that the point of land between Turnagain and Knik arms where Anchorage sits will be completely developed, but was stunned at how many people now live in the Palmer-Wasilla area.

We crossed Knik Arm on a fancy new four-lane bridge of Alaska Highway #1, then got off at N Peter's Creek exit and drove to the residence of Claudia and Dan, my sister and brother-in-law. At once I was impressed by the beauty--and size--of their lovely log home that they have spent many years building. It is three stories tall with



wonderful decks all around. The ceiling of one-half of the house rises a full two stories up from the main living room with tall walls of logs. It is a 3-bedroom house with 2.5 bathrooms. In addition, they have a complete "in-law" suite or small apartment with kitchen and bathroom (and two huge wine cellars) in the basement in which they lived while building the main house above. Everything about the house is just great, from its unique design to the decoration that Claudia has spent many years developing. They should be very proud of their accomplishment, as I sure am.

At their bird feeder I identified numerous black-headed chickadees and some red-breasted nuthatches. Claudia fixed us a wonderful supper of baked silver salmon and we turned in tired from the day's drive and activity, and happy with a reunion of my little sis and me.

Saturday, 25 August 2007

Omigod! Today was unexpectedly fabulous. Kathy, Claudia, and I drove into Anchorage from Claudia's lovely log home in Chugiak (15 miles from Anchorage up Knik Arm of Cook Inlet). We first stopped in the parking lot of a Microtel Motel so I could tap into their wireless and send photos to the family of our Denali National Park visit. We then drove into the heart of Anchorage and Claudia took us all around to see the sights. First was the first place in which our family lived when we first got to Anchorage in 1950, and then second was the house that Dad built on East H Place one block from the junction of Fireweed Lane with Seward Highway. We drove down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and what's left of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue (the main street until the Great Anchorage Earthquake of 1964). There were only a handful of old buildings left that I recognized, but for the most part, Anchorage has changed so dramatically that I was unable to recognize it. I thought it was awful, hating development, of course, as I do. We next tried to get to our old high school, in the 1950s called Anchorage High School (the only one in town), now called Anchorage West H.S. The road to it was under construction in anticipation for school, which starts next week, so we did not even get to drive by it. We had lunch at a place called Peanut Factory, shopped in a big souvenir store, and then drove east down the new Seward Highway, a four-lane freeway.

Claudia had found the phone number of the present owners of the log home that was Dad's dream house, the one that we, the small family, helped him build. The people were very nice and invited us out to see the house. En route we drove down Lochlomon Lane and found our Uncle Dick's and his partner, Jim's, house where we had celebrated many a holiday with the family. While parked in the driveway and taking photos, the owner came out into the yard to see what was up. I approached on foot and told him whom we were and why we were interested in the house, and he immediately got friendly and invited us in. The house has been renovated considerably, doubled or tripled in floor space with added rooms, but the original living room, which was the bulk of the house, was still there. The family presently living in the house is the Constantinos. We had a nice time remembering the house and telling the Constantinos all we could about its history.

Then we drove up Rabbit Creek Road further and I began to relive the old days of my teen years, 13 through 18, seeing places and landmarks dear to me. The land along the road has changed a lot with dozens and dozens of houses, but the road was still the same (although paved now). The house of Chuck and Florence Thornton was gone, recently bulldozed for a new construction. We turned down Goldenview Drive and slowly made our way to the Big House, as we called it. Migod! What a thrill. We proceeded up a new driveway that approaches the house from the west, circling around the shoulder of the hilltop on which the house sits and coming up from the backside of the property. Originally we approached from the east up a long, gentle grade. I can hardly explain what it felt like to step out onto that hilltop and see the log mansion that Dad designed and built, with all of us helping. The first thing that struck me was the site of my "wood yard" as I called it, located at the SE corner of the house. That's where I spent my teenage years hauling logs that I cut up and split to heat the house through its four fireplaces, and then later through a wood burning furnace.



Front half of the living room of the wonderful log home that Dad and the family built from 1954-1964. It is 19.5 feet from the floor to the top purlin. One of four fireplaces in the house, this one with a six-foot opening.

Grif and Judy were the most gracious hosts you can imagine. They welcomed us with great enthusiasm and made us feel right at home. They escorted us into the house and we spent about an hour or more visiting and loving each room. Many improvements have been made over the years, and the house was just gorgeous, even more so than I remembered. Especially wonderful is the “great room,” once our living room, and the Griffins have maintained and improved it beautifully. They replaced the old thermopane windows with new and better ones. I was enthralled at the beauty of that room, with its log walls, huge cross beams, 19.5 feet high central purlin, and knotty pine ceiling. I fondly recalled many things about its construction and living there. I once was able to jump up and wrap my arms around the crossbeams and hoist myself up onto and over the top of them. This is quite difficult because of the physics of hanging from a large, horizontal log and trying to swing a leg up onto the top of it. I was skinny, 6’ 4” tall, and strong enough to do it in those years. I also recall the hard work of lying on my back on a scaffold that Dad built so I could sand the ceiling with an electric, rotary sander.

It was wonderful visiting all the rest of the rooms in the house, and seeing the very nice studio that has replaced and expanded what was once a glassed-in greenhouse all across the back of the house. But recollection of not-so-fond memories was stepping down into the partial basement that I had to dig one summer in order to put in a wood-burning furnace. We walked around the outside of the house and were able to see—and photograph—everything we wanted to, including the wonderful view south over Cook Inlet. Mt. Susitna lay with her summit partially obscured by clouds. It was a wonderful reunion with my teenage years, and for that I am deeply grateful to the Griffins for the privilege of their time and tour of their home. I have not seen the house for 48 years!

All the rest of the day was anticlimactic, but I did receive some very good news via email. A couple of days ago a colleague, Blair Hedges, had emailed me that two of my new species of frogs from the Wokomung Massif were not new to science because of DNA analyses he had performed on tissues of frogs from there. That would have been a severe blow to my work since I have a major research paper in press naming those two species and one other. Fortunately, another colleague, Ross MacCulloch of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, who had sent Blair the tissues to study, had misidentified the specimens. It now looks as though I am in the clear and can proceed with naming all three frogs and not having to change the manuscript I worked on for so long. Hooray!

Claudia and Dan cooked up a wonderful steak supper and we sat and talked into the early night. Dan has done some amazing things in his career, the most fascinating of which (besides building his wonderful log home) was cleaning out the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Periodically the pipeline gets clogged with sludge from the petroleum and needs to be cleaned. Two-thousand feet long stretches of pipe are opened up and Dan and others enter the pipe on wheeled dollies that they kneel on while they work on cutting out a plastic (or fiberglass) liner. The pipe has only a 48-inch inside diameter, so imagine pulling yourself along on the dolly, crouched down, and in a suit designed to keep the toxic chemicals off your body. More importantly, he had to wear special filtered masks to breathe through. I thought they would have been supplied self-contained air tanks like SCUBA, but Dan said, "No." A fan pushed air through the 2,000-foot long pipe that they filtered with their masks. The air in the pipe was so laden with bad chemicals, however, that you couldn't take a breath of it without filtering it. And Dan said that they had to change the filters about once every three or four hours. What a nightmare!

Sunday, 26 August 2007

Today Kathy, Claudia, and I drove in Claudia's car to Independence Mine and Hatcher Pass above Wasilla. It is an important place in my memory, having walked from King's Lake to the mine and back to Little Susitna River in 1953. I did this when I was 12 years old, walking (or trotting) 38 miles in 9 hours.

After the high altitude visit, we drove down to Palmer and spent three hours at the Alaska State Fair. It was very disappointing. The booths sold only very cheap goods and the giant vegetables were quite unimpressive. We were glad to get out of there.

Claudia and Dan fixed us some steaks for supper, and we retired about 10:00 p.m.

Monday, 27 August 2007

Kathy and I drove down the Seward Highway this morning, a highway that is on the nation's top 10 for scenic beauty. We saw a cow moose and calf in the Potter Marsh and then drove along Turnagain Arm to Girdwood. We visited Alyeska, this areas

famous snow skiing resort, taking the side road there, but I declined to ride the tram to the summit.

We next visited Portage Glacier, and en route we stopped and watched and photographed some salmon spawning in a clearwater stream. Portage Glacier has melted so far back into the hills that there was no ice visible in the now large lake. I remember as a kid that icebergs floated right up to the edge of the lake where we stood to view it.



If you don't believe in global warming...I took both photos from the same vantage point, on the left when I was a kid in the 1950s; the valley glacier was completely gone in 2007, having receded many miles.

