

Northwestern Canada And Alaska

Summer, 1991, Trip

INTRODUCTION

Jim and Sylvia Gallagher are active birders and members of Sea and Sage Audubon Society, Orange County, California. Jim is a bird photographer, while Sylvia records bird sounds. When at home, Sylvia also teaches bird identification classes and is a director of the Orange County Breeding Bird Atlas Project, which was in its write-up stage when this diary was written.

They usually spend several months each year "on the road" with their truck and travel-trailer. This diary was written by Sylvia during the trip they took to the north country during the summer of 1991.

It was written, first of all, to be read by others interested in nature in general and birds in particular, and that is its major content. In addition, there is much material which should be of general interest, especially to my non-birding relatives. Finally, there are things that I simply don't want to forget, such as the names of all our campgrounds, the names and addresses of some of the special people we met, etc.

I hope everyone who reads it will find something of interest.

Tues. afternoon, May 7, 1991

On the road at last--sort of! I'll explain that later. We're embarking on the most ambitious trip we've taken yet. After weeks of gathering together supplies and getting extra spare tires and gasoline cans, we set out yesterday on our trip to northwestern Canada and Alaska. I finished my last *Birding by Ear* field trip Sunday morning. We had thought we wouldn't be ready to leave until Tuesday, but we both wanted to be off, so we made the effort and left.

Everything seemed to fall into place at the last minute: Jim's film order arrived Thurs. Our new AAA card arrived Friday, as did a clothing order from Blair. We were even able to get spare ink cartridges for the little printer we bought to take with us. After calling all over town, I finally phoned the store where we bought the thing, and they had just gotten some in, so we stopped by there on the way out of town.

Our first destination was Buena Vista Recreation Area, about 10 miles west of Bakersfield. We were so relieved to be on the road finally that we didn't even stop for lunch. The wildflowers through Gorman were especially spectacular. I think it was because there were no early rains to make the grasses grow, so the fields were absolutely solid color. It was only a three hour drive, so we arrived around 3:00. Our favorite site was available, with no other vehicle nearby.

Then our luck broke. Jim decided to put on some old shoes before he unhooked the trailer. At that point he realized that he had forgotten to bring any. All he had were the dress shoes he had on plus his heaviest high-top hiking boots, which he rarely wears. His feet are so wide that the only shoes that fit him must be purchased from a mail-order place. So there seemed nothing to do but to detour back home again to get them.

Then came another piece of bad luck: Jim looked at the right wheels on the trailer and the tires seemed to be much too close together. When he crawled underneath, he discovered that we had a broken spring. The last time we had such a problem, we had been driving for miles on a western Quebec detour, which consisted of pothole after pothole. This time it was the L.A. Freeway system which was to blame. The right hand lane, where we have to drive with the trailer, was really broken up in spots. In fact, in retrospect, I think I heard the spring snap when we were in the north end of the San Fernando Valley. I didn't think much about it at the time, beyond idly wondering what that sound was.

To top it off, Jim was exhausted. He had been awake since 1:30 a.m., and up since 3:30--writing a letter to Dick E. Bird--first in his brain and then on the computer. He really wanted to get it in the mail before we left. (D.E.B. is the editor, publisher, etc., of a small, somewhat corny, somewhat serious monthly newspaper about birds in general and back-yard birds in particular. I have some reservations about the publication, because of its sloppy editing, but Jim has been obsessed about writing in that style ever since he read his first issue. He lives, breathes, sleeps D.E.B. News. I think Dick likes his style, for he has had several telephone conversations with Jim and has published a couple of his letters already.)

After that he had to install his new platform on top of the truck. It's designed to carry eight five-gallon gas cans (empty till we need them) plus a second spare tire for the truck. Since the truck wouldn't fit in the garage with it on, it was of necessity a last-minute task. His clothes were almost an afterthought, and the shoes obviously didn't occur to him at all.

We solved the shoe problem, thanks to Diane (my brother Gil's wife). When she had called us Sunday to wish us a nice trip, she had remarked to Jim, "If you forget anything, just give me a call. I'll be driving up that way on Tuesday on my way to Vancouver to visit my mother." What a life-saver that was. Jim called her, and she's bringing the shoes. In fact, they're probably waiting for him right now at the entry station to the campground.

Where are we right now? In the side alley of a spring shop in Bakersfield--sweltering! We expect to be here the rest of the afternoon while they outfit us with a set of new springs. We don't want to take any chances on this trip. We've even ordered a spare set to carry along--just in case.

Some of you may be wondering why we stopped at 3:00 near Bakersfield when we're heading for Alaska. Each year in early May, I drive three Breeding Bird Survey routes for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Each 25-mile route has 50 stops on it 1/2 mile apart. I start 1/2 hour before sunrise and count the birds I see or hear at each stop for three minutes. The vast majority of the birds are identified by ear, not by eye.

We did my first route this morning--the Maricopa Route, which is partially through the Elk Hills. The route was the greenest it's ever been in the 12 years I've been driving it. I ended up the morning with only one tiny foxtail in my socks!

To top it off there were wildflowers in many places, especially through the Elk Hills. Some of them were extremely showy. I wished I had the time to stop and figure some of them out, but I know I saw a Phacelia, fiddleneck, a lovely large yellow composite sort of like desert dandelion, and best of all that large member of the sage family, whose name escapes me. [Later: It was Thistle Sage, *Salvia carduacea*.] There were lots more.

Even the birds seemed to know that spring was not over. I heard lots more singing than I usually do on that route. Half of my 50 stops had singing Sage Sparrows. I even heard three LeConte's Thrashers, and saw two of them. I usually consider myself lucky if I find even one.

I've often felt that May is sort of late to be doing these censuses in a desert environment like this, but the rules say don't do them before then, so I comply. Usually the vegetation is all dried up by then, and there is much less singing.

Same place

Wed. afternoon, May 8, 1991

The Arvin Route this morning was quite interesting. I saw several new birds for the route, some of which are conceivable breeders. A Spotted Sandpiper in breeding plumage was foraging along the shore of a rather nice little reservoir. There seemed to be suitable cover there for nesting. An Osprey was on a power pole near a large lake, where I'm pretty sure several species of egret breed--Snowy, Great, Cattle. I even saw two Turkey Vultures flying around together overhead. If they breed, it must be in the mountains to the south. I'm sure the Spotty and the Osprey have never occurred on any of my routes before. I can't remember about the TV.

On the other hand, the habitat continues to be degraded by the agribusiness companies that are taking over the land. An old reservoir that had been dry in recent years has been obliterated. The ditches are cleared of cover for birds. The numbers of Red-winged, Tricolored and Yellow-headed Blackbirds were all quite low. (Of course the drought could have something to do with that. The recent rains didn't cure the drought.) The Brewer's Blackbirds, which are happy with just a single tree, were as plentiful as ever. Meadowlarks and Horned Larks seemed low. There was only one Loggerhead Shrike, a bird that there seems to be concern about nation-wide. Of course, I don't usually get too many of those on this route. Let's see what tomorrow brings.

There was one of those chocolate-brown Red-tails, too. At least, we're pretty sure it couldn't be anything else. I saw it from the stop, but we drove closer on our way to the next one. Still the bird would not fly. When we were almost underneath it, Jim got out of the truck to try to flush it. It jumped a bit when he slammed the door, so he slammed it again. Still it would not flush. By this time, it had shown us a bit of its tail, which was not red. So we concluded it was an immature bird. Red-tail is by far the most likely species. (This is the second very tame Red-tail we've encountered on our travels. The first was also an immature melanistic bird. It was at Lower Klamath N.W.R. a year ago October. (I'm not suggesting it's the same bird, of course, because they reach adult plumage after one year.) [Many years later: Raptor experts have viewed Jim's pictures and confirmed that the tame Red-tail at Lower Klamath was a Harlan's. I wonder if this dark one was also.]

After we did the route, we were both hungry, so we had a second breakfast at Denny's. I had their new Apple Grand Slam--whole wheat/nut pancakes with stewed apples on top. It was OUTSTANDING. The pancakes were delicious, and the apples were tart, slightly crisp, and

sweetened just right. It came with the usual eggs and bacon of a Grand Slam breakfast.

This afternoon we both took a nice nap, then Jim went into Bakersfield after the extra springs. (Of course, he had to wait while they made them after he got there!) Meanwhile I remained in the trailer and compiled my report. Tonight an early dinner and to bed EARLY for a change.

KOA, Barstow, CA

Thurs. eve., May 9, 1991

Last evening after dinner the winds came up all of a sudden. One minute it was calm, the next it was blowing 40 mph. We wondered if any people were caught out on Buena Vista Lake in it. I guess a cold front came through, for it soon clouded over. Trash cans all over the park started sailing around, using their inside-out-plastic-bag liners as sails. The campground is in the shape of a U, with a bare-dirt overflow section in the middle. The winds blew the dust from that section toward the other side of the campground. Fortunately we were upwind from there. Fortunately also, the winds died down by 1:00 a.m., and this morning was just mildly breezy. It's no fun trying to bird by ear in the wind. Birding by eye is no better, for the birds lie low.

Today I did the Buena Vista Route (formerly Shafter, until I replaced six noisy stops last year). The areas which are flooded in wet years were mostly dry, although some of that country had recently been converted into hay fields and is being irrigated. I saw no LeConte's Thrashers today, although some of their habitat is still left. My most interesting experience was seeing a Northern Harrier flying round and round a large mesquite bush. When Jim and I looked more carefully, we discovered it was harassing a Great Horned Owl--the first I've ever seen on these routes. We knew there was one around, for this stop was very close to our campground, and we've been hearing one hooting every morning when we set out.

When we finished the route, Jim said, "Are we anywhere near that Denny's?" Of course, he knew we weren't, so I offered to make him some waffles and sausage for brunch. I'd bought a cute little Oster waffle iron before we left home, and it worked beautifully. We can't ever share the same waffle anyway, because he likes his cooked one minute, and I like mine cooked three.

Jim worked an hour or so anchoring the platform on top of the truck more securely, while I took a nap. Then we set off for Barstow. The wind got up, but was mainly following us, so it was no real problem. The wildflowers were lovely along the way--lupine, goldfields, etc., in the mountains, and desert dandelions plus other things by the mile in the deserts. All in all, it was a pleasant drive. After arising at 3:30 this morning, we were glad to get here though.

KOA, Ely, NV

Fri. evening, May 10, 1991

A long drive today--around 430 miles, but there was no place short of Ely to stay. The Mojave Desert continued to be full of flowers, especially beside the road, where they get more rain run-off. We took I-15 until about 20 miles past Las Vegas, where we turned north on U.S. 93. Instead of continuing on U.S. 93 all the way, we took a short-cut on NV 318, which proved to be an excellent road--much better than the Calif. freeways we've been driving recently.

As we ascended from the Mojave Desert to the Great Basin Desert, we encountered a few sagebrush plants in full purple bloom, but when we got even higher, it had been too cold for them to bloom yet.

We stopped for lunch beneath some tall cottonwoods near the Pahrangat Lakes along U.S. 93. While I was in the trailer fixing lunch, Jim came in reporting a Black-and-white Warbler. Since he's reported one or two others this spring in California, and they've turned out to be Black-throated Grays, I was skeptical. I asked him what it was doing, and this time he gave the "right" answer--climbing around on the heavy tree limbs like a creeper. It was indeed a Black-and-white. We both got some good looks at it, but unfortunately it was always too high in the tree to photograph. Maybe

we'll encounter one in Alberta soon. They breed there. [Later: We didn't.]

The lakes are lovely and part of a National Wildlife Refuge. North of the NWR we passed by charming farms nestled in the narrow valley. We noticed an attractive campground in the town of Alamo--nice woodsy sites beside a meandering stream--full hook-ups, according to the Trailer Life campground guide. It should be a nice place to spend a few days sometime.

The road more or less followed the White River, which ends up in the lakes. We wondered if this was the valley in which Las Vegas is buying out the water rights--just as L.A. did in the Owens Valley. We've read about it in the paper, but don't remember the details. It would be a shame to destroy this beautiful valley just to supply a few more monstrous casinos or golf courses in Las Vegas. Furthermore, it looked as though this verdant valley is a major wildlife migration corridor through the desert. It's oriented due north and south.

Continuing on north we drove between snow-covered mountain ranges on both sides. The tops of some were cloud-capped and looked as though they were receiving more of same. There was snow on the ground and the trees as we surmounted the final pass into Ely.

We're staying at a KOA about three miles south of the main part of town, and really out in the country. It has lots of trees--Utah junipers and some sort of deciduous tree that has not leafed out yet--not cottonwood, however. As usual, Jim selected the last site in the row, so we wouldn't have to look out at the trailer next to us.

As we were driving to the site, we caught sight of a bird, and Jim remarked, "Just another House Sparrow, I suppose." Just in case it wasn't, we paused and looked it over and discovered it to be an *Empidonax* flycatcher. After some study, I finally decided it was a Gray Flycatcher. Its down-flicking tail clinched it, although it didn't seem to be doing much of it at first. Also it seemed to be darker than the ones I've seen in the San Bernardino Mtns. I tried hard to make it a Least. I certainly have never had better looks at any *Empid*.

The cute little thing used the fence post at the edge of our site, just outside our dinette window. It couldn't have been more than a dozen feet from us. Jim tried a few shots through the glass, as well as some more distant ones outside. The bird seemed totally oblivious of our presence--just liked to fly from one perch to another. It spent a fair amount of time on the ground, too, something I've never seen an *Empid* do. I guess the flies kept low in order to stay warm.

Other nice birds here include Vesper Sparrows, one of which discovered Jim's Magic Meal (corn meal, flour, peanut butter, fat) in short order, Gray-headed race of Dark-eyed Junco, Mountain Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Cassin's Finch, Western Wood-Pewee, Lark Sparrow.

The temperature is quite cold--probably in the 30's or 40's with a brisk wind when we arrived this afternoon and spent an hour or so wandering around birding. It's certainly colder now. We didn't hook up to the water or sewer, because we didn't want to chance frozen hoses in the morning.

It's 9:15, and Jim has already gone to bed. I think I'll do the same.

Mountain View RV Park, Arco, ID

Sat. evening, May 11, 1991

Not too much to write about this evening. We spent the day driving north on U.S. 93. It was a beautiful day--partly cloudy, with puffy clouds enveloping some of the mountain-tops, yet enough sunshine so things were not dull. Still there is a hypnotic quality about a seemingly endless drive through a long sagebrush covered valley, punctuated only by an occasional Pronghorn in the distance. In fact, I was drowsy nearly all day. I did spell Jim in driving for about 1½ hour this morning, but that was all. I think I'm finally relaxing after all the weeks of preparation for this trip.

We're the only vehicle in this nice new RV park on the outskirts of Arco. The sites are widely spaced, and Jim said the bathroom was wonderful. They even have a little cafe, where we ate dinner--BBQ spareribs that were pretty good. The price was certainly right: \$5.95 for a full dinner. We were unable to resist the freezer full of delicious flavors of ice cream and the home-made sugar cones, so each of us had an enormous one for only 95 cents.

Jocko Hollow Campground, Arlee, MT
Sun. evening, May 12, 1991

Another day of driving, but this time the roads were slower, especially the stretch along the beautiful Salmon River in Idaho. The trees at that elevation were just starting to get a veil of green, while those at higher elevations were still bare.

When we awoke this morning, the sky was nearly clear, but by the time we were ready to leave Arco, it was cloudy, and large wet snowflakes were falling. The snowstorm lasted just about the length of time it took for Jim to get the trailer ready to roll. We also encountered a bit of falling snow over the pass that divides Idaho from Montana--7000 ft high. It didn't last when it hit the ground, though, so it was no problem.

We drove past Missoula and then started looking for a nice campground, and found this one on a grassy lawn amid still-bare trees. A moderately large river runs by about 20 feet out the back window of the trailer. Not too many birds here yet--the inevitable robin, of course, plus occasional glimpses of a Song Sparrow. Jim saw a Downy Woodpecker. I heard a Kingfisher.

We tried to find a phone, but the only one near was in a closed "bar and deli" restaurant nearby. Jim wanted to call his mother, since it is Mother's Day. I wanted especially to call the Cohens in Whitefish to let them know approximately when we'll arrive at their house tomorrow. We're about a 2-hour drive from there now. I guess we'll just look for the first one along the road tomorrow morning.

Ferne and Martin Cohen's yard nr. Whitefish, MT
Tues. eve., May 14, 1991

I had no time to write up my log yesterday, we were so busy. We left our Jocko Hollow place with all our gray water and an empty fresh water tank. Their dump station, such as it was, was higher than our exit spigot on the trailer, and the only water tap in the park--by the rest rooms--was out of order from having been frozen. We found a dump station at a gas station in Kalispell, but had to fill our tank from the Cohens' hose when we arrived.

Ferne Cohen, for those who don't know her, is a past president of Sea and Sage Audubon. More than that, she was our *first* president to really get the attention and respect of the political big-wigs of Orange County. Her successors, who have all done a great job, have her to thank for that entree. [As I edit this once more in 2020, I still look back at Ferne's presidency as the one that really made our conservation organization one that local politicians have to contend with.]

Ferne and Marty have a nearly finished house on ten acres not far from the main highway. They might have preferred a more remote location, but this seemed more prudent in the winter time. It's also on fairly high ground. We saw lots of fields flooded from the spring rains. (The soil is a nearly impermeable glacial silt.) As it stands now, their house is in the middle of an alfalfa/oats field, but they and their son Richard have ideas for the property, which they'll carry out over the years. Richard wants to build himself a house, too. Perhaps a greenhouse, a pond, more habitat for wildlife, etc. They have planted young trees and shrubs all around the two sides of the property that do not have plantings now.

The house is a story in itself. It's the state of the art in environmentally sensitive architecture. Richard is in the construction business and is an almost fanatical conservationist. Their house faces south with small windows to the north and large ones to the south. The front of the house is all glass, with the living floor opening onto a six-foot-wide glassed in balcony the full width of the house. This air space gets very warm when the sun is out and can be opened to the rest of the house if heat is needed there. (There's also a conventional electric furnace.) If it's too hot, there are doors on either end of the balcony area that can be opened to let cool air blow through.

Beneath the living floor there is a huge basement partially dug into the ground. The glass from

the upper level extends to the ground level. The floor of the basement is several feet below that. All along the front side of this lower level they plan to install gravel and top-soil and plant a year-round garden. The garden will be watered with gray water from the house.

The toilets are of a special composting design, whereby the wastes are mixed with wood chips and other solids in a large bin. Once a year or so, this can be taken out and used as fertilizer. I don't completely understand how it works, and neither do Ferne and Marty, I suspect. But it seems wonderful. If the product works out, it should be ideal for dry climates, as well as those remote from sewers.

The furnace is another highly efficient unit, which I've forgotten the details of.

The only thing that I wouldn't like is that the place is rather air-tight, for efficient use of heat. I like to sleep in a cold room. With their set-up, the bedrooms are as warm as the rest of the house. Thank goodness our trailer is parked in their driveway, so I can sleep in my nice cold bedroom at night.

Ferne and Marty seem completely happy here in Whitefish. Ferne has immersed herself in all the various environmental causes of the area. She belongs to the Native Plant Society, was chairman of Earth Day for the area, and is program chairman for the Flathead Audubon Society, their local chapter.

Last evening we attended the annual potluck dinner of the Audubon Chapter. They're really an active group, with lots of people, both old and young, involved in chapter projects. It seems like a really healthy group--unlike some chapters we've visited where one person seems to do all the work or where all the members are quite elderly. Wonderfully friendly folks, too--we really enjoyed meeting them. The business of the evening took up almost two hours, after which there was a program--a report of the research on wolves that a local biologist is doing. It was interesting, but after such a long business meeting, it was hard to stay awake. We didn't get to bed until 11:30--way past our bed time.

This morning we birded along the road which borders the Cohen property, while we waited for them to get up. (We fixed our own breakfast in the trailer.) Jim staked out the bird feeder near the end of the driveway and photographed a Pine Siskin well and a Black-capped Chickadee imperfectly.

Later on we drove with the Cohens to a couple of local places trying to find a Pileated Woodpecker for Jim to photograph. We did find a promising spot with the birds audible in the area. Jim stood by a likely nest tree for an hour or so while the rest of us checked out another spot. No luck. Again Jim has been unsuccessful in getting this spectacular bird.

After lunch we drove up into some of the lowland areas of Glacier National Park. One road, popularly called Camas Road, goes through nearly flat forest with occasional meadows. Along one of the road cuts we came across a mother Black Bear and her cub. They contentedly went on with their munching on the new grass shoots while Jim took several rolls of photographs. His only complaint was that the mother was too large for his 500 mm lens and filled the frame too completely. These were Jim's first photographs of bears, and he was pretty happy.

Ferne cooked a delicious dinner of baked salmon, fresh asparagus, etc. A little more conversation, and we called it a day. It's hard to quit early, because the sun doesn't go down until around 9:00 p.m. Right now it's 10:30, but I wanted to write up this log before it got too stale in my brain. Even so, I'm afraid it's pretty pedantic and doesn't truly do justice to the experiences of the past two days--especially the wonderful conversations we've had with two special people. We certainly miss them in Sea and Sage.

We're back at the RV park where Jim did such nice work on Red-naped Sapsuckers, Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows in July of 1987. I love the place because the sites are perched high above the road with a wonderful view of the mountains of Glacier N.P. and two lakes in the middle distance.

We left the Cohens about 11:30 after a morning of tending to loose ends. I had to complete my Breeding Bird Survey report, take it into town to Xerox a copy for myself and mail it off. I also tackled the new printer and sent home a copy of this log so far. [This was long before the days of email.]

We selected a site at the West Glacier KOA, which is about a mile off the highway. Unfortunately it is in the middle of a 2nd growth Lodgepole Pine monoculture, so the number of birds was very limited. Most were those we usually see around campgrounds--robins, juncos, chippies, Audubon's Warblers, and that's about all. They never did pick up on Jim's birdseed, although a couple of juncos wandered all over the ground where it was scattered. One even stood on the picnic table for five minutes surrounded by the stuff!

