

Alaska And Return the Long Way

by Richard and Barbara Cleaveland

This diary was originally published chapter-by-chapter and posted by email to our closest relatives and neighbors. We are republishing in this (considerably edited) form for uploading to our web site as a possible aid to those who may be interested to making a similar trip in the future. By way of background, we had a relative get all our forwarded mail, review it, and send us appropriate information about it via email, as well as forward important stuff to us at various stops along the way. Of course this required us to periodically find a way to connect. Our motor home was a 1989 31 foot Winnebago Super Chief. Readers are reminded that this trip took place in 1991, and things have probably changed since then.

Chapter I

The first leg - Home to Phoenix

May 15, 1991: Got underway at 0830, headed out route 66 then down 81 as far as a little town called Hungry Mother, where we stayed at the (grin) Hungry Mother Campground. Pleasant weather all along, a bit hot but clear and sunny.

May 16, 1991: Underway at 0830. South on I81 (stopped for 67 gallons of gas - 6.7 mpg) then over to I40 and on to Lebanon, Tennessee for a gathering of the GOOD SAM club. We arrived at 2:30 (central daylight time now) and joined about 200 other RV's parked in the state fair grounds, and they're still coming in. First activity is a nacho and cheese party followed by dancing. Hot and a little humid but nice breeze outside - although it's nice having the air conditioning working as the humidity is very high.

May 17, 1991: Left for a Nashville city tour at about 9 AM. The tour group was only about 20 people; we were in a mini-bus driven by a part time disk jockey/drummer/sax player. His patter was quite entertaining, and the tour extensive - we didn't get back until 2 PM! Saw Music Row, the Ryman Auditorium, had a chance to visit the country music hall of fame, saw a replica of the Parthenon (!) and so forth. Impressive was the small size of the "big" recording studios here, most of them were converted homes. The driver said that they have better acoustics than the usual "built for it" studios, but I find that hard to believe. Saw the homes of many of the country music stars and the house that Dolly Parton lives in while here.

That evening there was a "grand opening" of the "Samboree," with the majority of the attendees wearing their Good Sam jackets adorned with patches commemorating their participation in previous events, offices held in their state and local organizations, and so forth. After that there was a show put on by some young cloggers, including a little gal of about 4 or 5 who sang some pretty grown-up country songs.

May 18, 1991: The day started with a pancake and sausage breakfast in the main hall. Considering the mass production required to serve something like 500 people it was pretty good. The rest of the morning was spent reading and generally loafing, in anticipation of the afternoon's planned visit to the Grand 'Ol Opry.

The Grand 'Ol Opry was the high point of the visit to Nashville. We attended a matinee performance, it was a little shorter than the usual evening WSM radio broadcast performances are, but there were no commercials to break things up so I figure we got the same amount of entertainment. The show opened with Porter Wagoner and closed two hours later with Roy Acuff, still going strong in his 80's. In between were various other lesser known but excellent country western stars. I was personally impressed with the Riders of the Sky, a trio that did some of the old westerns and who seem to be up and coming in the CM world.

May 19, 1991: Underway in time to get to the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's estate, by opening time at 9 AM. The tour was excellent. Each tourist was given a cassette with earphones, and the tape told one where to go and then described the scene. Very well done, and easily paced as there were "pause here" spots on the tape that prevented one from getting out of synch. The home and grounds were impressive, especially the garden that was his wife's hobby until her death just before he was sworn in to the presidency.

From there we headed south from Nashville to Birmingham, and stopped for the evening at the Oak Mountain State Park just south of Birmingham. It was a beautiful place, nicely isolated camp sites with full facilities, and only cost \$10.75 for the night. We called the couple we were going to visit in Mississippi when we settled in for the first use of our cellular phone while roaming.

May 20-21, 1991: It was a pleasant drive from Oak Mountain to our host's place in Pass Christian; overcast and some rain but not much of it heavy.

May 22-23, 1991: We left Pass Christian and headed toward Houston, stopping just shy of that metropolis (4th largest in the states, I heard). Just after leaving the dump station at the RV park where we spent the night I felt that my left leg had caught on fire, and I quickly removed my pants to discover ONE red ant on my leg. Maybe there were more and I didn't see them. At the place where we tanked up on propane the fellow there said those ants were the "welcome to Texas" travelers encounter. We drove around Houston on its beltway and went to San Antonio to visit the Alamo. I was surprised by the availability of parking in the downtown area on a workday; there was no trouble finding a parking lot for our motor home. We then went on to a nice state park just south of Austin (McKinney Falls State Park) to spend the night. This was the first day without rain since we arrived in Pass Christian.

May 24-27, 1991: It was only a relatively short hop from Austin to Plano, north of Dallas, where we moored for the long weekend (Memorial Day) in the parking lot of the garden apartments in which a relative lived. Astonishing; in the DC area where we live parking spaces in apartment areas are scarce as hen's teeth but here there were enough

spare spaces that we could park parallel in what normally would be about 5 or 6 spaces and nobody cared; there were plenty of spaces left. Our hosts took us to see both the well known and lesser known tourist spots in the area. We saw the Kennedy assassination spot, went to the stockyards in Fort Worth and visited Billy-Bob's, where many of the famous country singers entertain, and saw Southfork, where the Dallas TV show was filmed. We dined at the Trail-dust steak house, renown for its steaks and slide, the latter a never ending attraction for the junior set. The last night we treated with a dinner cruise on the Texas Queen, a paddle wheeler that circles Lake Ray Hubbard.

May 28,1991: From Plano we headed west through the oil fields around Big Spring, Midland and Odessa, and stopped for the night at Monahan's Sandhill State Park; a rather astonishing outcrop of sand dunes in the otherwise flat area covered with oil well pumps. When we stopped for gas near Odessa I chatted with a fellow waiting for the pump (takes a while to load up 69 gallons) and he explained to me why so many of the pumps were obviously idle. They are intentionally used only a part of the time, and it has to do with the oil field depletion allowance which, as I remember it, is a deduction one can claim on one's income tax for not pumping the wells dry as fast as possible. It was nice chatting with him, and when we left he gave us each a very nice ballpoint pen sporting the name of the gas pipeline company he worked for. This evening was the first I can recall where we were outside the range of any cellular phone service - although the reason may have been the sand dunes which were higher than our motor home.

May 29, 1991: The day started with a bang, so to speak. We awakened at 12:30 AM to our weather alert warning of severe thunderstorms one county over, and then the winds hit, shaking our motor home (even though it was up on jacks) so that there were times we thought it might overturn. The sand was whipping up against the sides, and I wondered how much paint would be left in the morning. Then the weather alert went off again about 1:30 AM and the warning was for our county - and there was a report that the local Sheriff's office had reported gusts of 84 miles per hour! By morning, however, things had calmed down, and an inspection showed that there was no apparent damage. Sand HAD filtered in the small cracks in the windows, however. The night's experience was soon forgotten, as we watched a lone prairie dog foraging near our campsite.

We proceeded to the Guadalupe Mountains over a washboard road (Texas 54) that passed between ranches; on the trip that took about an hour we saw no more than 10 other vehicles until we hit the US highway that actually goes up into the mountains. The view of El Capitan was impressive, and the scenery throughout was magnificent. We then went on to visit the Carlsbad Caverns and were duly impressed with the size of the cavern and the variety of the formations. They are now into the self-guided tour system, where each person can use a small radio that provides informative talks at various points along the trail. This is much better than the old group-guided tours that are still used in so many places, because each person can proceed at his or her own pace. After leaving the caverns area we headed into the town of Carlsbad to spend the night. It was the hottest place in the state that day, 100 degrees.

May 30, 1991: From Carlsbad we headed through Albuquerque to Gallup, fighting side and head winds of about 30 mph all the way, and climbing to an altitude of 7000 feet. The humidity we had experienced since leaving home finally was replaced by the dry air for which New Mexico is known. We had dinner in the town of Gallup, and stayed in the Red Rock State Park just outside of town. The town of Gallup is long and narrow, all along the old route 66 and the railroad tracks (the new I40 bypasses the town proper).

May 31, 1991: An early start (time zones keep helping us that way) and we arrived at the Petrified Forest National Park by 9 AM and saw the beautiful painted desert and petrified forest sights in the cold drizzling rain. By the end of the day we had reached the Grand Canyon National Park and occupied a campsite hoping for better weather the next day.

We keep being surprised by the effectiveness of the Golden Age Passport issued by the National Park Service. At the Petrified Forest the usual \$5 fee was waived, at the Grand Canyon the \$10 entrance fee was waived, and the \$30 charge for three days camping was reduced to \$15. The park is nicely arranged, and we got here just in time to get one of the last sites large enough for our motor home. There are some sites which have water and electric hookups, but they were all taken so we are "roughing it" again on self-contained water and the use of the battery and generator for electric.

We had expected to end the day with grilled filets, but the on-again off-again drizzle changed to a mixture of sleet and snow, and despite numerous trips between the RV and the grill I couldn't manage to coax a charcoal fire to get hot enough, so we settled for Stauffer's Pizza and put the steaks back in the fridge for another day. We heard that the temperature back in DC was 99 degrees; here it was 42 with 30 predicted for tonight.

For the third night in a row there is no cellular phone service here; so much for my advice to friends and relatives to use that to contact us in case of emergency. We just have to have faith that no emergency has occurred or will develop that our knowledge of it would make a difference.

June 1, 1991: This morning, in light off-and-on drizzle, we walked to the rim of the canyon and along it for half a mile or so, had lunch at one of the lodge restaurants, then in the afternoon took a (free) bus tour of the eight miles of the rim towards the west. First thing in the morning I dug out our heavy winter jackets, and they were certainly welcome, as the temperature started out at about 35 and only managed to get up to the 60's in the late afternoon.

June 2, 1991: Today we devoted to exploring the canyon and videotaping various views. Walked the village area in the morning, took a tour of the east rim area in the afternoon and then viewed the sunset in the evening. The weather was fine, just a little cool, but the clouds weren't right for the spectacular sunset one can hope for.

June 3, 1991: We awoke at 5:50 this morning to a plaintive beeping from our propane gas detector. Concerned that it was a propane leak, we aired the place out (it was COLD) and then read the instructions. The problem was that, after three days of no external

power and no driving our batteries had dropped down to 10 volts and the gas detector didn't like that. Well, as long as we were up and planning to leave that morning anyway, we left, heating the place with the engine heater (and charging batteries as we went).

We elected to head for LA via Phoenix, pausing in Phoenix to do a laundry and relax (canyon viewing takes a lot of walking). When we hit Phoenix and settled in at an RV park in nearby Avondale it was in the 90's. After the laundry was done and I'd managed to talk the park manager into using her phone to check for computer mail we went for a brief swim in the park pool.

Chapter II

The Second leg - Phoenix to Prince George, BC

June 4, 1991: We drove from the Phoenix area to San Bernardino, a pleasant and interesting drive through the desert watching the various kinds of cactus change with the climate and noting the mountains that seem to rise right out of the desert.

June 5, 1991: The trip from San Bernardino to North Hollywood via the infamous LA freeway system was not as bad as we had been led to believe. Of course we traveled outside of the rush hours, but traffic kept moving at a good pace (10 m.p.h. or so over the speed limit of 55) and there were only a few zig-zag maniacs changing lanes and passing everyone - about one per minute. We visited a friend during the afternoon, then took a freeway up to a KOA campground in Sylmar, CA for the night. The weather was pleasantly cool; no need for air conditioning.