Then we had a great time driving through the long railroad tunnel to Whittier, the port that my father helped build in 1943. Back when I lived in Alaska, the only way you could get there (besides by air and sea) was by train through a 2.5-mile long tunnel drilled through a large mountain. Now, you can drive through that long tunnel because it was enlarged to accommodate trucks and vehicles, but is still one-lane with asphalt paved to the top of the rails. Cars and trains take turns traveling through the tunnel, the tunnel workers allowing 15-minute alternating directional use for vehicle traffic every half-hour except for trains and maintenance. You have to queue up on an hourly schedule to come or go, but you have only a 15-minute window to complete the drive when they let you through. The tunnel is dark and dank, with bare rock exposed on the vertical walls and domed ceiling. When you first enter the tunnel for about one mile from each end you cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel at the other end, even though the tunnel is straight as an arrow, because of the 2.5-mile distance.

Whittier is quite a picturesque place. We stayed a couple of hours, having a lunch in a diner on the main drag near the boat harbor. A huge Princess Line passenger ship was docked there. After lunch we visited several of the souvenir shops around the harbor. While we were in one shop, a man walked in and blurted, "I thought that was Kathy." She looked up into Tom Brinkley's face, one of her coworkers in Tallahassee. Neither of them knew beforehand that the other was going to vacation in Alaska, let alone a trinket shop in the remote village of Whittier. This is a good example of those strange coincidences that demonstrate just how small the world has gotten. This sort of ironic and improbable crossing of paths seems to happen several times in ones life. I know it has to me.

When we emerged back out of the 2.5-mile long Whittier tunnel, we stopped at the junction of the Seward and Whittier/Portage highways and discovered that we had cell phone use. We phoned ahead and made reservations on the Kenai Queen for what

we hope is a wonderful daylong cruise of the Kenai Fjords for tomorrow. We then drove through Moose Pass and on to Seward. Just outside Seward we saw and photographed humpie (pink) salmon spawning in a clear creek with houses along the creek. It was so spectacular, seeing the red-sided salmon, that I waded in with my camera and tried to get some close-ups. Had I been a bear, I could have caught my limit. However, salmon on their spawning beds are cottony and not very good tasting to human palates. Seward is another coastal seaport, but a larger town than Whittier. It is an all-year-round ice-free seaport, as well, and is quite historical. However, tourism has hit hard and drives a lot of the local economy. We had a rather disappointing supper at Yoly's Café on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and then we spent the night in Murphy's Motel.

Tuesday, 28 August 2007

What a day! We left Murphy's Motel at 11:00 a.m. and walked to Major Marine Tour Company on the Seward docks and boarded the Kenai Star, a large steel-hull boat that held about 100 passengers for an 8-hour cruise among the Kenai Fjords. The tour route was south out of Resurrection Bay and then up Aialik Bay immediately west. We saw from a distance some wonderful mountains and glaciers, including Bear Glacier, and lots of timber growing on the bottom slopes of the precipitous mountains rising steeply up out of both bays. The bays are said to be more than 1,000 feet deep from glacial scouring, and probably also from tectonic activity, since these mountains are rising as the Pacific oceanic plate subducts under the Alaska continental plate here.

Our ultimate objective was to stop for 30 minutes at the edge of Aialik Glacier and watch it calve into the bay while we ate a fantastic lunch of prime rib and baked fresh silver salmon. En route we watched for sea mammals and birds. I got to see and photograph quite a few Horned Puffins, Tufted Puffins, and Common Murres, besides hundreds, if not thousands, of Red-legged Kittiwakes and other marine birds (Pelagic Cormorant). We were also lucky to see at a distance two pods of Killer Whales, and as we pulled out of the dock, Kathy and I spotted a Sea Otter along the jetty, but it dove before I got a photograph of it.

The open ocean out the mouth of both bays had rolling swells of up to eight feet, so many people got seasick on that leg of the journey, but in both bays the waters were calm. The boat moved at some speed, however, with a cold wind making for a chilling stay on the deck. Kathy and I were well layered, so we stayed outside for the whole trip except for our meal. Watching the glacier and hearing the rifle-shot sounds of ice cracking, and then the roar of falling ice was a splendid experience.

The most dramatic wildlife viewing was among some islands at the mouth of Aialik Bay, which we wended our way through. Thousands of Red-legged Kittiwakes were nesting on cliff faces with a southern exposure. We also got to see about six or eight Northern (Steller's) Sea Lions lying lazily in the sun on some rocks, but they were not very close to us. All in all, the daylong boat trip was highly worth it, even though we dropped about \$275 for the both of us. We had our room at Murphy's Motel reserved, so

we made our way there and slept the deep sleep of the wind-burned and sea-bounced boat travelers.

Wednesday, 29 August 2007

This was surprisingly not the best day I have spent in Alaska during this trip, but not terrible, either. I guess the reason is that the second half of the day was over what I consider (and did so as a kid) humdrum landscape of relatively flat terrain with dumpy black spruce, muskeg marshes, and no mountains. It started out quite different, however, as we traveled through some of the Kenai Peninsula mountains at first. Leaving Seward, I was amazed that every creek the road crossed was chock full of pink (humpy) salmon spawning. We saw hundreds of salmon in several creeks, and I stopped to get a bunch of photographs of them at two such places.

We motored up the canyons of the Kenai Mountains to Kenai Lake and then turned on to the Sterling Highway beyond Moose Pass. Soon we came to Kenai Lake again as it turned into Kenai River. The beauty of the lake and river is enhanced by the fact that the water is a very pretty light blue color caused by a slight amount of glacial silt in otherwise clear water. All this was beautiful enough but soon the road became obviously developed with houses, lodges, tourist facilities, and fishing camps along it. This continued for the most part all the way to Homer at the end of the peninsula and Sterling Highway. I was amazed at how many people now live along the highway, especially in Soldotna, Kenai, and Homer. Driving down the Sterling Highway was not very different from driving down many of the roads in the developed and settled parts of the eastern US. Around Clam Gulch, Ninilchik, and Anchor River there was not so much development and we did get some splendid views of Mts. Iliamna and Redoubt across Cook Inlet, two snow-capped volcanoes whose summits are each over 10,000 feet in elevation.

We got to Homer about 5:30 p.m. and what a disappointment Homer was. Now, it must be admitted that I hate development, and that my recollections of Alaska from 40+ years ago colors my evaluation of the present-day experience, but honestly, Alaska is going to hell with development just as ardently as anywhere else I have been ON THE GLOBE. People refuse to appreciate the POPULATION BOMB that we have exploded on this planet, and Alaska is no more aware of it or doing anything to ameliorate its effects than anywhere else, especially in the lower United States. There is no public discussion of our unbridled population growth in this country, and whether it is good or bad. I was so totally disgusted with the US media when, earlier this year, the media was celebratory when the US passed the 300 million people mark. There was no mention at all about whether this might not be worth celebrating, or about the consequences of continuing the growth that we are engaged in. There are limits to any kind of growth, humans included. Are we to wait until those natural limits begin to impose themselves on our quality of life before we even acknowledge we have a problem of too goddam many people on earth!!?

Anyway, what was once a quaint spit with commercial fishing houses at the tip is now a bustling tourist destination with cutsie shops along both sides of the road selling whatever trinkets the tourists will drop money on. And the crush of RVs was overwhelming. I couldn't wait to leave, and I think Kathy shared my opinion, although she gets tired of hearing me gripe about human overpopulation and my environmental concerns. If we had possessed the money, AND the time, I know there are flights and marine boat excursions we could have taken to some very wonderful and spectacular natural places such as Katmai National Park or overflights of the fjords, mountains, and the Harding Ice Field, for examples. Alas, we are running out of time and funds, so we did the one thing I really wanted to travel to Homer for: we ate Alaska King Crab.

We first tried it in Coal Point, a fish house/restaurant, ordering 1 lb of it steamed at \$21.00 per plate. We shared a plate, noting that the legs of the crab were frozen before they steamed it. This wasn't fresh off the boats as I think I recall getting it in the 1950s. Anyway, we had been tipped off that there was a cheaper way to get a good meal of king crab, so after we shared the one order of steamed crab, we drove to the Safeway Market in Homer and purchased two pounds more of frozen legs and then drove back up the Sterling Highway to a lonely campground on the bluff overlooking Cook Inlet. We pitched our tent between Anchor Point and Clam Gulch at Stariski Campground. There I heated water in a pot on our camp stove, thawed out our two pounds of delicious king crab, and we feasted on it. The two pounds cost us about the same as the one pound we purchased at Coal Point Café. It was \$10.98 per pound at the Safeway, a great price. [We later saw even better looking legs for sale at a Safeway/Carrs in Anchorage for the same good price!]