After checking in that first afternoon, we decided to drive up the Going-to-the-Sun road as far as it is possible to drive this early in the season. There had been reports of Grizzly Bears being seen regularly near an avalanche site beside the road. All we found were a couple of extremely tame White-tailed Deer pan-handling in the parking lot at the turn-around place. Apparently neither they nor the tourists (including Jim) can read the "DON'T FEED THE WILDLIFE" signs

McDonald Creek was running at full spring flow, so the lovely rocks on the bottom, which Jim photographed so beautifully with his Polaroid filter on our last trip were not visible. However, it was exciting to stand on the brink of a little waterfall and watch that torrent of water pass over it.

Yesterday morning we decided to drive up the road along the west side of the north fork of the Flathead River--to a little settlement called Polebridge. There had been reports of Grizzlies there recently, too. It was a lovely drive, first through the woods, then through farmland with lots of scattered trees. No Grizzlies--or anything else--to photograph.

We got back to the trailer about 1:00 and both took two-hour naps. I think we were over-tired from all the activities of the past several weeks. Jim woke up so energetic that he spent four hours completing his letter to Dick E. Bird--the one so many of our friends have read. He wanted to get it in the mail before we left the U.S., and succeeded in doing so. (He printed it this morning before we left camp.)

Today we drove the 100 miles around the south end of Glacier N.P. to St. Mary--the eastern terminus of Going-to-the-Sun Highway. It was a beautiful drive. On the west side the trees were just starting to get their new spring leaves. The new leaves showed all sorts of fall-like colors, having little chlorophyll yet. The larch trees (a deciduous conifer) were brilliant chartreuse, and some hillsides were covered with them. Of course, the middle fork of the Flathead River, as well as several creeks we drove beside, were in full spring freshet. Many of them were an ugly shade of gray-brown because of the load of silt they're washing off the upper slopes of their courses.

The deciduous trees on this side have barely started to bud--no leaves out at all yet. It's colder over here. The elevation is higher, but that's not the entire reason. Here the weather is more associated with the Arctic Express from central Canada, while on the other side, the moderation of the Pacific Ocean still is felt.

We got here about 1:00 and had lunch in the trailer. Jim scouted the tent camping section of the park, where he photographed all the birds last time--says things are starting to happen back there already. He got back here just as it started to rain. The rain has stopped now, but looks as though it could start up again any time.

Lovely shooting stars and pasqueflowers are in bloom all around our site.

Daisy May Campground, Ft. MacLeod, Alberta
Sun. p.m., May 19, 1991

We awoke to the same leaden skies yesterday morning in St. Mary, but decided to leave for Alberta just the same. The showers were intermittent, so Jim didn't get too wet getting us ready to roll. (He does most of the outside stuff, while I take care of the inside details.) We stopped by the general store, which had a mail box, and deposited a few last-minute letters and postcards before leaving the U.S.

Canadian customs was no problem, although the man did quiz Jim rather thoroughly about firearms. Thank goodness he had none this time. He did no inspecting of our supplies. Jim had been afraid the Canadian customs would think he was bringing in enough photo film to start a store and make him buy a business license. So he had stashed his film here and there throughout the truck and trailer, and we had put our remaining citrus fruit and avocados in his Coleman refrigerator instead.

We're situated in a nice campground here on the outskirts of the small town of Ft. MacLeod. We have a full-hook-up site (water, electricity, sewer) overlooking the Oldman River. There is a tent-camping section with lots of trees and a small marsh on the edge. I've been down there twice, but have found no birds that we particularly need pictures of. The only warbler is the Yellow. Unfortunately the Brown-headed Cowbirds have the warblers outnumbered 10:1. I heard Pied-billed Grebes in the marsh yesterday, but did not have my recording gear with me. It would have been a poor place to record anyway--too many people nearby and too much traffic.

The campground is unusually full for this time of year, because this week-end is a 3-day holiday for Canadians--Queen Victoria's birthday. According to the folks we've talked to, they can take or leave the old queen, but they appreciate having a long week-end.

It rained off and on all day yesterday and all night--until about 10:00 this morning. Then it started to clear. Right now it is very breezy with high puffy clouds, and the temperature must be around 70°--very pleasant.

This morning, at Joan Kitchens' insistence (She had never been there, but was fascinated by the name and is also very interested in Indians.), we visited the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump historic site. Yes, there really is such a place, and that is the English translation of the Indian name for it. Despite the fact that for over 6000 years buffalo had their heads smashed in as they were run over the cliff there, the place gets its name from a Blackfoot Indian who got in the way of the horde that the Indians stampeded.

There is a very nice--and obviously very expensive--visitors' center built into the cliff near the site where the buffalo (American Bison) were killed. It explains the life-style of the plains Indians, especially its relationship to the buffalo.

Along the walk from the interpretive center out to the cliff edge, we found Vesper and Clay-colored Sparrows singing on territory. Jim had left his camera in the truck, but after our visit, we walked along another path nearer the parking lot and found the Clay-colored there, too. I recorded the song--two unmusical buzzes--and played it back ONCE. In no time the bird was singing from the bush right in front of Jim. It continued to fly back and forth across the path right where we were standing. Jim feels he got good pictures of this new bird for our collection. I've never seen a bird which required so little aural stimulation in order to pose for its portrait. I only played its sound back to it one more time the whole time we were standing there. The whole process was over in 15 minutes. [Later: this became the Alberta bird for my Birds of North America quilt.]

We also found a cute little ground squirrel, whose name I must look up. [It was Richardson's.] Jim photographed it from the truck beside the road.

Dinosaur Provincial Park, Alberta

5:30 p.m., Mon., May 20, 1991

It was a 150-mile drive here from Ft. MacLeod--through the rolling farmlands of Alberta. Along one stretch there were Pronghorn in the fields, and Jim successfully photographed a pair of them from the truck. Thank goodness for the nice wide shoulders on Canadian highways.

The campground here in Dinosaur Prov. Park is in the cottonwoods by the Red Deer River. Surrounding the area is a badlands formation where dinosaur remains have been found--more about that later when we find out about it. We are so fascinated by the birds here in the campground that we have not left it since we checked in a couple of hours ago.

We had ignored the "CAMPGROUND FULL" signs by the highway 25 miles away, and were proved correct. They only referred to the weekend crowds. When we arrived, the last of the Victoria Day weekend campers were leaving. Now there are only two or three other parties in the 46-site campground. It's rather warm--probably in the low 80's, but there is a good breeze--too good for recording unfortunately, for there are some nice eastern birds here--Brown Thrasher, Least Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole (which was singing beautifully--totally unlike the Bullock's, with which they say it is conspecific! [Later: not any longer]), and Yellow-shafted Flicker. I found the Flickers' nest hole, and Jim is standing in front of it right now.

It's so warm this afternoon that we're going to have our first hamburgers of the season.

Same place

8:00 p.m., Tues., May 21, 1991

Last evening after dinner I went for a walk along the nature trail, which follows a row of cottonwoods along the river. Some of the same birds as are in the campground are out there, but without the people quite so close. There was one party of four in the campground whose voices carried a good 1/4 mile though--especially one woman with a loud cackle. It was so pleasant out on that trail that I wanted to stay longer, but I had told Jim I was only going out in the nearby field of sagebrush. Even so, I did get a lovely complete recording of a Flicker's "quee-quee-quee-quee" from right under the bird. Also a long sequence of Brown Thrasher song. That bird seems to sing forever, so you can't really get a complete sequence.

I wished I had stayed out longer, for about 9:00 p.m. a strong wind came up. I thought it was due to the fact that valleys cool faster than the plains, lowering the pressure there and thus causing the wind to blow for a while in the evening. (We observed that phenomenon in Crow Valley in the Pawnee Grasslands of Colorado last summer.) However, this wind blew all night and all day today. It was also much cooler, but still pleasant to sit out-doors. Unfortunately it prevented me from getting any first-class recordings. Despite that, I spent most of the morning out on the trail with my tape recorder. I got a fairly nice American Goldfinch song, plus the Least Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, etc. There were few man-made sounds to interfere.

This afternoon it clouded over and even rained a few minutes around 5:30. Now it is nearly clear. The weather is certainly changeable. I just hope it won't be windy tomorrow.

Jim spent the day trying to photograph the Yellow-shafted Flicker and the Least Flycatcher. The Flicker nest is nice and accessible to him, but the exasperating birds pop in and out of the nest all too rapidly and all too infrequently. Occasionally one will favor him with a head shot as it peers out of the hole. I told him he should set up his blind, but he is reluctant to do that because he'd have to sit down in it, and it would make him even farther below the nest, but I believe he's thinking of trying it anyway.

The Least Flycatcher eluded him until I played back a recording. Then it came in and posed nicely for a few pictures before flying off, but proceeded to ignore further playbacks of its incessant "chebek" call.

We're right where east meets west here. We have both Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Bullock's and Baltimore races of the Northern Oriole [taxonomy of that time], the eastern Yellow-shafted race of the Northern Flicker and yet western birds such as Say's Phoebe and Rock Wren. We had a nice conversation with a couple of excellent Alberta birders, Bill McKitterick and John Thomas, who said Red-shafted Flickers are more likely in most of the province. (For the record, Bill McKitterick's address is Prairie Seeds, Inc., Box 428, Nisku, Alberta, T0C 2G0; Phone (403) 248-3397--near Calgary.)

We took the short drive through the badlands where dinosaurs have been found. There are a couple of display buildings along the route where one can peek through the glass. One of them has a Duck-billed Dinosaur partially excavated from the limestone. A display on the wall keys the various bones as they protrude from the ground to a painting of the animal as it would have looked walking around--a very effective display. Another one looks as though they have moved the skeletons of two dinosaurs to the little display buildings, so it isn't quite so impressive.

We never did make it to the museum. Maybe tomorrow. We've decided to stay here one more night.

This whole area reminds me so much of Utah--badlands like those around Dinosaur Natl. Mon.--possibly the same geological formation--Morrison, I think. [Later: It's called the Judith River formation, but it surely looks the same.]

The cottonwoods around the campground are also like Utah. They are among the few stands of cottonwoods in Alberta--and new trees are unlikely to replace these as they die because of a dam up-stream. (Cottonwoods only live about 200 years maximum.) I understand that this is one of the hottest places in Alberta in the summer. We certainly notice that the trees are more leafed out than in most places we've been.

Despite that, Bill and John were disappointed that some of the summer birds had not arrived yet; Common Nighthawk and Yellow-breasted Chat were mentioned. So spring migrants arrive late in this country. Our conversation with them told us we must not hasten north too fast, or we might miss some good birds. We think we'll go back south about 30 miles to a lake we skipped on our way here and spend a few days there before heading north again.

Same place
1:00 p.m., Wed., May 22, 1991

It dawned clear and calm this morning. Of course, dawn comes around 4:00 a.m., so I just dozed a while and listened to all the birds singing outside; American Robins, House Wrens, and Yellow Warblers were the most insistent, but I could also hear Baltimore Oriole, Least Flycatcher, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, and several others. It's such fun to be able to recognize birds by their voices. It's even more fun when I know I have most of them on tape now, after a whole morning wandering around the area.

Right after breakfast I had Jim drive me up to about half-way around the two-mile loop road through the badlands. I wanted to walk back and, if possible, record the Vesper Sparrow's song. I did get it, but not as close as I wanted to. I also got Rock Wren and Western Meadowlark. Only the Meadowlark was satisfactorily close, but all will be usable tapes.

I also recorded Canada Goose. Those crazy birds apparently roost atop the mesas--one per mesa, thank you. I was especially amused as I walked down the road when one goose--or more likely gander--started sounding off about 150 yd to my left. After he had been holding forth for several minutes, another one perched about 150 yd to my right stretched her (or his) neck around and took notice. Then it took flight, flew over to where the first one was calling, circled around a couple of times, then the two of them took off together toward the river.

After I got back to the cottonwoods, I spent the rest of the morning wandering around there--for a total of about 5 hours in the field--recording again the same birds I had only been able to record in the wind before. The air is still calm, but now someone is mowing the lawn in the campground.

Besides, I'm ready to relax for a while.

The birds are finally beginning to patronize Jim's feeding station. There's no cover nearby, so they're pretty wary though. Even so, we've had Am. Robin, Black-billed Magpie, and (ugh!) European Starling. One Robin likes to play "King of the Roost"--or is it "Dog in the Manger"? He perches for long periods of time atop the pointy-topped log where the magic meal is stashed. Whenever a Starling deigns to come near, all the Robin has to do is lower his head, and the Starling keeps its distance. (I wish that Robin would spend all its time there.) We love the big beautiful magpies, and of course the Robin gives way for them.

The Robins around here are incredibly brash and unconcerned about people. This afternoon as I was sitting on my sun couch beside the picnic table reading, a robin lit on the far side of the bench, then hopped down onto the ground. Before I knew it, it had wandered under the table and *under my sun couch* and out the other side. I'm sure it knew I was there, although I tried to sit still.

My bird list for the park so far has 44 species.

3:00 p.m. same day

I just came back from the little museum in the park. It's a branch of a much larger museum of paleontology in Drumheller. Much as with the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, they've done an excellent job, this time bringing the age of dinosaurs to life. My only complaint would be that they need a little more technical stuff in smaller print for those who want to delve deeper. They also need a little book store.

While at the museum I looked through the glass into the lab. A pick-up truck was backed half-way into the lab and a large dinosaur (?) encased in plaster of Paris was being unloaded onto a forklift. The thing was about 6 feet long by 3 feet wide by 2 feet high. It took the strenuous efforts of three or four young researchers to chain the far end and lift the near end onto the forklift.

All the while a group of about a dozen 15-year-old school kids, who were there on a bus tour, hung over the sides of the truck. Most of them were simply interested in the logistics of unloading a heavy ungainly object. However, one girl was totally lost in the wonder of it all and had a thrilled smile on her face. I could tell she was really moved by the idea that this was a precious ancient animal that had been unearthed after millions of years underground.

7:00 p.m. same day

Just as last evening, the sky got black around dinner time, and we had some rain. This time it started with several minutes of hail--pea-sized. While we were eating, I caught sight of a rainbow developing, and Jim left his food and dashed out to the truck for his "other" camera. [The term "other camera" refers to whatever camera he needs and doesn't have right now. He has a whole lot of "other cameras" with him.] He ran to the edge of the campground so as to photograph it with only the natural badlands landscape in the foreground. As is always the case when you're in a hurry, he discovered when he got out there that he had only three shots left on his roll. So he pelted back to the truck, then out again. Fortunately the rainbow was even more brilliant the second time out. He said it was double and that some of the colors were even triple. It arced clear across the sky, too. It was really lovely against the black sky, but with the sun shining on the formations in the foreground. I remained at my dinner and enjoyed it from there, but through the trees. Now the storm has passed, and the sun is shining again.

Kinbrook Island Provincial Park, AB

8:30 p.m., Thurs., May 23, 1991

What a spot! To think we almost gave it a pass. Kinbrook Island is a wooded island off the shore of a large lake, Newell Lake, here in southeastern Alberta, near Brooks. On the west side of

the island are vacation homes facing the open lake. The campground meanders through poplar and other trees which have obviously been planted. Along the east side, though, are sites which overlook the marsh. Here we sit at one end of a grassy strip surrounded by Richardson's Ground-Squirrels. Twenty-five feet away on one side is a row of trees between us and the next campsite. Twenty-five feet east is the marsh. It's heaven!

We had no sooner driven up than we saw several kingbirds, both Eastern and Western, squabbling overhead. The Easterns sit on the barbed wire fence, while the Westerns sit in the tree tops. While I was eating dinner, there were six of them in the air at once--couldn't tell which they were against the bright sky. Probably both.

In the marsh nearby are Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds, mostly the latter. They do make a fuss, and no one can say a Yellow-headed Blackbird has a pretty voice! The female simply makes a raspy buzzy call, while the male's somewhat resonant rendition sounds mainly like he's trying to up-chuck his dinner. Some people liken it to a squeaky gate, but I can't really hear that.

Thirty feet farther is the more-or-less open water where all sorts of waterfowl are swimming around two-by-two. We watched a pair of Blue-winged Teal doing their courtship bowing--until a rival male tried to break up the affair. He was chased off post-haste, whereupon the pair took up where they left off.

Other ducks include Mallard, N. Pintail, Am. Wigeon, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback, Redhead--so far. Also out on the open water I've seen Pied-billed and Red-necked Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Am. Coot.

Most of the birds seem to be in the courtship, copulation, and nest-building phase, but we've seen a pair of Canada Geese with 20 goslings. One bird leads the line of goslings, while the other brings up the rear. Since the birds only lay 4-7 (rarely up to 10) eggs, these two must be the local baby sitters.

Speaking of courtship and copulation, a pair of Yellow-headed Blackbirds gave us an eyeful right on the campsite barbeque outside our window while we were eating dinner. Lots of wing fluttering from her, lots of sky-pointing and wing-spreading from him. They then mated repeatedly, flew off into the reeds and continued the process all the while we were eating.

This afternoon I took a long walk across a nearby causeway and along the edge of the marsh on the other side. There I was thrilled to watch a Willet doing its courtship display flight. I knew there was one around, because I heard the incessant "pill-WILL will-will, pill-WILL will-will" (can't seem to make it say "pill-will-willet"). Finally I discovered it high in the sky and farther away than it sounded. It was flying in deliberate undulations, first flying upwards for about 30 feet at about a 45 degree angle with exaggerated wingbeats, then holding its wings partially extended and somewhat curved downward, it would glide downward for another 30 ft or so. It repeated this process over and over for many minutes. All the while its beautiful black and white wing pattern was shown off to perfection. During its flights it more or less circled an area with a diameter of 1/8 mile.

The birds in the woods seem to be similar to those we saw at Dinosaur Prov. Park. Again there are Yellow Warblers, Least Flycatchers, Baltimore Orioles and of course the I.R. (inevitable Robin). I haven't really explored that habitat very thoroughly yet.

Jim took a nap early this afternoon, then spent two or three hours standing in one spot at the edge of the marsh. The birds got so used to him that an Eastern Kingbird almost lit on his head. And a Tree Swallow fluttered around the opening to the sunshade of his lens, apparently checking it out as a possible nest cavity. Cavities are in short supply here, for the trees are quite young. (Maybe the park people remove all the dead wood as the trees die.) The only cavities are a few bird boxes over by the private cottages. They are definitely popular with the Tree Swallows, as well as the House Wrens. I have seen no woodpeckers in the park, although I did see some old sapsucker workings in one spot.

While Jim was standing there, he said he heard Soras in the reeds. I haven't heard any, so it's possible he was mistaken, but he gave a pretty good description of the sound. Possibly he heard it while I was off for my walk. He also said he saw one--until he took a good look at the picture in the

field guide. He said it had fairly strong vertical streaks along the back--more like a . . . (Shall I say the name?) Yellow Rail! Wouldn't that be wonderful! According to the book, they're more likely to call at night than in the daytime. I'll be listening for them, but the nights around here are so short, I spend most of that time sleeping.

Backing up a little in time: We left Dinosaur about 8:00 this morning, drove into Brooks and did some of those annoying, but necessary, tasks like laundry, banking, and grocery shopping--got here around noon.

The laundromat was totally deserted of other customers, but not of people. When I entered the place, I thought it was empty until up from behind the last washing machine arose a scroungy hitch-hiker, who said he had slept there all night to keep out of the rain. (The sign says they're open from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., but obviously they don't lock the door.) The place is just off the Trans-Canada Highway. He left soon after we arrived.

Then a short time later in trooped all the smokers from the nearby Alberta Department of Social Services for their morning coffee break. They're obviously not permitted to smoke in their office. I thought I was going to be asphyxiated, it was so bad. I also feared my laundry would reek of their smoke. But I opened the door and apparently the exhaust fans in the building drew the smoke out efficiently. The women apparently only had a 10-minute break, thank goodness.

It wasn't hard to figure out why the laundromat had no other customers. We saw another one elsewhere in town, and there may have been others, too. Several of the machines were out of order. One was full of rocks, while still another was full of hay. I was hard-pressed to find three acceptable machines. In addition, the dryers only gave 5 minutes of drying time for a quarter, and one I happened to use at first quit after two minutes. I've always felt 10 min/quarter was pretty chintzy. Since this was the first washing we've done since we left home (We deliberately bring lots of clothes, because it takes no longer to do a big wash than a small one in a laundromat--just more machines.), we spent around \$7.00 getting our clothes washed. (That's a little less U.S., since \$0.86 U.S. buys \$1.00 Canadian.)

Same place

1:30 p.m., Sat., May 25, 1991

Thursday night the overcast turned into rain, and it rained all night and all morning yesterday. So I spent six hours yesterday getting started on my Orange County Breeding Bird Atlas write-up.

While I was doing that, Jim kept busy. We had forgotten to go to the post office when we went through Brooks the day before, so he decided to drive back to town--ca. 10 miles. But when he tried to start the truck, the battery was dead. One of the rear doors had been left slightly ajar all night, so the dome light drained the battery. He was able to get a jump start from someone in the campground.

Since the truck needed to be run to charge up the battery, he decided to take the long way into town, via the "all-weather" secondary road around the south side of Lake Newell. He came back here within an hour, rather shook-up. It seemed the "all-weather" road turned into a slippery bed of clay when it rained. "Turn your wheels in the direction of the skid. You'll get traction that way," they say. It made no difference which way the tires were aimed, the truck simply spun around. He ended up sideways on the road several times and slid off the road completely once, but managed to drive back onto it. Another portion was such a deep quagmire that he said he drove in ruts made by a prior vehicle, up to his hub-caps--or deeper. He preferred that to breaking his own trail, because it was so slick. Finally the problem became not how to go on, but where to turn around. He eventually managed to do it AND retrace his steps. He did go into town--the short way--and to the P.O. before returning here.

When he got back, I laid on him the news that the water pump, which had been giving us some warnings, had stopped completely. We checked "the book" and found that the closest RV store listed was in Medicine Hat, 67 miles from Brooks. (Isn't that a funny name for a town?) So Jim set off

again, to try first in Brooks and, if necessary, drive to Medicine Hat to get a new water pump. He went first into Canadian Tire, a general hardware-type store, and they told him there was an RV store in Brooks and directed him to its location on a back street in the industrial part of the little town. So he got back here at 12:00--hungry for lunch. (He had said he'd buy himself a hamburger if he went on to Medicine Hat.) After lunch he installed the new water pump--and with only a single "Damn it!" (The difficulty of any task he attempts is always measured by the amount of profanity it requires.)