June 6, 1991: We drove up to Sunnyvale along route I5 and US101. It was interesting coming out of the mountains north of LA and entering the valley, then seeing the areas of desert which were irrigated - green sections in an otherwise inhospitable brown. We checked in at Mobileland Senior RV Park, right next to US101. As we "docked", the manager suggested we keep our connections off the ground as much as possible, and spray around the tires, as the ants were "coming up for water." We did as he suggested that night, and had no trouble.

June 7, 1991: About 10:00 we went to the Mountain View offices of CommSoft, where they produce the genealogical software that I use, and after some discussions went out to lunch with the staff. I found it especially interesting to meet some members of the staff that I talked to many times over the phone. After lunch Barbara and I went to Portola Valley to visit a friend who lives in The Sequoia, a retirement village there. We found her in good health and spirits, and after a bit of socializing over cocktails she drove us to a nice continental restaurant nearby, the Iberia, for dinner. Then we took the motor home back to the Sunnyvale location for the night. This time we didn't bother with spraying around the tires, and sure enough by the next morning we had a few ants living aboard.

June 8, 1991: Our trip to San Francisco from Sunnyvale was relatively uneventful until the very last moment; the exit we were instructed to take from I280 to the San Francisco

RV Park was closed - apparently damaged by the earthquake and not yet repaired. This required us to do a little imaginative re- routing, but we managed to find the place with little difficulty. The sites are compact - only about eight feet between motor homes - but that's adequate if the main purpose is to be near the city.

We first introduced ourselves to the public transportation system, each buying a three day pass for ten dollars; this lets one use any of the public transportation vehicles except BART just by flashing the pass. It paid for itself over and over during our stay.

After a lunch downtown we went to the Fisherman's Wharf area for sight-seeing and dinner. Barbara and I were very impressed by the extent to which the wharf area had been extended since she was here in 1964; it was only one pier then and now it seems to span about a dozen. We had dinner at Dante's on Pier 39, and were very pleased with it. During this day we were reminded about the temperatures in San Francisco; it was cool and there was a stiff breeze blowing most of the time. The second day of our stay I wore a sport coat all day to take advantage of both the extra warmth and the pockets for maps and so forth.

June 9, 1991: We first went to Ghirardelli square, a collection of craft and novelty shops near the Fisherman's Wharf area, then took a cable car up to the Mark Hopkins Hotel, and went to the top ("top of the Mark") for a Sunday buffet brunch. The price was a little steep (\$28 each) but the varieties of food, the quality of the food, and the view were magnificent. Entertainment was a harp-playing vocalist, who sang beautifully during most of the time we were there. Leaving, we walked to the cable car museum, which is the central power station for all the cable cars - the cables run through there and get their power from electric motors; everything is arranged so the public can get a good view of the operation. A trip back to the RV for a rest and to pick up the camcorder, and we retraced our steps (except for the Mark Hopkins) to get some video tape of the city. We had previously planned to find some Peking Duck in Chinatown for dinner, but after having eaten so much for lunch decided that dinner could be a lot smaller, so we snacked and then went "home" to the RV park.

June 10, 1991: In the morning Barbara did a washing at the RV Laundromat, and I went via bus to do some errands, then replaced the TV through-roof fittings, as they had become corroded, resulting in an erratic picture. The afternoon was spent touring Golden Gate Park. The breeze was quite chilly, but in a calm location with the sun out it was warm. In the evening relatives living in the area picked us up and drove us into Chinatown where we treated them to dinner. We ate at the Empress of China, but unfortunately we hadn't remembered that many places require advance notice for Peking Duck, and we were out of luck on that score. Otherwise, the dinner was fine, and we could watch the fog intermittently obscuring Coit Tower.

June 11, 1991: We left San Francisco and headed for Yosemite. Things went fine until we got well into Yosemite itself. The two lane road from El Portal into the park is extremely narrow - lane widths about what one would see on a country farm road - and along the drop-off edges they have a stone wall about two feet high. The road is VERY

winding, and on one of the right-hand curves there was a bus coming from the other direction and I gave him about an inch too much room; the right side of the RV scraped the wall with considerable cosmetic damage right where the basement hatches latch. Boo.

As we entered the park proper we discovered that all major campgrounds were already full, so we headed for Wawona campground, which is on a first-come, first-served basis. As we were maneuvering into a parking space there, the power steering and power brakes suddenly failed. It turned out that space was already taken, so we had to move to another. It is HARD steering a large motor home without power assist! Inspection showed that the belts were ok, and there was plenty of fluid, so I concluded that the power steering pump had failed. By then it was dinner time, so we called it a (bad) day and resolved to call our Good Sam Emergency Road Service in the morning.

June 12-13, 1991: The Good Sam Emergency Road Service came through; about 11 AM a tow truck showed up and towed us the 20 miles or so to the nearest garage. I told them I thought the power steering pump had failed, but it took them an hour (at \$60 per hour!) to reach the same conclusion. The new pump, of course, took a day to be acquired, then it took hours to install. The total bill was just short of \$500, and when they finished there was a loud whine from the power steering system which they insisted would go away after we have driven it for a while and air in the system had been purged. We spent the night of the 12th in the garage's driveway, then the next night in a nearby RV park.

June 14-16, 1991: Early on the 14th we went back up to the Wawona campground and selected a campsite. We made a phone call to the service manager of an RV repair organization in Fresno, and he confirmed that we might hear the howl from the power steering system for another four hours of driving or so, so that put our minds more at ease. We decided to stay for the weekend and leave for Sunnyvale on Monday the 17th.

We took a tour of the nearby Giant Sequoia groves, and were impressed by them. The "most photographed tree in the world" is the one which had been tunneled in 1881, and had been pictured many times with buggies or cars running through it. We found that it had fallen down in 1968, but that there was a similarly tunneled one still standing. One might expect that these huge trees had similarly huge tap roots, but they don't; their root system is shallow (about 5 feet deep) but very broad. It is said that each large specimen uses something like 1000 gallons of water a day during the growing season.

The rest of our stay was spent loafing or walking along the nearby river.

June 17-18, 1991: We returned to Sunnyvale, power steering system howling like a banshee all the way except for a period about half way there when it was a little quieter. A dinner at Chef Chu's restaurant Tuesday evening provided an interesting distraction. We had ordered Peking Duck several hours earlier, and when we arrived at the restaurant at first we seemed to be special people, but that feeling rapidly deteriorated when the waiter informed us that they were all out of pancakes but that we would be provided buns instead. After a little time - while we recovered from the astonishment - we asked to see

what these buns looked like. The waiter brought one out (along with his boss, apparently); it was in fact a bun: spherical, about three inches in diameter. We finally told the waiter and his boss that was totally unsatisfactory, and after a little Chinese chatter the waiter told us we would get pancakes. We did, and in fact they were quite good (as was the duck), much to our relief. We left wishing we could have known what the original problem was and what it was the boss had said to the waiter.

Much of our time in Sunnyvale was spend with a friend and picking up various and sundry items we needed to restock our larder and so forth. On the 18th, being still concerned with the power steering situation, we made an appointment with a local RV service organization for the next day.

June 19, 1991: We went to the RV place and then to a Chevrolet dealer; in the process the system was bled and the noise decreased considerably and we felt comfortable enough to continue our progress towards Alaska, although knocking on wood on behalf of the mechanical aspects of our motor home. We "docked" in Petaluma, CA, only about 100 miles north of San Francisco, at one of the nicest KOA's we have seen so far.

June 20, 1991: After a short run we stopped at the post office in Windsor, CA to check on the post offices in Washington state; we decided our next postal "drop" would be the town of Mount Vernon, Washington, and we'd pick up the mail next Monday. Then we went over to see the new offices of CommSoft in Windsor; they were very nice - all empty, of course, since they were planning to move in the end of this week. While looking around I met the building contractor's on-site representative, and after a little chatting he volunteered to let us use his telephone to check in to Compuserve. After doing this we proceeded up through the wine country into the Redwood area, staying for the night in a very nice campground in Myer's Flat. This campground had an interesting feature: the various sites were separated by bamboo clusters. This was great from a privacy standpoint, but it made looking around a little difficult. The drive, incidentally, went without much complaint at all from the power steering system - we could barely hear it, so at this point we have, at least tentatively, concluded that the work done in the Sunnyvale area was successful.

June 21, 1991: Our trip North from Myer's Flat was of mixed blessings. On the one hand we traveled through some of the most interesting and spectacular scenery we had experienced so far - redwood forests, rocky and sandy seashores, etc. On the other hand, the roads were generally two lane (sometimes one and a half marked as two!), very curvy and hilly. To a driver who had recently scraped the wall of a narrow road - or to one who had observed the scraping - the drive was nerve wracking. Especially scary were those cases with a narrow lane and a cliff off the right edge; this was frequent enough to cause us to decline the opportunity to continue up the coast on US101 and to head inland towards I-5. We spent this Friday night at the county-run campground at Selmac Lake. Again we lucked out with a beautiful spot - in the midst of young redwoods and other pines, full facilities and a nice beach. Before dinner I replaced the lavatory faucet assembly. For weeks now I had been bothered by a hot water tap that would turn itself off as soon as the water got hot. When I changed the washers I saw what the trouble was:

the designer had done it intentionally (it seems), as the shaft of the valve was made out of brass (which expands with heat) and the body of the valve was made of plastic (which does not). The new assembly solves the problem nicely (it's all brass). Beats me why manufacturers of expensive things try to cut corners on trivia.

For a change the evening was comfortable, so we could sit outside and have our cocktails without being chilled.

June 22, 1991: Back onto the interstates, then North to Portland. We discovered that Oregon is one of only two states that still does not permit self-serve at the gasoline pumps, and that it does not have any sales tax (yet). We stayed at an RV park on the north edge of the big city. Shortly after getting a slot we went out to a nice seafood restaurant for dinner (this WAS Saturday night!) and when we returned we found that the clerk had given somebody else our slot too - and he was in it. The clerk readily admitted the goof and gave us another (but less desirable) slot. While this park was a little nicer than most that are near a big city, it was far inferior to the one we had the previous night. It was on an island (Hayden Island) in the Columbia river, although it might as well have been in the middle of a plains area for all we saw of the water.

June 23, 1991: Our last Alaska-bound full day in the US (we believe) was spent traveling up I-5 to the town of Mount Vernon, where we had asked our niece to forward important mail to us at general delivery. It being Sunday we spent the night at a nearby RV park. For the first time on our trip we found a state park that operates on a no-reservation basis that was full, so we had to stay at a private park. The I-5 trip - and a short segment of I-405 around Seattle - reminded us of the Beltway around the DC area; heavy traffic even at Sunday noon. We wanted to check in via computer, but the attendant at the RV park was quite unfriendly (a rarity among RV park operators) and he wouldn't let us use his phone.

In order to find out what local number to call to get a computer connection to Compuserve one calls an 800 number. Not knowing whether the 800 numbers in the US were effective in Canada, I asked the AT&T operator; she called the Canadian 800 information operator and found a different number there. I will be interested to see if it works.

June 24, 1991: We picked up the mail sent to us at the Mount Vernon post office when they opened at 8:30, then proceeded north towards Canada. We stopped at a shopping center in Bellingham to replenish the larder, and while Barbara was busy doing that I dropped in at a nearby Radio Shack, where the manager was interested enough in the data exchange that we were involved in to let me use his phone to check in with Compuserve.