As the sun set, I got some photographs of beautiful Mt. Iliamna across Cook Inlet. The sun set exactly over the middle of the summit, so the volcano was beautifully backlit. We snuggled into our tent and I soon fell sound asleep.

Thursday, 30 August 2007

Kathy got up first and hollered, "The sun is rising and shining on Mt. Iliamna, get your ass out of bed." I jumped up and got a couple of photos of it, but was unable to see the more symmetrical Mt. Redoubt because it was socked in with clouds. We drove to Soldotna and had brekky at Sal's Restaurant. As usual in Canada and Alaska, breakfasts are huge and I almost choked on the massive amounts of potatoes, toast, reindeer sausage, and eggs. There was even a plate-sized pancake thrown in for good measure. After breakfast we telephoned my very good, long-time friend, Melba Prator Hosken, who grew up with me, was my classmate, and dearest neighbor up Rabbit Creek Road. Melba and her husband still live up Rabbit Creek Road just north of Melba's old homestead. They were home and they invited us for a visit as soon as we could get there from Soldotna, which was about a three-hour drive. The drive was beautiful through the Kenai Mountains again and along Turnagain Arm, and then we turned up Rabbit Creek Road immediately after exiting where the Seward Highway first touches the cliffs of Turnagain Arm.

Wow! The reunion with Melba—and meeting Howard—was wonderful. They received Kathy and me enthusiastically and really made us feel at home. Both are just fantastic people. I always knew Melba to be bubbly, effusive, and charming, but Howard was equal to the task. We just loved them and had a great time talking about the past, present, and future. Melba prepared a delicious lunch and we talked so much and laughed so hard that my cheeks began to hurt. Melba, bless her, with the help of some of our classmates with whom she keeps in touch, might help organize the 50<sup>th</sup> reunion of the Anchorage High School Class of 1959. That class was quite special for two reasons, the great people in it, and the fact that it was the first graduating class after Alaska's statehood. I am already looking forward to a return trip to Anchorage two years hence if this reunion comes off.



We left Melba and Howard about 5:30 p.m. and called on my old high school chum, Smiley Shields. Fortunately, he was home and we got to visit with Smiley for a couple of hours, too. Smiley lives on the bluffs overlooking Cook Inlet in a home he built with his own hands. We had a nice visit and were especially delighted to see Smiley's son, Brennan, and Brennan's two young daughters, Emma and Allie. Smiley's wife, Sue, was in Florida awaiting the birth of a grandchild from their daughter, Jennifer. Fortunately for Kathy and me, at least we got to see Smiley because he is flying to Florida tomorrow. Moreover, seeing Melba and Howard was propitious, also, because they have plans to drive to Russian River tomorrow for a traditional Memorial Day family get-together. Our visits were the highlight of the day. We stopped in Eagle River and had a pretty poor Mexican supper, and then we drove to Claudia's and Dan's Bear Mountain View Bed and Breakfast where my dear sister had left the door unlocked for us weary travelers.

Friday, 31 August 2007

Claudia's husband, Dan, gets up about 4:30 a.m. and goes to work very early, so we missed seeing him this morning. We slept in and had a nice visit with my great sis, Claudia, who fixed us another good breakfast. Parting was such sweet sorrow, as always. We said goodbye about 10:30 a.m. and then did some shopping in Eagle River before hitting the Glenn Highway north out of Anchorage. We took our time up the Glenn Highway, taking in the views. Unfortunately, the good weather we have had for our whole time in Alaska has stopped and it is now overcast and partly drizzly. We got to see the Matanuska Glacier, and I was amazed that it seems not to have receded any since I last saw it in 1968. I expected it to have receded miles up its valley like so many other glaciers, but this one appears not to have melted much.

I was hoping to see mountains I loved in my childhood and during the days I worked for BLM surveying State-selected lands in the 1960s: Drum, Sanford, and Wrangell. Unhappily, the cloud cover had them mostly hidden, but just at sundown I got a view of that spectacular volcano, Mt. Sanford, which is over 16,000 feet high and higher by far than any mountain in the continental US. The Glenn Highway brought back many memories, especially at the crossing of the Slana River, upstream of which a maddened grizzly bear that charged us in 1957 almost wiped out my family.

At Glenallen we had to make a difficult decision. We both wanted to drive State Highway 4 (Richardson Hwy) to Valdez, but the distance (=time) was prohibitive considering how many days we have left on our way home to Tallahassee. And, most of all, I wanted to drive to McCarthy, but time is not with us. So, we decided to put the time we have left to seeing the Top of the World Highway and Cassiar Highway, instead. We headed on up the Glenn Highway towards Tok, arriving there about 8:00 p.m. No four-legged animals were viewed and the reason is obvious. Hunting season in ON. We saw many folks in trucks and on 4-wheelers reading for the big game hunt. And that is why the big game is not visible near any highways! They are not stupid. Young's Motel where we stayed a couple of weeks ago was booked, but we got a nice room in the Snowshoe Motel and burrowed under the blankets for a good night's rest.

Saturday, 1 September 2007

We left Tok a little late, at 10:30 a.m. We got up late (I stayed up until 12:30 surfing the internet) and had a nice, leisurely breakfast at Fast Eddy's Restaurant, well known to my beloved son, Ryan. I called Ryan while after we had blueberry pancakes at Fast Eddy's and had a nice chat with him. Ryan spent several summers working for Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge hereabouts during his undergraduate school years.

Our travels today were to be over a road not traveled before by me, and one I have looked forward to, the Taylor Highway to Chicken and the border with Canada. We drove it slowly, admiring the rolling topography and late season vegetation, most of which is turning reds and yellows. The climax of the color of autumnal leaves is still a week or two away, but is at least 1/4 to 1/3 along at the moment.

The scenery is spectacular interior Alaska/Northwest Canada terrain, with long, broad “hills” and ridges up to 4,000 and 5,000+ feet high and deep, wooded valleys in between. I took particular note (and some photos) of Mt. Fairplay (5,000+ feet elevation) because my beloved son, Ryan, climbed it and camped out on it when he worked for US Fish and Wildlife here years ago.

We might have seen some ungulates except for the fact that it is now hunting season and the four-footed beasts are wisely keeping some distance from the roads. Alas, we did not see much else save a lone camp robber (gray jay) and no ravens. I guessed that the lack of ravens is because this relatively poorly traveled road has little carrion to be scavenged since the lack of travel doesn't kill many birds and small mammals (or even a few big ones). Ravens are very common along the major highways, however.

We arrived in Chicken about 12:30. What a forlorn place it is, simply a couple of lodges catering to travelers and some miners still working the placers for gold. I photographed the large, abandoned hydraulic dredging machine, and we had a snack lunch in one of the little lodges where I saw a nice, robust proboscidean tusk hanging from the ceiling that they had washed from the gravels, and a couple of cheek teeth of the woolly mammoth. The tusk was so robust that I wonder if it was from a mastodon and not a woolly mammoth. I couldn't get the owner to sell me a woolly mammoth molar, but we purchases a quite nice half-of-a-burl that had been fashioned into a bowl. A gift from me to Kathy. Beyond Chicken we passed the 80-mile road to Eagle, a side trip we decided not to take. The road runs north down a long, high ridge to the north and terminates at that town on the Yukon River.

The border crossing was really a bleak place, above timberline, and in a downpour of rain. The Canadian officer was pleasant and we continued for a short while in SLEET! I got out when it wasn't raining and picked a couple hands full of low-bush blueberries and low-bush cranberries and ate them, reminding me of the many hands full that I ate as a kid. I saw crowberry plants, but no crowberries on them. These are watery little berries that sometimes are more abundant than any kind of berry in the tundra, especially at highest elevations. I used to gorge on them when I surveyed for BLM and occupied high elevation triangulation stations.

The drive into Canada was uneventful, but beautiful in fall colors and on top of a long, high ridge. When we approached Dawson City, I was thrilled to see my childhood favorite river, the mighty Yukon (glacially gray here). We had a marvelous view of its confluence with the Klondike River (clear water) and Dawson City sitting in the valley bottom immediately north of their coming together. We drove up and down the streets of Dawson City, a surprisingly large town, and stopped in the local visitor center. We spent some time having a nice supper of fish (salmon) and chips at Sourdough Joe's, on the very first lot of the city of Dawson. They had an old jukebox with lots of great oldie songs that I played for an hour. Great ambience and a good feeling.