Around 2:00, since the rain seemed to have stopped, I took a walk through the wooded section of the campground. I met a man from Brooks, who had brought his trailer out here for a few days. He said this campground had originally been laid out for a golf course, but the developer couldn't make a go of it, so the Provincial government took it over and made it into a campground--hence all the trees, which had been planted to serve as windbreaks along the fairways. It certainly makes a lovely campground.

He also suggested that we take that drive around the south end of the lake, because there were several places where you could view wildlife, including a breeding island for White Pelicans (he said Brown.) and cormorants. I think we'll wait 'til they pave the road before we try that one! He told us they're planning to do so and graded it last year. Maybe that's why it was so soft this year.

The most interesting birds I saw on my walk were a Red-eyed Vireo (singing) and a Tennessee Warbler (not singing). I had not taken my tape recorder, because there was too much wind.

Interesting observation: Western Kingbirds hunt earth-worms. I watched one land on the muddy park road frequently. Once it flew to a nearby post with a 5-inch long red worm. It tried to eat it there, but then flew off elsewhere with it.

We went to bed around 8:30 (Jim) or 9:00 (me). Around 11:30 I was awakened by a strange cry--loud and moderately high pitched, a sort of a slurred la-do. This went on for about 15 minutes. I desperately wanted to record it, but didn't want to wake Jim up. Then it started to hail. This woke Jim up, and he heard the sound, too. The source of the sound became clear when I heard a loud descending whinny. It was a Sora! Usually I hear the la-do several times, going immediately into the whinny. This bird did either one or the other, not both.

The hail turned into rain and then stopped within about 15 minutes, but the Sora didn't. Jim went back to sleep, but I didn't.

Finally I couldn't stand it any longer, so got up, got dressed and went outside with my tape recorder. (This woke Jim up briefly, but he said he went back to sleep quickly.) By then it was 12:15 a.m. Also by this time the bird was calming down and doing no more la-do's. It still whinnied occasionally, and this I wanted to record. It uttered its whinny about every 10 - 15 minutes--without warning! It took me a while to figure out that it was only going to do it once each time. Several times I turned on my recorder after the first couple of notes, but this was not what I wanted. I wanted the whole thing. So I finally just turned the recorder on and stood there, *and stood there, AND STOOD THERE.*

And then I got tired of standing there, so I figured out that I could sit on the couch in the trailer and lay the microphone on the floor aimed out the door. The base of it is much heavier than the business end, so a good deal of it could protrude. (Fortunately there have been no mosquitos anywhere to date.) After about 10 minutes of sitting with the recorder recording, the bird finally gave me a complete whinny.

Whereupon I put my gear away and went back to bed. It was 1:30 a.m. by then. It took me a long time to go back to sleep, and during that time I heard no more sounds from that Sora.

The morning dawned windy and partly cloudy--high puffs blowing in the wind. No recording for me in that gale, so I went for a walk, then came back and took a nap to make up for my night's activities. (We got up at 5:30 this morning as usual.)

I just heard a Sora whinny again. But I'm glad I got it at night when no other birds were singing. Now any recording of it would have Yellow-headed and Red-winged blackbirds, Robins, Baltimore Orioles, etc., for those birds sing incessantly.

Incidentally, all the while I was up at night I heard no sound that resembled the call of the Yellow Rail. (It sounds like two pebbles being struck together.) Early this morning Jim ran into two birders doing a "Big Day", and they told him that in Alberta Yellow Rails are normally found farther north.

Same place

1:45 p.m., Sun., May 26, 1991

Last night we had another hail storm, but none of the thunder and lightning of the night before. The Sora did not call. I wonder if the electrical display, rather than the hail, wasn't what made it call at night.

This morning dawned partly cloudy again, but the wind was very mild. So I decided to do some recording. I walked out the dike road to the unoccupied group camping area. Over a little rise, my back was protected from the campground sounds, which are inevitable on a week-end. In turn I surprised both Willet and Marbled Godwit. Each bird flew off a ways. When I approached it again, it called again, so I think I got some good stuff. The only problem is there were Canada Geese out on the water which were calling all the time. I also got Black Tern and Red-necked Grebe, but from afar. Same with the darn Pied-billed Grebe that I've really been wanting a nice recording of for a long time.

The people are going home early today because of the lousy weather, but there is still campground noise. A few minutes ago I tried to get a Red-eyed Vireo, but I don't think I ever got it unaccompanied by some extraneous noise--kids yelling, people hammering from two different directions, park personnel unloading firewood, speed boats on the lake, etc., etc., etc. That's the way it is with recording. Acceptable conditions for it are much harder to come by than for photography.

So I decided to come back here and write up this installment and edit the rest so I can mail it off when we get to where there is electricity. We use our solar panels to charge up our 12 volt system when we're in public parks like this without hookups. Our printer requires 110 volt electricity. Fortunately we have devices that permit the lap-top computer I'm writing with to be recharged from either voltage.

Our feeding operation is quite popular here. Again it's out in the open with no bushes nearby, but we get Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds, Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, House Sparrows, and Ring-billed Gulls. A gull finishes up all the Magic Meal in one visit, so Jim puts out only a little at a time.

The Richardson's Ground-Squirrels like it, too, but they are truly ground squirrels and can't climb up onto the upper log that Jim has placed on top of the barbeque. Of course, he occasionally puts some lower down for them. He loves squirrels, although these have such scrawny tails that he has expressed no great urge to fondle them.

He's placed his syrup feeders in a bush where the Baltimore Oriole forages, but so far the bird hasn't figured it out. There are no hummingbirds here to show them how, I guess.

We love watching the antics of the squirrels. There seems to be a family here, two parents and three half-grown youngsters. The young ones chase each other around and engage in a great variety of mock battles.

The thrushes here have forced me to delve into my detailed ID notes. I finally decided they are Swainson's--the Olive-backed form. Our Swainson's on the Pacific Coast are the Russet-backed form. I tried to make them into Veeries, which should be here, too, but so far I have not seen a Veery. These birds have a distinct eye-ring, while a Veery does not. Also, these birds have brownish flanks, while Veeries have gray ones. I've discovered that you have to be careful on that flank color. There is frequently a gray area surrounding the brown, and if the wings are the least bit drooped, it looks as though the flanks are gray. (The belly is white.) The birds are not singing, which is in accord with their being Swainson's. (These thrushes only sing on their breeding grounds.) The field guide does not show extreme southeastern Alberta as being part of their breeding range. So they must simply be late migrants. Veeries supposedly breed in this area, but they must not be here yet. The

park has no bird list--surprising for a place which is supposed to be one of Alberta's birding hot-spots.

Same place
12:30 p.m., Mon., May 27, 1991

The weather finally cleared yesterday afternoon late, and this morning dawned cloudless. It's so gorgeous that we've decided to stay another day. Who can drive off and leave sparkling blue water dotted with emergent marsh plants and accented with ducks and other water birds, all swimming around two-by-two? Overhead you don't have to look long before a Black Tern or a White Pelican flies past.

The marsh sounds are mostly the Yellow-headed Blackbirds, but they are interspersed with the occasional calls of the Pied-billed Grebes. That bird's sounds to me are the essence of a marsh. Unfortunately I've yet to record one isolated from the other marsh sounds.

Then there is the wooded section, all those wonderful lines of trees with shrubbery underneath. What will the next little bit of movement turn out to be?

My bird list has 73 species, and every time I go out, I add something more. This morning I took a wonderful long walk through the north part of the park--the day-use section and a portion of the campground that is closed for renovation. I found a Brown Thrasher and a female American Redstart. She was singing a nice little song. I had the whole place to myself. There was very little wind, and I could record to my heart's content.

The park is full of birds--many individuals of most species, so wherever I went the trees and bushes were atwitter. The only problem recording in such a place is that solos are impossible to come by--because the Western Kingbirds, Least Flycatchers, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds vocalize incessantly.

I've seen a Merlin streak down the ex-fairways a couple of times. Another time an assortment of Icterine [Icterids were a subfamily for a while, so this is not an error.] types were trying to rout it. Then this morning as I was walking near a flooded open area of the park, I saw two Killdeer and a Willet fly off in panic. It turned out that a Mourning Dove had flown out of a tree directly towards them. It took me a moment to determine that it was a dove, not a Merlin, and I'm sure the shorebirds decided to flee now and ask questions later.

Last evening after dinner I walked to the area where a dozen or so pair of Black Terns are getting ready to nest. Jim had spent some time there in the afternoon photographing the birds in flight--two rolls worth, but maybe only one or two shots will be good. That's the way it is with flying birds. When I got there, the terns were calling, as I expected, but so were the Yellow-headed Blackbirds. It was so beautiful, though, in the last rays of the lingering northern sun, that I couldn't tear myself away to go back to the trailer. Lo and behold, the blackbirds began to subside--not completely, of course--while the terns were still going strong, so I think I got some pretty good recordings.

The sun was still above the horizon a trifle when I last saw it on my walk back around 9:10. Of course, the twilight lasted an hour or so longer.

Jim and I usually go to bed around 9:00. At that time it is still broad daylight. We don't have any trouble going to sleep, so I don't think the constant light farther north will bother us.

Same place

11:00 a.m., Tues., May 28, 1991

I spent a relaxing afternoon sitting out-doors embroidering California woodpeckers on a shirt for Jim and watching the birds on the lake and in the marsh. Usually the weather is too cold or windy for that. Even yesterday I had on a long-sleeved shirt and a light jacket. The only thing you can depend on about the weather around here is that it is going to change.

Last night just after I got into bed I heard a pair of Great Horned Owls duetting in the distance.

Then, all of a sudden, it sounded as though they were right outside the trailer. I peeked out the window, and there they were, one above the other, in the top of a small dying tree. So I had to get up and try to record them out the window. By the time I got my gear ready, I got only one song--from the male only. The female did not respond that time. After a short time they both flew off, and I continued to hear them in the distance for a short time.

This morning we took a drive south along the lake shore. There is a fairly good (when it's not raining!) dike road that pretty much follows the shore of Lake Newell. (We've learned that it's a man-made lake for irrigation purposes.) Saw a Chestnut-collared Longspur at one point, but since Jim got such good pictures of that bird last summer in Colorado, we did not stop and try here.

At another point there were swallows flying all around. We stopped and identified them as Bank Swallows. Jim walked over to the edge of the lake, and a swarm of them emerged from the eight-foot high bank. The bank itself was too unstable looking to approach and peer over. He stood there a few minutes and tried to photograph them in flight. The results will not be known until September. He doesn't think he did very well. Swallows are hard to shoot, because they never continue in the same direction very long. I tried to record them, but there was such a gale blowing that it was hopeless.

Our main destination was a little nature preserve near Jackfish Bay. It was set aside by an oil man, who had had a house in the area. It's called Swen Bayer Nature Preserve, after him. We walked around the short nature trail, but found nothing different from what we have right outside our trailer.

As we set out on our walk, we kept hearing a mellow pulsating sound that we both thought was a Pied-billed Grebe in the distance. The only problem was that we couldn't figure out where it was. First it seemed to be from one direction, then another. Finally I looked up, and saw a speck high in the sky with a long bill. It dawned on me that it might be a Common Snipe, so I looked it up in the book, and the description fit the "winnowing" sound made as the wind blows through the spread tail feathers. It was doing its display flight. I didn't try to record it then because of the wind, but by the time we had walked the short loop trail, the wind had died down considerably. So I tried it. Standing in the lee of the truck, I think I got a fairly good recording. I hope I'll have another chance, though, for it was an interesting sound.

As we were leaving the park for our drive this morning, we caught sight of a Northern Harrier carrying nesting material. When we came back, I left Jim to sit for an hour beside the entry road and see if he can get a picture. Maybe the nest will cause the bird to fly repeatedly to the same place.

Dinosaur Trail Campground, Drumheller, AB

8:00 p.m., Tues., May 28, 1991

We left Kinbrook Island around noon and got here a couple of hours later. Drumheller (accent on the 2nd syllable) is set in the Red Deer Valley, and the formations around here look like those in Dinosaur Prov. Park, where we were a few days ago.

Our reason for stopping here was to visit the Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. What a place! It's worth a visit by anyone who comes anywhere near Alberta. A large building, set on a hill among the badlands where dinosaurs have been excavated, it must have cost millions of dollars to put together, but the results are absolutely outstanding.

The main theme of the museum is a walk through the history of life on earth. It starts with the earliest formation of life and takes you through the various ages. In each age you start with a map of the continents as they appeared at that time, along with their inland seas. Then you see examples of the various forms of life of the period--fossils, reconstructed skeletons, and artists' conceptions of the fleshed-out creatures. There are many full-sized replicas of the skeletons of the various prehistoric creatures in realistic dioramas of what they might be doing. For example, there is a meat-eating dinosaur gnawing open the belly of a slightly smaller prey-dinosaur that it just caught. Painted on the background of the natural-looking setting is an artist's conception of what the fleshed-out creatures

probably looked like. The setting is true to the period, with the plants, etc., all represented. And there are many such displays.

There is even a large botanical garden room, which simulates, with as many plants as are still in existence today, what the habitat of the age of dinosaurs in Alberta must have looked like. We were amazed to find that lots of the plants are those we grow in our yards in Southern California, including staghorn fern, baby tears, etc.

Just when your feet are getting tired, there is a place where you can sit down for a spell, punch a button and watch a short (or in one case 25-min long) TV explanation of some aspect of paleontology. One explained why they believe hard-shelled invertebrates developed, when only soft ones had existed before. Reason: the oxygen was freed into the atmosphere, instead of being tied up in acids, which would prevent calcium carbonate from forming. The long presentation was on the various theories of why dinosaurs suddenly became extinct and mammals took over. There are several gradual theories and several catastrophic theories which are treated with respect by scientists. [Years later: a catastrophic one seems to have won out.] In addition, there are, of course, many unsupported folk-lore-type explanations, including the one in the Bible. These were only mentioned briefly.

Despite the fact that it was the end of the day, our energy was revived by the beauty of the place and the marvelous way the material was presented; we spent a good three hours there and got back to the trailer around 6:30 p.m. (We should have allowed a whole day.) I doubt there is another museum like it in the world. And here it is in the middle of the plains of Alberta in a town of 3,600 people. The closest city that is any bigger is Calgary, which is 100 miles or so away. The reason for putting it in Drumheller is, I believe, because of the extensive laboratory facilities behind the scenes. It's a working research museum, not just an educational one.

One might wonder why all this interest in paleontology in Alberta. The main reason is that some of the most extensive deposits from the age of dinosaurs are found here. Second, almost all the geological ages on earth are represented in the surface rocks of the province.

Lions Club/City Park Campground, Stettler, AB

9:00 a.m., Thurs., May 30, 1991

Before I forget it, here are a couple of interesting Alberta-isms: (1) Whenever there is a cattle guard upcoming, the warning sign reads TEXAS GATE. (2) A personalized license plate is a "bumper stumper."

Yesterday started out as planned, but certainly didn't end up that way. We got a late start because we decided to take advantage of the electrical hook-up that we had not had for over a week. I printed out my log to mail, and we cleaned the trailer.

As we drove northward, we could watch the open short-grass prairie gradually become interspersed with trees in all the low spots. The land is quite bumpy with lots of little hills and little ponds. The unevenness is left over from the last ice age, of course. They call it "parkland". Officially, it's the aspen parkland, named for the most common tree.

We stopped for groceries in the little town of Stettler. While I was in the market, Jim caught sight of a leather store. Since he had forgotten his every-day belt when he left home, he decided to go in and buy one. And there it all started.

While he was waiting to be served, he overheard a conversation between the owner and a woman who had stopped in: "I got 54 species. How many did you get?"

"I got 76."

He knew they had to be birders! It turned out that the owner of the store is a very competent birder--probably the best in the area, and excellent by anyone's standards.

His name is Lloyd Lohr (Box 1414, Stettler, Alberta T0C 2L0; Phone at store: (403) 742-2944, home: (403) 742-3846, additional phone: (403) 742-4880).

Lloyd lent us a copy of a book on vireos and warblers of Alberta, published by the museum in

Edmonton. I spent the afternoon gleaning eight pages of information from the book on nesting habitats, breeding ranges, and descriptions of voices. Thank goodness for the computer and printer, or I could not have done it so fast.

Lloyd told us that the local bird club was having a field trip that evening. They were to meet at 6:15 at the fairgrounds parking lot. We'd be most welcome to come along, too. We said to ourselves, "Why not? We're not on any schedule."

They have an outing every Wed. evening and sometimes on weekends, too. The evenings are so long, that it doesn't get dark until 10:00 this time of year.

We turned up at the appointed hour at the fairgrounds. In short order about a dozen friendly people had gathered. All were at least 60 years old, and the oldest man was proudly introduced as being 85 years old. Most of them wore very attractive new green-and-white hats proclaiming their membership in the Buffalo Lake Naturalists. The men's hats had buttons on the top, while the women's had pompons.

Around 6:30 we drove south out of town. But before long we had to stop and pick up Trude. Then after we had turned onto a dirt road and made several more turns that got Jim and me hopelessly confused, we ended up at an old farmhouse nestled in the trees. Out came Samantha, a dear lady with the highest, chirpiest voice I've ever heard. There was also another woman with her, whose name escaped me. We wandered around their small apple orchard for a while. It soon became apparent that birding was secondary to conversation with that group.

While we were birding the orchard, Lloyd had detoured out a little ways and picked up his mother, a tiny bit of a thing--92 years old. She's getting a bit forgetful, though, for she told us several times of the three years she lived in Los Angeles--around 1908.

Only Lloyd is a serious birder, but he knew we were and was continually passing pieces of interesting information to help us understand the birds in the area. We had been wondering why all the bluebird houses along the road--and there are lots of them everywhere--came in pairs--mounted about 15 ft apart. Then the next pair might be 100 yd farther along. I had suggested to Jim that maybe one was for the Tree Swallows and one for the Mountain Bluebirds. Anyway the caravan stopped along the road at one of those pairs of houses, and Lloyd came back and pointed out the paired boxes to us. I was pleased to learn that my conjecture had been right. Furthermore he said that the two species do not compete, for the swallows feed high in the air, while the bluebirds feed near the ground. If there were only one box there, there might not be a home for both species. Neither species will nest close to another of its own kind.

After everyone was gathered up, we set off down the road, stopping several times to look over ponds or bits of woodland. During minor lulls in the chit-chat we did see around 40 species of birds. To me the best bird was the Horned Grebe in breeding plumage. The best bird we heard was the booming of the Ruffed Grouse emanating from the woods. I wanted to record it, but we were 1/4 mile from the truck by that time, and besides I knew it would be impossible to quiet that group down. I really didn't want to, for it was fun listening to their country talk--all about which crops in the garden had come up yet, the relative merits of the various kinds of berries, what insect pests were eating their apple trees, etc.

The people did live up to their name, Naturalists, for they were interested in all sorts of wildlife--flowers, insects, and of course a porcupine which crossed the road in front of the lead car. Others in the group had a smattering of knowledge of the names of a few birds, plants, insects, etc. It was Lloyd who know not only their names, but how they fit into the ecosystem of the area. He told us his grandfather (or was it great-grandfather?) had settled in this area before it was even surveyed.

Around 9:30, as it was starting to get dark, we all drove back to Samantha's for "coffee and juice." As we entered the house, everyone automatically took off their shoes, even though we had not been in any particularly muddy areas. Then we sat and chatted for about 20 minutes while the coffee brewed. The "coffee and juice" turned out to be a Fern Zimmerman-type spread, with all sorts of fruit, cheese buns, cookies, donuts, etc. Unfortunately none of it was very tasty. I don't know why it is, but I've had almost no food anywhere in Canada that was particularly memorable, and much of it

is downright awful.

Then when we had eaten our refreshments and chatted a bit longer, Samantha asked, "Do you want to see the film of the bear?" Except, she pronounced it "beer." Everyone politely said they did. Well, it turned out that this was a full-length commercial movie, "The Bear." Jim had heard of it. He's heard of *every* movie and has several hundred on tape, but rarely watches one. It had taken the producer seven years to film this story. Samantha's son had taped it off of cable TV and sent it to her. She had obviously watched it many, many times and loved it, for throughout the film, she continually twittered about the good parts coming up:

"Here comes the little fella!"

"Look at the way the bushes move. He's coming out!" (this many times)

"Oh look, this is so cute.!"

Her commentary was so charming, that it helped both Jim and me to stay awake, for by the time it was over it was nearly midnight. I knew he was amused by her chatter, for every time I glanced over at him, he had a slight smile on his face. The movie was charming, too, but a bit preposterous in spots. It also had its dangerous moments for the baby bear.

Although a few people went home before it was over, most stayed until the bitter end. Since we had no idea where we were, we had to stay so we could be led back into town. It turned out that only one couple in the group actually lived in Stettler, so we followed them. Not only did they lead us to town, they drove us to the entrance to our campground!

We got out of the truck and staggered to the trailer door, it being long past our usual 9:00 bedtime. What did we find on the steps of the trailer, but a couple of green-and-white hats--one with a button and one with a pompon. Whenever we wear them and read BUFFALO LAKE NATURALISTS, STETTLER, ALBERTA, on the front, we'll remember the delightful evening we had with those fine folks.

Jim has gone back down to Lloyd's leather shop to take him a copy of the *Dick E. Bird News* for each member of the group. As soon as he comes back, we'll continue on up the road toward Edmonton.

Half Moon Lake Resort, Sherwood Park, AB
5:00 p.m., Sat., June 1, 1991

We managed to get to our destination without further delay. Sherwood Park is a suburb of Edmonton, although where we are the influence of the nearby city of nearly 600,000 people is pretty slight. There are a fair number of widely spaced homes in the area though.

This RV park is probably 3/4 full of RV's parked here for the summer. Most of them are not occupied now, but nearly every space has a vehicle of some sort in it. Nothing special right here in the way of birds.