At the border we were inspected much more carefully than the average tourist; when I asked why I was told that they always checked Alaska-bound people more carefully to make sure they know what they're getting in for. One person, according to the customs inspector, said he was going up to spend the day in Alaska! We suspect they also found it hard to believe that we had no guns with us.

We spent much of the rest of the day in Canada getting familiar with the Milepost, a publication that details Alaska and Alaska-bound routes much in the same manner that the AAA does various routes with strip maps, only in much greater detail, listing, for example, each tunnel that the road passes through. Scenery again was spectacular as we went up the canyons and valleys of the Cascade Mountains. I have pretty much given up hope that I will find varied enough adjectives to describe the scenery along our trip. "Spectacular" will have to do, and so far has been unfailingly apt. We stopped in one town to change our money (\$1.12 Canadian per US dollar) and then took advantage of a British Columbia Provincial park just east of Lytton for the night. Very nice sites, well separated, but no water or electricity. Our power steering system continued to operate fine during this leg of the trip, so we are now pretty much convinced it is fixed for good.

June 25, 1991: The terrain today, as we went north, changed from craggy mountains to rolling hills to flat plateau and back to rolling hills again. During the trip we had our first experience with Canadian gasoline prices: \$1.72 per US gallon after converting the intake from liters and the charges to US dollars from Canadian. During the afternoon we had our first precipitation (rain) since the snow we had in the Grand Canyon. We settled in on the south edge of Prince George at a Good Sam park that had all facilities including CATV for \$14.55.

Chapter III

The Third leg - Prince George, BC to Fairbanks, AK and above

June 26, 1991: Last night we had a violent thundershower and heavy rain, but at least it washed some of the bugs off the front of the vehicle. We topped off the fuel tanks in Prince George before leaving; the price was \$.576 per liter, or \$1.76 or so per gallon US. We also stopped to get copies of Chapter 2 copied for mailing. Today's trip was a paradox. On the map it looked like the first leg would be hilly and curvy and the second leg would be easy; it was just the opposite. We had our first experience with long 10% downgrades; second gear alone wouldn't slow us down to a reasonable speed.

One thing we've noticed is the days getting longer as we move north. Sunset is 9:55 PM and sunrise 4:15 AM. Makes it hard to sleep our usual seven or eight hours when it's so light. It will get worse as we proceed. We put in this evening to Charlie Lake Provincial Park, at the junction of routes 29 and 97, where we finally join the Alaskan Highway. Again these Provincial Park campgrounds amaze us; the sites are all level and far apart, nice picnic tables are provided, and they even provide a good supply of firewood for campers to use. The fee of \$8 or so is collected by an operator that visits each camper in his site during the evening.

June 27-28, 1991: On the 27th we drove to just past Fort Nelson and on the 28th we proceeded to Watson Lake, in the Yukon. Although both drives included some good highway, in general it was the worst driving I have ever experienced or hope to experience. Washboard sections that threaten to destroy the motorhome by vibration

were frequent, and sections of loose gravel - even on tight curves with sharp dropoffs - were even more frequent, and two roadblocks in favor of "repaving" operations caused us to lose about a half hour at each place. The loose gravel - and indeed the rest of the road - was so dusty that by the time we got to Watson Lake one could hardly read the Winnebago logo on the front of our motorhome. We had to slow down many times because we couldn't see through the dust from the vehicle ahead. The RV park we elected to stop at provided free do-it-yourself vehicle washes with a night's stay; it took me a good hour to rinse the junk off. On the positive side, we did see some nice scenery and some wild mountain sheep. Summit Lake, where we woke up on the 28th, was a picture rivaling those of Lake Louise; mirroring the nearby mountains. At one of the roadblocks we were first in line and enjoyed conversing with the flag-woman. She told a few stories about people she's met in the process of her job; people who ask if they are on the road to Alaska (there's hardly any OTHER road for hundreds of miles), people who leave a rest stop and go the wrong direction, and people who have planned to go up to Alaska for the weekend. She said she hopes they don't fix the roads too well, as nice highways wouldn't fit in with the primitive atmosphere she wants to see maintained. Although she has the option to have her children get schooling totally through correspondence and in-home training, she plans to drive her oldest 50 miles three days a week so the benefits of classroom work will also be accrued. No school buses.

The way they fix the roads here, apparently, is to lay down and pack gravel, then lay down some asphalt, then another layer of gravel, then let it wear off. The gravel is cheap - just dig down a foot or so and there it is. I imagine it's expensive to get asphalt here; the only shipping method is truck, as the rail system gave out several hundred miles ago. What baffles us is why there are so many very bad patches close to areas that are fine. During one road block the vehicle in front of us had to be towed out of the soft dirt and gravel mix that we were directed to proceed through.

Weather here is quite changeable, with afternoon storms apparently common. The couple we experienced were minor, but we heard about some with large hail. Sunset is now 11:36 PM and sunrise 4:30 AM, with twilight in between.

During the evening at Watson Lake we attended a "Canteen show" - a weak attempt to mimic the USO shows put on during the building of the highway in 1942. The music was so-so (3 piece band plus gal vocalist) but the volume could better be characterized as an assault on the ears (if you can't play good, play loud) and the humor was only barely passable. Maybe that's what those USO shows were like; I don't know. The show was in a tent just behind the multiple milepost signs for which the community is famous.

June 29, 1991: The trip from Watson Lake to Whitehorse was a snap; for some reason the roads were much better and we could do 55 mph most of the time. We went "out" for lunch at a small one-store community, the Swift River Lodge. We both had brunch, and were astonished at the size and quality of the servings. During the afternoon there was considerable rain, however, so when we arrived in Whitehorse the vehicle was all dirty again.

In Whitehorse we managed to do a little shopping and placed a call to allay any fears and catch up on news since we had been out of computer touch for almost a week. Later we went out to Angelo's restaurant for dinner (it WAS Saturday evening) and had Greek(!) food. Turns out Angelo sold it to a Greek family, but they kept the name and still had pizza on the menu.

June 30, 1991: North from Whitehorse the roads started out nice but rapidly deteriorated to a wavy but generally not washboard surface. We had to slow down to about 25 mph to keep from porpoising ourselves right off the road. In Kluane (pronounced clue-AH-nee) we stopped at a bakery and stocked up on a few items. Normally such an event wouldn't be worthy of note, but towns here are so small, many times just one family running a gas station, that it was something finding a nice bakery.

There was a 45 minute delay as we started around Kluane Lake; even though it was Sunday the road crews were out improving the highway. There had been too much rock falling on the road over a short stretch of road at the lake edge, and they were blasting it out and carting away the debris. During the delay we chatted with a nice couple who lived in Whitehorse and were going up to Alaska to a square dancing competition; they gave us some good advice about the various areas. When we finally got going again there must have been about sixty vehicles in the group released by the flagwaver.

We called it quits at about 3:30 and pulled in to Lake Creek Yukon Territory campground, another one of those jewels Canada provides. This one came fully equipped with gigantic horseflies, but they were too big to get into the door of our motorhome so they didn't bother us much. I mean the openings in the door screen, of course.

July 1, 1991: Canada Day, equivalent to our 4th. The last hundred or so miles of the Yukon Territory was over roads that continued to porpoise when they weren't shaking and rattling our bones. We crossed into the US at about 10:30 AM and the highway immediately got better - and the time immediately became 9:30 AM. Although the roads today were much better than what we had been experiencing, they were not without an occasional loose gravel patch or long period of "frost heaves." We paused at Delta Junction long enough to pick up our "We drove the Alaska Highway" certificate, a bumper sticker to the same effect, a fishing license, and a (yesterday's) Fairbanks newspaper. It's amazing how one misses their daily paper; we haven't been in a town that had any for a week. We also bought an Alaska State Campgrounds annual pass for \$75; it permits one to use the campgrounds the state provides with no additional fee (which usually runs about \$6 per night). About 15 miles out of town we found a nice campsite near Quartz Lake and bedded down for the night. During the drive out of town we passed a woman on a bicycle who was towing a light 2-wheel trailer; she later camped in the site next to ours. She said she was from Juneau, had taken the ferry to Haines and been biking around ever since. Haines is about 400 miles from here as the crow flies. She said she likes to camp next to someone in case a bear comes to visit. While cleaning off the bugs from the front of the motorhome I found that one of our headlights was broken. I guess I should have believed that advice to get screens for them.

July 2, 1991: The trip to Fairbanks was brief but not without some sections of crummy highway, although all-in-all it was pretty good. The last leg of the trip, from Eielson AFB to Fairbanks, was on 4-lane divided highway, the first we've seen for a week. During the trip we were consistently disappointed by heavy haze which defeated our attempts to see the touted scenic views of nearby mountains. After arrival here we lined up an RV park (Norlite), both got haircuts (mine cost \$12, Barbara's \$19), registered for a campground space in the Denali National Park for July 14th to 18th, and discovered that the problem with the visibility was the nearby forest fires. There were 143 fires in the Fairbanks region, according to the (today's) paper we bought. Later we settled in at the RV park, and I tried without success to get the operator to let me use the phone to get my messages although she said that she'd have her computer-user son-in-law Mark get in touch with me during the evening to fix me up. A stiff thundershower came through about 5 PM and lingered as rain. It was nice being able to watch the CBS news again; Fairbanks has six TV channels. About 8 PM I made contact with Mark and used his line to get messages and send one off to her. Mark is working on the Motorola project "Iridium", which (in 1997) will link up with all cellular phone services and provide a satellite system to fill in the gaps between the regular cellular systems. It seems Fairbanks is going to be the system operations headquarters, and he's in charge of the control system development.

July 3, 1991: Today was stock-up and fix-up day. Besides the grocery shopping that was required we picked up a new headlamp to replace the broken one, some wire stone guards for the headlights to reduce the probability of another breakage, and a grease gun kit. We also located a welder who brought his truck around to weld a heat shield in place that had broken loose at one end. This shield is used to prevent too much heat from the exhaust line getting to the LP gas tank, and I presume it shook loose due to the rough roads we had been traveling. Besides installing the new headlamp and the stone guards, I rigged up a warning buzzer for the headlights. They are standard in all cars these days, why not in Motor Homes? Because of the very dusty roads up here one has to drive with headlights on all the time, and it's easy to forget them in the daylight.

This evening we went to Alaskaland. It looked like a typical "theme park", but it wasn't. It was free (except for a donation to the museum) and it contained many things of interest about the early days of the area. There were a lot of old mining and transportation machines, dog sleds, and so forth. The only "ride" was an old carousel. We attended a Salmon Bake (think of a clam bake) and both of us were impressed with the taste of Halibut, which was served as deep fried cubes.

July 4, 1991: Greased the front end and drive shaft of the motor home, and changed the oil and filters in the generator, and managed to exchange messages, thanks to Mark's hospitality. Just after dinner we walked to Alaskaland for a revisit to the gift shops; it started raining not long after we left and continued until we returned, bodies but not spirits dampened. We heard fireworks during the evening, but considering that the sun doesn't set until about 12:30 AM there wasn't any display worth bothering about.