We found that all the hotel and motel rooms in Dawson City are booked, so we weren't able to stay the night in this historic gold-rush town. That's just as well, however, in my opinion, because Dawson City is quite the tourist trap in summer. Tomorrow marks the last of their season, with the famous "outhouse race," where people run down the main street pulling crazy replicas of outhouses they make for the occasion. That's why the town is full of tourists, and we want no part of it. We gassed the car and drove a few miles out of town up the Klondike River Valley, noting how horribly the valley floor has been mined by huge hydraulic dredges leaving monstrous tailing piles of river-tumbled boulders and deep, stagnant-water swales in between. I now understand a sign in the window of a local business, which read, "We support the dredging industry."

We turned in to the Yukon government campground beyond the airport and pitched our tent on some soft ground among the spruce, birch, and aspens.

Sunday, 2 September 2007

We rose early, as we often do when sleeping on the ground. Sounds of red squirrels making a fuss were common, but no one else was stirring. When Kathy got out of bed we found out why: it was c-o-l-d, about 42°F. Later, as we drove, it dropped to 38°F with a breeze. Brrrrrr! We decamped and drove SE to the Klondike Lodge at the junction of the Dempster Highway and our road, the Klondike Highway. The Dempster Road runs many miles north to near the mouth of the mighty MacKenzie River and the village of Inuvik, waaaaay above the Arctic Circle. It is Canada's most northerly point that can be reached by road. One day I would like to drive this road.

On the Klondike Road, Kathy thought she spotted a bear so we turned around and drove back for a really great wildlife treat. She did see an adult black bear, and it didn't scare when we stopped to photograph it. It was eating some kind of fruit and even walked to within about 80 feet of the car. In my 300 mm lens I was able to see that the fruit was rose hips. Kathy and I got some really good close-up photos of the bear, filling 50% of our frames.

Monday, 3 September 2007, Labor Day

We slept soundly overnight, again, waking to overcast skies, some fog, and the temperature at a chilly 37°F. We ate a light brekky of baked goods sold in the Johnson's Crossing campground/RV store and then hit the road. We drove 180 miles over part of the Alaska Highway that we traveled coming north, and then turned south onto a new road for the both of us, Canada's Cassiar Highway.

The Cassiar Highway turned out to be a great road right away. First, of course, it was paved, but not such a wide right-of-way as the Alaska Highway, which has two very wide driving lanes and then the road shoulders are paved and as wide as the driving lanes! In effect, the Alaska Highway is almost a four-laned road and posted speed limits

are 65 mph, but you could go 80 with ease. The northern half of the Cassiar, in comparison, has two nice driving lanes but no road shoulders to speak of. In fact, one has to be careful not to wander to the edge of the pavement because it drops precipitously down for several feet on average. One could roll a car off the edge easily. However, the forest comes very close to the roadside and is very lovely, full of spruce, a small-needled pine, and aspen. As one goes south on the Cassiar, the trees become taller and taller and eventually are commercially so valuable that they have been logged in patches.

But the Cassiar is wilder than the Alaska Highway, if that is possible. Probably because it is a newer road, less well traveled, and only recently paved. Between the junction with the Alaska Highway west of Watson Lake and Dease Lake about halfway down the two-day long drive there are a couple of several-mile stretches that are gravel still, but the Canadians really make good gravel roads. They crush stone and pile the very finely ground (less than pea-sized) gravel two and three feet deep to make a very fine roadbed. Unlike in Alaska, where gravel roads are simply made of the local soil with many boulders and mud, the Canadians make what is almost a paved highway with their finely crushed gravel which they have to truck many miles to put down.

We saw a cow moose, one of the few moose seen on this trip, in a typical moose-feeding habitat—a marshy wetland surrounding a shallow pond. We believe that we don't see many moose on these northern roads simply because it is now hunting season and even in some places cows and calves are allowed to be taken. The Cassia Highway runs south through northwestern British Columbia along the east side of the Coastal Range of mountains of the Alaska panhandle. One is continually in view of lofty summits with small glaciers all over their sides, and an occasional hanging glacier. West of the line of summits lies several impressive ice fields because of the huge amount of precipitation that falls on these mountains when moisture-laden air off the Gulf of Alaska rises from the west to the east. The coastal areas of the west side of the Coastal Mountains have that classic Pacific Northwest climate of high humidity and high rainfall, meaning that it is almost always overcast and drizzling or raining or snowing!

As we traveled south, we passed over Gnat Pass, the highest pass on the Cassia at 4,072 feet elevation. On the mountains as we approached the pass we could see fresh "termination dust," fresh snow of the night before. And, Oh yes, the weather today got gloomier and gloomier, drizzling almost all day. We had to have the windshield wipers on the whole time and the one on the driver's side makes a horrible squawking sound. I couldn't get it to stop unless the rain was falling hard.

There was one really good highlight of this day. Kathy had read me information from our travel materials about Jade City, a highway community made up of just two businesses dedicated to jade mining. From the literature and the proprietors we learned that this area produces 75-85 % of the WORLD'S jade. Loving geology and rock specimens I was determined to stop and see what I might be able to purchase in the way of good, natural jade specimens for myself and sons. Well, only one of the businesses was open, but I was enthralled. It was the best mineral display I have seen on this trip and I was looking at the source of some of the world's most productive and best source of

jade. The shop called Jade City had all sorts of jade mining equipment and samples outside, before one even entered the souvenir shop. Kathy made a beeline for the shop and my eyes fell on two huge chunks of beautiful jade that had one side polished and the rest natural stone. I couldn't resist. I picked both of them up and walked into the shop and asked the owner if they were for sale and if so, how much? I got the stones to use as bookends and souvenirs of Kathy's and my wonderful Alaska trip, but I am ashamed to say how much I dropped to get them. I talked the proprietor down \$150 off of the price and had him throw in a \$49 pair of best grade jade earrings for Kathy, so one can imagine what the total cost really was.

We came to rest tonight in the rain at Dease Lake. We found a motel called the Northway Motor Inn for \$100 a double (ouch!). That was one of highest charges we have paid, although \$100-125 is a common charge if you don't shop around...but if there is nothing cheaper available, we camp out. It was a nice room and we got to use the wireless Internet service and much desired HOT BATHS. Kathy had a nice, warm tub soak before bed, but I waited for my shower until morning. Guess what? The rest of the motel patrons had run out all the hot water and I got a miserable, spotty warm, and instantly freezing shower, mostly freezing. Grrrrrrrr.

Tuesday, 4 September 2007

Oh wow! Today was an unexpected day of great thrills. We left the largely Amerindian town of Dease Lake late. In the morning we watched a Kevin Costner movie waiting on shower water to warm, and then discovered they weren't serving breakfast in the local restaurant. Kathy wanted a decent brekky, but I was so hungry that I gobbled down three pieces of nasty pizza that I couldn't choke down for supper last night. We drove south, hoping to find some place to get something to eat, and crossed the continental divide just south of Dease Lake where waters flow north into the Arctic Ocean (that part of the highway north of Dease Lake) and south into rivers that dump into the Gulf of Alaska (Pacific Ocean). I like these sorts of geographical items and am always looking for them. It was a very low pass, not really recognizable as a mountain watershed divide, but the Milepost said so, and I was satisfied with that. Besides, all the rivers immediately began flowing south with us rather than opposite our driving. At one place where we were driving alongside a river we could swear that we were driving downhill but the river was flowing against us. I have noticed a few of these optical illusions before. Kathy was fascinated with the confusing illusion, unless, of course, just in this secret place, water flows uphill!

So, for our breakfast/lunch story. We spotted a typical looking roadside lodge with a café sign saying "open." This was important because we have found that many of the businesses along the Cassiar are already closed for the season. We entered the stuffy, run-down café and sat at a crummy little table. The matronly waitress was friendly with a big smile, so we expected a good meal and a good time. Kathy told her she wanted a BLT and the waitress said, "OK, what kind of sandwich?" That should have given us a clue. Next, I ordered pie with ice cream after telling her that I had some nasty leftover

pizza for breakfast and didn't want anything else. She asked what Kathy wanted to drink and said she had coffee and tea. Kathy said, "Just a glass of water, please," so the waitress went over and began to heat some water. I had to jump up and explain that all Kathy wanted was a GLASS of water.