We went to Elk Island National Park, about 30 miles away, yesterday. This park is an "island" of boreal forest in the midst of the aspen parkland. The continuous boreal forest starts about 100 miles north of here.

We had no sooner entered the gates than we met up with the specialty of the place--a herd of about 30 buffalo. These beasts are more correctly called bison, and there are two types in the park--the wood bison and the endangered plains bison. The populations of the two sub-species have been kept apart by fences and a highway. In our section they were plains bison.

They were milling around all over the road and grazing on the grassy stretch between the road and the woods. They seemed uneasy with a car right beside them, but otherwise tolerated us. We'd been warned at the gate not to get out of the car when in a herd of bison, and for once Jim behaved prudently and photographed them from the truck.

They were exasperating to shoot, for they wouldn't hold a pose. As soon as he spotted one standing with its head up, it would immediately avert it, walk away, or do something else. So I'm not sure how good his pictures will be.

We stopped first at a deserted picnic ground next to a large lake. Since the area was out a spur road from the main park road, there were no man-made noises, so I did some recording. Red-necked Grebes were out on the lake making an ungodly assortment of sounds. I wished they were a bit closer, but still I got quite a bit.

Ruddy Ducks were courting and quarreling along the immediate shore when we first arrived, and I recorded some of their splashes and vocalizations. They swam away soon after we arrived, so Jim didn't get any photos, although I think he photographed the grebes. The light was from the wrong direction anyway.

I took a short walk through the woods, but don't think I got anything memorable. While on my walk I did run into a man with a strong middle-eastern accent, who spent five minutes or so telling me his philosophy that people are no good at all, and that the birds and animals of this world are far superior. He feels very strongly that people are ruining the planet and that the idea promoted by many of the world's religions that people were put on earth to have dominion over it is completely wrong. He was very bitter about the way this world is going and only finds solace by walking in places like that wooded trail.

I tried to inquire what country he came from and what experiences he had had which led him to have his ideas, but he would not be diverted from his train of thought. So I just gave up and listened to him.

When I got back to Jim, it turned out that he had received the same spiel. We agreed that, although we may not be as bitter as that man is about the way the world is going, we certainly agree with him in essence.

After our interlude of near solitude, we drove on up to the populated part of the park, where a campground and store AND GOLF COURSE(!) are located. There were several bus-loads of school kids, who had come to the park on a field trip, so the place wasn't exactly peaceful. It was right after lunch, so Jim decided to take a nap, but I wanted to explore the area.

I had no sooner gotten out of the truck when a man came up to me and asked, "Wasn't your husband photographing Red-necked Grebes?"

I was surprised he knew me until I realized that our truck is probably unique in Alberta--a Chevy Suburban with Calif. plates and on top a rack with eight bright red gasoline cans and a spare tire all imperfectly covered with a wind-tattered bright blue tarp! (We have a stronger tarp, but Jim can never find time to do the pesky task of replacing the old one, which tore to shreds our first day on the road. [Later: He *never* did.]

Anyway I agreed that he had the right person. He had apparently visited the lake while I was off down the trail through the woods. He told me that there was a pair of Red-necked Grebes nesting right beside the floating boardwalk just over the little hill. I decided to check it out while Jim was sleeping. (Usually people don't realize how close Jim has to get to birds to photograph them. They think that with a long lens like his, he must be aiming 100 yards away.) But when I got to the area, I discovered that they were nesting only 15 ft from the walk.

I sent Jim back to the area, and he returned ecstatic at the photos he had taken. When he approached the birds, the incubating bird left the nest at once, but after Jim had been there a short time s/he returned. So he got good pictures of the birds on the water and on the nest and pictures of the nest with eggs.

We left the park after that and went to a nearby restoration of a Ukrainian Village. These people settled the area northeast of Edmonton between about 1890 and 1930, and their influence is strong in that area. Many old buildings have been brought together to commemorate that settlement. Role-playing young Canadians impersonate the people who lived in the buildings. Some are more effective at it than others; I particularly enjoyed chatting with the feisty constable's wife.

Poverty in their homeland, where the farms became ever smaller as the father divided the property among all his sons, drove many people to come to a new country, where land was nearly free, and one could own a larger parcel.

One particularly poignant story of these immigrants: In order to enter Canada, they had to

demonstrate that they were not penniless. So as the line of them went through immigration, they would surreptitiously pass the same \$25 from person to person back through the line.

I tried to buy some books about the immigration, but the book store had nothing--just one or two simple stories for children. Some historian in Canada should get busy before it's too late and get stories from some of the elderly people. Surely there must be letters that could be translated, too, perhaps in the Ukraine. There are quotes from them on the walls of the interpretive center. Some of that material should be gathered together and published.

In general, I've been disappointed by the dearth of books available in natural and cultural centers in the area. I noticed the same lack in the Tyrrell Museum--just a few books on dinosaurs, mostly for children, but nothing on the present-day natural history of Alberta. Don't adult Albertans read books?

The Ukrainian Village was pretty spread out, so we were quite tired when we got back to the trailer around 5:30.

This morning we decided to drive over to Beaverhill Lake, because the area near the south end is a wildlife sanctuary and supposed to be one of Alberta's birding hotspots. Unfortunately a strong wind got up just as we were setting out, so the birding was only so-so. I had read that they did bird-banding in the area, but we discovered when we got back to the truck that we had taken the wrong trail for that. By that time, we were tired from our long walk and were hungry for lunch.

We had a good lunch, especially the strawberry cream pie, in a nearby town, then came back to the trailer and rested the remainder of the afternoon.

Tomorrow we are heading north again. Our main destination is Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park, on the shores of Lac La Biche. It's supposed to be the warbler-watching capital of Alberta, and the last week in May and the first two weeks in June are supposed to be the peak of the singing season. I hope it lives up to its billing.

We probably won't have hook-ups again for some time, so I guess I'll print out my log and send it home now.

Long Lake Provincial Park, AB

1:30 p.m., Mon., June 3, 1991

Each Alberta provincial park seems more wonderful than the one before. I'm sitting here in a grassy site beside a large lake. I can hear birds twittering in the trees (especially Yellow Warblers and Song Sparrows) *and* I can see and, occasionally hear, Red-necked Grebes and Common Loons out on the lake.

Life in a trailer is heaven. Here I sit in absolute comfort in a lovely natural area. Last night it rained and thundered for hours on end, but we were cozy and comfortable in our own bed in our little house on wheels. I can walk out the door of the trailer and be on the sandy beach watching Common Terns or Bonaparte's Gulls in breeding plumage within two minutes. Or, if I choose, I can wander along a path through the woods and find Least and Alder Flycatchers--or hear a Northern Waterthrush singing. Each park has some new delight right outside the door. It surely beats staying in motels. And the price is right, too. Campgrounds are the only things that are *less* expensive in Canada than in the U.S.

We were glad to leave the commercial RV park near Edmonton yesterday morning. It was an overcast day, and before we had driven very far, it was raining. Since I needed groceries before heading north to the land of no large towns, we stopped in the fairly large town of Fort Saskatchewan (named for the Sask. River, not the province). The largest grocery in town was the Safeway, and it didn't open until 10:00 on Sundays, and 9:00 the rest of the week. Thank goodness our Calif. groceries open earlier. Anyway, I decided we'd better sit around and wait 45 minutes for it to open. I stocked up with meat, eggs, etc., so my refrigerator, especially the freezing compartment, is bulging. I spent about \$65 (U.S.) for what might have cost me \$45 at home.

We continued on north toward Winston Churchill Prov. Park, but decided to check out Long

Lake Prov. Park for a couple of nights. It turned out that one loop of 48 sites had electricity, so we went for it. All sites there had been occupied the night before (Sat.), but everyone was leaving or had left by the time we arrived. The rain sent them home early. By evening there were only about four vehicles in the entire loop.

The rain stopped about the time we arrived, so Jim didn't have to get wet doing his outside chores. We didn't unhitch the truck from the trailer, though, because we didn't plan to do any driving while here. There was no more rain until around 7:30, when the electrical storm started. However, a cold gale blew all afternoon.

I bundled up and took a walk through the woods along a trail which was only a few feet from the lake. As I was emerging to a grassy area at the far end, I heard a crackling noise and looked ahead in time to see a large poplar tree break off just above the ground and fall onto the roof of the rest room building. That opened my eyes to the trees all through the woods that I had walked through. Quite a few looked as though they had just fallen. Most were uprooted, but some had snapped off. Of course, most of them probably fell the day before when the wind was even stronger. Even so, I decided to get back through the woods rather hurriedly, and to listen carefully for hints of cracking as I walked.

This morning was still overcast, but not too threatening. Best of all, there was almost no wind. Albertans on vacation rarely rise before 9:00, so no boats were on the lake. Airplanes seldom fly over this park, so conditions were ideal for recording. I set off along the lake-shore trail through the woods. The nice gravel path had no muddy spots, despite the previous night's deluge, and I walked a mile or so before turning back.

Most of the birds were those I had recorded earlier, but I did get a distant Common Loon calling and a rather nice Baltimore Oriole. I watched a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak foraging in the foliage, but he was not interested in singing.

Then I heard a sound that was totally unfamiliar to me, coming from about 30 ft up in the tops of the trees. It consisted of high "clup" notes in a rather steady rhythm, with a slightly accelerated ending on a slightly lower pitch. I recorded it and then tried to figure out who the songster was. He was somewhere up there, but I could not locate him. So I tried playing back what I had just recorded. Usually the bird will come closer when I do that. This bird just continued to fly back and forth from one high perch to another. Finally I spotted him silhouetted against the sky. He was small with a very slender bill and lots of streaking that came well down on the breast. A Warbler! The only warbler I know of with that much black streaking is a waterthrush, and only the Northern is possible here. But what was a waterthrush doing up in the treetops? They're usually on the ground. A little while later, though, I got a glimpse of his eye stripe, so I knew my ID was correct. I guess even a ground-loving warbler likes a high song perch.

I returned along the same trail. At one point I was standing in the forest about 20 ft from where the trail opened onto a little beach and boat-launching ramp. I was startled by a bird that flew into the woods along the trail right above my head. It went around the bend in the path and looked as though it was landing on the trail. As I slowly approached the bend, what should appear on the ground to the left of the trail, but the tail-bobbing form of a Spotted Sandpiper. By that time I was no more than twelve feet from the bird. I remained motionless and watched it. It foraged here and there in the newly emerging forest floor vegetation, acting totally unaware of my presence. Then it settled down on a spot and looked for all the world as though it was incubating eggs. I had to know if it really was, or if it was false-incubation, a distraction display common to many shorebirds. So I took a few steps closer. The bird got up and, instead of flying off in a panic, just pecked around on the ground a few seconds and then came back TO THE SAME SPOT and settled down again. So I walked closer still. That was too much for the bird and it left. To my delight, when I looked at the spot where the bird had been crouching, there was indeed a nest with four spotted eggs, carefully arranged so the points were all towards the center. I left the area quickly, so the bird could resume its incubation; it was a cold morning.

To my surprise, not five minutes later, another Spotted Sandpiper darted off its nest. This nest

had just three eggs. It was located where the path came within a couple of feet of the water, but it too was nestled in forest vegetation--on the inland side of the path. I've never seen a more exquisite setting. When I got back to the trailer, I made Jim unhitch the truck and drive back to the spot with all his gear and take a picture. (It was about a mile away from our site.)

Two Spotted Sandpiper nests in one day! And I've only found one other in my entire life--at San Elijo Lagoon in San Diego Co., California. The forested setting surprised me, for most I've studied seemed to be nesting in the open--usually in short vegetation in the dry edge of a marsh.

Same place

12:30 p.m., Tues., June 4, 1991

Last evening we had a bit of ground fog and drizzle--almost like June at home in Huntington Beach. This morning there were high clouds--again like H.B. But since this is Alberta and the weather forecast had been for another totally overcast day, we were pleasantly surprised when the fog burned off around 8:30 revealing typical post-storm high puffy clouds. They're predicting afternoon thunder showers, so I suppose the puffies will coalesce before evening.

This morning we decided to drive up into the only section of the campground which is not right on the lake. There must have been 100 sites, all vacant. The habitat is typical boreal mixed forest, with birch, poplar and aspen trees mixed with spruce, pine and fir. Deciduous trees were dominant, and some of them were quite tall.

The camp sites are all on little loops which branch off of the 3/4-mile-long main road. We went first to the last loop, which is also the highest and has the most coniferous trees.

We had no sooner gotten out of the truck, when up came a flock of Gray Jays. The first one we spotted was very dark gray, but later we saw some paler ones and realized we had first seen a juvenile. Do these birds take two years to reach adult plumage? I can't believe they could have fledged young this early in the year. Jim immediately cast some peanuts on the ground for them, but they didn't seem to know what they were and thought he was throwing stones at them. After we backed off, though, they figured it out. Curiously enough, they soon lost interest in the whole proceeding and flew off. Certainly they were not the typical "camp robbers" that these birds usually are.

Along with the jays came a Western Wood-Pewee. It was clearly agitated by their presence and kept dive-bombing them and making the little churring trills that they always make when alarmed.

Our attention was divided between this little drama and the sight of an Alder Flycatcher, which kept fluttering around near the bases of the bushes, like a big butterfly. After watching her (probably a female, according to the *Birder's Handbook*) for a short while, we realize she was gathering spider silk. In short order she flew to her nest about 25 ft high in a spindly spruce. The nest was a cup-shaped affair attached to a fork in a branch about 3 ft out from the main trunk. It was very rough in outward appearance and looked as though it had lots of dead leaves sticking out in horizontal ledges. It also had lots of white stuff, which could have been poplar fluff or the papery thin bark of the birch trees.

The bird was incredibly active and totally oblivious of our presence. Once she came up behind me and lit for a couple of seconds *on my head*. She was trying to perch on the bow of my earphones, but scrambled around and couldn't get a foothold--or so it seemed from the feel. Jim said that several times she flew up to his belt buckle, a large leather oval which matches the red-brown color of his tooled leather belt. He spent the whole morning photographing her. She was not an easy subject, for she darted here and there and was seldom still. He said he never saw her do any fly-catching, her nest-building chores were so all-consuming. He does feel that he got some fairly good shots, though.

[Later: The following paragraph is garbage and illustrates how an inexperienced birder (me) can call a Western Wood-Pewee a Willow Flycatcher This was written before people started looking at shapes more carefully, especially primary projections. The photos clearly showed the bird was a Western Wood-Pewee.]

I ID'd the Alder Flycatcher by appearance. They're supposed to look almost identical to Willow Flycatchers, except for a slightly bolder eye-ring and a slightly greener back. I could really see the difference. Both birds have broad orange bills with almost totally orange lower mandibles. They also have more rounded crowns than most Empids and broader tails, especially at the base. All these things I'm beginning to be able to discern. Finally, she even said "fe-bee-o" to clinch it. Of course, the habitat here is not right for any other Empid, except Least, and it looks and sounds quite different.

I wandered off after a while and told Jim I'd walk back down the road to our campsite. Along the way I recorded Red-eyed and Solitary Vireos (The bright eastern race of the latter is here [now a full species, Blue-headed Vireo].), Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Ovenbird fairly well, plus a few other species not so well. The Olive-sided Flycatcher puzzled me at first, because its song was unlike the "Quick, three BEERS" of the east or the "Quick, THREE beers" of Southern Calif. It only had two notes. However, I was pretty sure what I had because the song was mixed with "pip pip pip" calls, which are apparently the same everywhere. Of course, the bird was singing from the top of the tallest spruce in the area, so I had a hard time finding it. Fortunately I did see it and clinched the ID.

I also recorded a couple of sounds that I could not identify. The birds would not come out to playback. Maybe sometime later I'll figure out what I have. Most of the unidentified stuff is from later in the morning when the breeze was getting up, so the recordings were not so good.

As I write this, I'm sitting on the bed watching two loons feeding in the lake. This is the first time since we've been here that there has been more than just one loon. I wish they were calling. I'd love to have a close-up version of that haunting sound. I did get it from a distance yesterday, though.

Sir Winston Churchill Prov. Park, Lac La Biche, AB
1:15 p.m., Tues., June 5, 1991

Our trailer site here reminds me more of a cathedral than anything else. We're surrounded by beautiful old-growth boreal forest. We selected a large, fairly open site so our solar panels could do their work, but even so we have lots of lovely big spruce and poplar trees all around us. The thing we like best about it is the gnarled old birch tree which guards the entrance. We're in our own private dell. With our truck at the entrance, people driving by can barely see into the site. Because the site is open, there are lots of tall shrubs underneath the trees.

I wish I had a book which would help identify the beautiful plants here, but as I've lamented before, they're simply not for sale in parks.

We drove here in about 1½ hours yesterday afternoon, and it is the farthest northeast we'll be. Even so, it's just about dead center in Alberta. We decided to come here when I read that it's the best place in the province for warblers. The old-growth forest is the reason so many species make their homes here. Also, the numbers of species start to decrease as you move west from here; there are simply more eastern warblers than western ones.

The park is situated on a fairly large island in Lac La Biche, one of the largest lakes in Alberta. The island is connected to the mainland via a causeway, which is perhaps 1/2 mile long. As we drove the last part of the road onto the island, we saw a crow-like bird flying right along side of us. Closer examination revealed the white wing patches of a Pileated Woodpecker. We watched it land in a tree, but then it flew off and we lost it.

Jim set up his usual feeding stations--minus the syrup feeders, because we don't expect Ruby-throated Hummers or Baltimore Orioles in this forest setting. Then after dinner he recalled, "Warblers love dripping water." So he tied a water bag to a slanting tree and embedded his little pumice bird bath in the peaty soil beneath it. He had no sooner come back into the trailer when we heard the soft calls of a sapsucker. We looked out and there on the tree above the water was a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. It took very little time to back down the tree, look over the water, and then jump in--with both feet. It bathed frantically for a couple of minutes, splashing all the water out of the little bath in the process; it's kind of a tiny bath for a bird that large. Then it flew off into the woods.

The only other customer we had last evening was a Franklin's Ground-Squirrel, a beautiful

bushy-tailed squirrel about the size of the California Ground-Squirrel. It's much more contrasty than shown in the mammal book we have (Peterson series). Its head and bushy tail are gray, while its back is a fairly bright reddish brown--a very striking animal.

Those people who know Jim will immediately guess what a quandary he was in. What should he do first, take its picture or fondle its tail? It turned out that neither was possible: he held the camera in one hand while he fed the creature peanuts with the other. Tail-fondling requires a third hand, while shutter-snapping would necessitate a fourth. But he went to bed happy that this was a tame squirrel and that it would probably all come together before we leave here. (We paid for the site through Saturday night.)

Today Jim set up his blind and sat in it all morning. He said he got a wonderful picture of the squirrel, plus some of the White-throated Sparrow. This was of the white-striped morph, and all our other encounters with this bird have been of the tan-striped morph. A couple of other birds came to the food or water, but were gone before he could photograph them. He's optimistic about the future. I certainly hope that sapsucker comes by again. We really need that bird for the Sea and Sage Library.

While Jim was sitting in his blind, I roamed the campground. There was very little breeze, and only one other site had anyone in it, so it was nice and quiet for recording. My only complaint was that there were more airplanes than we've had at any other place in Alberta. They were certainly not as bad as most places in the U.S., though.

I got good recordings of quite a few species--Mourning Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Swainson's Thrush, plus two or three which I could not lure out to be identified. I found Boreal Chickadees, but they didn't have much to say. As I write this, I'm hearing the Mourning Warbler, which is just the other side of the site next to us. I can also hear Swainson's Thrush, Yellow Warbler and White-throated Sparrow.

Some of the birds were in parts of the park where conifers are dominant. Here in our site the deciduous trees are the main thing. I also found an abandoned road through the woods across the road from the campground, which I want to walk, perhaps tomorrow. I walked it a short distance after I discovered it and heard a Pileated Woodpecker in the distance, but had no time to pursue it.

Same place

1:30 p.m., Thurs., June 6, 1991

Yesterday afternoon we took a short ride on the road around the island. There is a short nature trail and also a hiking trail out a 1-km-long spit. Both look interesting. I also took a look at the breeding island for Double-crested Cormorants and White Pelicans just off the north shore of the island. This island is a little higher than the level of the lake itself. Most of the nesting birds were cormorants, and their stick nests were placed right on the ground, not in trees as they frequently are. There were also quite a few Ring-billed and California Gulls on the island, but it was hard to tell, even with the scope, if they were nesting. (The park bird list says they do nest here.) Only 3 or 4 White Pelicans were in view.

Jim spent the rest of the day in the blind and thinks he photographed three life birds. (Only birds he photographs count as life birds by his rules.) They were Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (the same bird as the night before), Boreal Chickadee, and Veery. (I must admit to a bit of skepticism about the Veery, but the photos will tell the tale. He's quite sure his bird was much less streaked on the breast than the Swainson's Thrush he also saw and that it did not have an eye ring. I have not heard or seen any myself, but I certainly hope he's right. The Veery is on the park list as uncommon, so perhaps so. [Much later: He did not get a picture of a Veery there, although on later trips, he did.]

This morning we set out at 7:30, planning to drive to the trailhead for the Long Point trail. To our disgust, the road around the island was blocked right outside the campground entrance. So we decided to check out the causeway instead. Jim did manage to get a couple of imperfect photos of a Cedar Waxwing, but I found recording impossible. The truck noises from several miles away in the

town of Lac La Biche were incessant, especially when the trucks used their lower gears as brakes.

We came back into the park around 8:30, and the gates to the road were still locked, despite the fact that the sign said the park is open from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. (These Albertans don't get up very early, as I've remarked before.) There was a girl in the entrance kiosk, to whom we complained about the gate. She tried to get the ranger on the radio, but without success, but promised to keep trying. I was pretty angry. They even have a sign by the trailhead recommending an early start in order to see the most birds!

So we came back to the campsite, and Jim promptly climbed into his blind for the morning. I decided to walk that nice trail through the forest across the road from the campground. As I was getting ready to leave, along came the ranger driving the loop road through the campground, undoubtedly checking to see if anyone had come in late and not paid yet. He said there had been "an emergency" that morning, but that the road was usually opened by 8:00. He also said he'd go open the gate right away! There was certainly no emergency as he drove that park road, so I'm highly skeptical about the whole story. Anyway, I expressed my displeasure and said I hoped he'd have it open on time tomorrow. (I think this was the same dumb kid-ranger who registered us when we first arrived. He had some trouble filling out the forms and gave us a blank look when Jim asked about where to find the Pileated Woodpecker's nest. I don't think he'd ever heard of such a bird. And here he's the only ranger on duty in the park, at least on week-days.)

