

Arlington to Alaska and Return.

Dick and Barbara Cleaveland

Phase 1 - To Rice Lake, Wisconsin

Tue 05-20-1997: Uneventful first day travel; a little rain when we left but cleared by noon. Went through Wheeling and then up US-250 (terrible road) to Tappan Lake park for the night. Lousy TV - nothing in the way of ABC so we'll miss the season finale of NYPD Blue. No mechanical problems, but that pesky noise is still there: after running a while, when we slow down for stops or traffic there's a kind of howl from the drive train somewhere. Doesn't seem to be related to brake or steering but just maybe with a small amount of acceleration. Crossing our fingers. Frozen dinners tonight - not very good Lean Cuisine chicken and ravioli, but preceded by shrimp cocktail so tolerable.

Wed 05-21-1997: The day started COLD - 45 degrees, making me wonder why I'd only taken four warm shirts for the entire journey. By mid afternoon we had checked in to Cook's Happy Acres campground in Angola and met with Willis and Vivian Roberts. After chatting a while I got a chance to check email. The area had recently had a very bad storm; no damage to their place but on a trip to dinner we saw several places where the storm had caused considerable damage. The most dramatic was at the local airport, where a hangar had been torn up and eighteen small planes badly damaged - some obviously totaled. At another spot a huge tree had fallen on a shed and crushed not only the shed but the four vehicles inside.

Our dinner was at an Amish restaurant in nearby Topeka - notable for the low prices and excellent food. As an example, a refillable cup of coffee was thirty cents. Complete fish dinner was about \$5. Willis, at 94, is slowing down - he still mows much of his 80 acres, but hires out the weed whacking trim job. Vivian seems to have recovered pretty well from her stroke of a few years ago although she uses a walker part of the time.

Thu 05-22-1997: Up "early" since we hadn't changed out internal clocks and had an uneventful trip to the Camping World facility in Bollingbrook, IL. Our 12:30 appointment for the installation of the leveling compressor was delayed for an hour, but we finally got out of the place by 2 PM, happy that I no longer have to hook up a compressor each morning to pump up the air bags. They did report to me that they saw leakage from one of the front shocks, however, so that's another job I'll need to do before long. Since it was so late when they finished we dry-camped in their parking lot for the night.

Fri 05-23-97 to Sun 05-25-1997: Parked in son Tom's driveway (McHenry, IL) and enjoying a nice visit. Beautiful weather until the last evening when heavy showers and thunderstorms presaged cool weather - Sunday is like March rather than May; 50 degrees and windy. The four grandchildren were all in good health; two stayed one night with us in the motor home.

Sun 05-25-97 to Tue 05-27-1997: Visiting son Jerry and family in Mundelein. He has done a wonderful job rehabbing his home - it was a wreck when he bought it - and the most recent achievement was the building of a nice recreation room and TV lounge in the basement - complete with pool table, large-screen TV, sofas, easy chair and full bath. I lost many games of 8-ball to both Jerry and grandson Ryan, and watched the bulls lose the fourth game to the Miami Heat.

Tue 05-27-97 to Wed 05-28-1997: Motored up to Wild Rose, Wisconsin, (stopping at the Mouse House for cheese and to tank up on gas at a station nearby) to visit cousin Earl and his wife Cynthia. They have a very nice summer house in a heavily wooded section on the edge of Gilbert Lake; Earl is in the finishing-up stages of building a large addition to the original cabin. I casually commented about my sensitivity to cranberries to Cynthia's dismay: the dinner she had prepared included turkey with cranberries, cranberry bread and apple pie with cranberries! Fortunately I was able to assure her that it was only when I ate them in fairly great quantity that I had a problem - and although I stuffed myself at dinner I suffered not a bit.

Wed 05-28-1997: Visited cousin Pat and her husband Clarence (and setter Aggie) in Marshfield. Their home had been extensively remodeled and redecorated since we had been there the last time; the home is beautiful and tailored to their lifestyle. They both cook, so there are two stoves in the kitchen, for instance, and an entrance room is used to display Pat's extensive glass and jewelry products. Unfortunately, on the morning of our arrival Pat's best friend was found dead of an aneurysm (she had been working in her garden). We were, however, treated to both a tour of the local Foxfire garden (oriental in motif) and a wonderful quail dinner prepared by the dual chefs. While there I noticed fluid leaking from one of the leveling jack actuators, so made a couple of phone calls to arrange for shipment of a replacement.

Thu 05-29-97 to Sat 05-31-1997: Drove up to Rice Lake and parked in uncle Earl's side yard, finding Catherine down with a cold and Earl apparently coming down with it too. Instead of taking them out to a nice place for a celebration of their 65th wedding anniversary we picked up some take-out Chinese and ate at home. Except for the colds they seemed well, with Earl struggling as usual with several devices to help overcome his hearing loss. The following day Catherine felt a little better but Earl began showing more signs of the cold. We had Omaha steaks for dinner along with Baked Potato, salad, peas and carrots and pie for desert. We have eaten well the last few days! We left Saturday morning.

Phase 2 - Rice Lake to Fairbanks

Sat 05-31-1997: An easy drive west along back roads to St. Croix and into Minnesota, back roads for a while more and then linked up to I-94 for the last leg to Ashby and a nice little motor home park where the owner let me use the phone line to check email and (hopefully) correct a mistake I had made in setting up our user group message forwarding procedure. Nice weather, with a warm sun and cool breeze all day.

Sun 06-01-1997: Uneventful drive to Bismarck, ND, except for the discovery of a minor medical problem which we decided to take care of there the following day.

Mon 06-02-97 to Tue 06-03-1997: At the KOA in Bismarck, making trips into town each day while Richard was exposed to all of the indignities a urologist could apply with the help of a radiologist at a local clinic. Kidding aside, the treatment and facilities were superb. The result: No real problem (lots of tests proved that), just the effects of bumpy driving and the use of an anti-inflammatory (for the minor tendonitis I have). Decided to drop the anti-inflammatory and proceed.

Wed 06-04-1997: Nice drive to Billings, Montana, partly along the Yellowstone river. It was interesting to note the way the gently rolling hills suddenly gave way to patches of "badlands". It was also interesting to listen to the radio and hear the commercials for cattle vaccine (Bayer, would you believe) and for branding supplies. Local news breaks during the Today show in the morning and on the radio during the day were mostly market prices. Cousin Willis likes to refer to me as a "city boy" and I really feel it out here. Evening was dinner out at a nice place in a crummy part of town right across from the rehabbed railroad station. Toasted our usual Wednesday evening dinner companions in absentia.

Billings appears to be a refinery town, and, as seems to always be the case in these towns, the gasoline prices were very high - \$1.35 per gallon.

Tomorrow to Yellowstone.

Thu 06-05-1997: The drive to Yellowstone started out casual, changed to tense, and wound up shaky. The first leg on US-212 was no problem, except that there was an almost imperceptible constant climb so that the engine vacuum gauge was always moderately in the red. No problem. Later, as we passed about 5000 feet altitude the road became more winding, and as we climbed the grade became steeper and steeper and the curves sharper so that much of the time we were in first gear and slowing to 15 mph for the turns. At about 8000 feet we began to have snow on the ground, and it got deeper and deeper as we climbed to about 11,000 feet. There the drifts were about 15 feet or more high. The road surface was clear of snow, but seriously degraded by potholes and frost heaves, narrow, and missing anything like a shoulder most of the time. Seriously, it was worse than anything we had seen on the Alaska Highway with the exception of the construction areas up there. These conditions persisted throughout the majority of Yellowstone's north loop. The road surface had not only the RV but ourselves shaky.

We checked in at the Fishing Bridge RV Campground for two nights, (\$27 per night), tried unsuccessfully to find a way to catch up on email, walked to the visitors center and then signed up for an all-day bus tour for the following day, another \$54 or so. During the evening we were treated by a spectacular and violent thunderstorm - but it wasn't quite hard enough to remove the bugs from the front of the RV.

Fri 06-06-1997: The tour, of the lower (or Southern) loop was excellent. It lasted from 9 to 6:30 and covered the major attractions and points of interest in the area. Accompanied by highly professional commentary by the bus driver, and in a recently modernized full-sized bus, it was well worth the price. We saw moose and bison close up and some elk besides two eruptions of "Old Faithful" and many of the other thermal and geologic oddities of the area. I must confess an admiration for the ability of tour guide/drivers who can keep up a patter for most of the day, day after day. We had lunch in the dining room of the hotel at the Old Faithful site, and were astonished at the excellent food and normal prices. We saw much evidence of the 1988 fires, but also evidence of regrowth. An interesting sidelight is that the reason the totally wood hotel wasn't destroyed in the fires despite the fact that fire surrounded it was that the hotel had been built with an integral external sprinkler system with just such an eventuality in mind, and they had been soaking it for days as the fire approached.