July 5, 1991: We made reservations to take a flight to Point Barrow and Prudhoe Bay next Wednesday/Thursday, and to take the ferry from Haines to Prince Rupert (on the way home) departing 21 August (at 4:45 AM!). Then a little shopping (including for repair parts for the toilet, which has been acting up a little). We visited the University Museum, which contained artifacts of Alaska history, and then motored down to Cripple Creek Resort for dinner and a couple of shows, and a spot in their private RV park. The resort is built on the remains of a gold mining camp which closed in the 50's. The dinner, presumably a copy of those fed to miners, was a typically good buffet; it included reindeer stew (good) and Alaska Dungeness crab which Barbara had and reported was excellent. The shows were good too; the first was a slide show of northern lights visible here at other times of the year (when there's some dark) and the other was a variety show in the "Malemute Saloon" which included song and dance as well as excellent readings of Robert Service's "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Cremation of Dan McGee."

July 6-7, 1991: First thing was the repair of the toilet. After thinking about it a little while I discovered that it wasn't necessary to replace the (expensive) part, all I had to do was clear out some debris from the valve assembly. \$96.00 saved! The rest of the time these two days was spent loafing in the Chena River State Campground, which is in a wooded section of the city. I tried a little fishing without success. I suspect the locals thought I was crazy as I was the only one there on a beautiful Sunday afternoon; if there'd been any chance of catching fish there I wouldn't have been alone.

July 8, 1991: After a few errands we went on a cruise on the stern wheeler "Discovery." We were taken downstream on the Chena and the Tanana a few miles, and received a nice lecture on the history of the area, illustrated by a few of the things we saw along the shores. We saw a fish wheel in operation - a device which was turned by the river current and which lifted salmon out of the water and deposited them in a box. The salmon season was not open, but the principle was clear. The ship (160 feet long qualifies as more than a boat, I think) stopped at the remains of the old village Chena where we had a series of lectures on the history of housing, clothing and fur harvesting of the area as well as a demonstration of mushing by Mary Sheilds, a retired woman Iditerod competitor, and one of her teams. She pointed out it was a nice life she had, working only a few months in the summer then going into the woods (16 miles from the nearest neighbor) where she, her husband and the dogs spend the winter enjoying nature. Her husband does some wood working and she writes books. I made lots of videos which I can use to bore friends and relatives in the future.

July 9, 1991: This was laundry day; while Barbara was busy with that task I did a few minor maintenance items, then discovered that my new friend Mark was off on a trip to Georgia so I couldn't check in for messages. It occurred to me that, when you want money you go to a bank, why not go to the telephone company when you want a phone line? We stopped downtown at the offices of the local phone company, and the receptionist was quite helpful - in exchange for a demonstration of the process. It turns out they had recently installed a jack in the reception area so people could check out their telephone instruments there, so my hook-up was easy.

We had lunch in the Pump House restaurant, which we had seen yesterday from the Discovery. The restaurant occupied the (enlarged and remodeled) pumping facility that had been used to pump water from the Chena river to the placer mining facilities at Cripple Creek (which we had visited a few days ago). We enjoyed the buffet, which included a snow crab salad which was mostly excellent crab. We then went to visit Gold Dredge No. 8, north of town. The dredge was built in 1928 at the Bethlehem Iron Works in Pennsylvania and eventually was sledged up the Yukon during the winter by a team of tractors. We panned for gold in the area where the dredge would have been working if it hadn't quit due to labor troubles at the time that the veins were giving out in 1959, and managed to come up with a few flakes.

In the evening we read and watched China Beach on TV. I mention the latter because it is an example of Fairbanks TV. They must have to tape most of their satellite pickups, since there's a 4-hour difference from times on the east coast. Since they tape the shows, it removes their incentive to transmit "on the dot" - China Beach started four and a half minutes after eight. The local newscaster on Channel 11 is a lad in his early 20's, but the contrast with the Jennings and Rathers of the networks makes him look and sound like about 12.

July 10-11, 1991: Most of the day of 11th we did odd jobs, loafed and read. About 3:30 we parked our RV in the airport parking lot and prepared to board MarkAir flight 15 (no, I never heard of them either) for Barrow. The flight was comfortable (737) and short. We were met at the Barrow airport by a tour guide and the first leg of the tour started. The bus we were on - 25 of us - behaved like a worn out school bus, and the driver/guide seemed barely out of high school, but the tour was informative.

Barrow is the seat of government of the North Slope Borough, which is larger than many states and covers much of Northern Alaska on the edge of the Arctic Ocean, including the Prudhoe Bay oil fields. Barrow itself has a population of just over 3000, a large percentage of whom are native. We have many impressions of the town; for one thing everything looks temporary. This is because building materials are very hard to come by, and all construction has to be on stilts in order to preserve the permafrost; this discourages brick or block construction, so everything was wood paneling. For another, the place looks "junky"; this is because when something gets beyond repair there's no effective salvage scheme. Autos, ski-mobiles and other machines are left abandoned where they fail. Our tour started with the local Inupiak Eskimos demonstrating some of their native dances and crafts, followed by the (inevitable) opportunity to purchase examples of the craft work. We then had a brief drive around the town and saw where the five frozen Eskimo remains that had been featured recently in a National Geographic article were discovered. We dipped our hands in the Arctic waters and checked in to a hotel across the road from the ocean. There were large ice floes in the water, which of course was quite cold, as was the air. An interesting aspect to the town (and Prudhoe Bay) was the direction the satellite dishes were pointing; instead of looking up at the sky they were pointing nearly at the horizon in order to see the satellites in geosynchronous orbit over the equator. The sun never set that night. The next day the bus tour continued with other parts of the area; we saw the Dew Line radar installation, and later got out of

the bus to walk around a little bit on the northernmost part of the US. We saw their memorial to Will Rogers and Wiley Post, who were killed in their plane crash a few miles from Barrow. We also visited the local general store, where we saw examples of the high cost of living there; prices were generally very high. A gallon of milk costs in the vicinity of \$16, for example. We bought deli sandwiches for lunch and the tab was about \$6 each - I had a ham and cheese, nothing particularly exotic. The guide then took us to the airport for our 12:45 departure for Prudhoe Bay. The reason for the high prices, of course, is that there are only two ways to get something into the area: by plane or by ship (barge). Barges can enter that part of the Arctic only during August and the first parts of September. Our guide was a disappointment; he was a local and had attended the Barrow High School, so his knowledge of Barrow was adequate, but his oral delivery was abominable. Our flight to Deadhorse (Prudhoe Bay), a distance of about 200 miles, was again short and sweet. There is no "town" there, everything is directly or indirectly involved in getting oil out of the ground. Upon arrival we were met by another tour guide, a girl who was half Eskimo, quarter German, and quarter "57 varieties" as she put it. She did an outstanding job of showing us the area. We had a presentation by a member of the ARCO PR staff, and saw the extensive installations involved in the drilling for, gathering and pumping of the oil. Here we also saw many examples of wildlife living among the installations. There were many caribou, some whistling swans (which winter in the Chesapeake) ducks, geese, and even a fox.

We were shown examples of the living quarters of the employees and the recreation facilities they have available to them. All personnel work 12 hour days and seven days a week. Some work one week on and one off, while others may work three on and three off, and so forth. Generally housing, food and recreation facilities are supplied by the employers, who also provide transportation to and from home for employee off periods.

Unlike Barrow, the place was quite neat; one condition of the lease the oil companies have is that they must leave the area as clean as it was when they arrived, which means that they must ship beyond-repair machinery out of the area. They must even degrade roads to the original tundra condition when a road goes out of use!

We left Deadhorse just after dinnertime and flew back to Fairbanks. It had been a full 28 hours!

Chapter IV

The Fourth Leg - Fairbanks to Anchorage including the Kenai Peninsula and the Denali National Park

July 12, 1991: After picking up our mail and exchanging messages we decided to head out to a state campground at Chena Hot Springs, some 50 miles up river. On the way there I noticed that the home batteries weren't being charged by the generator, and a little inspection showed that the dual-charging solenoid had developed an internal resistance,

so it had to be replaced. We visited the hot springs, which were at a commercialized resort, then headed back to Fairbanks to find a replacement solenoid and install it. By the time this was over it was really too late to go back out there, so we returned to the Norlite, where we had been staying much of the time. During the evening we printed out chapter 3 for reproduction.

July 13, 1991: First we found a print shop, then spent the rest of the day generally loafing and catching up on correspondence. We also reviewed the video tape we had made since leaving San Francisco, and chalked up some "lessons learned" about technique.

July 14, 1991: The morning we spent driving down to the Denali National Park and Preserve on Alaska route 3. There were a few ripples in the road, but nothing serious. When we went to check in at the visitor's center we encountered a long delay, but finally got our assigned camp site, which turned out to be one of the smallest there, taxing my ability to park without scraping a tree or two. The only firewood available was for sale at the store, which was an hours-worth of shuttle bus away, so I reached into our "private stock" of good old Virginia Oak for the evening's meal.

July 15, 1991: The only way to see the innards of the park is to take a shuttle bus to the Eielson Visitor Center and return, which is roughly an eight hour trip. We had tickets for the 9:20 bus, and departed on schedule, complete with lunch in a cooler, binoculars, camcorder and insect repellent. The buses were in fact school buses on summer vacation (?), hired by the Park Service for the occasion. School buses are not made for eight hour trips over rough gravel roads with adults in them! By the end of the trip we both had lots of aches and pains. The most annoying feature to me was that the windows were double, and the upper and lower parts met at just about eye level, and we had to try to see wildlife through the frame.

We did see some wildlife though. Dall Sheep live in the highest parts of the mountain range, and we could see them - with binoculars. To the naked eye they were only small white dots. Then we saw lots of caribou, in various situations. Several of them were lying down on snow patches, presumably to reduce the peskiness of the insects. Of course there were plenty of ground squirrels and birds of various kinds (but no eagles). There was a bear visible on the far side of a valley, but even through 7x50 binoculars all it was was a brown speck on the green tundra.

A couple of places along the road we could see a part of Mount McKinley from a distance of about 60 miles; in one place we saw the base, with the top obscured by clouds, and then at another place the reverse. The family seated near us brought along their 16 month old daughter. Although she was as well-behaved as one could expect, it wasn't pleasant for me having the baby-talking, diaper-changing father seated across the aisle from me for the entire eight hour trip.

July 16, 1991: Although the day started out very overcast and windy, we again took the 8 hour bus ride through the park, and this time not only did it clear up but we were much

happier. We had the same (competent) driver, no small children, and saw bears and moose we had not seen the day before. There were four grizzlies, or perhaps three (and we saw the same one twice), and only one was asleep when we saw him. Another appeared to be chasing something - perhaps one of the arctic ground squirrels. Another was munching on willow bushes, and slowly working his way toward our bus. The moose was a large bull, with a rack that the experts claimed was magnificent. He was close enough that I thought that I got some really good videos, but later they didn't look all that great. I got some fairly good ones of the bears, but they suffered too. I guess wild animals look larger in the flesh than in a picture. Again we saw lots of caribou, and a few Dall sheep.

The park literature points out that the drivers of these buses are just that; they are not to be expected to narrate. Our driver did, and it increased manyfold our enjoyment of the trip. I asked a park ranger why they didn't include narration in the job description for the drivers, and he gave a very weak answer - they wanted them to pay attention to the driving. If any of those reading this visit Denali and get a driver that doesn't narrate, I recommend just getting off the bus and getting on the next one; they come along about every 20 minutes, and I gather that many drivers do narrate.

On the first leg of the trip we again got a glimpse of the peak of Mount McKinley. Statistics kept by the rangers indicate that there's about one chance in sixteen of getting a good view of the mountain during July; about double that of getting a partial view, so we did a little better than average in that department.

