

2013 USA-RV Trip May 3 – Aug. 14, 2013

Part I, Itasca to Olympic Park

Dave Cox in Itasca St Park, Minnesota, Tue., May 14, 2013

Hello everyone. I am on the road again. After 12 years of mostly international travel (a few trips to the 4-corners area of the US), I decided it was time to revisit much of North America. I last visited most of the states in the 1960s. I have purchased new, from the manufacturer, a tiny RV trailer called a Scamp. Barely 10 feet by 6 ½ feet inside (6 foot 3 inch ceiling), I ordered it fully loaded, with bathroom w toilet and shower, gas/electric heat and water heater, full AC, kitchen with sink, gas stove and gas/electric fridge, and booth table for 4 which converts to the double bed; even some storage cabinets. How they packed all into such a tiny trailer is amazing. It is actually quite enjoyable working inside at the table, surrounded by windows, which is where I am writing this now.

The trailer was built in Backus, Minnesota. I left Tucson May 3 and spent a week driving to Minnesota, passing through and spending a couple of days with my brother and his wife in Kansas City. I traveled mostly small US highways to avoid the Interstates, and lodged and dined in tiny country towns (such as Vaughn, NM and Pine River, MN). Southern Arizona and all of New Mexico treat the backroad driver to endless vistas, raw mountains and interesting little diners. The panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas are endless grain silos and cattle feedlots; the aroma of thousands of cattle standing around in damp soil just eating and dumping is pretty much constant. Kansas, Iowa and southern Minnesota are pretty much endless grain silos and wheat or corn fields, now barren as it just is ending winter.

Backus, where I picked up the trailer, has a population of 150. I discovered, upon hooking up the RV, my car had been wired incorrectly for the various connections to the trailer, and so spent 4 extra hours in the only auto mechanic shop in Backus for rewiring (they were experts, being close to the RV factory). I had intended to head straight to a state park for my “maiden voyage”, but it was late Friday when I finally hooked up the trailer, so I spent the first night in a motel in Park Rapids. Well, I got the last room in town (3 motels). I already had been warned numerous times that the next day was “Opening Day” for fishing season in Minnesota – this turns out to be a HUGE deal here. All roads were trafficked with pickups hauling boats. Turns out Park Rapids, where I stayed, was where the governor came for opening day; my motel was full with the news corps from Minnesota TV and radio stations, in town to cover the governor’s opening day fishing. I chatted with several TV people from a St Paul station, and asked whether they were the political reporters - “no”, they were not; they covered fishing. The next morning, opening day, as I was stocking up at a Wal-Mart for my trip into the park, I learned the governor had caught his first fish, I believe it was a northern pike, at 12:36; I noted it wasn’t noon yet – they clarified he had caught his fish at 12:36 am, i.e. just after midnight, on opening day. They take fishing season very very seriously here in Minnesota.

I now have spent 2 days here in Itasca State Park in northern Minnesota. The entire northern part of the state is covered in thousands of lakes of all sizes. Most still have ice covering large parts, and there are small piles of snow on the ground; it has been very cold (in the low teens at night). Itasca is the oldest

park in the state, covered in deciduous and evergreen forest, and full of small lakes, plus one large lake named Itasca – this is the headwaters of the Mississippi River. I now have walked across the Mississippi on a small split log laid across the river, 20 feet from where it originates out of Lake Itasca. Beautiful place. Already I have photographed several new bird species for me, as well as a couple of new squirrels. I have hiked the woods, and particularly the back side of the Lake; there for the first time I was able to photograph trumpeter swans swimming and resting on the ice shelf. More exciting was my encounter with a very good sized black bear. I was on a small trail on the edge of the Lake and, coming around a bend, saw the bear foraging in the bushes just 45 meters ahead. The bear didn't see me, and after a few moments decided to come ambling straight down the trail toward me. Although I sorely wanted to wait until he was much closer and in the sunlight for better photos, I decided the better option was to give a loud cough, advising the bear of my presence. He paused, looked me over, and decided to turn tail (the normal reaction).

I anticipate leaving here in the next day or two and heading over to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota for wildlife viewing. I am heading west rather rapidly only because I want to spend a couple of weeks in Yellowstone before the crowds get bad, and understand May is the best month.

I have included photos of my trailer, rust backed squirrel, white-breasted nuthatch, chipping sparrow, the Mississippi River as a baby, trumpeter swans, my bear encounter and a ruffed grouse. Later. Dave



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Dave Cox at Custer State Park, SD, Thur. May 23, 2013

Hello everyone. I have visited the Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, and currently am visiting Custer State Park and the Badlands National Park in South Dakota. It has been cold, overcast and/or windy every day since last I wrote from Itasca State Park in MN. A little over a week ago I drove from Itasca into North Dakota, and on into Medora at the entrance to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The two day drive across western Minnesota and west across all of North Dakota provided the only sunshine I have seen in two weeks; however, I drove into cold headwinds of 40 mph constant speed. It was miserable, and the poor car drank gas as if it couldn't quench its thirst.

I stayed in an RV camp in Medora for 3 days and drove into the Park and badlands each day. Theodore Roosevelt National Park is full of wildlife and the scenic badlands. It was here that a young Teddy Roosevelt came in his late 20's and set up 2 ranches. He spent a number of years living the life of an outdoorsman hunter and cowboy. He credited his life here with permitting him to be President, and it was here that his conservation instincts kicked in as he saw the last of the bison being hunted to extinction. He created more national parks and wildlife preserves than any other president, and so is honored with this Park. In the Park I photographed bison, pronghorn, mule deer, wild turkey, wild horses, black-tailed prairie dogs and a remarkable badger (rarely seen) that I found had taken up

residence in a prairie dog town. The badger was well fed and sleek as he simply left his hole and had only to wander a few feet to dig up yummy fat little prairie dogs.

I had a huge adrenalin attack early one dreary overcast wet morning. Having seen a large male bison grazing around a campsite in the park the previous day, I assumed it was somewhat accustomed to people on foot nearby. I approached on foot, and for 10 minutes tried pictures from several angles from about 50 to 60 feet. Suddenly, through the viewfinder, I saw the huge bison (the big ones weigh about 2,000 lbs.) spin around, lower his head, and come charging straight for me. I took off at high speed, but immediately remembered that bison run 3 times the speed of humans. I looked back and he was about 30 feet from me, and I clearly remembered thinking of what dogs do when chased by bulls, as well as the picadors in bull fights who plant the barbed flags; they run at an angle, more toward than away from, the beast (I admit to simultaneously wondering what it felt like to be gored). So I turned and took off at less than a right-angle. The bison immediately stopped and went back to grazing. He had done what bison always do when bothersome predators hang around. I was chagrined at breaking an easy rule - keep a 100 foot distance; many people have been gored by bison, and some killed. I subsequently got many great close-ups of bison, but though often much closer than 100 feet, most were from around my car; bison, as with most wildlife, seem less concerned with cars than with people on foot. Of the many bison pictures I have taken so far, I decided to include the one that to me seems most iconic; I think it reminds me of the "buffalo" on the old nickel.