I found the walk through the woods to be lovely, despite the case of warbler-neck it caused. I again heard the high song I recorded yesterday and tried diligently to get a glimpse of the songster. The bird would not respond to play-back of its voice. I guess it simply doesn't consider ground level to be part of its territory.

I also recorded a couple of other even higher-pitched warbler voices. I found that the speaker in my Marantz tape recorder would not play those sounds back. (I know I got it on tape, because I could hear it through my earphones on playback.) Fortunately I was able, with much neck-craning, to see those two birds. They were Blackburnian and Bay-breasted warblers. It made me pretty happy to get them. By then the trucks had gotten where they were going, and the airplane noise was minimal, so I think my recordings were pretty good. They do have other bird sounds, of course, especially an incessant Red-eyed Vireo in one and an equally incessant Western Tanager in the other.

We're alone in our loop of the campground, and practically alone in the entire place, so naturally I had the old road/trail through the woods to myself. It was very easy walking, and oh, so soft underfoot--like walking across a mattress if I stepped off the trail. (Jim later recalled that the thing that had impressed him the most when he moved to California as a youngster was that it hurt to fall down. He had grown up running around in the woods of Portland, Ore., where the mosses and fallen leaves make the ground as soft as a pillow.) Only a small portion looked like it was ever driven, and it led to the lot where they store the firewood for the campground. I swear there must have been an entire acre of wood, stacked five feet deep. Firewood is free in Alberta parks. They truck it to stations in the various park loops and leave a little in each site, too.

I guess I'll take a short nap now and then go sit outside. It's a lovely clear, warm day.

Same place

12:30 p.m., Fri., June 7, 1991

By evening yesterday a veil of high clouds had rolled in, and it rained a little bit last night. This was a warm rain, unlike the fairly cold ones we've had previously. This morning was cloudy and muggy and looked like more rain, but so far it has not done so. Temperature is quite comfortable, despite the humidity.

I decided to set out at 7:00 and walk over to the trailhead for the Long Point trail and have Jim bring the truck over after 8:00, then walk back to the trailer. (I had discovered a short-cut, in the form of an overgrown, but passable, trail from our campsite to the road, which cut off a good 1/2 mile of walking along the road.) I loaded myself down with umbrella and poncho--just in case.

It was a lovely trail with good footing and steps whenever it was the least bit steep. It looked as though someone had just been through with a hedge clipper trimming back the lush shrubs, which would take over quickly without attention.

Again I got more mystery sounds, but one of them seemed to come from the interior of a dead fir tree. I don't know if it was a gnawing insect or perhaps a tree frog on the bark that I simply overlooked. The other two seemed to be birds. One would not come to the playback. I was a bit far away from it, and it was absolutely impossible to leave the trail, the vegetation was so high and thick. The other one I didn't try to play back, because it was obviously too high-pitched for my Marantz speaker. Again, more neck craning, to no avail. Such is birding in the woods. Despite the frustration, it's fun, because every success in pinning a bird to a sound means more because of the effort involved in achieving it. (I guess that's why I don't take birding tours, even though my life list would undoubtedly be longer if I did. I love to figure out my own birds.)

At the end of the trail, there was a bench overlooking the lake, which I was glad to rest on for a few minutes. As I sat there, numerous cormorants flew past the point. (They'd been flying over it all the way out, too, with a loud whoosh of their coarse feathers.) Then along came a Northern Goshawk! She flew past right below where I was sitting and was gone in a second or so, but I still got an excellent naked-eye look at her. I sat there a while longer hoping she would come around again, but of course she did not.

Meanwhile, where was Jim? In his blind, of course. This is the first place on the trip where he's gotten it out, and he's having a ball, even though he sometimes has to sit there for an hour or more before something worth photographing comes along. Every day one or two more birds discover his station, and the water is the main thing! Despite the proximity to the lake, there is no water standing around in the woods, so this little drip is a wonderful chance for forest birds to get a drink, to bathe--and even to gather nesting material. A female robin discovered just this morning that the wet, muddy leaves around the little bird bath are just perfect for a nest, so she's been going back and forth all morning with the biggest mouthfuls of stuff you could imagine. Her mate accompanies her, but does none of the nest-material gathering. He stands nearby with his back to her, looking all around just like a Secret Service Agent attending the President. Jim said that once he perceived some sort of danger, and called his "beep beep beep" alarm call, whereupon the female dropped her load of nesting material and they both fled for cover.

Jim's also had visits from Yellow and Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers, American Redstart, Purple Finch, Boreal Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch. The Finch goes for the seeds, but all the rest go just for the water.

Lac La Biche was one of the first places in Alberta to be settled. It was through this area that the early French (mostly) fur traders portaged from Lac La Biche to Beaver Lake--and thus from the Pacific Ocean watershed to the Hudson Bay watershed. (They also portaged from the headwaters of the Athabasca River to the headwaters of the Columbia, thereby reaching the Pacific watershed.) The present-day town of Lac La Biche grew up around an early trading post of the Hudson Bay Co. The name came from a lengthy Cree Indian word meaning Elk Lake, but the English mis-translated it as Red Deer Lake, and the French translated that into Lac La Biche. The island where the park is

located is the biggest island in the lake, and the park was named Big Island Prov. Park when it was established in 1952. It was renamed in memory of Winston Churchill in 1962. The causeway to the mainland was built in 1968. [I got this historical info. off placques at the viewpoint along the road. The complete text of the placques is on one of my audio tapes, if I ever need it.]

Despite the name, there are few Elk left in the area, and on the island the largest mammal is a fox, according to one of the brochures. Jim and I don't believe that, though, for we've both seen deer tracks. Anyway I can walk the trails safely without worrying about encountering a bear--I think.

Same place

3:30 p.m., Sat., June 8, 1991

The last 24 hours can be summed up in one word: RAIN. It started raining shortly after I wrote up yesterday's log and didn't quit until almost bed-time. No rain at night, but it started up again around 8:00 this morning and has continued almost without stopping since then. I think it's letting up now, but can't be sure, because there's so much wind.

I left the trailer this morning at 7:00, because there was a bit of blue sky peeking through. The air was totally calm and the moisture kept noises from carrying from any great distance. I did get a few good recordings--including another mystery bird, which I'm rather sure is a Cape May Warbler. At least it fits the description of the sound, and the bird is reputed to sing from the same invisible perch high in a conifer for long periods of time. [Later: When I got home I compared it aurally with the one on the Peterson recording, and it matches perfectly.] It wasn't the rain that sent me back, but my batteries. The recorder announced that they were low, but by the time I got back to the trailer it had started to rain a bit, so I stayed.

Have spent the entire day working on the Breeding Bird Atlas and will probably give it another hour.

Marten River Campground, Lesser Slave Lake Prov. Park

8:15 p.m., Sun., June 9, 1991

Around 5:00 yesterday afternoon the rain suddenly stopped and within 15 minutes the sky was all clear. As I've noted before, this Alberta weather can be counted on for only one thing--to change.

We had such a case of cabin fever from being cooped up in the trailer all day, that we decided to drive over to the other side of the island and walk the only nature trail that I had not walked by myself. This would also give Jim a chance to see the nesting island for cormorants and pelicans. I didn't take my tape recorder because there was such a gale of wind blowing. Of course, Jim took his camera.

We hadn't walked 50 feet out the trail when we heard the low "thump.....thump...thump thump thump thump-thump-thump" that could only be the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse. Furthermore the wind was not so strong on that side of the island. So I jumped in the truck and rushed back for the recording gear. By the time I got back, Jim had located the bird! It was too hidden by close-in cover for him to hope to photograph, but I managed to get one recording of the full drumming sequence from only 15 feet or so from the bird. My recording was so complete that I even got the sound of the bird scratching on the log with its toenails prior to drumming with its wings. Jim and I decided it had to hold on so it wouldn't take flight when it flapped its wings so frantically. It wasn't easy to record, either, because my equipment went into one of its noisy phases. (I mistook the toenail noises for the tape recorder acting up the first few times I heard it. I'll have to clean the powering module for the microphone. That usually solves the problem.) Furthermore, we weren't the only people who decided to walk that trail after being cooped up all day. The other folks' voices compounded the problem.

Even though Jim couldn't photograph the bird, we could still see it through the bushes doing its performance and both went home thrilled and hopeful that someday Jim will find one he can

photograph. At least I have the sound now to go with it.

This morning dawned beautiful and clear, but we decided we'd been at Winston Churchill Park long enough. Also, the rain probably seriously diminished the attraction of Jim's water drip. So we drove the 100 miles or so westward to Lesser Slave Lake, stopping for a while in Athabasca to do our laundry. It was a lovely drive through the boreal forest, with occasional clearings and MANY lovely blue lakes, ponds, and even puddles, dotted with nesting waterfowl. You never know what species will be found on any given body of water. Even diving ducks like the Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead nest near rather small ponds that don't look deep enough for those birds.

Our present park is on the eastern end of Lesser Slave Lake, the largest lake in Alberta. (Great Slave Lake is in the Northwest Territories.) I don't know the origin of the name. We're in a site surrounded by a thicket of young poplar trees with an understory of wild roses and (I think) Saskatoon berries in full bloom. Not far away are conifers.

It's really lovely.

While Jim and I were standing chatting outside, a snowshoe hare--all brown except for its comically long white hind feet, which are apparently the last part of it to turn color--went hippity-hopping right between us, its nose to the ground. I don't think it even saw us. Snowshoe hare ears are much shorter than those of the hare we're most familiar with, the jackrabbit. That only serves to accentuate their long hind legs.

The first birds we found here were a pair of Cedar Waxwings, passing the same berry back and forth, back and forth, to cement their troth.

Next there was an Eastern Phoebe nesting right over the door of the men's john, and Jim has already photographed the bird at close range. (We're glad it's not the women's john, but I doubt anyone would notice, because there seems to be only one other party in the campground tonight.)

Flying over the edge of the lake was the first Bald Eagle I've encountered on the trip. It was a majestic adult, and I hoped it might have a nest nearby, but it flew on up the shore and disappeared.

The usual Yellow Warbler is singing outside the trailer, and while I was sitting outside working on my embroidery, I spied a Canada Warbler in the bush not ten feet from me. It eyed Jim's water drip, but then flew on. Maybe it'll come back tomorrow. Between that and the heart-rending, clear refrain of the White-throated Sparrow, "O sweet Canada, Canada, Canada," we really know where we are and are so glad to be here. Even the mosquitos are no serious problem--yet.

Same place
7:15 p.m., Mon., June 10, 1991

I think it must have clouded up and cleared off half a dozen times today. We awoke to cloudy skies, but by the time we had had breakfast, it was beginning to clear. I took a walk while Jim stayed behind in a funk because his water drip and birdseed had attracted nothing but a Boreal Red-backed Vole. It was a rather cute little "mouse," though--gray with a broad reddish streak down the middle of its back.

I hadn't been gone long before I recorded what I thought was an Ovenbird, so went part way back and called for Jim to come to where I was. When I played back the recording to see what came, we discovered it was a Mourning Warbler. This one apparently sounds as they typically do in Alberta, according to the *Warblers of Alberta* book by W. Ray Salt that I borrowed overnight from Lloyd Lohr in Stettler. Each run-together motif was a pure note, not a slurred one as in Winston Churchill Prov. Park. Salt in his book remarks that the Alberta birds do not sing a slurry song typically. Anyway Jim got a couple of shots of the bird, but it did mostly fly-by's from one high perch to another.

After I finally succeeded in dragging Jim out of the campsite, something I'd been wanting to do for days, he happily accompanied me around the rest of the morning. We found a Red-eyed Vireo on a wonderful low perch. It unblinkingly endured a whole roll of flashes while Jim photographed it. At one point it coughed up a small berry, so we wondered if it had indigestion, and that was the reason it stayed put so long. But vireos are noted for their sluggishness anyway--except they usually perch out

of sight somewhere in the treetops and sing forever. This bird did not sing.

A bit farther along, as we were approaching a place where the trail crossed a brook on a small bridge, I heard loud ringing "chip" calls. We looked up and saw that it was two male Canada Warblers in a territorial dispute. I recorded them and played the sound back. The males flew around excitedly, but pretty soon along came a female. Jim got a couple of shots of her. Then she seemed to be agitatedly flying around one particular bush at the base of a fir tree. We stepped back a few feet, whereupon she continued to flit closer and closer to the base of the tree. Then she slipped out of sight almost before our eyes. We know she had returned to a nest with eggs, but decided not to try to see it. It was under the leaf litter at the base of the tree.

I read the description of the nesting habitat and behavior of the Canada Warbler in the warbler book, and it fit the area to a T: "Never far from a brook meandering through mixed forests or a woodland stream whose banks are overgrown with willows, alders and such tangled shrubbery. [We had alders.] It does not like the dark forest. Only where the stream and its brushy border are open to the sun will it set up a territory. It is a bird of the forest borders, rather than of the forest depths. Like a flycatcher it works among the willows watching for insects on leaves or more commonly darting out to catch those which pass in flight. Its movements are quick and graceful. It is always on the go. Yet it is not of a nervous disposition; it will meet the observer eye to eye and exchange look for look until, tired of such inactivity, it is off again to feed and sing." Our birds had done no singing, only chipping.

While we were out on the trail, we encountered the young park interpretive naturalist, Frank Fraser, who had been looking around for us. (Jim had mentioned to the attendant at the gate that we were birders and would like to talk to a knowledgeable person.) We had a nice long chat with him. He's getting ready for a summer full of children's groups, as well as interpretive programs for evening groups of campers. He spends some of his weekends working on Peregrine Falcons in Edmonton, where they're trying to introduce them to feral pigeons, just as they are in L.A. We apparently just missed him when we searched for the bird banders at Beavertail Lake a week or so ago, too.

We wandered on back to the trailer. Along the way I recorded the "zee zee zee zee zee zeeoo" song of an American Redstart, but it was just too flitty for Jim to photograph.

After lunch, a nap, and a shower, while I was sitting outside letting my hair dry, I heard what sounded like a Common Yellowthroat, with its triplets, but something wasn't right about the sound quality. Also, it seemed to alternate constantly between chipping and singing, something I can't recall Yellowthroats doing. In fact, the chips seemed to be part of the song. Since I had gotten my tape recorder out and set it on the picnic table bench by my side some time earlier, I was all ready and recorded it. What should appear on playback, but a male Canada Warbler. Again Salt was right on when he described its song: "Usually it is introduced by a sharp 'chip' similar to the call note followed, after a very short pause, by a quick staccato note: 'chip chupety sweeditchety' to produce a short, rather explosive song. There is variation, of course, but the introductory note is always present to aid in identification." Jim got several shots, one or two of which he felt were pretty good, as the bird looked at him "eye to eye."

True to form the weather clouded up in the early afternoon, then cleared off around 4:00, so I decided to prepare some chicken with lemon and margarine to cook on the BBQ. By 5:30 it was clouding up again, but I went ahead and lit the fire. At just the instant I was taking the chicken off the grill, it started to rain. TV says we're in for two more days of clouds and possible showers.

Winagami Lake Prov. Park, AB
7:30 p.m., Tues., June 11, 1991

We awoke to overcast skies and a total lack of wind. I wandered the campground recording again some of the birds I got earlier, but nothing new.

We started down the road around 9:30. We could not have started any earlier if we had wanted to, because one of us had left the rear door of the truck ajar and we had another dead battery this morning. Jim tried to start it with the battery from the trailer, but we decided our jumper cables

are no good. When one of the few other camping parties in the park was awake, they kindly gave us a jump start--with their cables. (After this second dead battery, Jim unscrewed the dome light, which we don't need anyway in this land of perpetual daylight.)

After spending another \$75 for \$50 worth of groceries in the town of Slave Lake, we were on our way. We stopped for lunch at a popular Chinese/Canadian cafe in High Prairie. (Even from the middle of that muddy parking lot, I could hear a Yellow Warbler in a small tree nearby. Those birds are clearly the most common Warbler in Alberta.) The table next to us had four people from the local Alberta Forest Service office. They were very friendly. (In fact, just about every Albertan we've encountered has been very friendly--not simply courteous.) We asked them a few questions about what lands were public lands, etc., in Alberta. Wayne Bowles, who seemed to be the man in charge of that district office, invited us across the street to their office after lunch to look at some maps they had on the wall. They showed that 2/3 of the province is in government hands. Most of it is forested, mostly with deciduous trees that aren't much good for lumber. Unfortunately they're working on ways that even those can be used.

I asked him if they had any literature on identification of the plants--trees and wildflowers, etc.--or knew where we could buy some. He had nothing, and when I asked him in particular about the lovely little blue bells that seem to be in bloom right now everywhere in the forest, he drew a blank. However, not to be deterred, he hauled out a couple of books. Another man happened to overhear our conversation, and he ran upstairs and got his books, too, but could not find the plant. Not wanting to take up too much of their time, we thanked them and left. Just as we were about to drive away, Wayne pelted across the lawn toward us, book in hand. He had found the flower! It was Blue Lungwort, sometimes called Bluebells.

Winagami (accent on the first "a") Provincial Park is on the shores of the lake with the same name. It gets its name from a Cree word meaning "stinking." The lake is an old lake geologically and rather shallow. In the late summer it gets covered with an algal film, which decays and apparently doesn't smell very good. This is natural eutrophication, because even the Indians observed it before this area was settled.

Even though far from town, the park is sort of urbanized, with grassy lawns and scattered trees. There is a wide sandy beach and a boat-launching ramp. The campsites are back in the woods, though. From our site we can see the lake through about 30 feet of trees.

We took a walk along the beach after we got here around 3:30. Saw a Semipalmated Plover in full breeding plumage. It must be a late migrant, for they don't nest this far south. Other shorebirds included a dozen or so Lesser Yellowlegs and a number of noisy Killdeer. Also saw Franklin's Gulls, but they wouldn't let Jim get anywhere near them. We need photos of that species, but have yet to discover a nesting area. They certainly don't look as though they'd come in for bread, when they spook when you're 50 yd away. Surprisingly there was even a Purple Martin house, with a number of birds flying around in the sky. I didn't realize they came this far north.

There's a trail along the lake shore which leads to a couple of observation platforms for marsh birds. We decided to wait until tomorrow morning for them. We were tired, and since the wind was blowing and the lawn mower was roaring, recording was out of the question. The sky was overcast, so photography was iffy. (I suppose it'll be raining in the morning!)

As we've been driving through Alberta, we've been impressed by the beautiful "Welcome to . . ." signs at the outskirts of each town, no matter how small. They're a blend of polished wood and tasteful colored lettering, sometimes with a little picture. Occasionally they add a slogan for the area. One especially nice one which comes to mind is "Land of Whispering Hills." But we were really taken aback when, out in the middle of nowhere, we saw one of those nice signs, which read:

**Welcome to
IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT NO. 17 EAST
(South)**

Municipal Park Campground, Grande Prairie, AB

2:45 p.m., Wed., June 12, 1991

We spent the night listening to a gale of wind blowing through the trees right off Winagami Lake. It wasn't cold, but the noise was annoying. Furthermore we were apprehensive that one of the trees would blow down on top of us. When we got up at 6:00, the sky was overcast, but rain didn't seem imminent, and it had not rained in the night.

Right after breakfast we decided to take the trailer over closer to the trailhead for the lakeshore trail. It would be out from under the trees and also get better light for our solar panels.

We took the trail, but the wind prevented me from hearing anything, and the dark sky wasn't conducive to photography. Jim carried his scenic camera along, though, and got some photos of the angry lake and the lowering sky. The birding was pretty poor, for even the ducks had sought shelter.

We were on the road by about 9:30, and drove up through McLennan, which bills itself as the "Birding Capital of Canada." Frankly we couldn't see why. Then we cut out to the main highway and drove here to Grande Prairie. We considered a stay at Young's Point Provincial Park, but the sites were all deeply wooded, and the trees seemed to be a uniform stand of 2nd growth poplars, which meant that the birdlife would be fairly limited. Besides the wind and threatening rain didn't make either one of us want to stop.

We're now in the heart of the Peace River Valley, a very rich agricultural land, and highly productive for this far north. The town of Grande Prairie has a population of around 21,000 and is the largest city in this part of Alberta, although it looks as though Dawson Creek, B.C., which is not too far away is larger.

We decided to stay here where we have an electrical hook-up (30 amp--unbelievable!), so I can print out my log for you all to read. It's been many days since we last had a hook-up.

Same place

5:15 p.m., Thurs., June 13, 1991

It rained most of the day today, so we decided to stay here another night where we have an electrical hook-up.

I worked all day on the BBA, but had a computer glitch, so had to redo everything I did the previous 2 days I worked on the stuff. What a nuisance! (My other thoughts are unprintable.)

The rain has stopped now, but the sky is still totally cloudy. The wind is still blowing, too. Don't know what we'll do tomorrow.

Sikanni Chief RV Park, BC

7:45 p.m., Fri., June 14, 1991

It was still raining this morning, but we decided not to stay where we were any longer. Besides, our gray water tank was full, and we'd have had to tow the trailer to a dump station to empty it anyway.

We drove west from Grande Prairie to Dawson Creek, Mile Zero on the Alaska Highway. There we stopped at the information center/museum and picked up maps, brochures. I also bought two books about the early days of the highway. The museum was quite nice, with many cases with very nicely mounted specimens of birds of the highway. I particularly enjoyed the raptors--hawks and owls. How I'd love to see some of those.

It rained intermittently all day. Most of the time there was at least a drizzle. Only once was it as vigorous as moderate, but it was a nuisance. We drove through some lovely country--rolling terrain with lots of forests--unfortunately checker-boarded with clear-cuts. I don't remember those from when I rode this route on the bus in 1975. I suspect logging here has mostly been done since then.