July 17, 1991: This was a day to loaf and rest up from the two days of trips. In the morning we took a short drive out to the place where private vehicles can go no further, and for another time were unable to see much of Mount McKinley. We returned to the campground, dumped and filled up our tank with fresh water, then had lunch. After lunch we went over to the park hotel and spent some time in the gift shop, also checking out the dinner menu. In the evening we took the shuttle bus over to the park hotel and had a very pleasant dinner.

July 18, 1991: We left Denali and headed down toward Anchorage. At one point on the highway we were face-to-face with a female moose; I guess she figured we were bigger than she was because she ambled off the highway before we got too close. We stayed at a utilitarian Good Sam campground in Houston(!); the manager was happy to let me use her phone to get messages - it seems her son does the same thing when he comes to visit, so it's no big deal to her. The news from home was that the Post Office has been holding our mail for a few days rather than forwarding it, goodness knows why, perhaps our regular mailman is on vacation and the substitute is incompetent. Our niece made some calls and apparently shook the mail loose (and hopefully the postal people up).

July 19, 1991: As we entered Anchorage, which is a BIG city compared to anything we've seen since we entered Canada, we first filled the gas tank (\$.99.9 per gallon, cheapest we've seen since we left!), and stopped to replenish the larder at a nice large Safeway. Lunchtime found us celebrating Barbara's birthday at a great restaurant, The

Cattle Company, where we had prime ribs. We then proceeded south from town on Alaska highway 3, toward the Kenai (pronounced KEEN-eye) Peninsula. As we got about 15 miles out of town we joined a myriad of others stopped along the highway edge watching some white Beluga whales moving down Turnagain Arm (of Cook's Inlet). Then a little later on we saw some Dall sheep on the slope overlooking the highway, and stopped to enjoy them; they were a lot closer than those we saw at Denali. We decided to stop early for the night at the Bird Creek Campground, and I got a couple of hours of fishing in, with again no luck. This time, however, I had lots of company; there was someone fishing about every 30 feet along the creek edge as the red salmon were expected any time. After dinner we topped off the birthday celebration with a delicious carrot cake (picked up earlier at the Safeway) which I managed to put a candle on before serving. A couple of times during the evening we walked down to the inlet to see if we could see the "Bore Tide," which is presumably a 6 foot or so wave leading the incoming tide, but no luck. The tide in Cook's Inlet runs about 28 feet.

July 20, 1991: We continued South along the Seward Highway, and stopped just before lunch at the Portage Glacier. There's a nice visitor's center there, and the up-close view of the glacier and the icebergs floating in the lagoon were impressive. In the visitor's center they had a display of live ice worms, little needle-like worms that live in and on the ice. I got some video of them using the macro feature of my camcorder. We visited the Williwaw campground on the way out of the park and resolved to stay there on the way back up the Kenai Peninsula in a week or so. Perhaps the salmon will be spawning then and we'll see them in the clear streams running through the area. For the second time on our entire trip we found that a campground we had planned to stay at was full; it turns out the red salmon (sockeye) were running in the Kenai River, and all of Anchorage was there to catch them. We finally found an improvised spot on the runway of an abandoned airstrip at the Morgan's Landing State Recreation Area, on the Kenai River, where there was an overflow condition met with some aplomb by the campground host. We were grateful; the campground was reached after a ten mile jaunt down a gravel washboard road, and the prospect of heading back out again wasn't pleasant. It seems with tires that require an inflation pressure of seventy pounds there's not much resilience, and we feel every stone.

We watched the fishing activity; an angler about every ten yards, some with waders, some with fly-casting gear but most with spinning tackle. I would say that there was one fish caught for every thousand or so casts; not inviting enough for me to go back to get my tackle. There were salmon visible swirling through the surface now and then. The winds were calm and the temperature about 65 - idyllic conditions. Speaking of the weather, it has generally been grand. A few showers, but all in all the past three weeks have been cool and dry - even though a little cloudy. We have heard about the terrible heat wave hitting the east coast, and here we have been having highs around 65 and lows in the 50's - and the humidity has been low. It's interesting to note that the North slope area qualifies as a desert; very little precipitation. Of course when it comes down it has no where to go, as everything is very flat and the permafrost keeps it from soaking in. That explains all the lakes in the tundra regions. The humidity has consistently been low; our iced beverages sweat very little.

July 21, 1991: Today we went up to Discovery campground, on the northwest corner of the Kenai Peninsula. This is where Captain Cook came ashore and claimed the area for the English in seventeen hundred something. The campground is one of the better ones; nice sites and far apart, with firewood supplied. Aside from a couple of walks, we generally loafed. The view over Cook's Inlet, with various snow-covered mountains in the background (including Redoubt Mountain, which erupted a couple of years ago) was spectacular. The only blight: on the way up here from the town of Kenai we must have passed about ten refineries. All of them were on the coast, and prevented travelers from seeing the inlet.

Our Virginia license plates frequently attract interesting people. This evening we met a woman from Norfolk, who has lived here for five years or so.

July 22, 1991: traveled down to Homer, touted as "The End Of The Road." The town proper is at the south end of the Kenai Peninsula, and there's a spit sticking out into Kachemak Bay with the majority of the tourist and fishing industry located there. This is the place which is pictured with motor homes parked along the beach; the city runs a campground which encompasses that area as well as some others. We parked near "The Fishing Hole," a lagoon which they stock with fingerling salmon and into which they release traces of a chemical to imprint the salmon. A few years later the salmon return to spawn, making for a pretty dense fish population in the lagoon. They can't spawn there, as there's no fast-running stream, so they're doomed to hang around until caught. We saw several caught, but again I had no luck, even though I spent a couple of hours at it.

July 23, 1991: Today we signed up for a cruise to Seldovia, with wildlife watching as a primary activity. It left at 12:00, and on the way across the bay we saw several type of puffins, gulls and terns as well as cormorants and murre. I got some nice video shots of a bald eagle taking off and circling overhead. Although we didn't see any seals or whales which sometimes frequent the area we did see several sea otters. One of the latter was a youngster who hadn't yet managed to dive effectively, as his youthful fur was too oily. It was interesting watching him try to stay under like his mother did, but popping to the surface in frustration.

Seldovia is a small village originally populated by the Russians, but now basically a fishing and vacation city with no road connection to the outside. It is interesting in that much of the town has been rebuilt because earthquakes have lowered the earth several feet in recent years. The population is reported at 403, and the landing strip had a population of about 40 aircraft.

July 24, 1991: Today we traveled back to Kenai, stopping at Soldatna first to pick up the mail which had been forwarded to us. We had planned to stay at Soldatna, but the place was wall-to-wall with RV's; fishing was a real craze. When we got to Kenai we discovered why; the state had opened the "dip net" season for the Kenai River. Wednesday and Saturday from 8AM to 8 PM Alaskan residents (only) are allowed to use dip nets to catch the spawning salmon. We had a view of these people at the mouth of the Kenai; the beach on both sides was lined by people wading into the river - most of

them up to their armpits - and trying to net salmon with nets similar to what I use to land large fish from my boat. We saw a lot of success; most people got fish at a reasonable rate.

A little upriver from where we were watching the netting there was a pod of beluga whales cruising the inlet and doing their share to decimate the salmon population. It was a beautiful sight, all in all, and I hope I captured it adequately on video tape.

Earlier in Kenai I found a new way to get access to a telephone with a modular plug. I stopped in at the visitor's center and explained the problem, asking them for information about where I could plug in. Not having the vaguest idea where else they could send me they cheerfully provided the service themselves.

July 25, 1991: Our trip from Kenai to Seward was punctuated by a clear view of a moose grazing through a pond, and salmon jumping in the Kenai. The latter inspired me to stop for an hour or so and try my luck, which was bad as usual. Galls me to see them break the surface within a few feet of me, right where my lure is cast, and not get a strike.

I have to say it again; the scenery is spectacular! The brochures are not an exaggeration. We settled for the night on the shore of Resurrection Bay, in the town of Seward - a city RV park that cost us only six dollars a night. Across the bay, about a half mile or so, there's a beautiful line of snow-capped mountains of the Kenai Range. The only blight on the landscape is a modern coal loading terminal (built in Korea!). Right out in front of our location were a pair of loons working the bottom. We went out to dinner at a nice restaurant nearby (Ray's), and the waitress told us she had seen the coal loader used three times since she arrived in April (for ships from the USSR). We later learned that the place the city has set aside for us to park RV's in is the area that the Corps of Engineers prohibits building construction. That's because, when the next severe earthquake hits, it will probably wind up several feet under water. Welcome, tourists! Speaking of dinner, Barbara ordered fish and chips - Halibut has suddenly become a favorite of hers, ever since the "salmon bake" in Fairbanks.

On the way back from the restaurant we shopped a little, and I bought a copy of "The End Of The Road" - by Tom Bodett, the Motel 6 spokesman. He's from Homer, the place we visited a couple of days ago.

July 26, 1991: We departed at 8AM for a tour with Kenai Fjords Tours. The boat was a 65 foot diesel, and the tour took us about a hundred miles along the waterways of the Kenai National Park. We saw several sea otters, one of them close enough to us that we swore they must have had him on the payroll. We also saw about a zillion types of birds, notable among them were the bald eagle (one with a chick in the nest) and the two common types of puffin, crested and horned, as well as several rhinoceros auklets and the common murre (looks like a penguin but flies) and terns and gulls by the hundreds. We came fairly close to some feeding humpbacked whales, and saw one harbor seal sunning himself on a rock, as well as three colonies of sea lions relaxing in the sun. One of the highlights of the trip was a visit to Holgate glacier, where we came up close and watched

- and heard! - the calving action when large chunks fell into the sea. We salvaged a little of the glacial ice and used it for our cocktails when we returned. I'd like to be able to report that it tasted different, but I'm afraid that would be stretching the truth somewhat.

July 27, 1991: This was a day to loaf - brought on by my suffering from a cold and by the fact that we had a pretty nice site facing the harbor. During the morning we watched an otter (probably the same one we saw in the harbor yesterday) as he scavenged the bottom about 100 yards off the shore. In the evening we returned to Ray's for my birthday dinner.

July 28, 1991: This morning Barbara saw a bald eagle flying over our site carrying a fish it had apparently just picked up from the harbor, then a few minutes later glimpsed another one fly over. We left Seward for Anchorage, on the way stopping off for a close-up view of Exit Glacier. This involved about a nine mile drive over one of those gravel washboards and then a half mile walk to the foot of the glacier. It was impressive, but not nearly as much as the one we saw on the 26th from the boat. On a diagram of the ice field at the park we noted one of the glaciers was named Pedersen Glacier; on other charts we had seen it named Pederson Glacier.

It was heavily overcast all day, and as we pulled into an RV park in Anchorage it started raining.

July 29-30, 1991: The rain continued, so we stayed in Anchorage to recharge our batteries (personal and vehicle), restock the larder and get a washing done, then headed down to Bird Creek campground to position ourselves for a trip to Whittier the next day.

July 31 - August 2: The rain continued, and continued, and continued. On the 31st we had been planning on taking a railroad shuttle from Portage to Whittier (that's the only way to get there other than boat or plane) but the rain discouraged us, so we moved over to the Williawaw campground near the base of Portage Glacier to wait for better weather for the trip. By the 2nd we gave up waiting and returned to Anchorage for the weekend. While we missed the scenic train ride and a possible cruise among glaciers in Prince William Sound, we didn't consider it a big loss as we can see much of the same sort of thing when we go to Valdez next week.