From Medora, I drove last Saturday to the southwestern corner of South Dakota, into the famous Black Hills, with enough attractions for 2 states packed into a tiny area. I have headquartered in the Beaver Lake RV campsite just outside the town of Custer, on the western edge of the Custer State Park, and just south of the Mt Rushmore area. I spent 3 days cruising the Park, which is filled spectacularly with wildlife and birds. It has the largest free-roaming number of bison in North America (about 1,500), as well as wild turkey and 3 species of deer, both mule and white-tailed deer and elk, plus pronghorn. I got to see and photograph the uncommon Yellow-bellied Marmot and the Upland Sandpiper in the Park. Driving the wildlife loop road in the Park one usually encounters the famous (or infamous) free roaming "begging burros". These often gather on the road to stop traffic, and will "mob" any car with open windows whose occupants offer food.

With the perpetual overcast and rain, but the marvelous wildlife, I have been considering the classic song "Home on the Range", written about these northern plains (although made the state song of Kansas). I have noted issues with the wording of the song, and on driving through Custer State Park for the last several days have revised some obvious errors; below is the rewritten version of the first verse, which original version needed 5 separate corrections. I need neither accolades nor smarmy remarks concerning the following:

"Oh give me a home where the great bison roam,
and the deer and the pronghorn still graze.
Where sometime is heard a discouraging word,
for the skies can stay cloudy for days."

On Tuesday I drove Hwy 16A (a little traveled alternate route) north to Mt Rushmore. This short alternate section of highway runs from Custer State Park north for about 20 miles, and is a remarkable narrow, twisting, steep road which passes through 3 even more remarkable tunnels carved square through rocky mountain tops. These tunnels have no supports; they just are chiseled through the solid rock. The smallest on this road is just 13 foot wide and 12' 2" high. The approach has to do a 300 degree very tight uphill loop, which bridges over itself with a wooden bridge, and then plunges into the tiny carved mountain orifice. See the attached photo to get the idea; the loop is behind the camera. While there photographing the tunnel, a giant motorhome approached (see picture). I helped measure the motorhome and the tunnel; even lowering all the air-shocks in the RV, it was 4 inches too tall. The driver was unwilling to try to turn around where he was, though I offered to help guide him and try to control traffic. Ultimately he contacted the state police who, when I departed, were on their way to resolve the situation. Do not try to take large RVs on tiny roads like this!

From the top of a neighboring mountain, on Hwy 16A, one obtains perhaps the most perfect view of Mt Rushmore; although it is from a distance of about 3 miles, it is straight on, and one is not required to look up into the nostrils of the 4 Presidents. I used a telephoto lens, and suspect many published shots one sees of the presidents is in fact from here, and not from the Monument which sits at the base of the mountain upon which the faces are carved. Arriving at the Monument, one finds a four lane entrance through toll booths, with flashing electronic signage, collecting \$11 for a parking fee to enter a gigantic 4 story concrete parking garage. This opens onto further concrete walkways and lines of state flags. It is our National Park Service gone seeming off track at a historic site which receives too many tourists in too small an area. I remember the Monument from a visit in 1960; it was rustic then. I chose not to spend time inside and tarnish my memories, and satisfied myself with the more pleasing views from the alternate highway.

The above story about the very large RV prompts me to digress a little, onto RVs. In the larger private RV camps where I have stayed, almost all the RVs are simply huge; I am guessing almost all are over 35 feet. Really noticeable are the "small" ones, which are in the mid 20's. I chose my tiny trailer (10 foot w/o hitch) as a significant improvement over tenting or sleeping in the car, and an improvement over the pop-up camper van I rented in Australia. I cannot imagine handling the big ones. Almost all have at least 3 expansion "roll-out" sides, and are hooked up to not only power, but water and sewer at all sites (my little one can be hooked up to all utilities as well, but I do not intend to use them under usual circumstances). Out in the "primitive" camp sites, with mostly tents, is where I have seen a couple of tiny RVs like mine. End of digression.

Yesterday, which was the lone day within the last week forecast to be sunny, I traveled east to the Badlands National Park for the day. It was not sunny; indeed, it was heavily overcast all day and rained much of the time (see again the revisions to "Home on the Range"). These badlands bare resemblance to the badlands of North Dakota only in the colorful eroded landscape. Unlike the rich with plantlife and wildlife northern badlands, these South Dakota badlands host only the hardiest of life on the fringes. The official bird list for the Park lists 21 species only as common. The soft colorful bands of the severely eroded hills are quite spectacular and otherworldly. I did find the burrowing owls which nest in holes at the fringes of prairie dog towns. Also, as predicted by the rangers at the visitor center, I did find bighorn

sheep where the loop road reaches Pinnacles Pass. The entire park area is famous for the paleontology done there; it apparently produces more "mammalian" fossils (from about 30 million years ago) than any site on earth.

Among the attached photos, which are not otherwise mentioned above, are the spotted towhee, downy woodpecker, western meadowlark, mountain bluebird, blue grosbeak and a rather neat mule deer clearing a railing. Tomorrow I probably will travel on into the northeastern corner of Wyoming to visit the Devil's Tower; perhaps I will have an encounter of the 3rd kind. After that I will be heading towards Yellowstone. Life still is good (would be great if the sun would shine). Later. Dave









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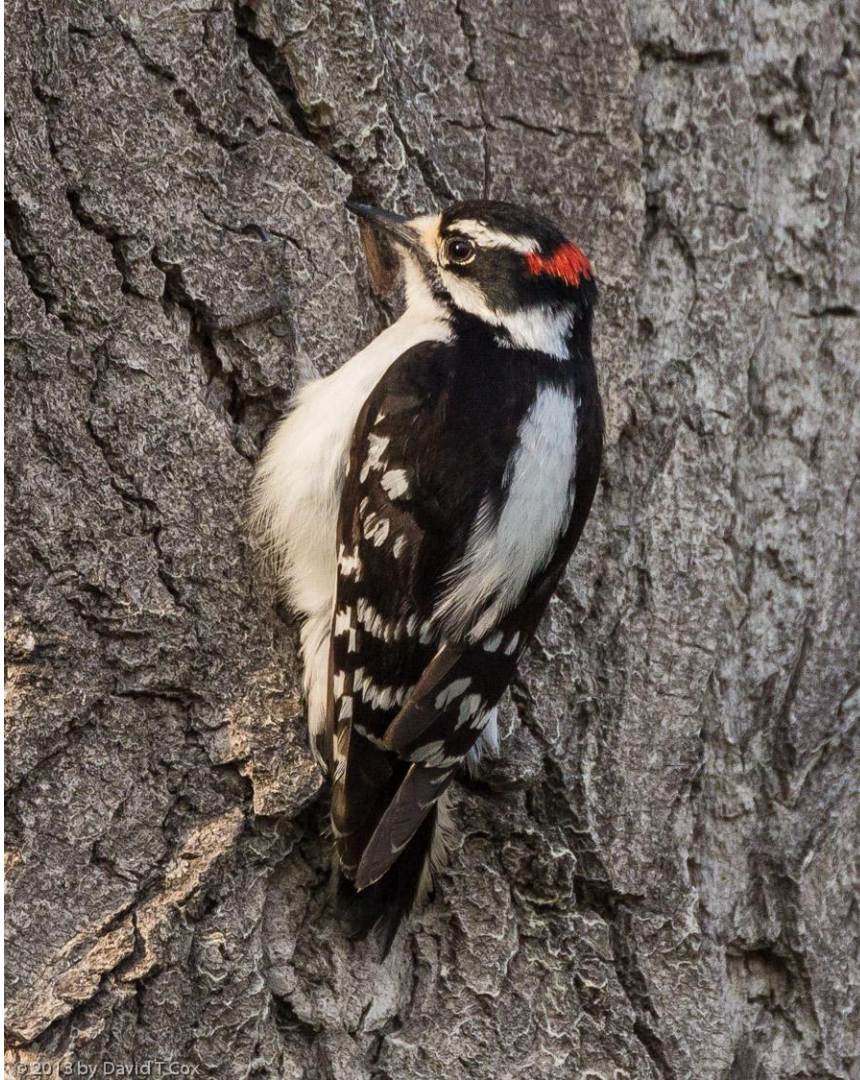