While at the Old Faithful site we saw a very sad sight. A fellow with a video camera had set up with a tripod to record the event. One minute before the scheduled eruption, he looked over to his friends and said "the battery's dead" and it turned out he had no spare.

Sat 06-07-97 to Sun 06-08-1997: As we left Yellowstone along the middle road and then out the western "Madison" entrance we saw quite a bit of wildlife. First a few bison, then a couple of elk, either a wolf or coyote and then LOTS of bison, in three or four groups. Each group was walking along the road towards us blocking the incoming traffic. Since they were facing us we crawled through the groups- they could see us and walked around us. People behind them weren't that lucky, though, and there were long backups each time.

The exit road was MUCH better than the one we arrived on - no white-knuckle bends and only a few miles of potholes. We drove through Butte and arrived in Missoula about 4:30, pulling into a nice KOA park where the owner/manager let me plug in to her personal PC line to get email. Since it was Saturday we went to a nice place for dinner - Prime rib and all the fixin's. Toasted our absent usual dinner companions. Fortunately the Prime rib was very tender - I've been suffering a little with a front tooth which doesn't like high altitudes - a situation similar to that which causes divers to get the bends. There's apparently a little bubble in the root canal and it expands when the air pressure gets low.

Sunday was an "off" day. Minor repairs, laundry, catching up on both kinds of mail and loafing. The tooth is now back to normal (Missoula is only about 3200 feet above sea level).

The air conditioner belt on the engine has been screaming at startup. The engine is arranged so that it is nearly impossible to tighten it from the hatch so I may go to a dealer tomorrow on the way out to see if they'll do it for me. A dealer in San Diego did on our last big trip. I think they remove a wheel.

Mon 06-09-1997: Stopped at three places on the road today, and none would work on the

air conditioner belt without a wait of at least an hour or more before they started, so it didn't get done. We stopped in Spokane for groceries and continued on to Kettle Falls, Washington, where we stayed at a small RV park - where we were denied phone access for an email check. During the day we passed through Coeur d'Alene and saw the nice lake, but the place looked very "resorty" so we didn't stop. The territory was mountainous, and there was much made of mining in the area.

Tue 06-10-1997: The drive up into Canada went fine, and was through beautiful country. US 395 to the border, then Canada 3 to Osoyoos and BC-97 north past Penticton to the Okanagon Lake Provincial park where we put in for the night. These provincial parks in Canada are beautiful and plentiful, but have no "hookups". Firewood is provided at each campsite and a stock is available nearby if you run out. Barbara identified a cedar waxwing in the bush less than two yards from our dinette window while we were eating.

During the drive up, as we were passing through Grand Forks (BC) a gas station attendant directed me to a mechanic who he said would probably be able to handle the air conditioning belt problem for me. We stopped there and the fellow dropped everything else he was doing, tightened the belt and gave us best wishes for the journey. I gave him \$20 US and he said it was much more than adequate. After that the belt slipped no more and the ac was much more effective.

At the campground we met a retired couple at the adjacent campsite; they had a motor home very similar to ours and we shared experiences about them - then discovered that he was into computers and she was into genealogy, so we spent the majority of the evening chatting and fighting off the mosquitoes.

Wed 06-11-1997: We drove up to Kamloops (local Indian for "meeting of two rivers") and had a nice lunch at a nicely-laid out Best Western motel. The three stories of rooms looked down on three sides of an atrium, and the restaurant occupied the fourth side and part of the middle. Very good and pleasant service. The owner offered me his credit card phone line to try for email, but it soon became apparent that the 800 numbers for Compuserve and AT&T don't work in Canada, so I had no luck. We continued on to Clinton and stopped at the Gold Trail RV park, right on the highway. Walked into town (it's a VERY small town) but there wasn't much of interest. We ate at a restaurant with surprisingly cosmopolitan cuisine - I had steamed clams and Barbara had chicken fingers, and we "shared".

Thu 06-12-1997: We had an easy drive up to Prince George along 97; we stopped at the Log House Restaurant and Campground about 2:30 PM. We could have gone farther, but our memories of the 1991 trip insisted we stop here. On the basis of our value system this is one of the high spots of the entire trip - as it was in 1991.

The campground isn't much physically - few trees, only electric and water service (no sewer hookup) - but it is located on the edge of a beautiful lake; our campsite was about ten feet from the waters edge. The campground area also serves as a parking place for

small pontoon aircraft; there were four there when we arrived; two took off while we were there. As we pulled in we disturbed two families of geese - the attentive parents shepherding their offspring out of our path. The only negative about this was the droppings; we looked like we were playing hopscotch. Later we saw on TV where a Canadian city park had a big controversy about what to do about the geese; they finally decided to relocate them. I'll bet they find their way back....

Our neighbors in the park included two German couples who had rented motorhomes after flying in to Canada, a Swiss couple and another German couple. The campground/restaurant owner is of German extraction, and had told us back in '91 that he advertises in Germany.

The owner chatted with us for a while and then, learning that I was interested in having a tour of one of the local pulp and/or plywood mills here, he called about tours and gave me the disappointing report that the tours are available only Monday through Thursday. Maybe on the way back....

When I asked about a computer hookup, he said sure - just get time and charges and pay appropriately. This was a new experience; I connected using the phone jack they use in the kitchen for making reservations. I tried the operator-dialed time-and-charges route but the computer wouldn't connect for some reason or other. I then found out that a direct dial to Arlington would cost only about 56 cents (Canadian) per minute, so dialed direct and got my mail in less than two minutes. Later the charges were reported for the failed call - total of \$4.06. \$1.50 for operator assistance, \$2 for time-and charges service, and \$.56 for the (less than a minute) call. As the owner's wife said when I paid up, that's an awful lot to pay for something that doesn't work!

We took a little walk around the campground and encountered a pair of killdeer protecting their nest. The antics they went through to distract us from the area were charming, and included the "wounded bird" display.

We went for dinner at about 6:15 or so. The restaurant really has to be seen to be appreciated, but I'll try to describe it. It's built of logs, and appointed with CLASS. The owner was/is a taxidermist, and the walls and ceilings are populated by his work. Pewter serving dishes, cloth tablecloths, ornate candle holders on each table, outside of each window a well-populated hummingbird feeder (we had a window seat and enjoyed them all during dinner). Past the feeders there was a terrace and past that there was the lake, with scavenging ducks and jumping fish. Our waitress was very personable and multilingual and the service was excellent. Background music was from a CD set focused on the 1940's big bands. Each table was appointed with a flag indicating the country of origin of the diners. For those of you who can appreciate it, the experience compares favorably to l'auberge Chez Francois in Great Falls, Virginia, although not quite as multi-course or nearly as expensive.

We returned to our motor home to read, compose this journal entry, watch the missing aircraft return at sunset, and see the multitudes of frustrated mosquitoes populate our screens.

Fri 06-13-1997: Wildlife-wise, this was a good Friday the 13th. On the trip north from Prince George we first saw a pair of moose by the roadside - a cow and her young. A little later Barbara saw a pair of bear cubs at the edge of the woods, then a while later we saw a black bear run across the road right in front of us, and a little later a young moose was munching alongside the road. Of course the video camera wasn't in hand for any of these encounters.

Our trip to a park just outside Dawson's creek - Kiskatinaw Provincial Park - was relatively uneventful except for a couple of stretches of very bad road, requiring us to slow to about 40 kilometers per hour. This park is beautiful as usual - we can hardly see our neighbors, there's a river running alongside, and the price is only \$7 for the night. There's also a plentiful supply of mosquitoes to keep us occupied during the evening.

A casual inspection led to the discovery of our first mechanical failure of note - the hanger for the right side tailpipe is missing. The bolt must have been loose and the whole thing fallen off somewhere along the way. Thank goodness for wire coat hangers; we'll make it to a proper source of replacement parts using bent wire.

Sat 06-14-1997: We stopped in Fort St. Johns and after checking at a Chevrolet dealer we finally wound up at a muffler shop where a very obliging fellow fabricated a hanger and installed it, asking only \$10 for his effort. A nice young fellow; he was proud of his service in the Canadian Air Force and that his squadron won a shoot-out against the top USAF fighter squadron at Colorado Springs back in the 60's.

The road was mostly good, with a few very rough areas. On one stretch we saw a large black bear foraging in the bushes along the side of the road. We made it to Fort Nelson by about 3PM, filled up the tank (gas is getting progressively more expensive) and did a little grocery shopping. The campground owner was happy to let me use the phone on my terms. I checked with the operator and found out that it would cost \$1 for the first minute and \$.86 for each minute thereafter, I direct dialed with my computer, swapped mail for 1 minute 25 seconds, and paid \$2 for the use of the phone.