Fishing here in Alaska is a major sport, but for me they tend to ruin it with the rules. The rules are different for different bodies of water and different times of the year. For example, right now one can fish for silver salmon using eggs on treble hooks for bait in certain areas, but other areas only artificial lures may be used and no treble hooks. You have to be an Alaskan resident to dip-net red salmon (on certain bodies of water, like the last five miles of the Kenai River but only on Wednesday and Saturday), but anyone can spin cast or fly fish for most of the river below the junction with the Russian River except for certain areas that are open only for fly fishing on certain days. To make matters worse, they change the rules as they go. The State counts the salmon as they enter each of the main streams to spawn, and if there are too few going up they'll close fishing down some days. If there are too many, they'll open fishing for extra days or allow a more

successful method, such as dip netting (for Alaskans only). It seems like every day there's an article in the paper reporting a change in the fishing rules for some area or another. Of course many people are "tuned in" to these variations in the rules, but for me it takes the fun out of it, wondering if I'm allowed to fish in that nice little stream we just passed.

Chapter V

The Fifth Leg - Anchorage to Prince George, BC

August 3, 1991: In the morning we found a printer for Chapter IV, then went to the visitor center in downtown Anchorage. When we arrived we discovered that the finish of the annual Midnight Sun Wheelchair Marathon race would soon occur. This is a race from Fairbanks to Anchorage, run in nine legs over as many days. We decided to walk to a fish ladder on Ship Creek nearby to see spawning salmon leap the steps, but when we got there, not a salmon was to be seen. By the time we got back it was just time to get a video of the last race entrant nearing the finish line. I figured that they average about 14 miles per hour! We lunched nearby (I had eggs with reindeer sausage) then did some gift shopping and visited a seafood market. That evening we dined at the Sourdough Mining Company restaurant. It is perhaps a tourist trap, with the mounted moose and caribou heads and salmon on the walls, but it was interesting and the food and service were very good. During our meal we noted the score of the Seattle-Raiders game over ESPN at half time. When we got back "home" at the RV park and tuned in the game on a local TV channel it was in the first quarter. Seems almost everything is broadcast delayed up here except cable stuff.

August 4-5, 1991: Sunday was a total day of rest except for minor items like checking tire pressures, cleaning tanks, getting chapter IV ready to mail, and so forth. Monday we mailed off chapter IV, did some shopping and headed out of town toward Valdez (pronounced Val-DEEZE, why I don't know). We got as far as Tolsona Creek campground, near Glennallen, about half way to Valdez. This was a rare state campground - no fee (although our yearly pass would have worked, anyway). The creek was pleasant; there was a fellow fly fishing here and he said he had caught about ten grayling, only one was of legal size. Again I passed, as I have no fly casting tackle and the water was much too shallow for spin casting.

August 6, 1991: Tuesday we made the last leg to Valdez. Surprisingly, the road was not in very good shape; there were lots of areas undergoing improvement, with the accompanying stretches of loose gravel. Many areas not undergoing improvement were peppered with frost heaves, making it unreasonable to use the cruise control. Some places we had to play the accelerator and brake pedals like an accordion. Shortly after starting we stopped for gas (in Glennallen). Here it is only about 200 miles from Anchorage, and the gas prices jumped from \$.99 to \$1.47 per gallon! In Valdez it became \$1.55 per gallon. Although all the crude from the Alaska pipeline passes through Valdez, there's no refinery here, but it seems to me that gas could probably be shipped

from Anchorage to Valdez, 300 miles, for less than \$.56 per gallon. I guess it's just a case of free enterprise in action. When we arrived we immediately signed up for a spot at the best RV park in town, the Bear Paw, which is across the road from the boat slips and a half block from "downtown." We then returned to a spot a mile or so back up the road where king salmon were spawning, and we finally saw the spawning taking place, one of the things high on our list of things we wanted to see on our Alaska trip. When we returned to the motor home park we signed up for a glacier/wildlife cruise the next day and I spent a little time trying to figure out why the automatic step retraction system on the motor home sometimes doesn't work, and getting a badly needed haircut.

August 7, 1991: After a failed attempt to locate a telephone where we could exchange messages we departed for an all-day cruise. This day was exceptionally pretty, with the sun shining brightly, the vessel at only about half capacity, and the wildlife cooperating nicely. There were sea otters (in larger groups than we had previously seen them), sea lions basking on a buoy, seals on ice floes, and many bald eagles perched near the shoreline, some with nests nearby. The glacier we saw was the Columbia Glacier. It was slightly disappointing after the Holgate Glacier we saw at Seward, mostly because it wasn't particularly high and because the ice field was so dense the boat couldn't get very close to the glacier itself. Here was where we saw a large number of seals riding ice floes.

Lunch was served up by the cruise company on their Growler Island installation across the bay from the glacier; it was a buffet featuring salmon, halibut, ribs and chicken. This island had tents which one could spend the night in for an additional \$70 or so, which includes meals. The idea didn't appeal to us much, but we know some folks who would jump at the chance; the setting was beautiful. While we were there one of the Princess liners entered the bay so the passengers could view the glacier. On the way back to the dock we passed the place where the EXXON VALDEZ had its unfortunate encounter with the (plainly marked) reef. Incidentally, we saw no evidence of pollution; we did see plenty of active wildlife.

After such a large lunch we couldn't think of much for dinner so settled for soft ice cream sundaes when we returned. I gorged on a banana split and later paid the price by being sick much of the night.

August 8, 1991: Basically a day of rest for me - planned but fortuitous to help me recover from the night. Barbara did a washing.

August 9, 1991: This morning I looked into the stubborn step problem and deduced a bad connection inside the motor assembly. After removing the steps I found that the motor assembly was not likely repairable, so ordered a new one to be sent to meet us in Tok (pronounced as in Tokyo) Monday. Meanwhile, we'll make do with a Rubbermaid stool. Besides picking up the stool, Barbara did some shopping and mailing. In the afternoon we took the Aleyeska pipeline terminal tour, free, provided by the pipeline company. We had seen the fields in Prudhoe Bay, pump station number one, pump station number 12 (the last one) and now the terminal where they load the tankers. Interesting tour,

peppered with information (propaganda?) about how they take all sorts of precautions to prevent contamination of the environment. One of the most meaningful things (pro or con, I can't tell) is that the total amount of crude lost from the EXXON VALDEZ was about half of the contents of one of the several storage tanks they have at the terminal. It was helpful to visualize the amount; smaller than I would have expected but bothersome that all that trouble was caused by such a small fraction of the oil being moved through the terminal. One of the interesting facts the guide mentioned was that Valdez had over forty feet of snowfall in 1989, and that was only a little bit exceptional. The town has several lots intentionally left vacant in order to accept snow removed from the streets. That snow finally melts in June. After we returned from the tour, we visited the Visitor's Center (finally) and saw their film of the 1964 earthquake. A segment was taken by a crew member of the tanker Chena in Valdez who happened to be using his 8mm movie camera when the quake hit; it was terrifying. His camera was on some kids and their dog on the dock before the quake started, then all heck broke loose. All buildings in the town of Valdez were wiped out, and all people on the dock were lost. Miraculously the tanker, due to thirty foot tidal waves, was grounded, placed in the center of town, refloated, and after a couple more groundings left afloat in the harbor.

August 10, 1991: We left Valdez in the rain, although the messiness of that was countered by the dramatic views of the mountains seen through various levels of cloud, some only a few feet over our heads. As we proceeded north towards Tok the weather improved, and we had a delightful evening at the Eagle Trail State Campground. The Eagle trail is the trail used by early gold prospectors starting out from Valdez and heading for Eagle. It's interesting that much of the trail history centers around (then) Lt. Billy Mitchell who, as a Signal Corps officer, managed the improvement of the trail and associated communications. For this he had one of the many snow-capped mountains along the trail named after him. Of course he later became celebrated as a General in the Army Air Corps, demonstrating that aircraft could sink ships. Milwaukee's airport is named after him. We walked a part of the trail near the campground.

I keep being amazed at the low utilization of the more remote state campgrounds. Eagle Trail has 40 sites, and I would guess that only about ten are in use this Saturday night in the height of the tourist season. The settings are ideal wooded areas, with picnic tables and fire rings at each site, and the price is right - \$8 per night, or free if one has the annual state pass we bought at the start of the Alaska part of the trip. Actually the only state campgrounds we saw full or close to it were those in downtown areas (Fairbanks) or where the fishing was HOT (on the Kenai).

August 11, 1991: After a brief run from the campground to Tok (population 1200 or so) and registration at a full service commercial campground we declared the day to be one for relaxation. We had lunch out, then took a long walk through the forest to see the place where the July 1990 fire was stopped just short of the town - fire-blackened spruce on one side of the firebreak and live ones on the other. After our return we felt a little restless and drove over to the washing stand in the RV park and gave our motorhome a good going over. Can't say it didn't need it, what with all the gravel roads we've

traversed since the last full wash just before we arrived in Alaska last July. Of course some of the rains had helped out some.

One interesting sidelight about what it's like to travel to the small towns of mainland Alaska is "communications deprivation." Where we camped last night, about ten miles from Tok, we could get no TV or commercial radio broadcast stations. Here in Tok we get the RATNET TV channel and two obviously very low power FM stations (the land in this area is very flat). RATNET stands for Rural Alaska Television Network; it is government owned and run, and a committee of people from small towns where there are local transmitters selects the programs to be broadcast from all those available over various satellites. This selected program set is then rebroadcast to the small towns via satellite. So in Tok, Valdez and Homer, for instance, RATNET is the only channel available unless you have your own satellite dish or unless some enterprising individual has set up a cable system. I'm not sure, but I think the two FM stations have a similar setup, as they sound the same in each of the small towns where we've listened to them. It's a little spooky to be in a campground and have the radio be on SEEK and not find any signals to latch on to, AM or FM.

August 12, 1991: The part had arrived at the post office, so the morning was spent replacing the motor for the automatic steps, then replacing the step assembly. Hard work, but everything worked fine at the end. The afternoon involved a few miscellaneous jobs and time to spend reading. Books, not newspapers. We learned that Tok only gets Sunday papers, not the dailies. Late in the afternoon a caravan of about 45 RV's pulled in to the RV park - turns out it was the same caravan that followed us into Valdez, and will depart, like us, towards Canada tomorrow on the Alaskan Highway. We hope they depart at a time other than when we do; we understand they make an effort not to all depart at once. They're going to Whitehorse, while we will leave the route at Haines Junction. Re-reading our June diary of this stretch of road we know it will be full of frost heaves, and cause us to porpoise, perhaps making good only 25 miles per hour.

August 13, 1991: The road southeast from Tok was pretty much as we remembered it; lots of frost heaves demanding low speeds. I lucked out again - the road was fine at first, then Barbara took over after lunch and it degraded terribly, then about 3:30 PM we swapped and the road became tolerable again. The crossing of the border into Canada was uneventful. We spent the night at Congdon Creek Yukon campground on the shore of Lake Kluane. It's nice being back in Canada where they provide free firewood at all the camp sites. There was a stiff breeze blowing so we heard the waves on the shore all evening.