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Dave Cox in Thermopolis, WY. Fri. May 31, 2013

Hello everyone. I am about ready to head north into Yellowstone Park, and don't expect to have email access for some time, so thought I would send this update. I last wrote from Custer, SD; I drove from Custer across into Wyoming and up to the small town of Sundance. It was in Sundance in 1887 that Harry Longabaugh, at age 20, spent 18 months in jail and took the name "Sundance Kid," some 10 years before associating with Butch Cassidy. Sundance also is the closest convenient stop for visiting the unearthly Devils Tower, famed for being the site of close encounters of the 3rd kind. I had no close encounters with anything but red squirrels, but am attaching a photo a Japanese youth kindly took of me, where he got down to an angle which makes me appear about to take off. Also see the photo of the climbers on the tower (look very close – many going up the right side). I noted groups of climbers on all four sides of the tower; a Park Service ranger told me they all do free climbs, using ropes only as safety lines, and to rappel down. Seems crazy to me. The tower is a monolithic magma plug which stoppered an ancient volcanic vent; the land rose, and the surrounding softer sedimentary rock wore away leaving

this towering 1,000 foot vertical tower. Over the eons, vertical pillars have sloughed away, forming the boulder fields at the base, and leaving the stippled sides of the tower appearing to support the ancient Native American oral tradition which tells of a giant bear which clawed the sides trying to reach a small group of people on top.

From Sundance I drove to Buffalo, WY at the SE foot of the Bighorn Mountains. In the RV camp I constantly had whitetail deer by my trailer, and a fair amount of birdlife. I spent a day driving forest service road loops on the eastern slopes of the Bighorns, and saw many moose and mule deer. The scenery is terrific at the high elevations. I drove out of the Bighorns on a tiny dirt road that dropped through Crazy Woman Canyon, shedding about 3,000 feet in 5 miles of steep to very steep descent. Speaking of crazy, I met an extremely interesting and amiable young lady, American now living in Australia, who back for several months for a US visit is riding a bicycle from Indiana to Yellowstone, alone. I first met her in the Sundance RV park (she uses a tent, often in the RV camps), and then, remarkably, a few days later ran into her again in the Buffalo RV park where I stayed. Passing her once on the freeway I saw she was stopped to photograph the "Crazy Woman" exit sign. I last saw her preparing for the climb over the 9,700 foot Powder River Pass in the Bighorns. GO EMILY!

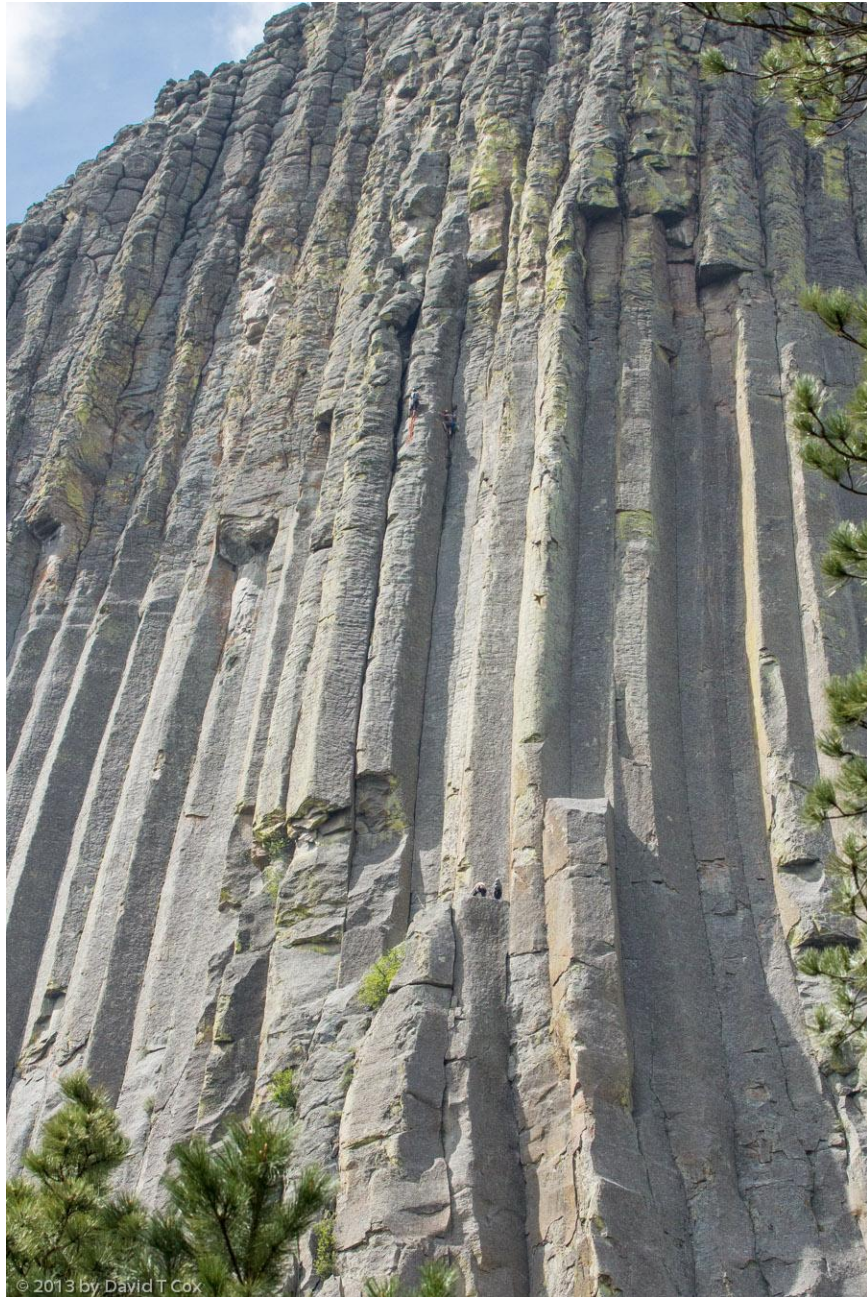
From Buffalo, I had my first real power test for my Subaru Outback in hauling the little trailer over that same Powder River Pass. Highway 16 climbs from Buffalo, at 4,600 feet, to the pass, at 9,700 feet; the first 6 miles is a fairly steady 7% grade. I stuck at 45mph and, although the little engine roared, it had no problem hauling the Scamp up the grade. I also was gratified at having no engine power issues at the summit pass at 9,700 feet, even though the regular gas here in Wyoming has just an octane rating of 85.