We spent the evening reading after discovering that it is not possible to get evening news on the local TV channel. Phillip Marlowe reruns, etc. We're really getting north now - when we went to bed at 10:45 it was still daylight, although the clouds were beginning to get a nice tint to them.

Sun 06-15-1997: Shortly after we left Fort Nelson we encountered a major road construction project. Canada is improving the Alaska Highway by cutting out some of the sharp bends and steep grades, but in these mountains that takes a lot of earth moving. We waited until a good queue built up, and then were guided along for at least a half hour at about 10 mph or less. It was raining lightly which made for a slick mud surface but at least it helped keep our windshield clean. The stretch from there to Muncho Lake was beautiful and relatively uneventful; the lake and its surrounding mountains were strikingly beautiful. It's clear why they are called the Rocky mountains - there are a LOT

of rocks strewn around. We were tempted to stop at a lakeside campground there, but it was so early in the day we forged ahead to Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park. On the way there we passed a couple of groups of stone sheep who blocked the highway briefly. Liard is a park with real hot springs, nicely arranged for bathing. There are two pools; we only walked to one. It was about 20 feet wide on the average, and about 100 feet long. Barbara put her feet in and pronounced it HOT.

It's now about 6:10 PM; Barb is just finishing doing the dishes; in a minute I'll get up to dry them and put them away. We had spaghetti, which she did in her usual style, notwithstanding the limitations. While we ate the cloud cover became darker, and now we have a gentle rain competing with the Kathy Matea tape I have in the stereo. No radio stations are within range, of course. Shortly while drying dishes I'll turn on the generator to shatter the outside silence for two minutes while I heat my coffee in the microwave. An idyllic evening.

Mon 06-16-1997: During the morning we saw a moose cow and calf cross the road about a hundred yards ahead of us, so we could chalk up another day of continuous wildlife spotting since entering Canada. The roads were mixed - some new, some old and some in between - construction, that is. When these people do a construction job, they bite off big hunks. We measured one of them as 3.8 miles of continuous loose gravel, one mile of it crawling behind a pilot car. We shouldn't complain, though, the newly constructed parts are very nice by Alaskan Highway standards. There's a shoulder of about three feet minimum - and frequently more, and even a white line marking the right edge of the lane. Sharp curves have been minimized, too. In general, although perhaps it's too early to say, the six years since we last took this trip have seen a significant change in the roads - for the better. No longer does it amount to an adventure every mile or so as it did back in '91.

We stopped just outside of Teslin, at the Dawson Peaks resort. They have a VERY nice restaurant, and sites with water and electric hookups. When I asked about the possibility of a phone hookup, though, the lady pointed out that they have only a radio telephone, which clearly wouldn't work with the computer. She said she had asked for land line service, and was told ok, that'll be \$90,000 for installation, so they skipped it. Canada still has a no-competition telephone system, so that's her only solution short of a satellite link, and that costs about \$10 per minute at the present.

We spent much of the evening on a small game hunt - trying in vain to rid the motorhome of mosquitoes before bedtime. Barbara was up much of the night combating them, and although I slept through the war I awoke with several bites. We have no idea how they are getting in other than through the door as we go in and out, but there seems to be too many for that. Spraying is out because of Barbara's allergies.

Tue 06-17-1997: On the way north we stopped at Whitehorse for lunch and a little shopping. It's a large town, with stop lights and numbered streets - a novelty for the past week or so. We ate at a Pizza Hut. We picked up a couple of newspapers hoping we might learn the outcome of the NBA finals, and were rewarded in that the Whitehorse

paper is not published on the weekends and is an evening paper, so the Friday game was written up in the Monday paper which was on the newsstand. News deprivation on this route can be severe. No TV or radio in most of the area. It's funny to watch the radio scanning over and over and never stopping.

The day was mostly overcast with spotty rain as we moved among the mountains, which was fine as it kept the dust down from the gravel sections. Much of the trip was over the old Alaska Highway which had been simply repaved since we were here in '91. They also had clear-cut for about fifty feet each side of the roadway so that big animals could be seen well before they step out into the road in front of you. It must have been some time ago, though, because trees and bushes have grown to six to ten feet high already.

Just before arriving at Kluane Lake we encountered a black bear munching on flowers at the side of the road. Right on the edge of the road, that is, and so we stopped - no other vehicles around - and I managed to get a good video. He seemed totally indifferent to us.

We stopped at Congdon park, another of the provincial parks. We had stayed here on the last trip and enjoyed the scenery of the mountains over the lake and were amused by the ground squirrel's antics - they act just like prairie dogs.

Wed 06-18-1997: When we woke up at about 7:15 or so we were astonished that almost all the campsites - they were full when we went to bed - were empty. SOME people get up EARLY on this trail! It was overcast and gently raining, and that weather lasted the first part of the day while we headed north. We kept our streak alive with the sighting of two moose in a pond off the side of the road.

Given the weather conditions and the frequency of gravel patches and construction underway, our rig finished the day with a heavy coat of the gravel dust - it's almost as bad as cement to get off. We passed into Alaska about noon Alaska time (one hour earlier than Pacific time) and after some mixed-quality roads reached Tok at about 2PM. We checked in to the Tok RV Village (\$18 per night for full hookups; we will stay two) and I finally got a chance to get email again. My heart skipped a few beats when I got up to leave the office and had forgotten to zip up the computer bag - the computer dropped from the table to the floor with a bang, but it appears that nothing was damaged! Fortunately it landed flat.

We saw our first US newspaper in a long time; the morning Anchorage Daily News arrived about the same time we did. They only get it here in Tok on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, for some reason or other, so we lucked out with fresh news. Interesting non-news item: Sunset is at 11:42 p.m. and sunrise is at 4:21 AM. Dusk is in between.

Barbara got in a load of washing while I processed the mail, then we had a cocktail (toasting our usual Wednesday evening dinner companions) and walked a couple of blocks over to a "salmon bake" where Barbara had baked halibut and I had beef ribs. The judgment was that the baked Halibut was not at all as good as the deep fried halibut we

had in Fairbanks on the last trip. Very casual dining, kind of cafeteria style. The weather here today has been quite comfortable, and NO MOSQUITO trouble so far (knock on wood)!

Thu 06-19-1997: A non-travel day, to catch up on chores. Washing the RV took priority, then a few loads of wash, vacuuming the rug, cleaning the window screens, investigate a problem with an intermittent automatic step, and then, having clear consciences, we spent the rest of the day reading. Two email exchanges during the day. The weather was overcast all day, with periods of light to moderate rain.

Fri 06-20-1997: As we left we got gas at a local Texaco station where we were promised five cents per gallon discount as a result of having stayed at the particular motor home park. As we proceeded to Fairbanks we saw gas prices about five cents per gallon less than we had paid even with the discount. Old trick, some of us never learn.

The weather started out with a slight rain, but it gave way to general overcast so that aspect of the trip was ok. The frost heaves were probably the worst we had seen yet, though, and forced us to keep our eyes glued to the road bed for much of the trip.

We stopped at Delta Junction to get state camping permits and a fishing license. Got the latter (\$50) but couldn't find where to buy the camping permit. This permit lets one camp free in any of the state-run campgrounds for the full year. Later we learned that they had raised the price for this permit since our last trip from fifty dollars to TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS! Since it only costs about \$10 per night if one doesn't have the permit and we don't expect to use the state campgrounds very much, we have opted to skip the permit.

Our string of "wildlife sightings while traveling" was kept alive. For a while I thought it would be on the basis of a snowshoe hare that zipped across the road in front of us, but later in the day Barbara spotted a couple of moose browsing the Tanana river as we passed by.

We arrived in Fairbanks about 3PM, and I got a badly-needed haircut while Barbara did some shopping. We then went to the Alaskaland park and paid \$12 to spend the night in their parking lot, toured the park and then partook in THEIR salmon bake. It was as good as we remembered, with the halibut deep fried, and the price including "all you can eat" including salmon, halibut and beef ribs as well as various other things that go along with a meal - all for about \$18 each. Great meal. I casually mentioned to the young lady at the park information desk that I would like to use a phone to get email, and she offered the phone at the desk. After a couple of false starts I discovered one had to dial an 8 to get outside, and everything went smoothly.

Phase 3 - Fairbanks to the Kenai Peninsula

Sun 06-22-1997: Not much of excitement today. We had brunch at the Pump House, which both of us remembered from '91 for its excellent snow crab salad; although the brunch was fine the snow crab salad wasn't there. We later learned that the place had

been closed for a time and reopened under new management. We spent the rest of the day doing a little shopping and planning the rest of our Alaska stay and developing our desired reservations for the return ferry trip. The evening was punctuated by the heaviest rain shower we've seen on the trip so far; it was nice being snug inside.