We considered several campgrounds along the road, but most of them were just muddy gravel lots right next to motels. This one is sort of that way, but the accommodations are simply three log cabins, and there is a small gas station and store. The gravel lot has forest on two sides and, best of all, the Sikanni Chief River on a third. The wooded hillsides rise steeply on both sides of the river. We were amazed to discover that the place has full hook-ups--the first we've had since a couple of weeks ago, when we stayed at that RV park near Edmonton that was so full of seasonal vehicles. The power here is from a generator up by the store, and the lights dim every few minutes, but fortunately we can't hear the generator above the river. We tested the voltage, and it was fine--except for those 1-sec dimouts. Our site is at the end of the row, and our dinette window faces the forest. We can see the river out the front window about 150 ft away. There are only 2 other vehicles in the campground, although most of the traffic on the highway seems to be RV's. (I guess most people went on to Fort Nelson, 140 miles north of here.) There are quite a few enormous trucks, while private cars seem to be in the minority. But by no means is the traffic at all heavy.

We've seen only a few birds--Robin, Yellow Warbler, Least Flycatcher. They're ones we had commonly with us everywhere in Alberta. But the rain has kept the activity to a minimum. Maybe if it's clear in the morning, as is forecast, there'll be more.

We can look about 1/4 mile west of here and see the old wooden Alaska Highway bridge. Apparently it's possible to hike on the old road bed. We may try it tomorrow--if it's not too muddy. We're not in a great hurry to leave this attractive spot.

Same place

1:30 p.m., Sat., June 15, 1991

It looks as though we're stuck here for the duration if we refuse to move on in the rain. It rained all night and all morning and shows no signs of stopping.

To make matters worse, this computer is acting up! When I tried to retrieve the first part of this log for Jim to read, the first 27 pages were missing. I don't know if they're on the diskettes. (I made two, just to be on the safe side, but they both give me the identical garbage.) Fortunately I mailed copies home to you folks, but I guess I should have printed out the stuff for me, too. Maybe I'll print what I have right now--just in case there are more glitches. [3:30 same day: I couldn't even succeed in doing that. I hope CanadaPost delivers all the stuff that I wrote to you.] [Later: I was reassured by Mother in a phone call I made to her a few weeks later that she had received everything. However I had to retype the entire log up to this part when I got home.]

I've decided to give up doing any more BBA stuff. I can't face losing days and says of work. I'll just wait until I get home to the big computer. I think this little one will work for short files. So I intend to save my work on my trip log from now on in many little files instead of one big one. [That tactic worked.]

Summit Lake Campground, Stone Mountain Prov. Park, BC

4:15 p.m., Mon., June 17, 1991

It stopped raining briefly in the late afternoon Sat., so we took a short walk around the Sikanni Chief area. It was terribly muddy and hard to maneuver. I wore my rubber boots and carried my walking stick, so got around better than Jim. We walked up to the base of the old bridge, which was mostly made of wood. It was about 1/4 mile from the new one. I couldn't see why they put that old one where they did in the first place. I've been reading the books I bought on the people who were

here when the highway was new. They said the entire road, such as it was, was built in nine months, and the engineers didn't have time to consider all possible routes, so they just pushed it on over the lowest rise in view. Many mistakes were made, so the road has been shortened many miles over the 49 years since it was first constructed.

Sunday morning we drove on up to Fort Nelson. The rain was only intermittent, and there were occasional breaks in the clouds. We stopped at a Provincial Park along the way to check out the birds, but found nothing we hadn't seen many other places. While we were there, a couple of Austrian college boys approached Jim for a ride to Fort Nelson. It seems they had placed all their possessions in a canoe and were trying to float down stream to Fort Nelson, but the canoe hit a submerged log and tore open. They managed to salvage their stuff and portage it 3 miles to this campground. It must have taken them 2 or 3 trips. They had spent the night in the campground. We loaded their gear in the trailer and cleared out the back seat for them and their nice dog and took them up to town. They had been planning to canoe the MacKenzie River, but were seriously reconsidering those plans!

Fort Nelson is a nicely laid-out town of about 3000 people. Mother and I stayed here when we came up in 1975, and I think it was at the Fort Nelson Motor Hotel, which is in the center of town. There are a few other nice-looking motels now. We found a lovely site at the Westend Campground and RV Park. It backed up into a spruce forest. The sites on both sides of us were occupied, but everyone was very quiet. I was worried when the man on one side built a campfire in his firepit, which was only about six feet from our bedroom window. Fortunately he let it burn down by the time we went to bed at 9:00.

We had no sooner sat down in the trailer when Jim spied a Robin building a nest in plain view in a spindly tree right outside our window. We enjoyed watching her. Then he spotted another one, which seemed to be feeding young in a tree about 30 feet away.

There were Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers flying all over the place. Not only were they catching insects behind the bark of trees, but they were doing a lot of aerial flycatching. And no wonder, there were mosquitos, little blackish biting gnats, and who knows what else. It was the first place there were enough insects to be distinctly annoying. They still weren't as bad as I remember them when I was here before, though.

Jim and I took a walk out into the woods behind the campground, but couldn't proceed very far before the road we were on petered out, so we wandered back to our site. As we approached it, Jim said, "That dead poplar tree looks like a good place for a sapsucker nest. Let's check it over." I had no sooner figured out which tree he meant, when I saw a head peeking out of a hole 7 feet off the ground. It was a sapsucker. Needless to say, Jim had his work for the rest of the day lined up, and by then it was 5:00. Both parents came and went frequently and usually clung to the tree outside the nest long enough for a picture or two before they entered, so we have high hopes that he got both sexes from several angles. (He had only seen the male in his little bird bath at Lac La Biche.)

This morning we didn't get on the road until about 10:00. While Jim photographed the sapsuckers some more, I did some grocery shopping in a very nice Overwaita (Don't ask me why they call it that!) supermarket, and the prices seemed no higher than they were farther south in Canada. Meat was *much nicer*. Then, after we hooked up, we towed the trailer around to the back of the campground, where they had a hose rigged up for washing trailers. Jim washed a week's worth of muddy silt off the thing. Most campgrounds will not permit washing vehicles in the sites--or anywhere else either.

We drove more or less west from Fort Nelson, which is the lowest spot on the Alaska Highway, and are now at Summit Lake, the highest spot on the Highway. It's about 4275 feet above sea level, but the tree line is visible less than 1000 feet above us. I'm writing this looking out the rear window of the trailer at the lake, which is only about 15 feet away. It's a beautiful mountain lake, densely wooded with spruce trees on the south-facing slope, and sparsely wooded with same on the north-facing slope. Most of that slope is tundra.

Jim spotted four Woodland Caribou on a slope above tree line, and we watched them for a

while through my scope.

Birds are rather scarce here. I've seen the IR (inevitable robin) and also what seems to be becoming the other inevitable bird, the Yellow Warbler. We've also seen Barn Swallow and White-crowned Sparrow. The latter tells us we've returned to the West. We still had White-throats last night, but Fort Nelson and vicinity is about as far northwest as the eastern boreal forest comes.

The road from Fort Nelson is not nearly as good as it was farther south--fairly narrow, winding, and full of chuck-holes, most of which have been patched, albeit roughly. It also has its ups and downs as it enters the mountains.

The country has become beautifully scenic, because we're now in the Rocky Mountains. It's the part Mother and I missed when we took that bus tour in 1975, because due to a washout on the road we were flown from Fort Nelson to Watson Lake, then bussed back to Fireside. I'm really seeing how *much* we missed. A man in a neighboring campsite said the next 75 miles or so is all really beautiful, so we're looking forward to it.

Just added a Spotted Sandpiper to my bird list. Guess I'll quit and fix dinner.

Liard Hot Springs Prov. Park, BC

7:30 p.m., Wed., June 19, 1991

We've really been enjoying the last two days through the Rocky Mountains. The scenery is beautiful, but doesn't have the grandeur of the comparable spots in Glacier N.P. or Rocky Mtn. N.P. Nowhere does the road go above tree line.

Yesterday morning it was threatening rain, so Jim decided not to try to hike up to where the Woodland Caribou were grazing--with some relief that he had an excuse not to, I detected. It would have been a grueling hike.

Luckily for him, we hadn't gone five miles up the road when we came across a herd of 14 of them in an abandoned gravel pit beside the road. They were drinking the water standing in puddles here and there. I think they were seeking the minerals from the salt used on the road in the winter. I wondered how good for them it was.

The flock consisted of 13 females and one male. The male always stationed himself between his harem and the people and vehicles beside the road. Yes, there was a caribou-jam--just like the bear-jams at Yellowstone. They allowed Jim to approach as close as he needed to with his good equipment, so he was pretty happy. Of course, he took longer than the other tourists with their sure-shot cameras, so pretty soon we were the only vehicle left. I told him he should get a group picture to go with his close-ups. While he went back to the truck for his "other camera," several females broke and ran across the highway. Then the rest of them did. Finally the male brought up the rear. They ran into a forested area. Jim tried to follow them to get some pictures there, but I don't think he got anything. He certainly didn't get his group shot.

A short time later we encountered a White (or Dall) Sheep (local race called Stone Sheep) beside the road. They were in places where there was a steep rocky roadcut right beside the road. When we came along, the ewe scampered up the vertical cliff. Fortunately she stopped several times to look down at us, so Jim got pictures of her. This happened a couple of times, but we saw no rams or lambs.

Still later we found a single moose, but she disappeared into the woods before we could even apply the brakes.

We spent the night at beautiful Muncho Lake (J & H RV Resort), having driven only about 75 miles. There was an RV caravan which had all the waterfront sites reserved, so we took a site up a ways from the lake. It hadn't been mowed yet this season, and dandelions were knee-high all over the area. (These were not your usual puny front-lawn dandelions!) The Pine Siskins found the dandelion seed heads which had not yet opened up just to their liking. Every time we walked across the site, a half-dozen or so of them would rise seemingly from our feet.

We walked down by the lake a couple of times and were glad not to be down there, even

though there were a few sites left. The sites were side-by-side, and those caravaners were a real party crowd.

Best birds in the area were a male Harlequin Duck on the lake and a Tennessee Warbler in the trees nearby. He was singing. I was pleased to be able to guess what I was hearing based on the description of the song in the Warblers of Alberta book I borrowed. His song is longer than that of most warblers--ca. 2 sec. He says, "Tenn tenn, tenna tenna tenna, seeeeeeeeeeeeeee," the latter being a trill. Sometimes it seemed he reversed the "tenn" and the "tenna" parts. I think I'll always know that sound now, even if it's several years before I hear it again.

We got on the road by 7:00 this morning. Stopped at a view point high over the north end of the lake, where Jim photographed the scene with just about all his "other" cameras. It was incredibly lovely.

Sometime farther we drove out a short side road to a trailhead for a mineral lick. Since the trail looked like it was designed for a Stone Sheep--slippery talus--I stayed behind while sure-footed Jim went down to the lick. He found one moose there, but said he had to photograph her from almost directly above, so wasn't thrilled with what he got.

As we rounded a bend, I spotted a dark object in the road along with several smaller ones. I said, "Jim, slow down, what's that?" Since Nervous Passenger Sylvia is always telling him to slow down, he replied, "Oh, it's just a rock." But I insisted it wasn't, so he pulled over to the side of the road. Fortunately there was a fairly good shoulder there. It turned out to be a mother Ruffed Grouse and several extremely young chicks.

Mother Grouse was a most solicitous mother hen, for she stood up to Jim when he approached her and her family. She was determined that every last chick get across that road, so she puffed herself up and stood guard between Jim and the chicks. Since the chicks were not nearly as well disciplined as most of the goslings and ducklings we've seen, it took long enough for Jim to shoot lots of pictures.

She really lived up to her name, "Ruffed" Grouse, for when she was standing her ground, she flared that ruff out to make herself look as large as possible. Jim decided to try the trick he uses when terns start swooping at him aggressively. He pretended to cower from her. It worked! She just became more threatening-looking. I hope Jim was able to cower and shoot photos of big, fierce Mother Grouse at the same time.

We arrived here at Liard Hotsprings (pronounced "Leerd"--French for poplar) around 10:00 and immediately fell in love with the place and decided to spend the night. Because of the hot-springs, the provincial park is a mecca for birds, animals--and tourists. It's the most popular campground on the entire Alaska Hwy. The sites are so nicely separated with brush and trees that one doesn't have the feeling of being in a full campground at all, though.

We walked the nice boardwalk about 1/4 mile to the two thermal pools, which are the main attraction here. One pool is 120° and the other 102°, which seemed pretty warm for a sultry day. But the people were in them. Since we brought no bathing suits, we just watched. It's supposed to be quite the thing to go bathing in them in the dead of winter. There are dressing rooms (not heated) right next to the pools, so I suppose it's not too bad.

The main attraction for us was the birds and animals. Moose wander in and out of the woods like cattle and feed in the marshy area which is below the pools. Jim's back there now for the umpteenth time to photograph them. We also found a little spot right next to the covered picnic area where all sorts of birds come to drink and bathe. It has no marsh grasses, so it's easy to see the birds. Furthermore, the birds there are used to the hordes of people who come and go each day. I saw a Magnolia Warbler--first of the trip. Jim photographed a nice male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. There were also Western Tanagers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Purple Finches, Myrtle Warblers, etc. Jim wants to stay here tomorrow night, too, and I suspect he'll be at that spot most of the day tomorrow.

I sat at one of the picnic tables while Jim was photographing the birds. Quite a few people came and went and were entranced by the ease with which they could see some pretty spectacular

birds. So you can be sure that Sylvia slipped easily into her teacher role and told them all about what they were seeing.

I finally found out why the two lakes are called Slave. They come from the name of an Indian tribe, whose name is pronounced "Slay-vee." They were driven out of the Slave Lakes areas by the Cree into the area we're traveling through now. Apparently because of their submissive attitude in vacating the territory, they got the name Slave. (The lakes are pronounced as you would expect.)

Campground Services Ltd., Watson Lake, YK

6:45 p.m., Fri., June 21, 1991

Isn't that a prosaic name for an RV park? It's actually a fairly decent private park in a grove of lodgepole pines on the outskirts of Watson Lake. Out on the highway and part of the same business there is a full-service repair facility for RV's, which fortunately we need only patronize for gasoline.

We stayed last night, too, at beautiful Liard Hot Springs. Both evenings after dinner we went over to the boardwalk, about a 5-min walk from our campsite. That's the time of day when the moose are likely to be out in the open. They wander around like big cows in the marsh that contains the run-off water from the hot springs. Surprisingly, there are no warning signs to people to be careful about them, because I've heard they can be quite unpredictable. Everyone we saw, though, seemed to be treating them with respect. There were a couple of mothers with calves. Once when several of us were standing on the boardwalk, the mother clambered across it, but the calf lagged behind. No one on the walk even considered walking between the mother and calf. Finally Junior decided to follow Mom, but had trouble climbing up onto the boardwalk, whereupon Mother came back and led him/her to a spot a few feet away where the walk wasn't so high. Then the baby was able to make it. All this happened while about 10 or so people were standing no more than 20 feet away. Unfortunately Jim wasn't one of them. He was off at a far pond waiting for a calf to emerge from the forest. However, he did get quite a few good moose pictures, something he wanted very much to get on this trip. The only thing he lacks now is a bull with a full rack. I'm glad he seems to have plenty of respect for these giant beasts.

There was quite a bit of breeze, so my recording endeavors were not too productive. I did walk around the campground with Jim to record birds and try to lure them out with playback. A Magnolia Warbler came out, but simply wouldn't sit still for longer than a split second.

We spent most of the afternoon by the picnic shelter, because the birds were more visible there than in our campsite. Quite a few people came and went all day, but that didn't seem to deter the birds much. Even a bus tour of folks from Saskatchewan stopped by. They were thrilled by close looks at a male Western Tanager. (We identified the bird for them.)

The best part of the day, though, was after dinner. I walked over to the boardwalk while Jim was doing the dishes. What should I see but a Lesser Yellowlegs on top of a scrubby spruce tree right next to the path, screaming its head off at all the passers-by. I immediately surmised there was a chick or two nearby and that the bird would stand its ground long enough for me to fetch Jim. That proved to be true, and he got lots of pictures of the adults. We only got a couple of glimpses of the tiny downy chicks. Because of the wind and the people, I hadn't gotten my tape recorder, but later it seemed that the bird was calling so loudly from so close to the path, that a recording might work, so I went back for it.

As you can tell from the small sample in this narrative, our day was filled with many walks back and forth from the trailer to and along the boardwalk. We were exhausted when our day was over. The daylight wasn't over, though. In fact, dusk meets dawn here this time of year.

We met lots of nice folks during our stay at Liard Hot Springs. Our equipment attracted a lot of attention, and people were very curious about the conspicuous birds in view there. Curiously, quite a few people were even wondering about sounds they were hearing. Two of these sounds turned out to be the White-throated Sparrow, but the third one I couldn't figure out from the description. Of course the antics of the Yellowlegs attracted lots of attention.

We met a nice recently retired couple, who have small vacation homes in the Berkshires of Mass. and in northern Florida: Mary and Bill Hubbard. Mary is a novice birder and very interested. We discovered that they have a hankering to go up the Dempster Highway to Inuvik, just as we do. Since they seem to share our slow-paced approach to travel and plan to spend all summer up here, we've decided to travel together up that road. It seems like such a lonely one, that we'd both feel better if we had someone with us if we ran into truck trouble or something.

We left Liard Hot Springs reluctantly around 9:00, after a last trip out the boardwalk. The road was probably the poorest stretch we've seen so far--rather narrow and with many miles of rough construction zone. It took us 5 hours to cover 130 miles. Lots of up-hill-down-dale with fairly steep grades. Not scary, just slow. Got here to Watson Lake just before 3:00, in case the bank closed then. Jim had to cash some travelers checks.

On the way today we passed Fireside, where Mother and I spent a night on our trip in 1975. The area is totally changed. There was a huge forest fire in 1982, which burned 400,000 acres, including the lodge where we stayed. There's still a gas station and cafe there, but they've not rebuilt that nice lodge, which overlooked the Liard River.

Weather the last several days has been clear with just a few puffy clouds, and rather warm (80's I'd guess) in the middle of the day. It cools off nicely at night, however.

Hi Country RV Park, Whitehorse, YK
2:45 p.m., Sun., June 23, 1991

Yesterday's scenery surpassed any we've seen so far on the trip--even that through the Rockies. Forests of spruce or lodgepole pine cover all the mountainsides, unblemished by the unsightly clear-cut rectangles so common most places. Above them are the tundra-clad mountaintops with a few patches of snow here and there. Much of the time we followed rivers, which regularly widened into lakes. The sky was perfectly clear when we started out, but puffy clouds gradually gathered over the mountaintops. Come evening we had some showers, which lasted half the night.

We stopped at one place and Jim walked back up the road to take a picture of me and our truck and trailer against the magnificent scene. While he was up there, I saw a coyote dart into the woods near where I was standing. Then it emerged up between me and Jim. So I yelled at him, "Coyote coming your way." Unfortunately he had only his scenic camera with him, with no longer than a 50 mm lens, but he did snap a few pictures. Then, what do you suppose he did? You don't know Jim if you didn't immediately know that he tossed the beast a few peanuts! It ignored the first couple, but then ate one. Apparently they were not to his liking, for he went on his way. All this happened miles and miles from any settlement. (We had a similar experience with a tame coyote at Bridal Veil Campground in Yosemite one time. Although it was after the camp was closed for the season, we figured that coyote had become used to people during the season.)

We spent last night at a territorial campground (Yukon government-run). It was by Teslin Lake, but none of the sites had a view of the water. They were just in the woods--poplars mostly.

About a mile down the road there was one of those establishments which are so common along the highway--gas station, store, restaurant, lodge, and RV park all in one. This one was called Mukluk Annie's. Since the restaurant featured salmon cooked over an open grill, I just had to eat there. It was very good. For only \$13.95 (Canadian, which is 13% less US), we had salad bar, four generous pieces of salmon (2 of which we took home for 2 lunches), baked beans, roll, dessert and beverage. The dessert was a tasty fresh-baked lemon turnover. It was the first dinner we've eaten in a restaurant since we left home. Mary and Bill Hubbard went with us.

We've had a number of lunches in cafes, though. We've particularly enjoyed stopping at some of the historic roadside businesses which date back to highway construction days. One of these was Contact Creek, where the roadbuilding crews from the south and from the north made contact. Another was Rancheria, on the site of an old construction camp.

After dinner, when we got back to our site, we found that a party of at least 10 adults and who knows how many kids was really getting rowdy. They had been pretty loud in the afternoon, but we thought maybe they would put the kids to bed and quiet down. Since Jim was afraid they'd never go to bed, he hitched up the trailer and moved us to another site. We were glad he did, for they didn't quit until 2:00 a.m. Lots of whooping and hollering, well fueled with plenty of beer. We may think twice about staying in another Yukon Territorial campground. Private ones are more likely to be patrolled better. We had no trouble in AB or BC provincial parks, but never stayed in any of their roadside campgrounds. I don't think YK has any territorial parks. [Later: We stayed in lots of Yukon Campgrounds and never had this problem again.]

This morning we had only about 100 miles to go to reach Whitehorse. So we poked along and got here about noon. Whitehorse looks much as I remember it from 1975. Population today is around 21,000, and it's the largest city in Yukon. It's also the territorial capital. I'll bet there are more people in Whitehorse than in all the rest of Yukon put together. [2020 note: I deleted "the" in front of Yukon in the last couple of sentences and will continue to do so. On our return trip in 2011, we found that the people there prefer that their territory be called simply "Yukon," not "the Yukon" or even "Yukon Territory," although that's what it is. There is considerable pressure there to make it a province, but then it wouldn't have all the special governmental support that only territories get.]

The road since Watson Lake has been quite a bit better than that before it. There were a couple of fairly long construction zones, but the surface had been graded and only the paving was lacking. Actually, I think they just spread the gravel on nice and smooth, then oil it. The parts which were not under construction were mostly very wide, with a paved or graveled shoulder wide enough for us to pull off whenever we wished. We're always frustrated when we see something--either an animal or a lovely scene--and can't pull over for a photograph.