My pie came out with NO ICE CREAM, horrors! And it was just about the worst piece of pie that I ever ate. It was supposed to be banana cream pie, but there was no cream and lots of nasty, off-lemon-tasting goo for the body of the pie and had some banana flavoring rather than any bananas. While we were eating, a grumpy, rotund, unshaven man kept coming in and out as though he belonged there. The phone rang and he went outside to fetch another person for whom the call was intended. Meanwhile, the phone began that awful disconnected-line beeping sound, so after nobody came to take care of it, I volunteered to hang it up. Just as I did, wouldn't you know the grump came in with the man for whom the bell tolled! He looked at me as though I had committed a crime, and just at that moment the phone rang again with the person calling back. In spite of me trying to tell the two men what happened, the grump answered the phone and said that a customer had hung up on him.

When we went to pay, the waitress had extreme difficulty operating the cash register. She didn't know what to charge for the pie, so I asked her who cooked it, thinking that if someone else did, I could tell her not to charge us very much because it was the worst pie I ever ate. She said, proudly, "I baked it," and I didn't have the heart to tell her how awful it was. She only charged \$2, which was pretty cheap considering Canadian prices, so I let it drop. I kept telling her I had two cans of soft drink, but she seemed not to enter anything for these, maybe because she was embarrassed that she didn't know what to charge for them, either. She then opened the register after charging us \$10.34, but she closed it without making change for our \$20. She really panicked when she was unable to re-open the cash register and couldn't find anyone to help her. So, she entered the items again, but this time, after she pressed \$795 for Kathy's BLT without entering the proper decimal, she pressed-in some strange numbers for my pie. The cash register flew open with something like \$8,217.00 on the read-out. She was about to close the drawer to try again when I shouted, "Wait, PLEASE give us the change, first!" And she did. She stood staring at the read-out while Kathy and I ran out of the place, jumped in our car, and tore out of the driveway laughing like mad at whole funny episode, but wanting to put some distance between us and the grump who might have been the owner and thought we had skipped out on a big bill.

After the incident at Café Dementia, the road improved markedly. This part of the Cassiar is well paved with centerline and white lines on both sides to mark the shoulder. We were able to sail along through the beautiful, large timber at the posted speed limit of 60 mph. We stopped and photographed several black bears and then came to Meziadin Junction on the Cassiar Highway about 5:00 p.m. I was tempted to drive west to see the little town of Hyder, Alaska, but it was 40 miles away. However, the Milepost guide said that only 15 miles west we could see Bear Glacier along the valley through which the road runs AND hanging glaciers, so we took what was supposed to be a quick side-trip. Bear Glacier was spectacular--a mountain glacier flowing down into a

lake. It used to calve there, but we could see a thin line of beach between the edge of the ice and lake, and no icebergs. Global warming is working its wonders here, too. While there, Kathy happened to mention that just beyond Hyder she had read about a bear-viewing boardwalk operated by the US Forest Service (Tongass NF). Since bear viewing was high on our list of wildlife things to do, and we didn't get to fly across Cook Inlet to some of the more famous salmon-eating bear sites, Hyder caught our attention. And then we read that this was one of the few places where you could see both black and grizzly bears fishing for salmon. Man-o-man, there was nothing to hold us back after learning that. We still had about three hours of light left, and Hyder was only 25 miles away, so we went for it, and we are so glad we did.

The drive took us down a deeply incised glacial valley that terminates in a wonderful fjord called the Portland Canal, which forms the southern border between Canada and Alaska. We passed through the town of Stewart, British Columbia, a quaint little town that looked appealing, and then we drove down the north side of Portland Canal about three miles to the border crossing, which was a Canadian customs house on the left hand side and nothing on the right hand side. Immediately beyond we passed around the headland between Portland Canal and the Salmon River Valley, another deep glacial valley and entered Hyder immediately. Hyder is really a remote destination. It has the feeling, still, of an old Alaska fishing village, nestled among tall, glacier-hung mountains, and on the shore of a braided glacial river. The tall, dark, temperate rainforest is classic southeastern Alaska Sitka spruce and Western hemlock. The place had a fantastic ambience. We loved it right away. The only drawback was the typical rainforest climate of cool, humid, and rainy weather.

We passed through Hyder on a gravel mining road that leads more than 25 miles up the Salmon Glacier Valley, stopping 3.0 miles from Hyder at a clearwater river where the US Forest Service has constructed a very nice elevated boardwalk along about 170 yards of the stream for viewing bears fishing for salmon. We were told that salmon don't run up the river until sometime in July because further up the canyon a glacier impounds the river and keeps the flow too low for salmon to migrate upstream. But when the ice finally goes out the increased volume of water permits salmon to run and the bears to come. We saw hundreds of coho salmon in the clear stream, spawning. Mew and Glaucous gulls, and a tern were common, eating the remains left from bear feeds. An occasional bald eagle flew by, and ravens were common, but shy.

We were pleased to get free passage (from the \$5 per person per day fee) because of the \$10 lifetime Senior Parks Pass I purchased back in the Badlands National Park of South Dakota. Kathy is included. We first were shown a sleeping black bear about 50 feet high up in the boughs of a huge hemlock tree, its feet and face facing us as it lay curled forward on its backside. I photographed lots of salmon in the river and we next saw another black bear that had climbed up into some low branches of another giant hemlock just below the boardwalk and about arm's length from it. You could almost reach out and touch the bear. We were told that the blackies sleep in trees to avoid predation from the much more dangerous grizzly bears. We returned to Hyder and encountered two more bears crossing the road. We were thrilled to find a very nice and

reasonably priced motel room at Grand View Inn. We were her only customers. She had no wireless and no television because the huge television dish that the city provides for residents was trashed in the deep snows of last winter and the town does not have funds enough to have it repaired or replaced! We had a fantastic meal of beer-battered freshly caught halibut and salmon stew in a quaint little café in a bus! We retired to a warm room and a clean bed and I fell to sleep early (10:00 p.m.) while Kathy read for a while.

Wednesday, 5 September 2007

We got up early to see the bears. First light was at 6:30, but it was too dark to photograph until about 7:30 a.m., partly because it was deeply overcast and drizzling (yuk!). At 7:00 when we arrived, there was a mother grizzly and three large cubs feeding in the river. They slowly worked their way downstream eating rotten fish on the banks and that were floating in the river. We did not see them catching fresh fish. The 1.5-year old cubs were a hoot, play fighting, standing on their hind legs facing each other, and growling over fish they didn't want to share. Mother mauled one pretty severely one time when it was too sassy.

At 8:30 a.m. we drove into Stewart, Canada, and had breakfast and hot coffee to warm up from the wet and cold morning, and to ready ourselves for another visit to the bears. We got back about 9:45 a.m. and either that same quartet of grizzlies or a different group were already feeding there. We got some more good photographs of bears. We had intended to leave after this second morning visit, so we drove back to Hyder a little after 11:00 a.m. and checked out of the motel. But our downfall was getting postcards for our two grandsons and niece. At the little shop where local postcards were available, the lady asked us if we had driven the 25 miles up the bear-viewing road to see Salmon Glacier. When we said no, she said we were missing one of the most wonderful drives and spectacular glacier views in all of Alaska. That did it. We bought our cards, mailed them, and were reinforced by her husband, the postmaster, who said we would never regret the drive. So we went.

En route we checked in at the bear-viewing boardwalk, but there was no activity, so we kept on up the braided river valley bottom for a couple of miles. Glacial rivers are usually hugely wide with bare gravels exposed between the many stream courses that braid their way down the valley. This is partly because of the huge bed loads of boulders and gravel and partly due to the volume of water during spring melts. Soon, however, we turned up a smaller valley with very narrow valley floor and steep mountains rising straight up on both sides at more than 45° angles. The road was built on the east side of this breathtaking valley, keeping some thousand or more feet above the valley bottom where the slope was slightly gentler (probably because it was above the top of the Pleistocene valley glacier that once almost filled this valley completely). The Pacific rainforest was superb as the road went up and up, with steep drops one could not look down for fear of falling. Kathy has special problems with precipitous drops and heights, but these scary heights were getting to me, too.