Mon 06-23-1997: First thing we went to a local travel agency to get the reservations and tickets for the ferry trips we plan to take. Fortunately there was space available for what we wanted, so we firmed up those plans. Next we came home and tried to firm up the needed campground reservations at the various ferry stops, and had limited success. Worst part was that the only way to get reservations for the US Forest Service campgrounds is to call an 800 number, and it was busy six straight attempts to get through. We also tried for reservations at the Denali campgrounds and were told they were reserved through this coming Saturday.

In the afternoon we took the Discovery river boat cruise. We had taken it the last time and enjoyed it this time as well. Notable change was that this time we got to meet Susan Butcher, several-time winner of the Iditarod sled dog race.

After dinner tried that USFS 800 number again - it was closed as their hours are 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. EDT (5-7 AK time). Must try again tomorrow.

Tue 06-24-1997: After at least 20 attempts to get through to the USFS, I was ready to call the Ketchikan Visitor's Bureau to obtain their advice, but gave one more try at the USFS 800 number - and GOT THROUGH! A young lady in Maryland processed our request and gave us a confirmed site. Her demeanor suggested that she was fairly new at the game. The fee just for making the reservation was \$8.25, presumably a charge paid to the "ticketing" service.

Relieved, we left our site to pick up the ferry travel material from the agent, only to discover that the ferry company hadn't faxed it to the agent yet. We left instructions to mail it to us at general delivery, Anchorage, and departed Fairbanks. We drove the highway toward Anchorage hoping to see Mount McKinley and had no luck due to the clouds, so we stopped just past the Denali park at the Grizzly Bear Campground for the night - and to investigate tours by air. We had stopped at the park, but discovered that the tour buses - even the commercial ones - were the same old school buses that we had ridden on our '91 visit, and that experience wasn't what we wanted this time.

Unfortunately, our string of wildlife sighting while traveling was broken, unless one includes the huge airborne things which happened to challenge our windshield with disastrous results (for them).

At the campground we picked up some brochures and investigated the fly-by park tours; something to mull over during the evening. These air tours take a little over an hour and cost about \$150 each.

Wed 06-25-1997: The day when we got up was nice and clear, with hardly a cloud to be

seen, so we signed up for the air tour promptly. We were picked up at 8:30 and driven to the air strip for a 9 a.m. flight. It looked for a while like we would be the only passengers, but a German couple showed up at the last minute to join us. The aircraft held just the four of us, the pilot and a staff member going along for the ride.

The flight was excellent; we saw much of the Alaskan range and got wonderful close-up views of Mount Denali (McKinley). The flight lasted well over an hour, and the pilot gave us a monolog about the various features of the mountains, glaciers and rivers. We had a nice view of the Denali park road that we took on a tour back in '91. I shot lots of still and video pictures. We decided it was well worth the cost.

After we were returned to our motorhome we took off for Anchorage, stopping along the way for a couple of roadside views of the mountain. Our wildlife sighting string was restarted by a moose munching in a bog about a hundred yards from the highway. We stopped for the night in the same campground we had used the last trip - Riverside in Houston, AK.

Thu 06-26-1997: Our trip to downtown Anchorage was without incident except that we rode on the first three-lane highway in a long time. We stopped on the outskirts of town to restock the larder at a large Safeway and had lunch in a restaurant near the mall. We settled in at the Ship Creek RV park; it is right along the Alaskan railroad tracks; the main track is about 30 feet from our stern. Not so bad, there's only a couple of scheduled trains per day - a train leaves for Fairbanks about 8:30 a.m. and returns during the evening. Then there's one or two "specials", perhaps, at odd hours.

We walked up to downtown, visited the visitor's center and made arrangements for a city bus tour the next day. I say we walked "up to downtown" because it's about a mile each way mostly through the railroad-oriented shipping area and includes about 60 steps up the bluff to the business area. It reminded us how out of shape we've become. We bravely resisted the available cabs and returned the same way we came.

Fri 06-27-1997: We repeated the walk this morning to meet the tour bus at the local Hilton hotel at 8:15. The tour was run by the Gray Line, and was by far the most disappointing "city tour" we have ever had. It was a three-hour tour costing \$25 each. We have taken many such tours in other cities, and have generally found them quite rewarding, but this one was a real flop. First, the people-shuffling by the "customer service representatives" in preparation for departure left a lot to be desired, resulting in departure about a half hour later than scheduled. Once on the bus we were shown the local Sears and J. C. Penny stores, the marina, the railroad station, the airport and the local museum of Alaskan history and art. Picture this: we made a special stop so people could get out of the bus to see float planes take off and land! The only quality feature was the hour stop at the museum; it was an excellent presentation of the history of Alaska which would meet or even exceed the standards of the Smithsonian for arrangement and realism.

The monologue by the driver as we traversed the city included a few statistics and items

of interest, but paled in comparison with other similar tours we had taken in the past. At the end of the tour he promised to drop some people off at a spot where they would get their next tour leg, but there wasn't a satisfactory parking place so he just skipped it.

After the tour we dropped a couple of rolls of film off for processing and had lunch at a local restaurant, then made reservations for a day trip to Whittier for a cruise the next day. We then picked up the pictures and returned, exhausted, to our motor home.

Sat 06-28-1997: After a fifteen minute walk down the tracks to the station we exchanged our vouchers for tickets, boarded the train, and at 9:00 on the dot we departed for Whittier. The train was just three cars long - two coaches and a dining car. The route was along Cook inlet and Turnagain Arm to Portage and then through two long tunnels over to Whittier. The train traveled quite slowly much of the way, and it took us until about 11:30 to get there, although the cars were comfortable and the attendant in our car gave a running commentary on the sights and environs. At the dock in Whittier (population about 200 or so) we boarded a small ship (capacity about 240) for the glacier cruise. We were among the last to board and chose the remaining empty booth, capacity six, to sit in. We were promptly joined by a foursome - Grandma, Mom and two quite unruly young lads of about 4 and 7 years. The trip was grandma's mother's day present - but we gathered she would have preferred to have made the cruise alone. They were all Anchorage residents.

We had heard that a complimentary luncheon would be served while the ship was underway for the ice fields, and were surprised to discover that it really was nicely done. I had chicken cordon bleu and Barbara had baked breaded halibut. Mixed fresh fruit, a bread stick and a big cookie filled out the meal; coffee, tea and/or sodas were included. Cocktails were available at the bar. Surprisingly, the meal was very good. Later we split an Irish coffee.

We "visited" several glaciers in Prince William Sound, and most significantly one - Surprise glacier - which was calving frequently enough for us to experience the event several times. I think I managed to get one good video (I haven't looked at it yet). On the trip we saw a few rafts of otters (darn, but they are CUTE) and a kittiwake rookery. We returned to the dock at about 5:30, boarded the train and settled in to the dining car for the trip back to Anchorage. Cocktails (we toasted our at-home companions) and clam chowder were all we needed after the large lunch. A brief walk back to the RV park told us that the weather had moderated some - the Anchorage heat wave (highs in the upper 70's) was over.

Sun 06-29-1997: Except for doing the laundry, a day of rest.

Mon 06-30-1997: We stopped by the post office to see if the material which was to have been sent to us from Fairbanks (ferry itinerary) had arrived (it had not) and left town for the drive to Portage. We stopped along the way out of town to do some grocery shopping at a large Safeway. Upon arriving in Portage we obtained a spot at the Williwaw campground (USFS) and then visited the Portage glacier. It had retreated quite a bit since

we saw it in 1991. We spent the remainder of the day reading and hiking up to the ice field at the base of the mountain near the campground. We had grilled steak and hamburger for dinner, complemented by the Turkish wine that had been given us for the trip by the proprietor of the Kazan restaurant back home.

Tue 07-01-1997: Aside from a three mile walk to visit the Portage Glacier gift shop for lunch and a newspaper, we spent the day reading and enjoying the scenery. This campground is in the valley carved out by the original glacier; the valley is heavily wooded and fairly narrow - just about wide enough to comfortably accommodate the road, the campground, the creek with glacial runoff and the tracks for the train we had taken for the trip to Whittier the other day. Several of the mountains edging the valley have snow fields or small glaciers on them. The temperature reached a high of 72, and there was a steady breeze rustling the leaves - the sound mixing with that of the several waterfalls on the side of the nearest mountain. In the evening I built a fire, let it die down and we toasted marshmallows.

Wed 07-02-1997: Despite the six miles of road construction which we were forced to take at about 8 mph, we arrived in Seward by 11:15. We had been concerned about being able to get a space in the city waterfront lot because the weekend (of the 4th) is a big deal here in Seward. They have a race up Mount Marathon which is getting quite a bit of publicity. Entrants race up the side of the mountain at the edge of the town and back down again; takes about forty-five minutes for the fastest man; they have separate races for men, women and children. They are run on the Fourth, and are followed by fireworks at midnight (it will still be light, even then).