August 14, 1991: The remainder of our trip to Haines was over some of the best highway surface we've seen since leaving the big cities of Anchorage and Fairbanks. Very few frost heaves, and the few gravel patches were smooth as silk. The Canadian road from Haines Junction to the border had a nice wide shoulder; in general we had no trouble maintaining 55 mph. When we got to the US border, however, the shoulder disappeared completely, and the road became very winding so we could only manage about 40 mph on the average.

We got one of the last remaining sites at the Ocean Side RV Park, the best spot from the standpoint of being able to walk to the center of town (population 2000, town's business district is about seven blocks long by three blocks wide). This is the location of the Southeast Alaska State Fair this week, so we should have plenty of entertainment. Among the events are ax throwing, hand bucking, power bucking (for both men and women) and log rolling and Hooktender's race, whatever that is (for men). We went out for dinner and watched the Sun Viking, of Royal Caribbean Lines, drop anchor and discharge passengers to various local attractions. Believe it or not, Barbara again ordered fish and chips - where the fish was deep fried halibut. While walking the waterfront area after dinner we saw a bald eagle make a pass at a raven that had something edible, but a bunch of other ravens joined him and discouraged the eagle. While this was going on a gull came along and made off with the morsel that the original raven had dropped. Nature.

Our RV park manager was friendly and cooperative, so we managed to swap messages via CompuServe.

August 15, 1991: As we looked out the window of our motor home this morning, we saw that the Yorktown Clipper had showed up at the dock! This is the cruise ship we had taken last January in the Southern Caribbean. Later we walked over to the ship and chatted with one of the crew members; when we mentioned the specific cruise we were on he said "Oh, the Cruise From Hell!" He said that all but about three or four of the crew members from last January were gone, and that it took one more cruise after ours before they figured out what caused the list problem.

In the afternoon we visited the Southeast Alaska State Fair. It was pretty typical of small fairs - about the size of those county fairs I've attended in the lower 48 - except for a couple of items. The entertainment included native dancing, and there was a pig race. Small (hungry?) porkers which I would guess weighed about twenty pounds each left the starting gates and raced around the track to a pan of cookies. It seemed to be the high point of the afternoon's activities for the non-involved visitors, and should result in some amusing videos.

August 16, 1991: This Friday we took the water taxi over to Skagway (\$20 round trip, 50 minutes each way), visited the town and took an excursion trip on the narrow gauge White Pass and Yukon Route railroad. The railroad construction was started in 1898 (gold had been discovered in the Klondike two years earlier) and finished in 1900. It paralleled the stamper's trail of '98 (the Chilkoot and White Pass trails), where the going was so rough that three thousand pack animals perished during the rush to the gold areas. Parts of the actual trail were still visible along the route, which extends to Whitehorse (although we only went as far as Fraser, 28 miles up from Skagway). As Barbara and I remember it, this was our first train ride in many years, and the first on a narrow gauge.

The town of Skagway was a little disappointing, as it seems to exist only for tourism these days. The National Park Service owns many of the buildings in the historic

district. The town has about 700 "residents," of which some 500 stick around during the winter. We had dinner at the Golden North Hotel, which has been in operation since 1908.

August 17-18, 1991: The weekend was spent on loafing and odd jobs, mostly the former. Several times eagles were seen cavorting over the water just in front of our RV, and for a while a sea lion (or perhaps seal) was working the area about a hundred yards from shore. The wind whipped up to about 25 or 30 knots on Saturday and stayed that way through Sunday; the small gill netters were operating in the harbor rather than further out at sea. We watched one working about 200 yards off shore pull in about 20 large salmon at the end of an hour's set. This is not very profitable when salmon goes for about \$.35 per pound at the dock. Saturday we visited the local museum. It was full of Tlingit (pronounced CLING-it) history and artifacts and included a couple of video presentations about the area. The movie White Fang was made here in Haines, and a dog sled made for use in the movie was on display. Saturday night we had dinner at the Fort Seward Lodge, which featured all-you-can-eat dungeness crab, which Barbara enjoyed, while I had a nice slice of prime rib.

August 19-20, 1991: These two days were basically a repeat of the prior days, with an exception or two. First, Barbara did the laundry. Then we discovered that a local eagle had a favorite roost just about a hundred yards or so away on the top branch of a spruce. He'd sit there for hours on end, surveying the area, then take off and cruise the shoreline for a while and roost somewhere else, then return after a while. There was at least one other eagle which patrolled the shore line too, roosting elsewhere. There is another RV park, with much nicer grounds, at the other end of town, but we feel the one we chose has it all over that one, because here we can look out over the harbor and enjoy watching the activity. Cruise ships pass by every half day or so, most of them with Skagway as their goal. The price is right, too - \$12 per night, which includes a cable TV connection. The latter has been especially welcome, what with the USSR coup being in progress the last couple of days.

We picked up our forwarded mail on Tuesday. It was supposed to arrive Monday, but the area had been socked in with fog and planes couldn't bring the mail in from Juneau. It was nice to receive the personal letters. One hears about how servicemen away from home appreciate mail; well, even though we get frequent information from the computer network it's still a pleasure to get those letters! I'm gratified to hear that these diary chapters are being welcomed.

Today I made a couple of local phone calls, to see if the mail had arrived yet, and to get information about the ferry ride we embark upon tomorrow. Believe it or not, local pay phone calls here cost ten cents! Considering the extra difficulty that the phone companies must have here, I am astonished.

This evening we watched the ferry we are to take on it's northbound trip as it passed by; it stops here, goes to Skagway, then does an about face and returns here to pick us up (we have to be at the dock at 0445!) for the southbound trip.

August 21, 1991: Getting aboard the ferry was mostly a matter of waiting; they put a seal on our LP tank and then, when the ferry finally arrived, we drove aboard. We had reserved a cabin for the trip, since access to our motor home was to be denied except while in port and we didn't relish sleeping in deck chairs. So we moved enough clothing up to the cabin to keep us until we arrive in Prince Rupert. We found the food (and drink) aboard the ferry mediocre and expensive - about 50% higher priced than at the places we had been in Alaska, which were usually higher than elsewhere. A strange exception: although liquor by the bottle was much more expensive in Alaska, drinks in most restaurants were about the same - \$3.50 or so for a cocktail. On the ferry a cocktail cost \$4.50 one time and \$3.00 another.

On the first leg of our trip, to Juneau, we passed a lone humpback whale working the Lynn Canal. The weather was heavily overcast, which diminished considerably the opportunity for scenic views; occasionally we'd see the top of a mountain poking through a gap in the clouds. We arrived in Juneau about 11 AM and departed at 2 PM.

August 22, 1991 The second day the weather was again heavily overcast and at times foggy. We passed near a group of about a half dozen humpback whales and later some Dall's porpoises.

The ferry we're on, the Matanuska, is fairly typical of those serving the Alaska Marine Highway. It is diesel powered, 408 feet long, with a draft of 17 feet, has 110 staterooms, and space for about 90 vehicles, depending on size. I would guess about half the passengers occupy staterooms, the remainder sleep in the various lounges or "camp out" on the covered part of the deck - popular with the back-packing set.

August 23, 1991: We left the ferry at 7 AM Alaska time in Price Rupert and it immediately became 8AM. The city looked like it was on fire, what with the smoke from the canneries and the nearby pulp mill. After a brief stop at a Safeway to replenish the larder (the refrigerator had been off since we boarded the ferry as they didn't allow propane usage) we took off for Prince George, stopping about half way at the Tyhee Lake Provincial Campground, another one of those beautiful spots British Columbia provides, complete with firewood.

In retrospect, our ferry ride had been a disappointment, mostly because of the weather, which eliminated the views we had been told to expect. If we were to do it again (and at this time that possibility seems remote) we would take the ferry ride in stages, taking a few days to traverse the Haines to Prince Rupert route and stopping for a day or two at Juneau, Sitka, Petersburg and Ketchikan and maybe Wrangell. That way there's more chance for good weather on at least part of the trip, one gets to see the small coastal towns a little better, one doesn't feel the need to get a stateroom (most segments are only a few hours) and food can be kept in the refrigerator, since it would be able to stand being shut off for the short periods. Our understanding is that the fare is only a little more expensive if one takes the trip in segments rather than in one long shot.

One thing we did see on the ride was the Cleveland Peninsula, which I faithfully recorded with the camcorder. Also, during the trip we were chatting with another couple and discovered they were from Annandale, a neighboring Virginia community. Since he was keeping a diary too, we promised to exchange documents after the trip.

August 24, 1991: We arrived in Prince George early, and headed for an RV park, the Log House, a little off the main highway on the southeast edge of town. We picked this spot because it was associated with the only restaurant in the Prince George area which was recommended by AAA. It was "out in the sticks" by the edge of a small lake (Mary). The owner let us do a full washdown of the RV, which it sorely needed, and, after we settled we read the most recent paper we had picked up in town on the way through (although Gorby is back in he apparently is on the way out) and then we went up to the restaurant. It was magnificent! The decor was unique. In a chat we had with the owner after dinner, he explained that he had spent six years roaming the US and parts of Canada, then one day just south of Prince George he had hunted and shot a coyote. He searched for a taxidermist, and after finally finding one he apprenticed himself to him - no salary, just learning while he worked nights in a hotel - and started doing his own trophies. The restaurant, which overlooks the lake, is decorated with a large amount of his work, from whole black bears through moose, elk, and so forth, down to marmots and skunks - including the original coyote. The meal was probably the best we've had at a restaurant since we left home. Although it wasn't mentioned in the menu we were served a pot of onion soup as a starter, followed by sherbet, then the entree. There was a pianist playing background melodies during the meal. As if Mother Nature couldn't help cooperating, the moon was full and reflecting off the lake as we walked "home" to the RV a few yards away. Recommendation to the reader: do NOT pass by Prince George, BC, without visiting the Log House! For our Virginia friends: it is like a rustic Chez Francois.

Chapter VI

The Sixth Leg - Prince George, BC to HOME

August 25, 1991: The trip from Prince George to Jasper was uneventful except for one thing: we finally saw a black bear on the road. It scampered across while it was about a hundred yards ahead of us, then dawdled for a while in the brush at the edge of the road. We stopped, but only had the barest view of it before it disappeared. We had been looking forward to seeing a black bear, and had just about given up hope, since we had seen none in Alaska.

After a brief visit to the visitor's center in Jasper we got a space in one of the nearby campgrounds (run by Canada National Park people) and then took a tram ride up to the top of Whistler Mountain (3900 feet) for the view. It was a nice view, but marginally worth the \$9 each it cost.

August 26, 1991: From the Jasper area we headed south towards the Columbia ice field. About 20 miles south of Jasper we pulled over to see what the other people were looking

at and there was a grizzly bear, sauntering along the ditch by the side of the road! It wasn't huge, but it was of fairly good size. We got some nice video of it before it headed into the woods, annoyed, presumably, by the people who were approaching it from the road. I thought for a while there that I was going to get a video of a bear attacking tourists.

At the ice field we took the tourist trip onto the Athabasca Glacier. The vehicles are specially built off-terrain buses with six huge tires, and six-wheel drive. We got off the bus to enjoy light sleet and 40 knot winds for a few minutes, then returned. The most interesting fact (in my view) about the glacier we were on was that it was about one thousand feet thick at the point that we stood on it.

We then proceeded south to Banff, where we pulled into Tunnel Mountain RV park, another campground run by the Canadian National park service. It even had full hookups!