5:00 same day

I spent the afternoon doing laundry and shopping for groceries and books. I bought \$100 worth of books, including one on the wildflowers of Alaska and Yukon--something I really wanted. The rest of the books are about people's experiences living in the wilds of this area or Alaska. Grocery prices since Fort Nelson have been much higher than they were in southern Canada. I'd guess they're twice what they are at home. I bought a head of lettuce today for \$1.98, but it was enormous and very nice looking.

The last we heard, it was still raining in southern AB and BC. Good thing we left, for the weather has been glorious up here. The forecast for Inuvik is low of 52° and high of 64°.

We leave Whitehorse tomorrow after Jim gets a haircut. Will take two days to get to the start of the Dempster Highway. There we'll inquire about road conditions and make the decision about driving it to Inuvik.

Minto RV Resort, YK

8:30 p.m., Mon., June 24, 1991

We're about halfway up the Klondike Highway between Whitehorse and Dawson (sometimes called Dawson City to distinguish it from Dawson Creek, which is mile 0 on the Alaska Highway.) The road today was very good all the way. The only unpaved spot was a construction zone. Very few chuck holes or frost heaves. Mother will remember driving the full distance in one day on a gravel road when we came up here in 1975.

We didn't get on the road until 10:30, because I took time to print out the previous installment of my log to send home and Jim needed a haircut.

The scenery today was lovely, but not as spectacular as yesterday and the day before. We drove for a while along Fox Lake, then along a couple of rivers, including the Yukon for the last part of

the day. Unfortunately actual views of the Yukon River were few and far between.

We made two stops at a couple of tourist attractions. The first was the ruins of the Montague House, which was a stop on the old stage route between Whitehorse and Dawson. It was used in the winter when the river was not navigable. It and the road were abandoned shortly after regular airplane service between the two towns came along in the 1930's. Then the present road was built in 1955.

Our other stop was at Five Finger Rapids. It's a place where four rocks or islands are spread across the Yukon River dividing it into five channels. It was the principal hazard to navigation between Dawson and Whitehorse. There is a stairway and trail which goes about 1 km down to the edge of the rapids. Jim thought I had taken it, so followed after. Much to his exasperation, when he got to the end of the trail, I was nowhere to be found. In fact, his first words to me when he got back to the truck were, "Where the hell have *you* been?" It was a warm day, and I had had no intention of taking that strenuous hike. There must have been at least 100 steps on the staircase alone. I think I was merely in the trailer changing into some cooler clothes when he thought I started down the trail. So I feel no guilt whatsoever about not being at the end of the trail when he got there.

Our RV park tonight is on the edge of the Yukon River, but unfortunately we have no view of it. All the sites are back in the spruce forest. Bank Swallows are nesting just over the edge of the river bank, and Jim has been trying to photograph them. There's quite a large colony all spread out along one particular level in the bank. It seems to be where the vegetation ends and the sandy/gravelly conglomerate begins.

Mosquitos are fairly troublesome here, so the incentive to leave the trailer is not there. Besides there are some incessant campground noises. There are no hookups here, and some people seem to think they can't live without 110-volt electricity, so are running their generators. I can't imagine why they need it, since they've been on the road all day and their batteries should be fully charged. Maybe they're running their air conditioners, since the day is a bit too warm. (And it's still daYKime and probably will be all night.) Or possibly their microwave ovens. There's also a very loud generator over by the owners' house and office. Fortunately we're at the opposite corner of the campground from that.

Tombstone Mountain Territorial Campground

Mile 47, Dempster Hwy, YK

6:30 p.m., Tues., June 25, 1991

Well, we did it: we decided to take the Dempster Hwy. It's a gravel road which goes 460 miles north to Inuvik, above the Arctic Circle. We've driven a bit so far, and the road is wonderful--very smooth and well graded. Lots of cut and fill, so the grades are gradual. We drove it comfortably at an average of 35 mph. We'd been going about 40 on the paved road, which had intermittent broken pavement and frost heaves.

We almost thought we wouldn't be able to take the road. When we stopped for gasoline at Pelly Crossing, about 25 miles after we started out this morning, the attendant told us the road was closed because of forest fires. As we approached the junction, we could see a whitish haze over everything, and the sun looked yellow. Even closer, we could finally see clouds of white smoke rising from right where the road should be. But we lucked out. The road had been closed for several hours last night, but the wind shifted and the fire burned back on itself. We drove through the still-smoldering forest on our way up here, for the major burn was only 1½ mile from the junction with the Klondike Hwy.

It was hard to see how such a green forest could burn at all, and in fact the lush brush which got the highway runoff seemed to be unburned. I don't think the fire was hot enough to burn all the trees either.

Our campground is far from the fires and right on the border between the boreal forest and the tundra in the South Ogilvie Mountains. I can hear the rush of the North Klondike River as I write this.

We had no sooner gotten situated in our campsite and fixed ourselves some tea/coffee, when we heard a loud scream out the window. We grabbed the binoculars and looked out. There in the top of a nearby spruce tree were two Merlins. We got excellent looks at them through the scope and Jim took some pictures. The day was rather dark--both from the usual afternoon clouds and from the white smoke from the fires--so the photos may not be excellent. One of the birds sat on the same prominent perch for over an hour, but unfortunately it was back-lit by the sun. We discovered that they seem to be nesting in a gnarled old spruce tree in the site next to us. [The photos were indeed disappointing, but the magic of digitizing them and editing them with PhotoShop revealed all sorts of details that couldn't be seen in the original slides.]

This campground has a nice little interpretive center (in a trailer) with a full-time naturalist, who is very knowledgeable. She confirmed that the Merlins were indeed nesting in that tree. I got a mile-by-mile travel guide to the highway. It lists biological, geological and historical points of interest all along the road. I also have a book, *Birds by the Dempster Highway*, which I bought from ABA Sales before I left home. We're really quite excited about what lies ahead.

Wildflowers are getting more varied. I'm having quite good success in figuring them out from the book I bought. I've picked a couple of bouquets along the road from spots where they were particularly lush. Right now I have on the table a gaudy display of bright yellow Narrow-leaved Hawkweed (sort of like a tall dandelion, but smaller) and bright magenta Wild Sweet Pea. The latter is exceedingly fragrant.

Along the Blackstone River
South Ogilvie Mtns., Dempster Hwy, YK
4:00 p.m., Wed., June 26, 1991

We didn't make very many miles today, the country was so fascinating. We had no sooner left our campground than we entered the tundra of the Blackstone Uplands. Between the roadside wildflowers and the birds, we were stopping constantly. So we're only about 25 miles farther up the road. This highway is a treasure and should be declared a national park of Canada. It's certainly a well-kept secret, for there is very little traffic. I'd say we see another vehicle about every 15 minutes. Most of them are other RV's. Only one huge truck passed us all day.

Mary and Bill Hubbard are enjoying our leisurely pace, too, and are parked right next to us here at a roadside rest stop. We'd have had to drive another 50 miles to the next campground, and it's legal to camp beside the road up here. Mary is having a great time becoming a birder and is just as entranced by her first White-crowned Sparrow as she is by her first American Tree Sparrow. Her first Mew Gull is as interesting as her first Long-tailed Jaeger, and so on. Between birds we are kept busy trying to identify all the wildflowers we're finding. The variety up here is incredible. Many of them are quite showy and tall, for we're in the sub-arctic, not the true arctic. [Later: The Arctic plants were pretty spectacular, too.] There are also some tiny ground-hugging pin-cushion plants.

Besides the birds mentioned in the last paragraph, we've seen Oldsquaw [new name: Long-tailed Duck], Harlequin Duck, Arctic Tern, American Golden-Plover, Lapland Longspur, and Least Sandpiper.

The latter was right on the road, which you will recall is gravel. We stopped, thinking it was a sparrow, but it went into the most vigorous distraction display you ever saw. It didn't take very long to discover the exquisite little chick which was the reason for it all. The minute ball of fluff was a rich chestnut color, with tiny white dots all over. Jim thought it was a beetle at first, and it couldn't have been more than 1½ in long. I've never seen a more beautiful chick.

The sky got overcast and very dark with thunder clouds this afternoon, so Jim didn't try to photograph the American Golden-Plover or the Arctic Tern, because he'd have had to use his 1000-mm lens extender, which cuts down the light. We hope to find others farther up. [Note added in Inuvik: We didn't, so will have to stop there on the way back.]

Our campsite beside the Blackstone River has low shrubby willows beside it and tundra on

either side. It's not a very large river, but I wouldn't want to wade across it! The only bird we've seen since we stopped is--you guessed it--the Inevitable Robin. [It's in Inuvik, too.] But we haven't looked very hard, because the wind was blowing and it was trying to rain. It seems to be clearing up now, so I guess it's time to go find something else.

The scenery as we drove through the Ogilvie Mountains today was beautiful, but unfortunately marred by the white haze from the fires farther south. The mountains had the typical U-shaped valleys between knife-edged peaks that testify to their glacial origin. Then just a few miles back we crossed into the region of gently rounded mountains, which were not glaciated in the last ice age. We were surprised to learn that most of Alaska and a good part of Yukon were not glaciated in that period, yet the ice coating traveled as far south as the northern tier of the lower 48 states in the eastern and central states. The reason was that there just was not enough precipitation to produce so much snow that it couldn't melt during the summer.

Engineer Creek Territorial Campground

7:30 p.m., Thurs., June 27, 1991

With effort we managed 50 miles today. Again the road was fine with so little traffic that we could stop wherever we wanted to sightsee. Jim thought he saw a Song Sparrow last evening, which is hypothetical this far north, so we spent a lot of time both last evening and this morning trying to find it. I think he was probably mistaken, yet the place where the book, *Birds by the Dempster*, says it was possibly found was right where we were camped. I listened, pished, played tapes, and just stood there for a total of around 3 hours and neither heard nor saw anything that even resembled a Song Sparrow. Yet, he could be right. Unfortunately he ruined his credibility yesterday by remarking that he had seen an Eastern Phoebe when he walked up a creek to take a picture of some aufeis. That bird is not even on the Yukon birdlist at all. He went back to the spot, and the birds turned out to be Say's Phoebes.

You're probably wondering what aufeis is. It's very thick ice that coats the tops of some creeks in this country. During the winter when the water under the ice expands, it cracks the surface of the ice, then flows across it a ways. That, too, freezes, and the process repeats itself over and over till a layer several feet thick forms. It's a beautiful blue color and looks almost glacial. Right now it is partially melted, but lingers on the edges. The literature says it'll be gone by the end of the summer.

Incidentally, there is almost no snow left on the tops of the mountains around here--just minute patches here and there. That certainly testifies to how dry the climate is in this cold country.

We got out of the haze today and could really enjoy the dramatic scenery. These old weathered mountains with their bald tops are unlike anything I've ever seen. Repeated water penetration in cracks and expansion by freezing has shattered the surface rock into scree slopes which are too unstable to support plant life.

Penetrating above the scree slopes here and there are castle-like rocky outcroppings. It is there that Gyrfalcons build their rudimentary nests. We searched and searched as we drove through this habitat today and found what we are pretty sure is a nest, but saw no bird. I think that's the bird I want to see more than any other on this trip. We'll just keep looking. Apparently the birds perch on those outcroppings, too, and their favorite perches can be recognized by the bright orange wash below them. This color is caused by the lichens which are nourished by their droppings.

The Gyrfalcon's main diet is Rock Ptarmigans, of which we saw none either. We did find a Willow Ptarmigan pair walking up a little piece of the old road which branched off the new one. I discovered them and beckoned for Jim to come with his camera. They disappeared in the willow thicket, then re-emerged *between* us, so he got photographs and I got recordings of their funny low-pitched cluckings. They were, of course, in their summer garb. The male retained his white belly, but the female was all reddish brown mottling. The male had a slightly more prominent red comb above his eye, too.

We passed a number of lakes and ponds along the road. Saw several Oldsquaws and a pair

of Red-throated Loons with red throats. How elegant they were in their breeding plumage, so different from the dull grays of winter.

Jim's outside the back of the trailer now photographing Gray [Canada] Jays. This will be the third (and final) race of these birds he's gotten pictures of. According to the field guide, there are only three recognizable races. Of course, they're gorging themselves on Magic Meal. (I think he went through a roll of film while I typed the last two paragraphs.)

Right across the river from our campground are the tall cliffs of Sapper's Hill. It's called Sapper in honor of the engineers who planned and built the highway, sapper being their nickname. Why, I don't know. The cliffs are very tall and sheer. The literature said to look for Golden Eagles' nests up on them, and after much searching Jim found one. We did not see an eagle though.

The mosquitos are getting worse and worse all the time. I think it's more due to the season than to the location. [Later: it was the location!] July is supposed to be the worst month for the pests. Jim screams like a stuck pig when they approach him and is continually bitching about them. I just smear myself with Muskol or Cutters and endure them. Their bites are really not that itchy, and even he admits it.

He does have problems with some other insect which we have yet to pin down. They give him extremely itchy welts which take a week to go away. He got them the worst back in Ft. Nelson when he stood outside and photographed the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker nest. His ankles were really a mess. They apparently bit him right through his socks. Since then he's worn the leg-warmers that my Mother knit for him and had no trouble with his ankles.

The temperature up here in the northern Yukon is delightful. Even though it doesn't get dark at night, it cools off to the 50's. We sleep wonderfully, and the eternal daylight doesn't bother us. In fact, whenever we have a nice private back-in site, we leave our curtains open so we can see out. In the daytime I'd guess the temperature gets to the high 60's. The warmest time of day seems to be around 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon.

We've taken a few short walks out onto the tundra. A short walk is actually a hike. Walking over tundra is like walking across an extremely soft, extremely lumpy, foam-rubber mattress--and rubber boots are definitely in order.

Eagle Plains Lodge Campground

7:00 p.m., Fri., June 28, 1991

Well, we made it half way, driving 105 miles today--a new record for us on the Dempster. Fortunately the last 50 miles or so were fairly uniform taiga, so we didn't have so much temptation to stop. Besides, we thought we should make a little time.

We stopped at one tall cliff and searched every orange spot for raptors. We were rewarded by a scope look at a Peregrine Falcon on the top. Somewhat farther along, where we think the guide leaflet said to look for Cliff Swallows, we found lots of Violet-green Swallows apparently nesting in crevices in the cliff face. (The kilometer locations of the various points of interest in the book do not jibe with the kilometer posts on the highway.)

Then somewhat later as we were driving through an area where we were instructed to look for Great Gray Owls, Jim stopped the truck suddenly, having seen an owl. It wasn't a Great Gray. Instead it was the Northern Hawk-Owl, which Jim has been searching for on the tops of trees, mile after mile, for 1000 miles. It was on the west side of the road, so the morning sun was right. It allowed Jim to approach as closely as he wanted to, and he shot 1½ rolls of that wonderful bird. I stayed on the road and put my scope on it and studied every feather to my heart's content. It was a magnificent bird, and we were really thrilled to see it. Certainly the field guide was right when it said, "can be approached closely."

Another time we stopped to look at a bird perched on the top of a small Black Spruce 100 yards or so off the road. It disappeared before we got out the scope, but we think it may have been a juvenile Northern Shrike, because of all the orange color we thought we saw through our binoculars.

Despite the fact that we lingered at that spot long enough to eat lunch, we never saw the bird again.

We started today's drive at the north edge of the North Ogilvie Mountains. We soon reached the Ogilvie River and followed it down out of the mountains. Then instead of continuing to follow that river, the road climbs up again onto the Eagle Plains. These plains are certainly not like any plains I've ever seen. The only thing flat about them is that most of the hilltops seem to be on more or less the same level. The terrain is actually very rolling, so it's up one hill and down the next all the way.

When we first climbed onto the Eagle Plains, we were on a ridge which is apparently colder than the rest, because there was only bare tundra. However, we soon reached the taiga forest and drove through it for perhaps 40 miles (with quite a bit more to go). Taiga forest is the stunted black spruce forest which is just one step below the tundra in altitude/latitude. The trees in some places grow only 3 or 4 feet high. In other more protected spots they are up to 20 feet high. The understory of the taiga *is* tundra. So if the trees are widely scattered, it's sort of an arctic/alpine savannah.

We passed a number of places where the taiga forest had burned at various times in the past. One spot looked like it had burned this season. In some places the trees looked dead, in others just singed. The soft tundra understory is almost wholly organic and burns readily if dry, as it was wherever we walked on it today. At the place where the forest burned most recently, I walked a little ways out on it. It was still just as soft as ever, despite being all black. (For that little jaunt I wore my rubber boots, which could be wiped off easily.)

We also saw forest which burned a number of years ago. How long ago is hard to tell, but it is undoubtedly longer than it looks, for things grow very slowly up here. There were only stalks of dead trees and an understory of 3-4 ft high willows. Apparently the young spruce take a long time to get established.

People call taiga the "drunken forest," because the melting and freezing of the permafrost underlying it only a foot or so tips the trunks every which way. This is the same effect that causes frost heaves in the paved highways. Because this road is not paved over with an impervious surface, it is considerably smoother than a lot of the pavement we've been on. Many vehicles drive faster on this road than they can on the Alaska Highway. We didn't only because we wanted to look for birds and other wildlife.

Incidentally we've seen no large mammals along the road [and still haven't now that we've reached Inuvik]. Native (Indian) people are permitted to hunt from the road, although others cannot hunt within a kilometer of the road. (This is a sore point with the locals.) We feel that all this hunting from the road has killed off all the moose, bear, etc., which we might otherwise see.

We've driven 240 miles since the last sign of civilization. No one lives up here except at a couple of highway maintenance camps. Our last gas station was at the junction with the Klondike Highway. You can imagine how welcome that red, white and blue Chevron sign was when we surmounted that last hill and saw it welcoming us to Eagle Plains Lodge. The lodge is actually another one of those all-purpose establishments, only we think this one is owned by the government. There is a major repair garage, gasoline and diesel station, hotel with nice-looking dining room, as well as a small RV park. We could have had electrical hookups, but elected for none because the electric sites were all jammed in together.

We filled our tank, and it took 35.8 gal. Since our tank holds 40 gal, we had made it easily. Besides, we had 20 gal stashed on top of the truck. Our fill-up cost us exactly \$100.00 (Canadian)--around \$87.00 U.S. When I converted \$0.799 (Canadian) per liter into U.S. measure, it came out \$2.63 per gallon--the most expensive gasoline we've ever purchased. But what did we pay for our campsite? Only \$5.50 (U.S.). It would have been around \$9.00 with electricity--much less than a California state park or RV park. We really make up for what we spend on gasoline by not staying in motels and not traveling very fast. We had 4 days of fun on that one tank of gasoline.

Not many birds here in Eagle Plains. In fact the only species I've seen so far are Raven and White-crowned Sparrow. Jim has a buddy in a cute little Red Squirrel, which came running up to us as soon as we stopped. It's now just about as full of peanuts as Jim is. (He can't keep the peanuts out of his own mouth when he has a pocket full, as he usually does.)

Right now we're about 8 miles south of the Arctic Circle--as the raven flies. I expect it's more like 15 miles by the road.

We're going bear hunting with the Hubbards--at the local dump--as soon as Mary gets her shower. There is a line over at the shower room. I prefer the shower in the trailer, but they have a rather small motor home and use their shower stall for storage.

9:30 p.m., same day

No bear. Just a lot of ravens, which seem to be the closest thing to an eagle that Eagle Plains can deliver.

Beside James Creek, NT

5:30 p.m., Sat., June 29, 1991

We crossed two important lines today--the Arctic Circle and the boundary to the Northwest Territories. The former was one I had crossed before, but Jim hadn't. The latter was new for both of us. Now all I need in order to make my life-tour of the U.S. and Canada complete is Newfoundland. (I can't really count the one-hour pre-dawn fuel stop we had in Gander on our way to Europe in 1953. There we were served breakfast--including scrambled eggs made from dehydrated eggs--ugh! To this day we refer to them as "Gander eggs.")

You wouldn't know we were above the Arctic Circle by the temperature. I'm sitting here in the trailer in my shorts, and the windows are wide open. The temperature outside is probably in the low 70's, but the trailer is warmer, having been closed up all day with the sun beating in.

We've had very little problem with dust in the trailer. The suggestion in the literature that you turn one ceiling vent around so it scoops air in and drive with it open a crack really works. The pressure from that air keeps the road dust from being drawn in through cracks near the bottom of the trailer. Of course, it's dusty, but no more so than it gets on a paved road or in a dusty campground.

We got a late start this morning, sleeping in till 7:00. It's easy to see why the native people have little sense of time. We're getting that way when it's daylight all the time.

The first part of our drive was on the north end of Eagle Plains. The trees gradually became scrawnier and finally disappeared, leaving only tundra. Once or twice we descended into a river valley, where there were stands of boreal forest. We gradually ascended into the Richardson Mountains, which are old and worn down. A few have bald tops--too cold even for tundra. These mountains were shaped by weathering, not glaciers, so have no knife-edged peaks. Where there is vegetation, it's all tundra.

At the Arctic Circle we pulled into the roadside pullout in order to take pictures of ourselves by the sign. As we approached the sign, we were puzzled by a wooden rocking chair with a cane leaning on it and a wine glass resting on it. The mystery was solved when out from a motor home parked there stepped a sprightly gentleman all dressed up in a top hat and tuxedo! He presented us with appropriately inscribed certificates attesting to our arrival at this important line on the earth. It turned out that he had been doing his greeting off and on as a hobby, but the Yukon government liked what he was doing so much that they hired him for the summer. Anyhow we all had to have our pictures taken with him, each one in turn hoisting his/her (empty) wine glass. [Twenty years later we drove the Dempster again, but there was no greeter at that stop.]

Our next stop was at the Northwest Territories border. Besides the sign, we were also looking for the Wheatear, a thrush which is supposed to nest close to the road in this area and nowhere else accessible by highway. Their nesting habitat is jumbled rock outcroppings in the tundra. We saw a slope of same across the tundra a ways. I put on my rubber boots, because the tundra here was quite wet. Jim just got his feet wet. It turned out to be much farther to the rocks than it looked. It had seemed to be about 100 yards, but turned out to be closer to half a mile. Each step was a chore, because you have to lift your foot high before taking the next step. Then when you put it down, you

don't know whether you'll strike a solid rock or sink in 8 inches or hit the top of a teetery tussock. I carried a walking stick, which was a lifesaver. Jim and Mary are more surefooted, and braved it alone. (Bill has emphysema, so stayed behind.)