Well, that road was one of the most beautiful roads I ever drove. When it passed into Canada it became a much better road than the 10-mile portion in Alaska. British Columbia builds its roads from crushed gravel, as I explained in the Cassiar Highway journal entry of 3 September. Besides the many hanging glaciers and high, craggy mountain peaks, the valley floor below was spectacular to look at. About 15 miles from Hyder we came to a huge, hardrock, open-pit, gold-mining operation that had eaten away a large part of the mountainside. I was sickened to see some holding ponds that clearly contained arsenic and other chemicals from the chemical gold-extraction processes. At the 17-mile mark from Hyder, we came into view of the toe of Salmon Glacier and could see the scouring of the glacier on the valley sidewall, plus glacial water gushing from the glacier's foot. Then we drove onward for five miles, following the ever-growing glacier. I got some good photos of the glacier, but the photos do not do the scenes justice because, typically, depth of field is largely lost in photographs. What is so spectacular about this road is the breathtaking heights that the road ascends and the thousands of feet drops to the glacier below. Eventually, five miles after first seeing Salmon Glacier, we came to the summit of the road and an overlook that was the best of all sights—except that the dratted fog settled in and we couldn't see it. After sitting for some time, the mists cleared for a few seconds and I was amazed at the sight. Salmon Glacier made a sharp left turn, doubled in width, and we could see it disappear into an icefield beyond where only the tips of 5,000 – 6,000 feet high mountains were visible above the ice.

On the way back to Hyder, we stopped at the bear boardwalk again, of course, and were treated to two more wonderful episodes of bears. First, we watched a big, boar grizzly actually catching salmon from the stream and eating them. He worked the sides of the stream where the water was a little deeper and the bank was overhung with vegetation. There a few salmon sought refuge in some undercut banks, but were surprised by the bear who could trap them against the bank. We got some more good photos and then were told there was a black bear up at the beginning of the boardwalk. Sure enough, a large blackie was very close to the boardwalk eating fish. He was so close that I couldn't get his entire head in my frame using the 300mm lens. Kathy and I were standing at the rail of the boardwalk when the bear walked right up to us and was so close that the Forest Service personnel pulled us back and stood between the bear and us with the intent of using bear spray if the bear decided to climb over the rail. The bear went under the boardwalk, instead, and worked its way up a smaller branch of Salmon River, but along one part of the boardwalk. We followed and watched the bear catch and eat two salmon, getting all the photos we wanted.

What a day. We left Hyder at 4:45 p.m. in the rain--with misgivings. We yearned to stay longer in this wonderful place, but time and funds prevent it. We drove to the Meziadin Junction on the Cassiar Highway, and then 97 miles to the Amerindian town of Kitwanga and the terminus (or beginning, depending on your orientation) of the Cassiar Highway. We didn't like what we saw at Kitwanga, so we drove about 30 miles further on Canada Highway 16 to New Hazelton where we got a great room at a good price at Robber's Roost Motel. However, the meal we had at a Chinese restaurant was awful and I went to bed disgusted at what I ate for supper.

Thursday, 6 September 2007

I stayed up downloading more than 500 photographs that Kathy and I had taken during our Cassiar Highway and Hyder days, and then sent some images to friends and family and I went to bed about 12:45 a.m. We refused to eat breakfast in New Hazelton, so we drove about 45 minutes to Smithers and found a place where we had a good brekky. Canada Highway 16 is a very good, major east-west highway, with two good lanes, special third lanes for passing, and wide, paved road shoulders. I was surprised that the entire countryside from Kitwanga to Prince George, a distance of 298 miles, was very developed with towns, lots of agriculture, forestry, and people all along the way.

For lunch at a roadside stop we had some delicious smoked salmon that we had purchased in Hyder, and then we drove on until Kathy got really tired of the bone-grating squawking the driver's side windshield wiper makes, since we began having afternoon showers not far out of Smithers. She stopped at an auto parts store in a town named Vanderhoof and we purchased a replacement wiper that makes NO DRATTED NOISE. Hooray!

We drove on toward Prince George, a relatively large town. Across the Fraser River east of town, however, we were told that there are few towns and mostly wilderness all the way to Jasper National Park. This was verified when we crossed the river and stopped at a gas station to fill up because a sign said "No gas for 202 km." In Prince George we were aghast to hear that it is snowing in Calgary and we might be in for some snow in Jasper National Park. Egad!

Kathy drove all day so I could catch up in this journal. About dark at ~8:00 p.m. we wound up in McBride, B.C., a small town with three or four places to stay. It was raining so we sought a motel, stopping at two that charged \$89 and \$79 before we settled on the third one for \$69. It had wireless, but it wouldn't reach our room, so we had to access it sitting in the car out in front of the office.

Friday, 7 September 2007

I thought we had finished having wonderful days on this trip, but Jasper National Park was beyond my expectations, and memory. I last traveled through Banff and Jasper national parks in 1968 in a Volkswagen bug, en route to Alaska. It was May, so the mountains might have been obscured by clouds most of the trip. Today we first entered the Canadian Rockies by approaching the tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies, Mt. Robson (11,000+ feet elevation). Mt. Robson had fresh snow on its upper half and was spectacular to look at. We stopped at the visitor center, which has a grand view of the mountain, but the darned weather kept the mountain obscured for most of the time. We did get fleeting glances of all of it, but never were the clouds gone long enough for a good photograph of the whole mountain. Mt. Robson was a wonderful introduction to a grand day driving down the Fraser River Valley with high peaks rising out of the V-

shaped valley straight up on both sides of the canyon. There were so many beautiful mountain scenes that I stopped the car dozens of times to get photographs. And stopping on the road was pretty safe because we had to pay \$17.50 to drive what they call the Icefield Parkway. It is Canada's National Park highway to show off Banff and Jasper national parks, so mostly park traffic drives it.

After many stops to view and take photos, we came to the most spectacular views of all: Athabasca Glacier flowing down from the Columbia Ice Field. The Columbia Ice Field sits on a drainage divide giving its meltwaters off into three oceans: Arctic, Pacific, and Atlantic! I don't think there is any other place on the North American continent that can make that boast. This is a wonderful phenomenon of biogeography. Animals that live in each of the three drainage systems can be found in the waters draining the Columbia Ice Field.

The Athabasca Glacier runs down its valley and terminates close to the highway, so you can walk up to its toe (and onto part of it if you dare—it's dangerous). There is a large, government-run Chalet/Information center nearby, from which you can take a special tour bus onto the glacier. We arrived too late (after 5:00 p.m.) to take the \$35 per person tour, but we may have been tempted to do so had we gotten there earlier. The highway (Alberta Hwy 93) runs over a pass at this point that is over 6,000 feet high. While we were walking onto the glacier, what was a sunny sky suddenly turned cloudy, the temperature dropped, and snow began to fall. We drove a few miles beyond as daylight waned thinking about whether to camp out or drove on to Lake Louise to get a room, but the exorbitant prices for motels and meals in the parks deflected us into the Waterfowl Lake Campground, nestled among dense conifers. The 116-camping spot campground wasn't very occupied, so we had it largely to ourselves.

As we put up the tent, the temperature dropped into the low 40s and a cold rain began to fall. I sat out in the cold rain cooking our supper of warmed canned soup, and then we ate it in the car. Kathy and I read until about 10:30 p.m. Eventually, the rain stopped and we were able to climb into our tent and try to snuggle into warm sleeping bags to spend the night. I doubled Kathy's sleeping bag, since she slept somewhat cold the previous night that we camped out. I fell into the deep slumber of a hibernating bear and tried to ignore my cold feet. Meantime, the temperature outside continued to drop.

Saturday, 8 September 2007

We woke about 6:30 a.m. but it was too damned cold outside to get up, so we pulled the sleeping bags tight around us and snoozed off again. At 7:20 we knew we had a long way to go today, so we got up and discovered ice on our car. Brrrrrr. We left camp at 8:00 and drove south, watching the temperature drop outside from 34°F to 30, then slowly to 29, 28, 27, 26, 25, and finally reach 24°F. Egad! Just past our campground and only a hundred feet to two in elevation higher, we entered a long stretch with about an inch of snow all over everything. The snow had fallen while we were sitting in the car last night. Had we driven only five miles further south to an overflow

campground (and we almost did) we would have woken with snow on our tent and car. It's clear to Kathy—with all my grumbling about it—that I don't like COLD!