The city is small by most standards, about six blocks wide and a couple of miles long; it was built as the starting deep-water port for the main supply route for Alaska, and is the southern terminus of the Alaska Railroad (from here to Anchorage and then Fairbanks with a side line to Whittier). There was a cruise ship - the Tropicale - at the dock when we arrived; it left about 9:30 in the evening.

We took a walk downtown from our bayside parking place (we had lucked out and found a good site), and later had dinner at Ray's restaurant (which we had enjoyed during our 1991 visit). We spent the evening looking out of our front windows at the fishermen bringing in what looked like 12 pound silver salmon, at a small otter cavorting slightly off shore, at the day-cruise boats returning, and at the departure of the Tropicale. As I sit here at 10:00 p.m. typing this a bald eagle is soaring around being chased by a smaller bird and the sun is showing on the top half of the mountains across the bay. The temperature outside is 57.

Fri 07-04-1997: The entire Fourth of July in Seward is a big block party - over about six blocks - and it attracts people from many miles away. The highlights of the day are the three mountain marathons. The race starts on the main street, proceeds about six blocks to the edge of the mountain and then up and back down the 3000 foot mountain. Most of the track is on the gravel trail on the mountain, and the vast majority of the finishers had fallen somewhere along the way. The winner of the men's heat crossed the finish line in

47 minutes - the downhill leg took him 7 minutes, so you can imagine what the slope is like.

There were a great number of sidewalk vendors, and each restaurant seemed to have a sidewalk stand - the local Catholic church and the American Legion had large-scale barbecues going. There was the usual small town parade with civic organizations and businesses participating. Barbara and I had sloppy joes for lunch and brought home some barbecued chicken for dinner. They cleared out an area of the waterfront RV parking area for the fireworks not far from where we were parked.

We returned home to the RV late to see a sad sight - a seal about 50 feet offshore seemed to be struggling to rid itself of something that was stuck in his mouth. He may have swallowed a fish that had a hook and line attached - a lot of people fish off the shoreline here, and more than one has lost his line to a stubborn king salmon. Later, however, it was seen chowing down satisfactorily unencumbered by whatever it was that he had been trying to get rid of earlier.

The fireworks display was much better than we had any reason to expect from this small town; a nice solid display which lasted for nine minutes and which included many impressive rockets and bombs - some of the former burst right above us as we were so close to the launch area.

Sat 07-05-1997: The day started with a beep - our battery voltage had dropped down to the point where the propane leak detector no longer would work, so it shut the propane down and that gave the refrigerator fits. All this at 5:30 AM. Such are the perils of "dry camping" - meaning without hookups, which is the way it's done here on the waterfront. So we waited until a decent hour and ran the generator and main engine for periods to put some life into the batteries. Other than that, the day was spent reading, walking and making phone calls.

Sun 07-06-1997: I went out fishing for halibut while Barbara stayed ashore and shopped and read. The fishing trip was of a type new to me. We went out - five passengers and the Captain - on the latter's 30-foot aluminum diesel cabin cruiser. The boat cruised at 24 knots and we ran for two and a half hours before dropping anchor to bottom fish in 84 feet of water. We were just off the tip of Montague island. The limit for halibut is two per day, and I managed to get my limit first - although that was because I elected to keep the first two decent size fish I caught. Others threw back the little ones (15 pounds or so) in hopes of catching something more impressive. During the time we were fishing we were treated to a "swim-by" of killer whales; the nearest orca was a large male and he came within about 200 feet of the boat. A beautiful sight! Some porpoises (dolphins) swam nearby too.

The weather in the Gulf of Alaska was as close to perfection as one could hope for. Warm sun, little breeze, temperature about 60, and nearly flat calm all day. There were periods when the water was like glass, reflecting the nearby mountains. During the trip home there was enough of a chop that the boat (at 24 knots) gave a somewhat punishing

ride, but I considered the resulting bruise a badge of honor.

After we returned, we had the fish filleted and arranged for the meat (26 pounds) to be frozen, vacuum packed and shipped home to our willing neighbor to hold in her freezer for our return to Arlington. A little more engine-running to beef up the motorhome batteries and that closed our day.

Mon 07-07-1997: We left Seward going first North (one HAS to) and then West to Soldotna, on the other side of the Kenai Peninsula. We picked up the mail which had been forwarded to us, did some shopping, and checked out the visitor's center. We stayed at the River's Edge RV park with full hookups - and with the batteries hopefully getting their top-off charge.

Tue 07-08-1997: A little shopping and some tests on the batteries seem to indicate that they are on their last legs while others contradict that. Checking with KMART in the nearby city of Kenai for replacements (they handle Delco deep-cycles) resulted in no luck - they were completely out, and the clerk said it would be two weeks before the next shipment. We continued North for the Discovery campground in the Captain Cook Alaska State Recreation Area and found a nice campsite on the bluff overlooking Cook Inlet. While tests were being made on the batteries early in the day I had forgotten to restart the LP system, so it turns out that the batteries were REALLY depleted since the refrigerator shifts to battery operation when set to automatic. Hence much running of the generator to get a reasonable charge into the batteries. We had a nice walk on the park trail. No mosquitoes, just a few pesky flies and some bees enjoying the blooming weeds - some kind of celery. There was lots of fireweed around too. That evening I had a session of chills followed by fever and went to bed early.

Wed 07-09-1997: I awoke feeling fine, and we spent the day taking walks and reading and running the generator to keep the batteries up. The silence in the park is so near-absolute that it seems a shame to shatter it with the generator noise, but we're not the only ones so we don't feel too badly about it. That evening we built a small fire and toasted marshmallows again. This is probably our favorite Alaska state park (the one near Portage which we like so much is a Forest Service park).

Thu 07-10-1997: We drove back south (the only direction possible) and returned to Kenai to check out new house batteries at a NAPA store. They weren't "maintenance free" but were a little cheaper and they had them in stock, so for our peace of mind we opted to buy them. I installed them on the spot, then drove to the KMART store for some other items. While there I noticed that they had a full stock of the batteries I would rather have purchased - the ones which weren't due in for "a couple of weeks" two days ago. Needless to say I was irked.

We had lunch at the nearby Pizza Hut and picked up some KFC to reheat for dinner, then headed back to the Soldotna RV park for the night. We did a washing and I caught up on email. Astonishing that one of our correspondents had been sending email to us since the 25th of June but we hadn't received it until today. Something awry on the internet, I

guess. About 8 p.m. it started to rain, which was a blessing to many - there have been some pretty nasty forest fires in Alaska, one just a little outside of the town where we were staying. Presumably the rain will solve most of the problems nearby. I heard that Alaska had something like 87 forest fires going the day before. This rain is supposed to last for four days or so.

Fri 07-11-1997: We drove south to Homer and settled on a campground on the far end of the spit, which projects out about three miles into the bay. We had electricity there, and it was a relief to discover that the converter didn't sound like it needed to charge the batteries any, like it had for some time. We had dinner at the Lands End Hotel restaurant, at a nice table overlooking the bay.

Sat 07-12-1997: Walked around a little to see the shops, marinas and fish processing plants on the spit, and took a shuttle service to the town on the mainland to see the town museum and shops. The museum here has won recognition as being one of the finest for a town of this size (about 5000 residents) and we enjoyed it quite a bit.

Sun 07-13-1997: We moved to a city-run campground on the spit which was devoid of any hookups - the acid test, so to speak, for our new batteries. Before we left the Homer Spit Campground we looked in at the beautiful little garden at one of the permanent sites which had the name "Eagle Spot" and discovered that it was the place where a woman feeds eagles during the winter. There was a TV special about her a couple of years back; she has well over a hundred eagles that gather on the shore near her place, and she feeds them fish she garners from the processing plants on the spit.

During the day and evening it became obvious that I wasn't well; I've been tiring more easily and having some chills-fever combinations the last couple of evenings, so we resolved to find a doctor the next day to see what was what.

Mon 07-14-1997: We found a clinic next to the local hospital, and a Physician's Assistant who checked me out. She sent me to the hospital for x-rays and blood tests, and diagnosed a clear case of pneumonia. Prescription: Antibiotic and rest. The local pharmacy was not a "preferred" one so we had to pay for the antibiotic Augmentin: well over \$100 for a ten day dose. We spent the rest of the day loafing.

I should mention that all of the people we have encountered here in Homer have been very pleasant and obliging. There's a shuttle service which uses a van and takes people wherever they want to go for a small fee - \$3 for going anywhere in town from the spit and vice versa, for instance. The driver took us to the clinic and even waited to make sure it was the right place before she left for the next pickup.