On the western side of the Bighorns I drove down to the little town of Thermopolis, which is famed for the largest natural hot mineral baths in the world. Although I do not intend to enjoy the baths (the main bath is free pursuant to a 1897 treaty made between the US and the local Shoshone and Arapaho tribes), I have enjoyed two other attractions. In town is the Wyoming Dinosaur Center, which contains one of the best collections of dinosaur and other ancient fossils on earth. The major showroom, inside a huge warehouse, holds the assembled and displayed (in semi-dioramas) skeletons of dozens of species of dinosaurs, including the 106 foot Supersaurus, and a full T-Rex and Triceratops. The center also has one of only 3 complete specimens of Archaeopteryx (the famed feathered flying dinosaur) in the world. Just 30 miles NW of Thermopolis I yesterday visited the little known rock art site called Legend Rock. Along a low stone cliff running beside the Cottonwood Creek, pretty much in the middle of nowhere in the high plains, is the best example of a petroglyph style called Dinwoody. Both the anthropomorphic and the many zoomorphic figures, to my eye, have detail in common with the early basket-maker and Freemont petroglyph styles in Utah. The claim by some experts, however, is that many of the Legend Rock petroglyphs are 5,000 years old, with two of the panels claimed to be 8,000-11,000 years old. I am skeptical, as dating petroglyphs is problematic, and the styles seem to have sufficient similarities to those to the south, which are generally accepted to be about 2,000-2,500 years old. Nevertheless, the art work is wonderful, with a number of unusual and new features for me.

I am debating whether to travel to another Dinwoody petroglyph site, stay in Thermopolis another day, or travel on into Yellowstone tomorrow. The weather is improving, having been partially sunny

yesterday morning, and only turning to rain in the afternoon. I have attached photos of a barn swallow, blue-winged teal, song sparrow, grey jay and black-headed grosbeak in addition to subjects discussed above. Later. Dave





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Dave Cox in Yellowstone NP, WY & Livingston, MT, June 11, 2013

Hello everyone. I last wrote from Thermopolis where I last had internet access. Eleven days ago I drove from there through Cody and up into Yellowstone National Park; it is my first visit back in the Park since the 1960s. Things have changed. Gone are the days of easy black bear sightings along most roads and in all camp areas. The Park Service is very serious now about locking up all food and never feeding any animals. I stayed the first 6 days in the only RV park with electrical hookups, Fishing Bridge. There they do not allow tents, soft-sided campers or pop-up campers. In the primitive sites where such camping is allowed, all food must be stored in on-site steel lockers. For real primitive backpackers, food items must be hung from trees at least 10 foot above ground and 5 foot from the trunk. Serious “no feeding” the animals. Also gone are the days of easy fishing for Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout; since the late 1970s they have become endangered mostly due to the accidental (? intentional ?) introduction of Lake Trout and Rainbow Trout into the streams. Now all fishing must be done with barbless hooks, and all Cutthroat must be released – AND all Lake Trout and Rainbow Trout must be killed.

The thermal areas are just as spectacular as ever, as are the high mountain passes and vistas over the high lakes. Yellowstone River still runs from the lake of the same name through Hayden Valley which is teeming with wildlife down on the sage-grass river bottoms; the river then plunges down two waterfalls into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, spectacular as ever.

Yellowstone is the largest thermal area in the world, and the only one with all 5 types of thermal phenomena; it has fumaroles (volcanic steam vents) hot springs, mud pots (boiling, bubbling, colorful mud), travertine terraces (so beloved by the ancient Romans for hot steam bathing) and, finally, the largest collection of geysers in the world. Most of the Park sits over one of the largest volcanic calderas in the world (an area where an ancient giant volcano collapsed into its own duct system). It would take days to visit all the thermal basins and features. Most are otherworldly, steamy, with crystal water and a pallet of brilliant colors from sulphur and mineral deposits and bacterial mats. Old Faithful Geyser still erupts about every 90 minutes, with accuracy within 10 minutes for each eruption. I watched it and the Beehive Geyser on two different days. Because so many of the thermal features involve motion (boiling, bubbling, popping, erupting), still photos do not do justice to the action. For the first time I am taking a number of videos in full high definition; unfortunately, they create sufficiently large file sizes I cannot reasonably attach them to emails as I can jpeg photos. I climbed the Observation Hill behind Old Faithful, and was alone on a beautiful day to video the entire eruptions of the Beehive Geyser and Old Faithful Geyser, both erupting within 12 minutes of each other.

I spent almost 2 full days visiting the some 7 different geyser-hot spring basins. Even after miles of walking (mostly along well constructed boardwalks to stay off the delicate and dangerous ground), I doubt whether I actually saw much more than half of the thermal wonders. The huge crystal clear thermal springs with the colorful bacterial mat runoffs, are the prettiest sights, but the boiling churning mud pots are the most sensational, after, of course, a major geyser eruption such as Beehive or Old Faithful. I wish I could attach some of the videos of the thermal holes which would periodically but slowly fill with water, which then would burst up into mini-eruptions with showers of bubbles and great billowing steam. Very definitely otherworldly.

I have spent a majority of my time seeking wildlife; Although the bird life is terrific (includes 5 new duck species for me – Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Merganser and, rarest, Harlequin), and the squirrels plentiful, the larger mammals are here in enormous numbers, but less often seen and many seldom seen closely. I have seen 4 Grizzly Bears, generally at probably over 800 meters. The photos of the crowds which gather are more interesting (see composite of crowd gathered for Grizzly). I did have good luck one day with a coyote with a beautiful winter coat doing its classic stance over a rodent hole, listening for movement, and then at the right moment pouncing; it was successful, and the photo shows the fat little dinner package (I have been unable to identify the species) which the coyote swallowed whole, with much grimacing (I would too).

The roads and parking lots in the Park are crowded by 9:30 am (they are empty from 6 to 9am). There are a number of tour buses which cruise the Park, about half of them Japanese tourists. Most Americans, Europeans and Australians are driving their own cars or rented RVs. Most surprising to me are the fairly large number of Chinese tourists, who also are driving rented cars; this is a relatively new phenomena.