Banff National Park was not so spectacular this morning as we passed through it because about 8:30 a.m. an overcast sky developed and hid all the mountains. Moreover, I think the Canadian Rockies in Banff are farther from the roadside than in Jasper, so the scenery might not be so breathtaking as the drive through Jasper N. P. There is no special fee to drive through Banff N. P., and the Parks Highway becomes Trans-Canada Hwy #1 for a while, with lots of trans-Canada traffic on it. The major towns along the highway through Banff N. P.--Lake Louise and Banff--are horrible tourist traps with all the commercial BS that I abhor so much. I did not have a good time passing through Banff N. P., therefore, so we exited the park just past the town of Banff and soon entered Alberta prairie country. The road became freeway driving with agriculture, farms, and as we approached Calgary, huge numbers of tract houses and suburban development. It was so yukky that I turned over the driving to sweet Kathy, who doesn't like such driving any more than I do. Travel through Calgary on the freeway was much like passing through any big city on 4- to 6- to 8-lane freeways.

In the afternoon we drove relentlessly on through prairie country now besotted with agriculture—wheat fields, mainly. We had a nice lunch in a little mom-and-pop café in downtown Nanton, and then continued on through Lethbridge towards the Canada/US border at Coutts/Sweet Grass. We passed Highway 36 at Warner at 5:25 p.m., and re-joined the route we took into Canada a few weeks ago. This junction is where we turned off towards Drumheller, Alberta, to see the famous dinosaur museum. Beyond Warner we only recrossed our path north to Alaska when we traveled to the Cassiar Highway from Whitehorse six days ago.

We crossed the US/Canadian border about 6:00 p.m. and drove south, trying to get as far into Montana as we could before we could drive no more. We were intent on finding a cheap motel, since we had a showerless night on the cold ground in Banff NP last night. We were tempted to stay in Shelby when we passed through, but we persevered since I-15 was lightly traveled and we could go 75 mph legally. I-75 went through rolling wheat fields in “big country” of the open west. Huge thunderheads were sparsely visible with obvious snow and sleet falling, not rain. The outside temps were in the 40s.

We were ready for Great Falls, however, so Kathy shopped in our AAA book for motels and we turned off the interstate at the first exit. We were shocked with pleasant surprise when we were told that the room at the Central Hotel would be only \$50 per night. We took it, one of the cheapest motels we have stayed in, and one with two large bedrooms and a kitchen and very clean. It was the best motel for the bucks we have found on the whole trip. We had to drive all over Grand Falls to find a restaurant, however, settling on a Chinese restaurant in spite of our bad experience a few nights ago. The food was not bad. We turned in and went right to sleep.

Sunday, 9 September 2007

Whatta day. We left Great Falls on US 89 rather than I-15. I wanted to get a taste for the Montana countryside, passing through old towns, and approaching Yellowstone on a two-lane road rather than race through the landscape on an interstate with all the development that you find at the interchanges. We were rewarded in spades for the decision, BUT almost paid for it with our lives.

US 89 goes through the Little Belt Mountains and follows a lovely, deep valley to the mountains. We drove through some picturesque small towns then ascended to King's Hill Pass (7,393 ft) in the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The scenery was spectacular and well worth the drive. Nearing the summit of the pass, we encountered a heavy snowfall, some of which had already stuck to the trees and ground, maybe half an inch. I found a couple of miles of the highway a little slick because the outside air was in the low 30s and snow, sleet, and small hail had fallen.

We got down out of the Little Belt Mountains and were driving through some more rolling terrain when we began to approach a large, black cloud over the highway. I was tooling along at 70 mph, the posted speed limit, when we ran into the leading edge of the precipitation. At first it was rain, but quickly began turning into sleet. The road was wet ahead, and what I didn't know, the road was covered in about ¼ inch of frozen hail and sleet—and slippery. As we progressed down the wet, two-lane road (but with wide, paved shoulders) I saw three cars were approaching from the other direction. I decided to disengage the cruise control by touching the brake. When I did, the tiny bit of braking caused the car to begin to slide and fishtail, turning our nose towards the on-rushing traffic. For about 3 seconds we were in the most potentially dangerous situation we have been in during this trip. I was trying to slow the car by not stepping on the brakes too hard, and then I had to try to get the vehicle under control so we wouldn't hit the oncoming car head-on. I turned the wheel slightly right and the car slowed by dint of its motor slowing down and I did get control of the sliding. Gasp! We were both frightened nearly to death by the scare.

After that we continued into Livingston, a large western town on I-15, and Kathy demurred and let me have some Mexican food (she isn't the big fan of it as I am). I needed something to settle my frazzled nerves after the fishtailing incident. I was quite surprised that the tamale I ate was really good. The masa was very light and airy and not hard and mealy like it is in many tamales. We then drove on down US 89 following the Yellowstone River to Gardiner, Wyoming, at the northern entrance to Yellowstone NP. I used my senior lifetime pass again to get us into the national park free. The original one-time \$10 fee has served us very well on this trip. Right away we learned two things: 1) the present federal government administration has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on a war nobody wants except the President and his cronies and has ignored many of the government services back home such as horrible roads in national parks that are in desperate need of repairs, and 2) even though this is not the high season, there are lots of cars and people in the NP.

There were hundreds of people around the Mammoth Hot Springs Visitor Center, and dozens outside watching and photographing a herd of elk sitting on and eating the lawn. Park officials kept people at a safe distance, but the elk were allowed to and go anywhere they pleased. We drove east from Hot Springs, ascending the mountains towards Mt. Washburn on the edge of the Yellowstone Caldera, that monster volcano that forms the main part of Yellowstone and its hydrothermal natural features. On the way to the Washburn Pass, we had several great wildlife stops. First, we spotted a coyote hunting for grasshoppers and anything else it could find in a meadow close to the road. I got some great photos of it. Then we had about 5 buffalo sightings. But the best of all was on a high part of the road where we could look out over thousands of acres of woodland interspersed with large, grassy meadows. We pulled off and watched a pack of timber wolves hunting as a group down in the valley below. Three of the eight were black(ish) and the others were typically gray. We watched for at least 30 minutes. It was a great sight.

When we topped Dunravin Pass (8,850 feet) we could see across the landscape over hydrothermal vents all the long way to a line of mountains that mark the eastern rim of the monster caldera. I got some photos, with the Yellowstone Valley cutting into the center of the caldera. During the drive from Hot Springs to Dunravin Pass the temperature was dropping and we went through a few spots where it was snowing, sleeting, or raining. At the giant petrified redwood the sleet and rain were so heavy that we did not get out of the car to walk up to it.

We got to the Canyon Visitor Center and learned that no rooms were available. We wouldn't have paid >\$250 that they were charging, either. We also learned that there was a 45-minute wait to be seated in the restaurant, so we purchased some elk salami and crackers in the grocery store and headed for the Yellowstone Falls. We got to the Lower Falls about 30 minutes before sundown. The sky was now clear and the sun casting some beautiful light into the spectacular canyon. Photographs never do scenery the justice such scenes deserve because depth of field is never very good in a two-dimensional photograph. I have seen photographs of Yellowstone River Canyon and Falls before, but until I laid my own two peepers on the scenery, I had no idea just how spectacular and beautiful it really is. Kathy and I took lots of photos down into the canyon from various look-outs, but at the Lower Falls stop, I left her on the upper outlook while I climbed down into the canyon on the trail to the overlook about 500 feet below. I got some shots as the sun was really just about down, so the falls and the canyon were in shade, but uniformly lit. The walk back up to the top of the trail took me 13 hard minutes of heavy breathing and heart-pounding walking. I am out of shape from 40-some days sitting on my duff in an auto on a 12,000-mile trip, plus the elevation there is about 8,000 feet, making for thin air and reduced oxygen availability. I was very tired after that climb.

We then drove in the dark towards the west, eating our elk salami (it was goooooood!), and spotting a large, bull elk on the road. We found a space in the Norris Campground and had an unfortunate accident while pulling into it. When I made a sharp left turn into the space, the right bumper grazed a large log bordering the parking space. The car almost cleared the log, but the bumper went over one end of the log and got hung

up. On the car-side of the log was a slight drop-off, which kept the tire from having any traction when I tried to back-up. Although Kathy's Saturn is an all-wheel drive vehicle, it couldn't pull the car off the log. Besides, had it done so, it might have pulled off the bumper! We were so tired we just left it hung up and we pitched our tent and crawled in for a bad night's sleep.

Monday, 10 September 2007

Oh what a night! The space we got stuck into had no really flat ground on which to pitch our tent, so I slept uphill from Kathy last night and on top of some troublesome roots, as well. Also, I slept on our air mattress that loses air and I woke up aching where my bones touched the hard ground. Worst of all, it was cold as all get-out overnight, so we didn't get out of the tent until after 7:30 a.m. At that time the car's thermometer registered 21°F! And the water all around was frozen stiff. We slept through a hard freeze. Ugh! After getting the stiffly frozen tent and sleeping materials packed, we faced getting the car out of its dilemma. That was easy, since I have lots of experience with stuck vehicles. I jacked up the right front tire so that the bumper was elevated above the end of the log on which it was hung up and then I quickly backed off the jack. The car came free and, I hope, with not much damage. I can't see it all because Kathy has a black sports "bra" fitted over the front to keep rock-dents and bugs to a minimum. We finished the elk salami and crackers for breakfast. So went the morning of our second day in Yellowstone.