Tue 07-15-1997: We drove North looking for an interesting place to spend the rest of the day and evening. Deep Creek State Recreational area was the winner. There's a long beach filled with RV's and boat trailers; people launch their boats right from the (gravel) beach and go out and fish; there are a couple of cleaning tables set up for the use of the lucky ones. And there were many of those; we saw a number of very nice King Salmon

brought in as well as some small and one large halibut. It was interesting to watch the four wheel drives trying to haul their boats over the dune when they recover their boats - it seemed to take on the average of about four tries or so to make it. We saw an eagle soaring off a nearby bluff.

Phase 4 - Kenai Peninsula to Home

Wed 07-16-1997: North to Soldotna to find that the RV park we had stayed at before was full, so we went to the next one which didn't look full; it turned out to be associated with the Riverside House hotel and restaurant. Although it only provided electric hookups, since we could dump our holding tanks and take on fresh water at a nearby Tesoro gas station that was not much of a problem. We did a little shopping and both of us had hair cuts. During the afternoon we edited and printed the third part of our trip journal, found a place to make copies and got them ready to mail. They were kind enough at the hotel to let me use the phone line at the reservations desk of the restaurant, so I managed to exchange email for the first time in a few days.

We decided to try the hotel restaurant for our usual Wednesday evening dinner out, and that was a GOOD decision. The hotel is on a bank of the Kenai river which passes through town, The river at this point is about eighty feet wide, and was running fast - I guess about ten knots. Our table looked out over the river and the marshy woods on the other side. There were many people fishing from each bank and several boatloads passed by, so it was interesting watching them. The best part, though, was when a moose walked into view in the marshy area across the way and rummaged around for awhile, unbeknownst to the people fishing a few yards away. The waitress said they often see a moose cow and her two calves in that marshy pond, and the offsprings really seem to enjoy it, cavorting around gleefully. I wish we could have seen that. We toasted our usual dinner companions with excellent manhattans and enjoyed a very good meal.

The evening pleasure was diminished somewhat by the realization that the thermostatically controlled cooling fan on our ac converter was running continuously - it didn't quit all night. The fan usually runs only when there's a fair load on the converter, and the only load which might have been on was the battery charging feature. At about 1:30 a.m. I couldn't stand it any more so I got my meter out and checked the charging - there was no significant charging, which was as it should be since the batteries were charged up during the run up from Deep Creek during the day. Mystery unsolved for the time being.

Thu 07-17-1997: We mailed off the trip journals on the way out of town and proceeded back to Anchorage. The terrible construction area was not nearly as bad as it was when we came down a couple of weeks earlier, but there were showers off and on to reduce the pleasure of the drive. When we got to Anchorage we took a spot in the same park we had stayed in last time, but this time asked for and received a site about a hundred feet farther from the railroad tracks. This time, however, we were in the pattern for the fighters out of Elmendorf air base, and there was a LOT of activity.

After we had been connected to power for a while we noted that the cooling fan for the converter had not gone on at all. I'm more convinced now that the problem is with its thermostat and not with the electrical system.

Fri 07-18-1997: Barbara did a washing and later walked into town while I loafed and read (following doctor's and nurse's orders).

Sat 07-19-1997: Mid-morning we took a cab to the downtown "Saturday Market" and picked up a few items of fresh produce and then had lunch of some of the items available from the stands. This market is unusual - a mixture of food stands, novelty items and fresh produce as well as some entertainers (violin duet looking for contributions, a juggler, and so forth). After lunch we cabbed home for the afternoon, then later back for a birthday dinner at Simon and Seaforth's, probably the top restaurant in Anchorage. The table was located so we could look out to the southwest over Cook Inlet. This was a mixed blessing - the view was very nice, but the hot Alaska sun was beaming down on us, and the restaurant, like so many places in Alaska, had no air conditioning, so we sweltered.

Sun 07-20-1997: As we left Anchorage after shopping at a local Safeway to refill the larder, it became clear that Barbara had picked up a nasty head cold. We stopped in Glenallen after a drive punctuated by showers once we had passed the first batch of mountains. Barb went to bed at about 8 PM; it rained steadily all evening and night.

Retrospect: I realize that earlier I had said that the fish we saw being caught at Deep Creek were "very nice." That didn't do justice to them. The king salmon were about four to five feet long and I would guess weighed about forty pounds or so. The large halibut was about five feet long and, based on the way the people struggled to hold it up must have weighed about 80-90 pounds. These are pretty much average for the "large" catches - although the record halibut is something like 400 pounds.

Mon 07-21-1997: Barbara awoke with very puffy eyes from her cold - she said she felt like a mole, not being able to see well. The swelling went down fairly quickly, though, so we got underway about 9 AM.

The trip from Glenallen to Tok was easily the worst we have encountered so far. There was only one short stretch of gravel, and one short construction area, but at least 80 of the 120 plus miles was nearly continuous frost heaves, limiting our speed to between 25 and 35 miles per hour - and even then it was a severely bumpy ride. We arrived at Tok at 1 p.m. and Barbara immediately went to bed for a nap.

Tue 07-22-1997: We decided to stay an extra night in Tok so that I could investigate getting an oil change and lube and possibly new shock absorbers for the vehicle. The oil change and lube was easy - right across from the RV park was a new "quickie" place. They seemed to do a nice job and no waiting. They suggested two places I might get new shocks installed, one was nearly next door. We went there and I stood around in the

messy entrance area while the people ignored me, so we left and went to the other place, "Grizzly's." about a mile or so away. The fellow who greeted us looked like a grizzly - about 300 pounds and bearded - but was friendly and helpful. He quickly discovered there were no shocks in town for our RV, but arranged for them to be shipped by air from Fairbanks and said he'd have them by 11:00 the next day. He didn't ask for money or even my name.

We relaxed for the afternoon (Barb napped, unusual for her) and then we went out to the local Westmark hotel dining room for dinner. Nice meal, but not outstanding (I had my first calves liver fix since May).

It was interesting that the pay phone system here is the same as it is in Homer. One dials the local number, and when someone answers THEN you put in a DIME and the connection is completed. If you don't put in the dime they can't hear you. But where else in the US is a phone call still a dime?

Wed 07-23-1997: We woke up to a steady rain, tanked up and went over to Grizzly's early lacking anything else to do, only to discover that the shocks were already in since the weather was rainy and the pilot had left earlier in a different aircraft than usual - or something to that effect. Anyhow, we had the shocks changed and were out of there by 11:00, and the bill seemed to me to be about what I would expect anywhere else in the states. The old shocks were clearly very bad.

We proceeded down the Alaska Highway and into Canada on our way to Haines, and stopped at the Lake Creek Provincial campground for the night. The new shocks clearly have improved the ride, especially over those notorious frost heaves.

Thu 07-24-1997: It rained off and on all day. We stopped at the nice campground - our favorite in the Yukon - at Kluane lake for lunch, but the rain and poor visibility limited our enjoyment. There were signs throughout the campground that a bear had been sighted and that tent camping was prohibited.

We stopped at a new campground in Haines Junction just a little after noon; there appear to be no good campgrounds between Haines Junction and Haines, and it's a fairly long haul and with both of us in a somewhat weakened state we decided to quit driving early. Barbara's eyes are improving but not fully recovered yet and her cold has the better of her. Although I feel ok otherwise, my stamina is lacking.

Fri 07-25-1997: The trip to Haines was easy - the roads were as good as can be expected in these parts, and although there was a little rain in spots (the lee of some mountains) in general the weather was fine. We stopped for lunch the same place we had on our '91 trip - on Chilkat pass - and fed a friendly ground squirrel just as we had on that prior trip.

We checked in with the ferry terminal in Haines on arrival, and were told some dismaying news. First, our departure time had been moved back a day, second there was no assurance any of the schedules would remain as they had been, and third service to

Prince Rupert had been suspended. All of this due to the fishing controversy which had resulted in the taking of a ferry hostage at Prince Rupert by Canadian fishermen. There is hope that the mess will be straightened out early next week as some important meetings will take place on Monday, but on the other hand the matter is in the hands of politicians at this point so our confidence is shaken. We'll wait and see.

We went to the Chilkat State Park and took advantage of another of Alaska's excellent campgrounds. This one is about six miles outside of Haines on the Chilkat river. During the evening Barbara complained about a sore throat so we took a good look with a flashlight and lo and behold it was red as a beet and swollen. We started her on an antibiotic at once.

Sat 07-26-1997: We drove to Haines and settled into our new campground - right on the water, beautiful mountains beyond, a half block from the start of the business district, and with a bald eagle perched on a tree nearby. Probably the same eagle that was perching there in 1991 when we were here. The RV park won't let me use a phone line for email, but the visitor's center in town has a line set up for just that use, so although it's a bit of a walk I won't suffer from email deprivation.