On Friday I left the Lake area and drove north to Tower Falls Camp, a more primitive campsite with no facilities except "hole-in-the-ground" latrines. This is the only campsite close to Lamar Valley, which is most famous for its wolf packs and huge herds of bison. Again, I would leave at about 6am each day and drive the Lamar Valley road (which is the road in from the NE entrance), where I not only encountered the wolf pack daily, but hundreds of bison, black bear, grizzly, bighorn sheep, pronghorn and moose with newborns, and, first time for me – mountain goats, with newborn. Most sightings were at long distances; generally the wolves were at around 1200 meters, and the mountain goats were well over a mile on the snowy cliff-sides of Baronette Peak. I did have one nice opportunity where a grey wolf came down just across the Lamar River, offering relatively close shots (maybe 150 meters). The wolves were generally easy to locate because there are a group of people, (especially on weekends when I was there), referred to as the "Wolf Patrol", who follow the daily movements of the wolves for the Park Service. One simply drives the Lamar Valley and looks for the "wolf jam" where perhaps 35 cars are clustered on the sides of the road, with a couple of dozen huge spotting scopes on tripods; a sure sign the wolves have been spotted (occasionally also for good grizzly encounters) (The Park Service uses the terms "wolf jams," "bear jams," and "bison jams" to refer to the traffic snarls caused when these animals offer good viewing opportunities – often where no convenient pull-offs from the road exist).

I was fortunate also to see newborn (same day) pronghorn and moose, although again at a distance. In both cases the babies are on their feet within an hour and moving (the pronghorn moving fast). I encountered the same black bear at least 3 times, among others. Really amazing, my final morning out along the Lamar road photographing wolves one final time, I was tapped on the shoulder, and turned to find Emily (the bicyclist I met in Sundance and then again at Buffalo), now entering Yellowstone from the NE; she was riding by and recognized me on the side of the road. She made it across the Bighorn Mtn Pass, and up into the 8,000 foot passes of Yellowstone. It is a small world.

From Tower Falls I moved to Mammoth Hot Springs Camp just south of the north entrance. Mammoth is the original and current Yellowstone headquarters, with 130 years of history and terrific 19th century

architecture and period photos. I admit to being a little disappointed in the travertine pool terraces; over 90% of the Mammoth complex is dry, ancient travertine, dull and grey. Only small areas are active with fresh water flows which are necessary for the beautiful shiny travertine complexes. I was spoiled a few years back visiting Pamukkale, Turkey (Hierapolis to the ancient Greco-Romans), where almost certainly the most beautiful travertine pools in the world seem to be sculpted down a mountainside. I did some hiking to rocky cliffs in hopes of photographing pika, but without luck. Some of the views are memorable, but little in the way of wildlife to thrill after the sites reported above.

Yesterday I drove down from Mammoth through the north park entrance into Montana, and on to Livingston, the original “gateway” to Yellowstone. The railroad brought the original visitors to the Park, where they disembarked at Livingston, and traveled by wagon the less than 60 miles to Mammoth. I intend to stay here a few days to catch up on my photos, emails, laundry and sundry things. I may visit the Depot Museum which deals with the early years of Yellowstone and the trains into Livingston. My little RV is holding up terrifically, and I am becoming very fond of it. The bathroom facilities are sufficiently small that I have been using the facilities available in the RV parks, except when in primitive sites (I just don’t shower for a few days – I don’t have company). I still am eating my main meals in little restaurants, again with the exception of the primitive sites, where I enjoy junk food and tuna sandwiches. My fridge works 24-7 so I never am short of beer, wine and cheese. The weather has been sufficiently cold and rainy that outside cooking is not something I want to do just yet. It is raining now, although I had several great blue-sky days in the Park.

I have checked on Glacier National Park, and the famous “Road to the Sun” will not be plowed and open until sometime after June 21; This will be a major stop for me – hopefully for closer photo opps with grizzlies, and so I will slow down for a while in hopes the roads are cleared.

I have attached a number of pictures, identified below. I also made a composite of 6 of the pictures I took with a Brownie Camera in 1960 when I was 11 years old, and have attached it first; I believe it shows some of the changes referred to above; notice the bears, begging on the road, in the trash, in a car with picnic basket, and see the ranger standing next to Old Faithful (now never done), and the catch of Yellowstone Cutthroat trout (my first fishing), once common, but now become endangered due to the introduction of Lake Trout and Rainbow Trout into the ecosystem in the 1970s. Until later. Dave

Attached Yellowstone Pics, in order

Yellowstone 1960 Composite

Lower Yellowstone Falls

Grand Canyon of Yellowstone

Grizzly Jam

Bald Eagle 3rd yr

Elk

bacterial mats Upper Geyser Basin

Ruffed Grouse

Coyote w rodent

Raven close-up

Barrow's Goldeneye
Lesser Scaup
Mountain Chickadee
Bison, Upper Geyser Basin
Hot Springs bacterial mats, Upper Geyser Basin
Grand Prismatic Spring
Least Chipmunk
American Widgeon
Pronghorn w Newborn
Uinta Ground Squirrel
Grey Wolf
Mountain Goats
Moose w newborn
Black Bear
Mammoth Hot Springs
Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel
Yellow-bellied Marmot
photographer at Mammoth Hot Springs