August 27, 1991: The trip from Banff through Calgary and back into the U.S. was uneventful. We stopped in Calgary to get Chapter V printed, and then as we approached the border used our air conditioner for the first time in over a month. We stopped at a city-run RV park just north of Selby, Montana.

August 28, 1991: We drove from Selby to Idaho Falls, a longer run than usual for us, but intended to make the next run to Salt Lake City shorter so we could make some arrangements there before the long weekend. Generally the drive was uneventful except for the first 20 miles or so of Utah; massive construction. A "follow me" car led us through the whole 20 miles of loose gravel and wet asphalt at the rate of 30 m.p.h. When he let us free everyone took off like mad, and gravel from tire treads peppered us. We got one more window chip (the other front window, too, darn it)!

August 29, 1991: Uneventful drive to Salt Lake City except that we passed an area of lava flow that seemed very out of place given the other geological characteristics. That area is near Hell's Canyon, and there was a sign proclaiming it as "Hell's Half Acre" - although it was a lot larger than a half acre. We pulled into the VIP RV park in Salt Lake City and immediately made arrangements to have our front disc brakes looked at the next day. The brakes had been yelling at us for the last few days, and I had decided that, given the awkward placement of things in this vehicle, I would let a commercial outfit do the job. Barbara did a washing and I looked at one or two items that might have been the cause for the cruise control to stop working, as it did about noon, without luck.

In the evening we took a shuttle bus downtown and attended a rehearsal of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The sum total of over 200 well trained voices singing inspirational music is hard to describe, so I won't try. We enjoyed the experience.

August 30, 1991: This was not a good day, although it started out ok. True to our promise we took the RV to the local Chevrolet dealer (this Winnebago is built on a Chevrolet chassis) and, after they inspected the brakes and made a \$180 estimate for

repair, we told them to go ahead and we took their shuttle service downtown to the LDS Family History Library. We saw their introductory slide show, then tried to make some progress on a couple of loose ends in our genealogies. Despite four floors of resources consisting of a multitude of books, microfilm reels, microfiche and computer files we made no progress except to show that one possible lead we had on a Benner was a dead end.

I called the Chevrolet dealer and was told that there had been an error in the estimate; that it would now cost \$220, as "parts" had provided the cost of the wrong brake pads. I said "that's ok, but did you not start the work because of the error?" and the service representative said "oh no, it'll be finished in a half hour." So we took a cab there, and waited about an hour and a half before being presented with the finished work and the total bill of \$259.28. They had replaced the front brake pads (I was told the old ones were not worn, just 'crystallized'), resurfaced the brake rotors (because the 'crystallized' pads had scored the rotor, they said) and repacked the wheel bearings. OK, so it's worth it having brakes one can be confident of while traversing the Rockies.

Lo and behold, about a mile away the brakes started screaming at us again, even worse than before. We had been told that the new pads might make a little 'grinding' noise until they wore in, but this was too much, so we returned to the dealer to demonstrate the problem. What they did was to bring out a Chevrolet bulletin that said that their new brake pads had been built for low noise but that they "will not totally eliminate brake noise." The mechanic and service representative insisted that the noise is endemic to motor homes built on Chevrolet chassis, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Never mind that I never had the noise before a couple of weeks prior! It was plain (given that the service manager wasn't there at the time) that I had no recourse but to bite the bullet and leave, hoping to find, sometime in our future travels, someone who might have a solution. It is terribly embarrassing to be traveling in traffic and have our vehicle screeching like a banshee at every stop, to say nothing of having to hear it ourselves while descending those long mountain hills (downshifting doesn't do it all).

Then when we got back to the RV park we found someone else in the space we had paid for. It seems the office had misfiled our contract and assigned the space to someone else, so we had to take a different spot. By itself not a big deal, but an unpleasant punctuation to the day.

August 31, 1991: This was a somewhat better day. I took the morning and part of the afternoon to diagnose and repair the cruise control. The throttle cable was broken at one end, so I had to fabricate a new connection. Fortunately, Barbara remembered that my friend had given her some earring post binders, and with one of them and some epoxy cement I managed the repair. Barbara took time for a permanent, and we loafed the rest of the day, going out for dinner to a steak house, Diamond Lil's, nearby.

September 1, 1991: We took off eastbound on I80 and passed through barren but interesting land most of the way until we got to Rawlins, Wyoming, where we stopped at an RV park that had cable, hoping to see the TNT presentation of the Redskin's game.

The bad news was that they didn't have TNT on the cable in the park, but the good news was that they did have it in the park's TV lounge, so we ate early and went there for the game. 45-0!!!!

September 2, 1991: We continued eastbound on I80 to North Platte, Nebraska. Generally a dull day.

September 3, 1991: East from North Platte on I80 then I29 and US30 to Carroll, Iowa, where we stayed at a campground in the Swan Lake State Park. Amazing place: full hookups for \$8 a night, and grounds that rivaled those we saw in Alaska and Canada; lots of trees, a nice lake, and a pasture with buffalo. The park ranger said this was not unusual for Iowa, many of the parks are like this. We must remember this if we come this way again.

September 4, 1991: To Fort Dodge in the morning, followed by some genealogical research. In the evening we stayed at the Kennedy Campground, a few miles north of the city, another excellent Iowa site - \$8 for full hookups, and a very nice setting between a lake and a golf course.

September 5, 1991: After picking up our forwarded mail we did some more genealogical research, then headed up to Forest City, where Winnebagos are made. We arrived too late in the day for a plant tour, so just moseyed around the visitor's center and then went over to the service center to pick up a part we needed. While there waiting for a clerk I met some other RVers who were thinking seriously about a trip to Alaska next year, and I promised to send them a copy of this diary after we get back.

We then drove up I35 to Helmer Myre State Park in Minnesota for the night. This was a surprise: the fee was \$14.96, only electricity was provided, and the sites were nowhere near as nice as those in most of the other states we had been in (although they were nicer than most KOAs). We were told that there were two areas for camping in the park, but the more wooded one is closed for the season. One reason for the high fee was that they had a surcharge for non-residents of the state.

September 6-8, 1991: We drove to Rice Lake and visited relatives. My uncle repaired the old automatic step motor for me, and I helped him develop an automotive charger and adapter for the batteries in his camcorder. Among other events, they took us to a cafe in Exeland (WI) where they make and serve an excellent (but sinfully rich) peanut butter pie.

September 9-11, 1991: We drove the short distance to Menomonie, WI to do some more genealogical research on the family.

During the stay here we had occasion to tell people to call us via the cellular phone roaming service, only to discover that there was some trouble with that service and it wouldn't work from a pay phone. Coupling that with the fact that roamer access (without the follow-me feature) won't work from any pulse (dial) type phone, and that makes it

much less effective. I found that one can dial 611 on the cellular phone and ask what the roaming number is for the area you are in; the call is free and you get a clear answer. In general the information operators you get by dialing 411 don't know anything about cellular service.

In Menomonie we stayed at a nice KOA close to town. In researching potential camp sites we noted that Wisconsin as well as Minnesota has a surcharge (\$6 for Wisconsin, I think) for non-residents of the state staying in state-run campgrounds. We consider this downright unfriendly of these two states, especially in face of the fee in Alaska and many of the lower 48 states being \$6 total in many cases. After noon on the 11th we traveled down most of the way to Madison on the way to McHenry, IL, and stayed at the Smokey Hollow Campground, a nice place in Lodi, WI.

September 12-15, 1991: We proceeded on to McHenry and spent a few days visiting relatives. Low point of the visit: discovering that the noise we had just started hearing in a rear wheel meant over \$600 worth of repairs to the rear brake system. Seems a caliper had "seized" and destroyed a rotor along with itself. Fortunately the repair was only a half day effort and the repair facility wasn't very far away. High point of the visit was taking four grandchildren out to a state park for a night's camping while their parents enjoyed a night off attending a wedding and the accompanying celebration.

September 16-19, 1991: We visited with a relative in Milwaukee. Highlights: dinner at Pandle's restaurant where five raccoons, a rabbit and a skunk (!) dined with us on the other side of the window, and a tour of the Miller brewing plant. Born and raised in the Milwaukee area, and this was my first tour of a brewery. As I recall, we were told that this particular plant produces about a half million cases of beer each day!

September 20-23, 1991: We visited with relatives in Mundelein, IL. Highlight was discovering Willowbrook Wildlife Haven, an installation run by DuPage County where people can bring injured wild birds and animals for care. Besides the "hospital" there is a nice little zoo of local wildlife, including more kinds of owls than I knew existed in one place. Another highlight was having the grandchildren "camp out" with us in the RV (while parked in their driveway). The 23rd we headed south past Chicago to Kickapoo State Park near Danville, IL. The park was named for the Kickapoo Indians, and has no relation to Al Capp's "Joy Juice."

September 24, 1991: A couple of miles west of Chrisman, IL is the farm of one of our neighbors. We visited the tenants, and were treated to a first class tour of the farm and some other areas they work. We were interested to see some of the details of raising hogs and Black Angus cattle for the market. One thing that surprised this city slicker was that those monster machines you see in the corn fields extract the kernels from the cobs, not just the ears from the stalks, and that just by changing the front end they'll work the same magic with soy beans, extracting the beans from the pods.

During the afternoon we drove to the northeast area of Indiana and stayed at one of the nicest private campgrounds we've seen, approaching the nicest state and provincial

campgrounds we've seen. Although Gordon's campground was huge (700 plus sites) the area is nicely wooded, on rolling hills, and on the edge of a lake.

September 25, 1991: Today we made the rounds of my Indiana relatives in Topeka, Kendallville and Angola. We had originally planned to drive a few miles toward home before evening, but after enjoying a fish dinner with the group we decided to stop at Pokagon (poe-KAY-gun) State Park for the night. It's a very nice place where we stayed once before on a visit, and this time we were treated to seeing a large number of deer which were grazing through the area during the evening and the next morning.

September 26, 1991: The horse is smelling the barn: we high-tailed it east on I80 and the PA turnpike to Donegal, PA. There we spent the night at Laurel Highlands Campland - a bare piece of ground with sites as close together as they could get them, but at least with full facilities, including cable TV.

September 27, 1991: We drove straight to our nieces house to pick up the mail that had not yet been forwarded to us and to visit with her. We spent the night in their driveway.

September 28, 1991: A straight shot home, stopping only to pick up our non-forwarded mail from the post office. The clerks were astounded at the mass of it, and were curious how long we were gone. There must have been about a hundred and fifty pounds, the bag with about half of it was so heavy I could barely lift it. (The next Monday the postman delivered another 50# or so that the clerks had overlooked.) We found the house smelling a little of mildew, but aside from a couple of minor leaks when I turned the water back on the only trouble was the cars. I had a devil of a time getting them to run for more than a few seconds, and then they were balky when driven. I had failed to drain the gas out of the carburetors when we left, so they were pretty gummed up with deposits, I suppose. I put some carb cleaner into the gas tanks, hoping that'll take care of it.

The weeds in part of the garden were horrendous: over six feet tall, leaves a foot across and main trunk two inches in diameter. During the drought we lost an azalea, a clematis and one small mountain laurel. Final mileage, driveway to driveway, was 16848.

Retrospective:

We enjoyed the trip, and recommend it to others. Our enjoyment was increased immeasurably by our niece's assistance in being our point of contact with the world we had temporarily left behind, dealing with our mail and the myriad of other tasks that seemed to come up, and by our neighbors, who saw to it that our home and yard were cared for in our absence.