We had lunch out at the restaurant associated with the RV park (really, a very nice one) but stayed in for the evening meal.

Sun 07-27-1997: We mostly loafed except for a brief walk into town to get a paper - Barb's first try at walking more than a few yards since coming down with her bad throat. For the evening we celebrated my birthday with a dinner at the Fort Seward Lodge; I had sautéed shrimp and Barb enjoyed all-you-can-eat steamed Dungeness crab - but the original one was all she could handle. We took a taxi there, but Barb felt so good after dinner we walked back.

Mon 07-28-1997: After a lot of consideration we decided to change our plans and not take the ferry to visit Juneau, Petersburg and Ketchikan. This is because they haven't put out any kind of a schedule effective for after the 4th of August, and that would be when we'd be at our first stop, Juneau. The worst situation would be to get to Ketchikan, a very small town, with few ferry stops, and then get stranded for several days. So we got a refund for our prepaid fare and plan to take the Alaska Highway back. If we can get a ferry hop over to Skagway as a standby Thursday morning we will - it would cut off about a day's drive.

Tue 07-29-1997: Spent the morning reading and deciding not to wait here an extra day in order to get an evening ferry to Skagway. After lunch we picked up the long-awaited mail (Priority mail took 6 days, PA to Haines) and did some shopping.

Evenings here we enjoy watching cruise ships either departing Haines or passing by in the channel from Skagway. Each day there's at least one and sometimes two or three. The ships range from very large and modern to fairly small (the Yorktown Clipper, for one).

Wed 07-30-1997: The morning was spent doing the laundry. Notable was the price - \$2.50 per load to wash, then \$1.00 for 30 minutes of drying. We did a little shopping and loafing during the afternoon, and went out to dinner at the restaurant near the RV park, toasting our usual Wednesday evening dinner companions.

Thu 07-31-1997: We rose at 4:30 in order to get to the ferry office at 5:45 a.m. when it opened, in order to get on the standby list for a trip to Skagway. As it was, we were about twentieth in line when we arrived; others had been waiting outside before the door was opened. We kept hearing the clerks tell people that standby was "pretty iffy" so we didn't have much hope when we got to the window. Fortunately I mentioned that I had heard we might get priority treatment since we had found it necessary to cancel our previous itinerary - we were given "priority standby" status, and as it worked out we got on the ferry as there was some extra space. It was interesting watching them load the vehicles on the ferry - since all had to be facing "out" and there was limited turning room at the entrance ramp, several RV's had to back down the ramp and make a right-angle turn to get into the desired position on the vehicle deck. Not so bad for motor homes, but those with trailers really stressed their driving skills. I should mention that the ferry was the Malaspina, the one which the Canadian fishermen had blockaded a few days back causing the nasty rescheduling problems.

The trip to Skagway was uneventful - we had a second breakfast during the one hour journey. Upon entering port we were surprised to see three cruise ships docked there - including one we had been on a few years back, the Windward. It was apparent that Skagway had built additional docking space since we were there in 1991; I seem to recall that construction was just starting then.

We left Skagway promptly and passed through Canadian customs 20 miles or so down the road with no problem. We opted to take a shortcut avoiding Whitehorse even though the 33 mile road was unpaved for the last 13 miles or so. The gravel was not bad at all - not "ribbed" very much like so many gravel stretches we have seen. We spent the night at Squanga Lake Yukon territory campground; I grilled our dinner over a campfire built with the free firewood Canadian campgrounds seem to have in great supply. Later marshmallows over the coals, and to bed for a well-needed rest.

Fri 08-01-1997: An easy day's ride to a few miles past Watson Lake to a commercial campground (Iron Creek) on a small lake just off the highway near Irons Creek. Irons creek was reportedly named after the need for Alcan construction vehicles to stop here to put on their chains - Irons. The drive was easy because almost all of the construction work we had seen on the way up was finished; just about 7 KM of gravel, and that was so smooth we didn't really have to slow down for it. It suggests that the people who take the ferry up to Alaska and the highway back home are smart - most of the ravages of winter have been erased by August. We had dinner in the restaurant at the campground - both liver and hamburger cheerfully overcooked. The place has power supplied by generator - they have two and use one or the other. The one they were using occasionally went into surging spasms - very distracting sounds in the campground.

Sat 08-02-1997: We dumped our holding tanks, loaded up on fresh water, and drove on. The first part of the highway was pretty good, but it quickly deteriorated to what we thought was good in 1991: mostly paved, but kind of rough, lots of sharp curves, a speed limit of 80kph (50 mph) and essentially no shoulders. we saw several young caribou along the road, and many stone sheep - they look more like goats than what we normally think of as sheep - wandering in the road and along the edge. We stayed for the evening at the Summit Lake campground, where we had stayed on the way up in 1991; it was just as pretty and impressive as before, with an altitude of 4250 feet, the highest point on this stretch on the Alaska Highway.

Sun 08-03-1997: Within the first hour of departure we saw several more young caribou and a short time later a brown (grizzly) bear grazing along the edge of the road. A while later there was a dead moose by the side of the road - apparently one which had lost a battle with modern transportation.

We stopped in Fort Nelson for a little shopping and lunch. We ate at the Coach House restaurant. Since it was Sunday they had a buffet, and it was excellent. We were surprised first of all that it was only \$9.95 Canadian (a little over \$7 US) but astonished when we were given the senior discount and the tab was a little \$5.95 Canadian each including tax.

We decided to "push" the afternoon driving to take advantage of Charlie Lake Provincial campground; we broke precedent and drove until 5:30 PM. Much of the drive was over excellent roads, but there were a couple of stretches of construction which were very dusty and tedious. There was a sign outside the campground when we got there that said "campground full" but we took a chance anyway and found a perfectly good site.

Mon 08-04-1997: Most of the trip towards Prince George was comfortable, but there was one very nasty stretch of construction followed by another stretch where the road NEEDED to be rebuilt. The outside temperature was in the low 80's; first we've seen that high for a long time. The add-on electric engine cooling fans were on much more often than usual even for this warm weather, so we decided to stop at a full-service campground while I checked on things. We stayed at Grizzly RV park in the town of Bear Lake, about 50 miles short of Prince George. I spent a lot of time cleaning bugs out of the radiator; we had gone through a place with a dense population of dragon flies and brought a good many of them with us. I'm hoping that solves the problem. While I was debugging the radiator Barb defrosted the refrigerator; it had been having trouble keeping the temperature into the 30's.

Tue 08-05-1997: The trip in to Prince George was fine, and the engine cooling was normal, thank goodness. We found the Visitor's Center and signed up for a tour of a nearby sawmill today and a pulp mill for tomorrow. After the tour we checked in at the Log House for the night and enjoyed their first class restaurant.

The sawmill tour was very interesting. Our first stop was at the place where they grow

the seedlings to replace the forest they cut down. There are about a dozen greenhouses where they nurture the plants, many thousands in each section. Except for brief periods when they are actually planting the seeds or moving them from one area to another the whole thing is automated and computer controlled - I think I saw only about two employees there. I found it interesting that they ship the seedlings out about a year after the seeds are planted. They are first grown, then short days are simulated by covering the greenhouses part of the time, then they are put into cold storage for the winter (18 degrees C) and shipped out for planting in the spring.

At the sawmill proper we followed the logs through the entire process. I was impressed by the huge machinery involved and again with the extent that the vast majority of the process is automated - they must have had about 30 desktop computers set up controlling various parts of the process from debarking the logs, trimming them to standard lengths, sawing into various lumber shapes (2x4, 2x6, etc) depending on the size or the log cross section, sorting the lumber by size and moisture content, packaging for kiln drying, planning and then final packaging for shipment.

The only down side of the tour was that it was the hottest day they'd seen so far in Prince George his year, and it felt like it; both of us needed showers before going out for dinner.

Wed 08-06-1997: A little shopping in the morning and a replacement of the air filter in the engine (very dusty roads in the recent past), a nice lunch out at Earls restaurant, and then the pulp mill tour. Another large plant, greatly automated. This one takes in wood chips from the sawmill and other sources and creates pulp fibre. The facilities for sorting the chips, cooking them to remove the lignin and then bleaching and drying the product were of course impressive - the cooking "vat" was about six stories high. The final product is a white material in sheets somewhat with a thickness and consistency somewhat like the usual beer coasters, the sheets are about two by four feet in area, packaged into bales and shipped to paper-making plants in the US, England and Japan. Very impressive were the facilities for unloading the double-semi trucks which bring the chips into the plant; they are backed onto a platform which is then tilted up to about a seventy degree angle - cab and all - and the chips pour out the back. Got lots of videos of that.