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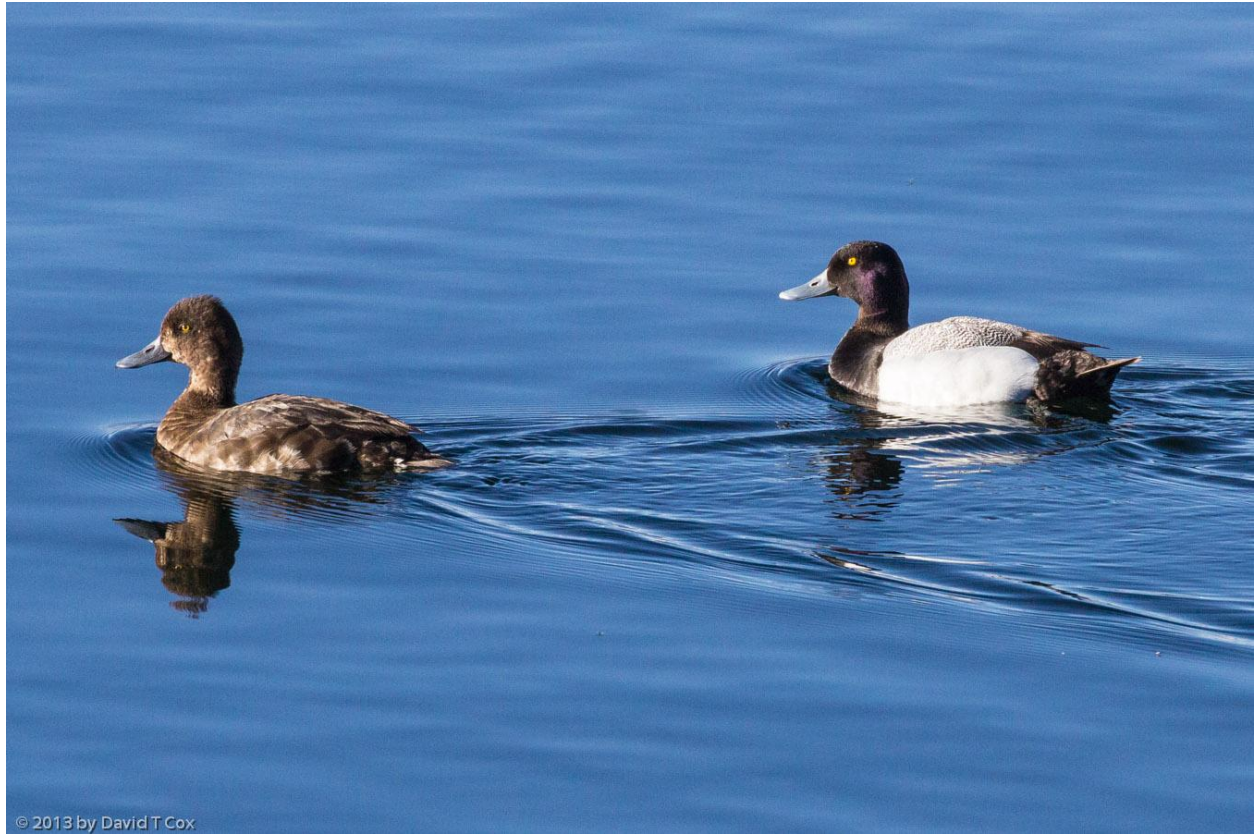
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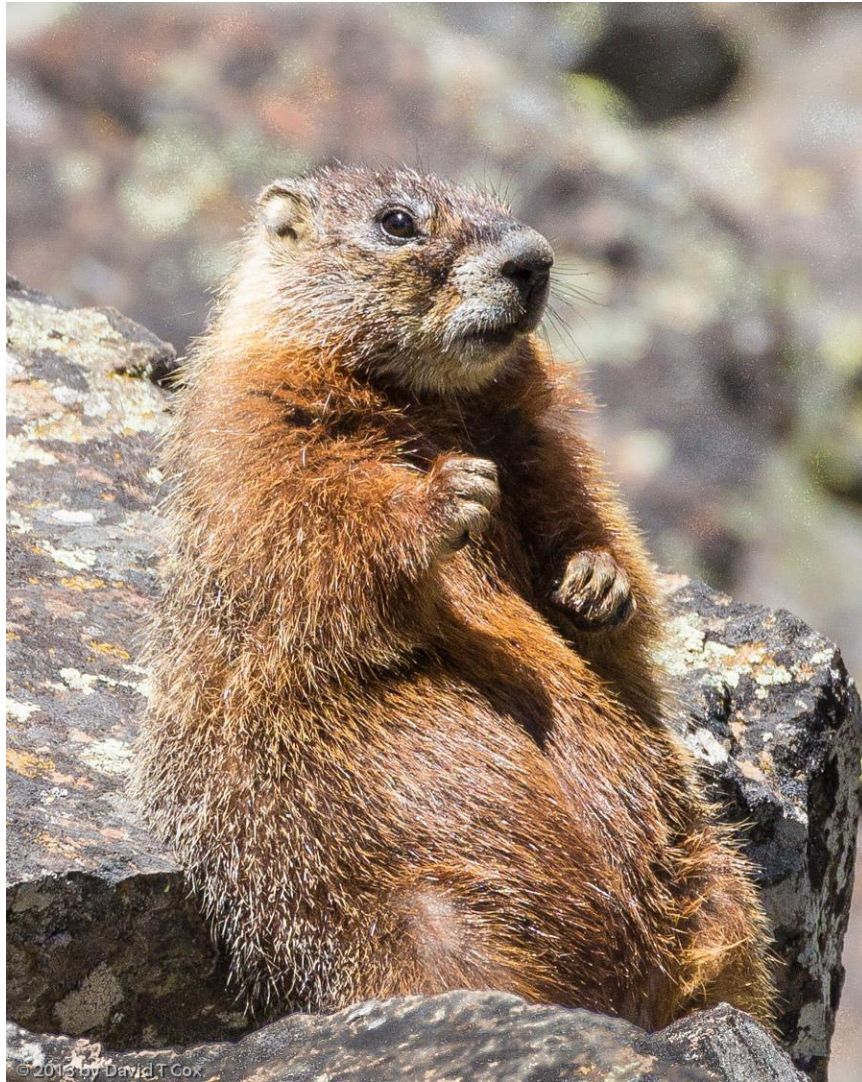












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Dave Cox reporting on Glacier NP from Calgary, Canada, June 30, 2013

Hello everyone. It has been almost 3 weeks since last I wrote from Livingston, Montana. I have not had internet access sufficient for email the last 11 days. I stayed in Livingston 3 days, photographed local birds and recovered from the 10 days of partial isolation in Yellowstone. From Livingston I traveled just a short distance to Bozeman, Montana, a delightful old town with a neat downtown of original brick buildings and a number of interesting restaurants. The town also sports the Museum of the Rockies, with a dinosaur display to compete with the Dinosaur Center I wrote of from Thermopolis, Wyoming. The Bozeman museum is the home turf of the famed dinosaur expert Jack Horner who advised on the 3 Jurassic Park movies. The Bozeman Museum has more dioramas and fewer complete skeletons than Thermopolis, although it has more Tyrannosaurs than anywhere else in the world; I enjoyed the museum in Thermopolis better, but include a couple of photos from Bozeman including a shot of the world's only life-size bronze Tyrannosaur, which stands guard out front.

From Bozeman I traveled up to Helena, the capital of Montana, where I stayed several days and visited Hauser Lake just below the headwaters of the Missouri River (the real Mississippi). From Helena I finally drove up to the east side of Glacier National Park, where I spent 9 days searching for better photo opportunities for grizzly bears and mountain goats, among other animals. The last couple of days I succeeded on both, as well as enjoying some of the best bighorn sheep encounters ever.

I stayed my first and last several days in St Mary, a tiny town at the east entrance to the park along the St Mary Lake, which sported a couple of RV camps where at least I had restaurants, grocery store and electric power for my computer, although the purported satellite internet connections never were sufficient for more than the occasional ability to open up some email. I timed my arrival for the day before June 21; the 21st is the earliest day for opening the famous “Going to the Sun” road through the Park; that road is considered one of the engineering marvels of the early 20th century, and, as it travels over Logan Pass through the continental divide it cuts on the edge of sheer rock cliffs, leaving little room for 2-way traffic, and has dozens of little waterfalls cascading right onto the side of the road (helping keep the cars clean). The road is limited to vehicles under 21 feet in length. The views are spectacular, and about a third of the Park area is considered alpine – above tree level. Many of the lakes are filled with glacial water, which takes on the unique deep blue-green coloration. The Park is home to the highest density of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states, but these and other wildlife are seldom seen from the much traveled road through the Park.