We stopped at several hydrothermal sites and walked around viewing their beauty and oddity, seeing geysers, pools of boiling water, and pots of bubbling mud at a stop called Artist's Paint Pot. We saw a nice herd of buffalo on one large meadow, and another coyote right in the middle of the road. We passed it and backed up before it moved. We got to Old Faithful about noon and sat down to a nice lunch of hot barley-vegetable soup. My stomach wasn't feeling very well, so I had a two-scoop Sunday with a banana that I purchased to make a poor-man's banana split. It was goooooood.

Then we went out to the huge semicircular arena of benches now constructed to view Old Faithful and sat for 45 minutes until she blew. I last viewed Old Faithful with Mary Helen on our trip to Alaska in 1968. At that time we did not stop for viewing anything else. Old Faithful was spectacular enough, but Kathy and I could see other geysers in the distance that were also erupting periodically. Again, since September 10 was well after the main visitor season and many of the park facilities are already shut down, I was disgusted with all the people here. There were well over 500 people sitting on the benches to watch the 1:05 p.m. eruption.

After Old Faithful went off, we walked the lovely boardwalk around many of the geysers and other hydrothermal phenomena in what is the largest aggregation of geysers in the world. It was very spectacular and worth the walk. When we got to a geyser named "Giant," we sat on a bench and waited for it to erupt. Giant is said to have the largest volume and be higher than even Old Faithful, but it is not so predictable in time.

The sign said it was due to erupt between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., so we sat there from 1:45 p.m. until it did erupt, late, at 3:45 p.m. It was really worth it. A small opening called Turban first bubbled out some hot water and then we saw the hot water pool below Turban begin to have waves. Soon Giant erupted out of the pool quickly, and spectacularly, high into the air. And we sat within only about 150 feet of it! It continued to erupt for 7 minutes, and then a second time for a shorter period, giving us a really wonderful show that we felt was well worth the wait. When it was over, the pool was completely drained.

We knew then that it was time to leave Yellowstone. Although there are many features worth visiting in Yellowstone, one must come here and spend at least a week doing all the wonderful things to do—especially on trails that you have to walk and get away from the madding crowds. We headed out of Yellowstone about 5:00 p.m. and drove through the northern part of Grant Teton NP. We took US 287 west and drove as far as I could stand to drive, stopping about dark in a little town called Dubois, Wyoming. We got a room in a Super8 Motel for a good price and then had to wait in the local restaurant for one hour before our food came out of the kitchen! The only thing on the menu that was appealing was grilled hamburger steak (Kathy had) and Chicken-fried Steak (which I had). Both were surprisingly very good and the long wait was somewhat dulled by the quality of the entrées. We were very tired tonight and welcomed a good sleep in a warm room with a convenient toilet.

I guess something must be said about our toilet. When camping out, poor Kathy has to get out of her warm sleeping bag cocoon and go out into the cold night air to bare herself to the elements. I need to urinate several times at night and have found a solution. I take a plastic gallon Ziploc bag into the tent and simply lie on my side to urinate—carefully—in it. The only problem is making sure it is tightly zipped up and stored where it won't leak or spill. I felt guilty this morning when Kathy had suffered all night holding it in (it was really cold) and I triumphantly tossed out a bag half-filled with my night's pee when we got up.

Tuesday, 11 September 2007

We got up about 8:30 this morning and had a crummy continental brekky downstairs in the motel. We were on the road again by 10:00, but immediately spied a shop with antler do-dads, and I had to stop. I almost purchased a large chunk of Wyoming jade, but settled for a couple of pronghorn horns. Pronghorns belong to the family Antilocapridae, the only family of ungulates that shed the horny sheath over their bony horns underneath. Bovids such as cows and buffaloes have horny materials over bone that they never shed. And, of course, cervids are the deer, elk, moose, and others that grow and shed bony antlers annually.

The drive today was scenic, crossing SE diagonally through Wyoming on US 287. There were some beautiful mountains and hills, some with red and tan “painted” sedimentary layers and others revealing ancient beds of volcanic ash and lava. I was

unaware how good the rock hunting is along this stretch, but learned about it when we stopped in Rawlins for lunch. After lunch, I stopped in a rock shop advertising Wyoming jade and was informed by Bill, the owner, about the two classes of jade, nephrite and jadeite. Both the Wyoming and Cassiar jades are of the more common nephrite type. Bill had some cut chunks (not polished) of Wyoming jade, a couple of which would make good book ends. He was selling it at \$20 per pound. Bill told me that Wyoming jade is very rare because most of it has been purchased by Chinese and Japanese merchants and that he probably had some of the last of it for sale. I rather doubt that, thinking that his statement was a come-on for me to make up my mind to purchase a piece. However, I thought, if Wyoming jade really is rare, I would be more interested in purchasing a piece. It is darker green than the Cassiar jade, and some is quite black.

I became interested in having a piece of Wyoming jade to go with my Cassiar jade, so I asked Bill what was the best price that he might give me for one piece that weighed 9.5 pounds. At \$20/lb that would have been \$190, but he thought a moment and said \$125. I said, "Great, I'll just go and fetch my checkbook," and I did. When I was writing out the check, he said, "That'll be \$105 with tax." I hesitated writing a moment, then asked him, "Are you sure it is \$105?" emphasizing the \$105. He said yes again, so I made out the check for \$105. He handed me a receipt that he had made out for \$105. I didn't press him about what happened to the other \$20, and I walked out of his shop a happy customer. The stone was supposed to have come from near Jeffrey City a short way back up US 287 from Rawlins. I'll have to have the one or two sides polished that are cut.

We drove through Denver and then got onto I-70 east. The drive from Wyoming to Denver was uneventful and uninteresting. We found a motel in Limon, Colorado and turned in after driving 529 miles today. We now are on interstate highways heading for home through some boring country. Tomorrow will be less interesting than today. And after crossing the Mississippi River we will be in eastern US with development, people, and traffic all the way home. We are not looking forward to it.

Wednesday, 12 September 2007

Today we got on the road at 8:00 a.m. and drove 637 miles from Limon, Colorado, to Columbia, Missouri, passing entirely through boring, flat, agricultural Kansas. I was tempted to stop at the Sternberg Museum in Hays, but we need to make time since we have to be in Atlanta on Thursday evening so that we can make it back to Tallahassee Friday afternoon. Kathy wants (and needs) two days of down time before she has to go back to the office. The only other thing that happened in Kansas of note was seeing dozens of pronghorn antelopes along the roadside fence within 100 miles of Kansas City.

We drove until 8:00 p.m. and spotted a sign advertising rooms at a Motel 6 for \$33. There was an Olive Garden Restaurant nearby, so we had some good marinara sauce on angel hair pasta and eggplant Parmesan, then got a room for \$39 (the two of us).

That is the cheapest motel room we have had on the entire trip! Nothing of natural history note to record for the horribly boring day on the interstate system. Tomorrow will be grueling.

Thursday, 13 September 2007

We left the motel at 7:00 a.m. even earlier than yesterday morning so we can make the long drive to Atlanta. St Louis was a mess, with traffic on I-70 backed up from construction. We were glad to be out of there. Kathy and I take turns driving, so the stress of a long haul is relieved a little. The day was one of persevering down the interstate highway system. We had white-knuckling through Nashville and Chattanooga, a few construction sites, and entering Atlanta. Nothing much to mention because we were not sightseeing, just making time down the highways. We got into Atlanta at 8:30 p.m. after driving 637 miles. We ate supper at a diner near Kathy's Mom's home, and then turned in for a deep sleep because driving so far two days in a row is tiring.

Friday, 14 September 2007

A boring drive home down I-75, Georgia 300, and then US 319 to Tallahassee. We were tired and ready to get home...BUT...the thrill of traveling leisurely in wonderful places is in our blood. We'll be back to Alaska in 2009 to celebrate my 50<sup>th</sup> Anchorage High School reunion. The anticipation is building already.

45 days on the road, ~12,000 miles of driving—all worth every minute, AND every dime. Unfortunately, it did cost a few dimes!