When we started on our way back to the RV park our fan clutch engaged and stayed on for the entire trip. Clearly this is not right, so when we got to the park I made an appointment for replacement at a local Chevrolet dealer. Unfortunately that appointment could not be until Friday, so we'll have to spend at least an extra day or two here in Price George.

Thu 08-07-1997: When I got up this morning I found that my left knee was quite painful - probably was aggravated by the climbing around the pump mill the day before.

We went on a tour of a plywood plant this morning. The process of creating the veneers from the logs - peeling - was the most dramatic; the five foot (or so) long lathe blades have to be changed every two hours. Although many of the processes were almost fully automated, The surprise for me was that the process of filling voids in the internal layers

was fully manual, and I saw many cases where the voids were very poorly filled. I have heard of other plywood plants where this process is fully automated, and some plywood I have seen and used show the effect. I have the impression that this is a small plant making a limited product line. One thing they make which I had not heard of before is tongue and groove plywood for flooring and subflooring.

After lunch we registered at a new campground - Blue Spruce - which is nearer to the city, and Barbara did a washing while I rested my knee and put heat on it. Decided to go on Ibuprofen for a few days to see if that would help the knee, taking a risk on a recurrence of the bleeding experience of last June. There was considerable rain during the evening.

Fri 08-08-1997: Although our appointment was for 9:30 a.m. and we showed up at 9:00 a.m. for the work, we were not serviced until 1:00 PM. There was much confusion about whether or not a part would be available in town. It was said the identification had to be read off the old fan blade, and the mechanic had a devil of a time getting the fan assembly off the engine to read it. He had to remove a frame cross-member first! Then the part wasn't available - would have to be shipped in and arrive Tuesday. However, I mentioned the possibility of using non-Chevrolet parts, and he said well, ok - and they got a replacement in about 15 minutes. All told it took him over 3 hours to do the work of replacing the fan assembly, and the cost was \$495 (Canadian) in all. We finally left to go back to the RV park.

Sat 08-09-1997: When we left Prince George at about 8:45 a.m. the entire town was smothered by smog - smoke from the pulp mills, probably. Visibility was down to about a half mile until we pulled out of the valley, and then things were nice and clear. The road was generally excellent except for some bone-jarring seams every hundred feet or so for much of the way. Along the road we encountered a moose which didn't seem to mind the cars that stopped, but was considerably upset when our motor home approached. Later we saw a brown bear at the edge of the road; he crossed after we passed him.

We arrived in Jasper about 3 p.m. in the new time zone; we settled into a site at the Wapiti campground. All day the temperature was in the mid 50's until we got to Jasper, then it "zoomed" into the 60's.

Sun 08-10-1997: Aside from the beautiful scenery that comes with the ride through the Canadian Rockies - Jasper and Banff National parks - the ride today was uneventful. We stopped at an RV park just south of Calgary, and paid the tab with our last Canadian currency - good planning, since we expect to get to the US border tomorrow.

While I was checking the oil I noticed the grill seemed a little loose, and further investigation showed that three of the four screws holding it on at the top were missing. Alaska Highway vibration, I imagine. No problem replacing them from my handy stores.

Mon 08-11-97 and Tue 08-12-1997: The drive south across the border and through Montana was uneventful, except that just north of Broadview MT a pickup truck tossed a

stone at our windshield and the driver's side took a nice whack about 6 inches above the dash. Right next to another nick left over from our Mexico trip - only this one is much bigger. We stayed Monday night at an RV park in Great Falls and Tuesday night at the small town of Hardin, MT. On the way out of Great Falls I got a haircut while Barbara did some grocery shopping.

Wed 08-13-1997: Just before we left Montana we passed through an Indian reservation and saw some beautiful Black Angus cattle. The astonishing thing about it was that they were being herded by four Indian cowboys on motorcycles! At about noon, when we stopped for lunch at a rest stop along I-25, we saw a herd of Antelope grazing the plain.

We stopped at the small town of Wheatland, WY. This is a very flat valley area surrounded by hilly grazing land populated by large ranches. The RV park was small but nice, with a view of the distant mountains to the west. We had dinner at a new restaurant in town, Timberhaus, and had an excellent dinner. Cocktails, prime rib entrees, one sundae (we split it) and an appetizer of Rocky Mountain Oysters (which we also split) and excellent service. As usual we toasted our normal back-home Wednesday evening dinner companions.

Thu 8-14-1997: The first part of our drive to Denver was accompanied by strong cross-winds; later we learned there was a serious accident caused by the dust stirred up by the wind in another area. When we arrived in Denver we settled in at the "DeLuxe RV Park" on the North side of town.

During the late afternoon and evening we visited with Roger Parsell and his wife Hazel. Roger is a fourth cousin and amateur genealogist; he showed us a Jacquard tapestry he has on display; it was created by our mutual relative Sophronia Lobdel during her engagement to Amasa Maroe Cleaveland, my great-great grand uncle. He also allowed me to photocopy a picture of Adelpha Cleaveland, who bears a resemblance to the current generation of Cleavelands.

Fri 08-15-1997: East from Denver on I-70 was fairly boring, so we worked through several audio tapes. There were some construction stretches, but the most significant aspect to the trip was the temperature, which hovered in the mid 90's most of the time. We pulled off for the day at the town of Russell, KS - Bob Dole's home town. Shortly after getting set up the 30 amp plug on the end of our power cord gave up the ghost (melted, blew the breaker) so I had replace it to get our air conditioning back in operation (at that point it was 97 degrees outside). One of the people at the park gave me a ride to a place which had enough parts so I could replace the plug.

Sat 08-16-1997: I took a little time first thing in the morning to wash the motor home - first time since we entered Alaska last June. It needed it badly, of course, and there probably won't be any more gravel roads to travel this trip. We drove east to a KOA just past Kansas City. This RV park was computer friendly - they had a special jack set up for computer use. The power level available in the park was low, however - it ran about 105 volts; it was so hot that I suspect the area was having a brownout. We switched the

refrigerator to LP and crossed our fingers on the air conditioners - but they held up ok. It rained heavily during the night, and broke the heat wave we've had for the last couple of days.

Sun 08-17-1997: Before we left I tightened up the air conditioner belt; it had been slipping a little at idle speeds. We drove to St. Louis and checked in at an RV park close to downtown. Since it was early we took advantage of some coupons and a shuttle service to visit a casino on the river and enjoy their food and drink. Did a little gambling - slots - and came out 150% ahead on our \$10 investment. This particular casino was run in a strange way in order limit individual losses. All gambling was done with tokens, and each time you exchange cash for tokens your ticket gets marked. One ticket lasts for two hours, and is good for \$500 of tokens - so theoretically one can't lose more than \$500 every two hours. Every two hours you can turn in your ticket for a new one. Crazy system. Aside from the strange system, both of us felt that the personnel at this casino were the least pleasant and helpful of any casinos we have been in.

Mon 08-18-1997: From 9 to 2 today we had a tour of some of the major aspects of Saint Louis. First we visited the gateway arch and, for \$6 each, rode in a little car up to the top, stood around for a few minutes looking out the little windows, and then rode back down. At the base of the arch there is an excellent museum focusing on the westward movement of western civilization. There was an extensive series of photographs illustrating excerpts from the record of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and some very high quality animated life-size mannequins gave mini-lectures on various aspects of the early days. The museum, which is free, was the high point of the visit to the site.

Other visits during the tour included the Anheuser-Busch brewery and the old railroad station which has been converted to a hotel and shopping mall. We returned to the RV park at 2PM and left along I-70 to the town of Brownstown, IL for the night.

Tue 08-19-1997: During our drive east we discovered that the compressor for the air bags didn't work. We stopped off for lunch and to pick up a new pair of test leads for my meter near the town of Plainfield Indiana, and while there faxed instructions to the post office to stop forwarding our mail. The drive on I-70 was pleasant as it was overcast and the rain we had stopped well before lunch time, and the temperature was in the high sixties.

Investigation of the air compressor failure undertaken after we stopped at Enon (OH) showed that the horn and cigar lighter were also affected; the fuse was blown and continues to blow. Since we're so close to home I elected to postpone the further troubleshooting and repair - moving the compressor to another line so we could keep the air bags properly inflated. I hope we don't need the horn for the next day and a half....

The Enon Beach Campground is a pleasant place, with a nice lake. We had hamburgers on the grill outside and sat under the awning (it started raining just after dinner) to do our daily crossword puzzles.

Wed 08-20-1997: We drove through rain and drizzle all day and stopped at the Mason-Dixon campground near Pocahontas, PA - just over the border from West Virginia. It is a very nice, wooded and quiet campground.

Thu 08-21-1997: A half day's drive in nice weather and we were home, almost three months to the day since we had left. A barrel full of junk mail awaited us; the house and yard were in fine shape - a bunch of weeding in the yard and airing out of the house was all that was required.

In all we traveled 12181 miles.