I traveled 4 times to Logan Pass in hopes of getting close to Mountain Goats. The Pass seemed perpetually foggy and rainy, with howling winds. I tend to go out for wildlife before 6 am; on average I seldom see other tourists until well after 8 am. Rather than the goats, on my second early morning at the Pass, when I had the area entirely to myself, I had 5 bighorn sheep rams appear out of the fog and come running at me across the visitor center parking lot. Scared me quite a bit; I found out later this group of rams was called “the bums” by Park Service, because they were accustomed to approaching tourists in hopes of food, and were apparently addicted to licking up antifreeze from the pavement, not a healthy habit. Despite, or perhaps because of, their habituation to humans, they had become aggressive and dangerous. I also lucked into one of those really idyllic wildlife scenes (every wildlife photographer has dream shots), photographing bighorn rams on a snowy crest, perfectly posed, just lighted by early sunrays, with deep fog behind.

In the various high alpine areas I also routinely encountered hoary marmots, delightful creatures constantly climbing the impossible snow slopes searching for food under every open ice hole around boulders. They have many territorial battles presumably at the contested borders of their protected home turf. Amusingly I heard a number of tourists referring to them as beavers, although they are scrambling over snow, at tree line, with nary a damable stream in sight – one gentleman insisted one was the very rarely seen wolverine. Also common at all elevation levels were the beautiful Columbian ground squirrels, considerably larger than most other ground squirrels.

I spent three days at a campsite in Many Glacier, a glacial valley with the highest concentration of, and best chance for, bears. My first day I hiked a short distance on the Swiftcurrent Pass trail, and encountered 4 more huge bighorn sheep rams (these were completely different sheep from Logan Pass) which aggressively forced me off the trail; it was a little uncomfortable, but another terrific photo opportunity. I spent years before I succeeded in my first close bighorn sheep encounter, and now, within 3 days, had several very close encounters; I did not expect Glacier to be a prime spot for bighorn. Although I spotted large grizzlies at a great distance as at Yellowstone, it was not until my 5th day that I found a couple of relative young and small grizzlies, a mated pair, close to the road into Many Glacier, which I then managed to locate 3 days in a row. They rooted under rocks in the same small meadow

every early morning, and were usually almost impossible to see from a car while driving by; this permitted me to, in effect, have them to myself for several hours on two different early mornings (the secret is to never allow any other passing tourists to see you pointing a camera, or staring in a single direction – if they do, they will pull over to see what you are observing, and then you quickly create a “bear jam” – if not, they slow down and assume you are just looking at the mountains). Although not yet grown to massive size (grizzlies in Glacier never get to the huge size of the bears farther north in Alaska), I at least partially satiated my desire for grizzly photos. I will keep looking for the “big” ones to be close enough for decent shots.

In the Many Glacier Valley I also got close encounters with mule and whitetail deer, and occasional moose. Although I could find mountain goats daily by glassing the high ridges, as in Yellowstone they were from 1200 to 1600 meters away (close to a mile). My 8th morning I returned to Logan Pass, and someone alerted me to a short boardwalk, still under snow, just below and to the west of the pass, at the base of one of the mountain ridges where I had sometimes spotted distant goats. I spent two hours at the site, and was rewarded with a single goat approaching close enough for some good photos. As with the bighorns, the goat seemed accustomed to human presence, and I suspect it had occasionally gotten food handouts.

Being at the Canadian border, I got in touch with my childhood friend, Ken Pease, with whom I grew up in India (in the 50s and mid-60s) - he lives just a few hours north near Calgary. I made arrangements to park my RV at the campsite in St Mary, and drove across the border and now am visiting Ken and his spouse Anna in their lovely home on over 4 acres of grassy property about 20 kilometers west of Calgary. We are having a great time reminiscing and, as normal, discussing and occasionally solving great world problems. When I return to Montana in a few days, I probably will spend a few days on the west side of Glacier (have been mostly on the east side until now), before traveling on eventually into Idaho.

I have reverted to loading the photos onto Skydrive, as it seems to be functioning well again, and this way my emails presumably are small files for easy download again; I believe you can download all the photos as a single file from the folder link below the thumbprints if you wish to save them, or can view them as a slideshow or open individually. Let me know if this works ok or if you prefer another method. I have included photos of birds from Livingston to St Mary, including a common crow protesting my approach to its nest, the “early-bird” American robin with breakfast, cedar waxwing, grey catbird, cinnamon teal, yellow-headed blackbird, common merganser and red-naped sapsucker; a couple of photos from the Bozeman Museum of the Rockies, and then the Glacier pics of a Columbian ground squirrel, a hoary marmot, various bighorn rams, a mule deer buck and moose, both with antlers in velvet, the grizzlies and the mountain goat, as well as a scenic of Goose Island and a stitched panorama of the east side of Logan Pass. Later. Dave



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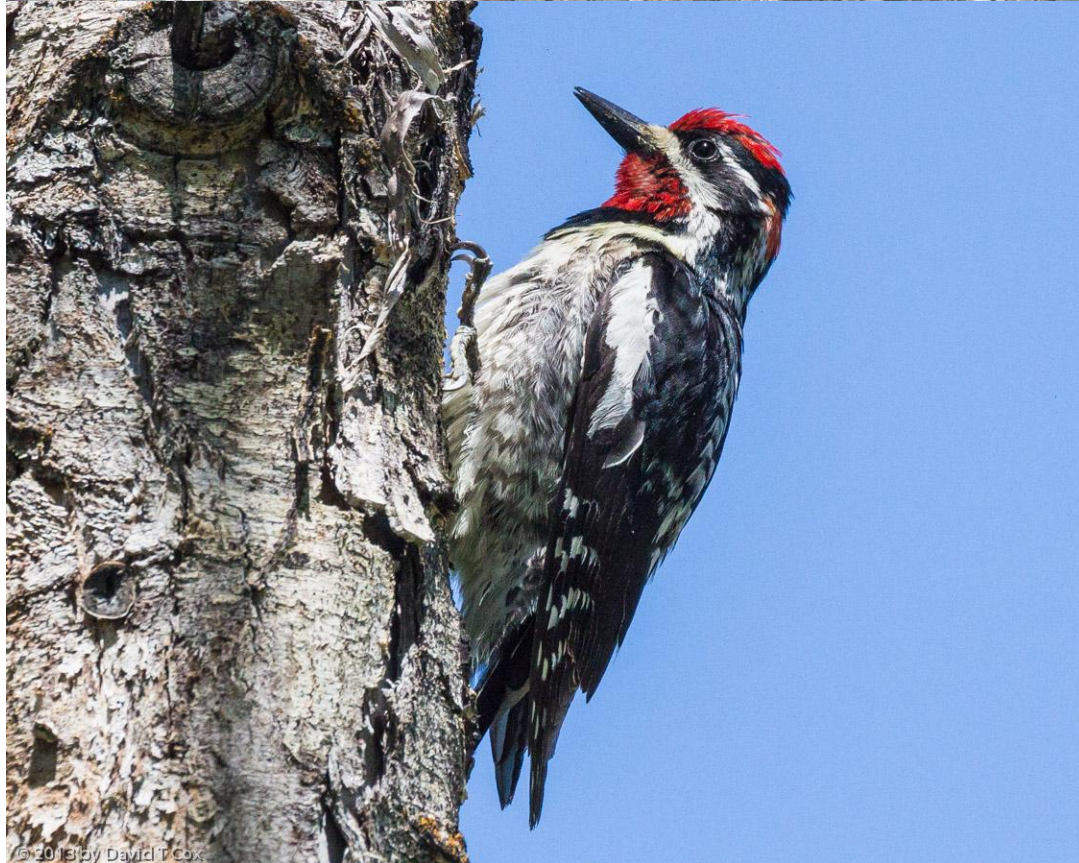






















Dave Cox Reporting on North Cascades & Olympic National Parks from Mt Rainier NP, WA, Fri. July 19, 2013

Hello everyone. I last wrote from Calgary over 2 weeks ago. I returned to Glacier NP for another couple of days, but could not find again my two young grizzly bears. I did spot a large grizzly, up on a mountain side, walk over to a long mound of snow and lie with its legs straddled over the snow bank as if enjoying cooling its belly. I drove around the southern edge of Glacier, following the late 19th century railroad line that finally found the low pass through the Rockies. On the southern tip of the park I visited Goat Lick, a salt lick used by the mountain goats which descend from the tree-line where they normally spend the summers; there were 3 goats at the lick.

I stayed in Kalispell, MT for a few days, driving the river banks and walking the tiny Sowerwine Natural Area for birds, without much luck; I did however photograph some very unusual dragonflies. From there I drove up to the small town of Libby in the Northwest corner of Montana. I found a lovely RV park in the pines, and the town sits on the edge of the beautiful Kootenai River. Upstream was the large hydroelectric Libby Dam; bald eagles and osprey nested and lived at the dam, attracted by not just the fish in the lake and river, but the fact that the dam spillway would occasionally chop up fish for an easy meal. Above the dam were a number of nesting pine siskin. Downstream from Libby is the beautiful, low, thundering Kootenai Falls and rapids, where it is possible to hike right to the edge of the falls, and to cross below the rapids on a long and shaky swinging bridge. On the way to the falls I was astonished to find a family of Guinea Fowl crossing the road; these large exotic birds are native to southern Africa, and I assume they were a feral group that had been imported and escaped some rancher.

Between Libby, Montana and Washington state lies the panhandle of Idaho, a long vertical spike that sticks up to the border of Canada, but is only about 50 miles across. I drove through Sandy, a tourist resort on dammed lakes, but it looked overdeveloped for my tastes. I continued on south through the panhandle and then west through Spokane at the Washington eastern border, and on to the Grand Coulee Dam, another hydroelectric dam. Washington east of the Cascade Mountains is very dry land, parts of it reminiscent of Nevada or western Arizona; this is particularly true of the Grand Coulee dam area, with its huge barren rocky cliffs. I did finally photograph my first California quail. At the dam I also again found nesting bald eagles and osprey.

From Grand Coulee I drove west up into the Cascades, through apple orchards, to the North Cascades National Park at the Canadian border of Washington. Interestingly, the National Park is comprised of only the wet western lowlands of the northern Cascade range, while the glacial mountain peaks and snowy passes are National Forest and Wilderness areas. But the western lowlands in the Park are the damp very dark deep pine forests, with moss covered fallen trees and ferns covering the ground. Throughout the western forests of Washington, the lighting under the canopy, even during full sunny days, is as dark as any equatorial rain forests I have visited. Wandering along the trails is at once exhilarating and a little eerily frightening, the pine needle ground cover muffling all sound, as one expects to encounter a black bear at any turn (sadly, I did not encounter any). I stayed in a Park camp

near the Newhalem Center for several days, and hiked short deep forest trails, as well as traveling up to overlooks over the Diablo Lake area for spectacular vistas including high country glaciers. In the forests I found numbers of Stellar Jays and could hear the very unusual and mournful chords of the varied thrushes, but could never see them. The common rodents had changed from the red squirrels and least chipmunks of the Rockies to the Douglas squirrels and Townsend's chipmunks of the Cascades. The Douglas squirrels have a much more pleasing bird-like scolding chatter-call than the dry rattle of the red squirrels.

I photographed a mountain goat right outside of Newhalem; it appeared stressed, and actually lost its footing on a 60 degree ledge over a small cliff, and spun and slid about 8 feet before catching itself (I captured part of it in photos). The Park rangers were astonished; none had ever seen a goat in the Park (the goats stay at around 6,000 feet, and the Park is all lowland), and one young ranger accompanied me to see the location. I provided them with copies of my pictures for their biologist. They told me the original meaning of the name for Newhalem was "goat's snare", and so assumed goats historically came to the area.

From the Cascades I drove down through Seattle and Tacoma around and back up to the Olympic Peninsula, most of which now is National Park and Wilderness area. There I visited for several days in Port Angeles with my gracious cousins Pam and Gene Moore, who live on the ocean with spectacular walks, views and bald eagles sitting right outside. We spent one day up on the Hurricane Ridge in the Olympic National Park, hiking the Hurricane Ridge Trail. Above tree line were endemic Olympic chipmunks and numbers of Olympic Marmots which, unlike other marmots which live under boulders, live in holes in the ground. We also saw snowshoe hares, dark-eyed juncos, grey jays and I finally saw my first varied thrush. Everywhere were black-tailed deer, the females almost all with the cutest spotted fawns.

I traveled over to Mora on the west coast of the National Park, where I camped for 2 days, walking through the lowland deep Olympic pine forests. Everywhere in the more open areas are wildflowers. I walked a short way up the coastline from Rialto Beach to "Hole in the Wall", where low tide produces fabulous tide pools with various colorful starfish and anemone. The shore is misty and everywhere are what are called "sea stacks", huge stone spires sticking up from the beach or as small islands close off-shore. Bald eagles flew constantly overhead with the seagulls and cormorants. The old growth forests extend right to the beach here, and as the rivers carry the gigantic dead logs into the sea, it pushes them back up onto the beach to form huge breaks of timber skeletons. Together it forms a most unusual coast, rugged and unlike any other I have seen. In the Olympic pine forests I finally saw chestnut-backed chickadees, fan-tailed pigeons and the very tiny but amazing winter wren. On the deep forest trails black bear scat was everywhere, but again I saw no bears.

I drove on Tuesday back to Seattle to spend an evening with 4 people with whom I grew up and went to boarding school in Kodaikanal in southern India. Each brought home-made Indian food, and we picked up more from Indian restaurants, and had way too big a feast of mostly south Indian dishes. What a fantastic delight to spend time with Laura, Margaret, Carol and Joel, all in my classes from grade school through high school. Our classmates (which include Ken whom I just visited in Calgary), though

scattered across the globe, have stayed in touch for the intervening decades; in the 50s and 60s we spent 9 months of the year living in a boarding school far from our parents, and so in many ways we are extended family.

Yesterday I drove south from Seattle to Mount Rainier National Park; I currently am ensconced just outside the south-western entrance, trying to catch up on 2 ½ weeks of accumulated photos. Once I get caught up, I will explore the Park. I have not yet decided where I go next, but assume it will be down through Oregon and into northern California. I will again attach photos to the word document; it is not working well but I seem to have no options now. When I return to Tucson I may try to build a website for easier travelogue communication with photos. Later. David









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