Our efforts were to no avail. The *only* bird we found was a single Savannah Sparrow, which Jim almost stepped on. When he searched where the bird flushed from, he found the nest--a little cup nestled in the tundra. There were four eggs in it. He couldn't photograph it though, for he had not brought anything but his long telephoto lens.

By the time we got back to the parking area, it was 1:30, so we ate lunch right where we were parked, then drove farther on. We hadn't gone any distance at all when we found the same habitat right by the road. Despite stops several places and all four of us peering carefully at the rocks as we drove by as at snail's pace, we saw no sign of a "perky, active bird, which continually hops from rock to rock in search of insects and seeds," as the book says.

We wanted to stay in the Richardsons in case we might find a Rock Ptarmigan or Gyrfalcon, so we are situated at a roadside fishing spot next to a creek. It's a lovely place, but the birds are few and the mosquitos are numerous--at least 30 on the screen (the outside, thank goodness) of the window behind where I'm sitting. All we've found so far is a White-crowned Sparrow, a Yellow Warbler, a female Harlequin Duck which passed through briefly, and several Long-tailed Jaegers high in the sky.

Beside road N of MacKenzie R. ferry

8:30 p.m., Sun., June 30, 1991

The mighty MacKenzie, the epitome of the northland to me and one I've long wanted to see! Today we crossed it on a ferry and are camped overlooking it. It is indeed an impressive river, especially up here near the mouth.

Our mosquito-infested campsite last night by James Creek turned out to have another hazard. Around 10:30 pm, in rolled a pickup truck with a family of around 8 or 10 Indians. They proceeded to gather wood and build a fire. Then they rolled their truck in between our trailer and the creek and proceeded to wash it. The father and a couple of older boys threw bucket after bucket of water on it and flailed at it vigorously with a string mop. After they had done one side, they turned the truck around and did the other. Meanwhile the younger children entertained themselves as kids do everywhere by heaving rocks into the creek and watching them splash. Around midnight they packed up and left.

They were not particularly noisy, and the roar of the creek drowned out much of their sound, but still it was difficult to sleep with that hubbub going on right outside our window. It was quite warm and we had to have the windows open. The temperature probably got into the upper 80's yesterday, but it was cooling off somewhat by then. Remember that we're in the land of the midnight sun, and to make matters worse, our bedroom faced north, so the sun was shining directly into that room.

I gave up and read until they left, but Jim tried with moderate success to sleep. Mary Hubbard said she slept through the whole thing, but Bill watched the proceedings as I did.

We really had no complaint about the noise, for they were not in any sense whooping and hollering. And we had to remember that these people up here have a totally different sense of time than we do. Since it's always light, they sleep when they're tired and are active when they feel like it. I suppose the same goes for the months of darkness in mid-winter. Perhaps they keep more "normal" (by our standards) schedules in spring and fall.

We got on the road around 8:30 this morning. The road went a bit higher through tundra with rock outcroppings, but we saw none of the three birds I especially want to see--Rock Ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon or Wheatear. Then it gradually descended onto the Peel Plateau, another one of those non-flat pieces of landscape. It's so cut up by river valleys that we no sooner got out of one when it was time to go down into another. The plateau is fairly high, so the landscape was mostly tundra, sometimes just low plants, sometimes with small willows and birches which look more like 4-ft tall shrubs than trees.

At one point we discovered a Short-eared Owl quartering over the tundra near a small lake. After we stopped, we spotted another ptarmigan, but try as I might, I couldn't make it into a Rock. It was another Willow. We saw another Short-eared Owl a few miles later, and the Hubbards, who stay well behind our dust plume, found a third and studied it very well.

Our route today contained two ferry crossings. The first was over the Peel River, a major tributary of the MacKenzie. Then about 30 miles later we crossed the MacKenzie itself.

We also encountered two Indian communities on the road today--the first towns since around 50 miles before we got on the Dempster. The first was Fort MacPherson, which despite its name has mainly Indian inhabitants. These are of the Guich'in tribe of Dene Indians, a forest people. This MacKenzie delta country has a surprising amount of boreal forest with fairly impressive trees.

We drove into the town of Fort MacPherson, which has several hundred inhabitants. The houses were all built on stilts so as not to melt the permafrost underneath them. If the permafrost were to melt, the house would first tilt, then gradually sink into the ground. Some of the houses were built out of logs, others from boards or plywood. Some of them were quite nice looking, while others looked as though they had been thrown together using whatever materials were at hand and painted, if at all, with whatever paint color was on sale.

Although there were no attempts at landscaping or decorations on the lots, we did not see the vast amounts of trash blowing around that I recall from when Mother and I visited Point Barrow in 1975. That, of course was an Eskimo (or Inuit, as they prefer to be called) town. Inuvik, which we should reach tomorrow, has quite a few Inuits. I wonder if they heave their trash out the back door as the folks in Barrow do.

We ate lunch at the cafe in the local co-op grocery store. The menu was the same as everywhere up here, the usual hamburgers, grilled ham and cheese, BLT, etc. So we opted for our usual cheeseburgers.

I tried to buy a loaf of bread, but none was on the shelves. It was Sunday, however, so I suppose they were sold out. They had their own bakery. I discovered frozen bread-dough loaves in the freezer case, but since I didn't know what to do with *five* loaves, I had to pass that by. I might have bought some, had the packages been smaller. Oh well, we can do without bread. Thank goodness for Bisquick.

The other town was called Arctic Red River, after the river of the same name. It's located on a point where that river and the MacKenzie come together. In order to visit it, we'd have had to get off the ferry there, then get on again later to continue across. Anyway, it's just a small village, but looked quite colorful and trim perched high on a bluff above the water. It reminded me of a Nova Scotia village more than anything else.

Just before we crossed the MacKenzie River, we saw a barge loaded with containerized cargo traveling downstream. We found out that much cargo is shipped up to Inuvik in the summer from a railhead at Hay River on Great Slave Lake in the southern NT. There some of it is transferred to ocean-going ships, while the rest of it is supplies for the Arctic communities.

After we got off the second ferry, it was around 3:30 and we were tired, so decided to opt for the first possible camping spot. We hadn't driven more than a mile up the hill, when we found a road up to a gravel storage lot. (These things are popular roadside campsites all over the northland. Since they use so much gravel to build the roads high above the landscape, the gravel pits have lots of flat area.) Where we're parked, we have a commanding view down the MacKenzie.

The last part of our drive today the wind started to blow. Around 5:00 the sky started to cloud over. The wind really blew a gale for a couple of hours. Now it has slacked off to just a breeze, but the sky is totally overcast. It's also considerably colder--around 48° outside, Jim just reported. What does it all mean? I don't know. At least the sun won't be shining into our bedroom window as we try to sleep, and it is not so bright.

Tomorrow we have 80 miles to drive north through MacKenzie delta country to reach Inuvik.

5:00 p.m., Mon., July 1, 1991

We made it! Inuvik! We drove the northernmost public highway in North America! It was a 460 mile bird-watch. I don't think I've ever driven that far looking out the window for birds every mile of the way. By the time we get back down, it'll be over 900 miles of same. What took us about a week to cover, the public bus does in 12 hours and most tourists do in 2 to 4 days. People who don't camp have to drive to Eagle Plains the first day and to Inuvik the second.

It was quite cold last night, and we awakened to overcast skies. By the time we got here, though, we had come out from under the cloud cover. And as I look back down south now, I can barely see it, so I know it has moved even farther south. The air is chilly however--just pleasantly bracing.

We drove about 30 miles today over the worst road we've encountered on the Dempster. It was full of potholes, but fairly wide, so we could dodge most of them. It really wasn't bad. Jim chatted with a highway contractor while I was fixing lunch and he told him that the repair of that stretch is out for bid this summer. He also told him that the entire highway cost \$800 million to build. I believe it, for the amount of gravel they had to haul to raise that road high (I'd guess an average of 10 feet) off the permafrost is staggering.

The man also told Jim that his itchy bites were probably black flies, which like to climb into dark places (like pantlegs) to lay their eggs.

Our drive today was mainly through taiga forest with occasional ponds and lakes. We saw several Short-eared Owls, and in one place there were three in the same place. Ehrlich's *Birder's Handbook* says they sometimes hunt communally. Jim tried to photograph them, but they were very wary and wouldn't let him approach them at all. When we drive back through that country, the light will be right for him to shoot out the truck window while I drive, so we'll see.

We saw another Northern Hawk-Owl. Like the other one, it allowed very close approach. Jim's only problem was the thing would not quit preening and scratching, and look regal and owl-like, so he could photograph it. Standing on the road some distance from him, I could hear him making various sounds trying to get its attention. He did manage to expose a roll of film, though. This bird was on a much lower perch than the last one we saw, but was not in the sun. Jim's still scanning the treetops, searching for one on a low perch in the sun.

The other highlight of our day was several ponds just south of Inuvik with breeding-plumage Pacific Loons on them. We scoped them and enjoyed the sight thoroughly. Jim got a few shots of one pair, but they were a little distant.

Inuvik is another town on stilts. It's new, having been established in 1963. It was intended to replace the Inuit village of Aklavik, which was on unstable ground in the middle of the MacKenzie delta. It had no room to grow, and much of it flooded every year when the river flooded. That town wasn't abandoned completely, though.

Inuvik has a population of around 3200 people. It's a colorful town, with buildings painted all sorts of bright colors. There are lots of four-plexes with four two-story homes in a row, and each unit is painted a different bright color. Sometimes the colors contrast, sometimes they blend, and sometimes they simply clash. Apparently each family is responsible for the color of its own segment.

The houses are mostly quite tidy with no trash around them. It looks as though the Canadian government enforces litter laws around the town. Barrow, Alaska, could use some of their help. [Note added at end of trip: All of Alaska could use their help!] All the buildings are built on stilts several feet off the permafrost. Sometimes there are plywood skirts concealing the stilts, sometimes not.

The utilities are all above ground, and insulated aluminum ducts called "utiladors" carry water, gas and sewage.

Same place

9:30 a.m., Tues., July 2, 1991

I didn't finish yesterday's log, so will continue where I left off.

We're camped in the Chuk (don't know what that means) Campground on the outskirts of Inuvik. We have electricity, but no water or sewer. This is the first time since Whitehorse we've had electricity, so I'll take advantage of it to print out my log and mail it home later today.

The electricity is pretty weak, as we discovered when we blew a circuit breaker when I turned on the microwave oven while the electric frying pan was in use. But we can work around that, now that we know we have a problem.

We certainly don't need the electricity for lights, for the sun will not set until July 19. This eternal sunshine is finally affecting our sleep. We're OK if the sun is behind clouds or if we're camped in trees or in a valley, but the sun actually shining in the vent overhead is like a giant floodlight. Furthermore, we need the vents open for cooling, because the trailer heats up like a greenhouse, even when it's fairly cool outside. So we can't put anything dark over them.

Our sleep was not aided by the people in the trailer across the way playing their TV loudly until 1:00 a.m. In addition someone came in in a pickup truck around midnight and unloaded a lot of wood into the woodlot and emptied the trash cans. People up here don't seem to pay any attention to the time. They stay up until all hours of the "night" and then sleep until they're ready to get up. Even the ferry schedules reflect that. They run from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m. every day.

To top off our sleep problems, there were several mosquitos singing around our ears which we simply could not catch.

Returning to our chronological activities. Yesterday afternoon before we unhooked in our campsite, we had to drive into the main part of Inuvik to dump our black (toilet) water. We had a brochure with a map of the town in it, and it showed a dump station at the far end. When we tried to follow the roads on the map, it turned out that not only was there no dump station there, several of the roads on the map were not there either. So we decided to go to the private campground in downtown Inuvik. That wasn't so easy either, for only about one intersection out of three has any street signs on it. Here we were dragging this huge trailer around the residential streets of Inuvik, with the Hubbards following behind. (They had the same map and understood our problem completely.) For a recently established town, it certainly has a haphazard street arrangement.

When we got to that campground, it turned out that the town dump station was actually outside the entrance and intended for all to use. It also had a water tap, so we could fill up our tank with fresh water. Our campground has water, but they apparently truck it in. Anyhow they don't want people filling up their tanks there. They do have showers--\$2.00. I understand the campground downtown charges \$4.00 for a shower.

After our dumping adventure I caught sight of a bookstore, Boreal Books, as we drove back along the main street in town, MacKenzie Ave. There was plenty of street parking out in front, so I went in. It was a wonderful bookstore, even though it was squeezed into one tiny room. It specialized in books about the northland in general and this area in particular. I spent \$89.00.

Meanwhile Jim walked across the street to the information center to find out where he could buy some propane. They sent him back to the other end of town where we had originally looked for the dump station. He came into the bookstore and told me he'd go down there while I was looking at books.

So off he trundled with the trailer. When he got down there, he couldn't tell which business actually had propane, until he finally spied a tiny sign. The man asked him if he could wait five minutes, because he was eating. Meanwhile Jim removed the tank from the trailer. When the man came out, he said he'd have to take him to the other end of town, because he couldn't operate the tank where he was. So off they went to the main tank farm--almost back to our campground. When it was all over, Jim gasped at the price: \$27.84 (U.S.). The most we'd ever paid before for a tank of propane was around \$12.00. Jim's still trying to figure out if that was the regular price or if he had to

pay a premium because it was a holiday. The man certainly didn't say anything about there being an extra charge, though.

By the time he got back, I had been standing out in front of the bookstore for around ten minutes.

Last evening the four of us decided to celebrate our arrival in Inuvik by going out for dinner. I had asked the bookstore owner where to eat, and he said any of the hotels were good. We selected the Finto Motor Inn, which was the closest to our campground. It had a nice dining room. All four of us selected the Arctic Special--Arctic char and caribou combination. Both were delicious. The char is a fish sort of like a cross between salmon and trout in flavor, color and texture. It was grilled and served with lemon. The caribou was also grilled and served with a delicious dark brown gravy with a hint of cranberry. It tasted quite a bit like a good beef steak, but the meat was more tender and the texture finer. On the plate were nicely seasoned cauliflower, zucchini, and potatoes. We had gasped at the a la carte price (\$22.18 U.S.), so didn't order any soup or salad. But the plate alone was quite generous, and we really enjoyed our meal.

For our afterdinner entertainment, we took the Hubbards to the town garbage dump! We had caught sight of Glaucous Gulls flying around the area. Jim shot about 3 rolls of film there.

This morning we slept until 7:30 to make up for our lack of sleep. After a leisurely breakfast accompanied by the morning news on TV (the first news we've had in 10 days), we gave the inside of the trailer a good cleaning. The outside is hopeless and will just have to wait till we get off gravel roads at Tok, Alaska.

We're going to spend tonight in Inuvik, too. We had wanted to take an all day boat trip to Tuktoyaktuk, an Inuit village up on the Beaufort Sea, but when Mary investigated, it turned out that the man's boat is out of commission. So I guess we'll head back down the highway tomorrow morning. We'll spend the day poking around the stores of Inuvik and photographing the town and its birds, if any.

James Creek Parking Area, Dempster Hwy., NT
8:00 p.m., Wed., July 3, 1991

I've decided the July theme song for the north country should be "Clappa yo' hands. Slappa yo' thighs." It seems we do quite a bit of that trying to rid our surroundings of mosquitos.

We're back at the same place where we stopped on the way up. This time, though, we elected to park on the other side of the road, rather than down by the creek. The mosquitos were too bad down there. Also we did not truly enjoy being right beside the Midnight Carwash. We're just outside the gate of a highway maintenance facility and a little bit off the highway. We're surrounded by the open Richardson Mountains, those rolling old tundra-covered "hills" with bald tops.

Lots has happened since yesterday morning when I last wrote this up and mailed it in Inuvik. I've also learned a lot about life in the north.

We spent most of yesterday cleaning the trailer, getting the trip log ready to mail, and writing (between us) fifteen post cards. (We had to brag a little about our arrival at Inuvik.) Then we went downtown and looked around. I did the minimum amount of grocery shopping, buying only the essentials. The poor, sad, shriveled head of lettuce I bought cost me \$1.59 (U.S.). A pint of sour cream was around \$2.23, so I bought a half pint for a bit less than half that. Whether things will be much cheaper in Dawson or Fairbanks remains to be seen. I'm now really glad to have all the staples we dragged up here.

I called Mother from a pay phone in front of the phone company on the main street in Inuvik--right next to the government liquor store. As I was about to make the phone call, up staggered an elderly man, about as drunk as a man can be and still stay on his feet. He managed to slur out, "I Eskimo," and stick out his hand. I told him firmly that I was busy and to leave me alone, whereupon he obediently staggered on his way. He was the only drunk we've seen up here, but I've read that alcoholism is a serious problem with these people. I can't see how it can be with the price of liquor

what it is.

A curious thing about his remarks was that he appealed to me for money for liquor by stating that he was an Eskimo. Apparently that works with some tourists, who might like to say they gave charity to an Eskimo. Most of the people who used to be called Eskimos prefer the name Inuit today. Inuit simply means "the people" in their language. Inuvik means, "the place of man."

We returned to the trailer for dinner. One night on the town in Inuvik was enough.

This morning I climbed the view tower in our campground, from which I could see far out over the MacKenzie delta. The best thing about it was the extremely interesting and informative signs, both at the bottom and all around up top. The next several paragraphs summarize what I learned from them.

At Inuvik the permafrost starts about 2 meters below the surface on the hilltop where the campground is. (A meter is a little over a yard.) From there down the ground is constantly frozen for about 200 m.

In some areas (and we saw one on the way up here) there are small conical hills called *pingos*. They can vary from around 10 to 100 ft in height, I would guess from the pictures. When shallow lakes freeze to the bottom, the liquid layer between the lake and the permafrost is under great pressure. This causes the ground to swell up. Because that spot is now a bit weaker than the rest of the surface, the swelling continues there, forming a low symmetrical conical hill. The surface looks like that of a normal dirt-covered hill, but it has an icy core.

In the banks (which looked to be up to 100 m high where we saw it) of the MacKenzie River here and there are *ice wedges*. Cracks form in the bank and water seeps in. When it expands in the winter time, this widens the crack. Eventually ice wedges form, which are as tall as the bank and perhaps half as wide at the top and pointed at the bottom.

I've mentioned that the highway is built on a thick layer of gravel high above the ground. The thickness varies from perhaps 2 meters to 20 meters or more. The gravel is laid directly on the tundra. This tundra of course dies, but the organic layer insulates the permafrost. We've noticed that there seem to be almost no road cuts, only fills. I'm sure this is because they do not want to disturb that insulating layer. Culverts are on either side of the road to carry away any melt water. This accentuates the height of the road over the surrounding land.

Homes in Inuvik are built on pilings. The piles are tapered slightly and are inserted thick end down in the permafrost. Thus they resist being pulled out by the motion of the active layer--the layer which melts and freezes with the seasons. The depth of piling underground is approximately equal to that above. After placement, it takes a month or two for the piles to freeze into place and one winter before they settle and can be used as the foundation of a building.

The MacKenzie delta is the tenth largest delta in the world and the largest in Canada. Inuvik is 75 miles from the sea and the river is 6.5 meters above sea level there. The river is 2700 miles long and drains 633,000 square miles of area--nearly 1/5 of Canada's land. Its tributaries include the Liard, Peace, Athabasca, Hay and Slave Rivers. They also include Athabasca and Great and Lesser Slave Lakes.

The MacKenzie Valley stays several degrees warmer than the tundra and mountains east and west of it. Inuvik can be warmer than Edmonton or Vancouver on a July afternoon. The temperature can range from 100° to -60° F. The Richardson Mountains to the west protect the area from severe storms and high winds.

Most of the Arctic is classified as a desert based on annual precipitation. Water in the MacKenzie Delta makes for rich life compared with the surroundings. Nearly every spring, the river overflows depositing a layer of silt and nutrients. These nourish plants. Some nutrients wash out to sea, so marine life is especially rich at the mouth of the river.

Over 25 species of birds nest in the delta, but only 6 or 7 overwinter. Some birds penetrate farther north here than anywhere else in North America.

Beluga whales shed their skins in spring and can be seen rubbing and scratching themselves on sand and gravel shallows at the mouth of the river.

Regrowth after fires is very slow. Some plants grow only as much in a full year as they would in southern Ontario in one week. There are fewer than 1/10 as many plant species here as there. Here a 50-year old spruce tree may have a diameter of only 4 inches.

The treeline here penetrates farther north than anyplace else in Canada (and probably North America, though they didn't say so). The forest here is an open forest or savannah of spruce with ground cover of lichens and shrubs. Birch is commonly found on well drained ridges with good soils, as in the campground. Tamarack (larch) and alders are more common in wet areas.

["Muskeg is an Algonquian term for areas covered with sphagnum mosses, tussocky sedges and an open growth of scrubby timber (Radforth and Brawner, 1977 - Google entry). ... In addition, Muskeg develops where the ground is saturated, the water table is high and drainage is poor. It is very common on flat, poorly drained terrain.]

Because the muskeg is wet, fires do not burn deep. Roots of grasses and herbs may stay intact and reestablish quickly. Fireweed is the first to grow. [It's a tall showy hot-pink member of the evening primrose family.] Next birch and willows grow. Spruce seedlings grow best in the shade of these pioneer trees. Jim took photos showing where a fire burned part of the area in view in 1969. The area on the opposite side of the tower did not burn.

After breakfast we took our postcards down to the post office, and then drove around the town taking pictures of interesting sights--the colorful houses and public buildings, a "vacant" lot with the pilings in place for someone to build, a utilidor (plywood casing which insulates the water, sewer, and in a few older neighborhoods, steam for heat). Jim also snuck a few pictures of the people, but they may not come out too well. The cutest was three very shy young boys all on the same bicycle. The kids here are up on the latest fashions--fluorescent colors and loud print fabrics, baseball caps worn backwards, high-top canvas shoes with oversized tongues, worn untied.

We noticed that none of the houses have garages. Too expensive, I guess--and how would you put a garage on pilings? Of course, they have an electrical outlet outside for a winter engine block heater to be plugged in.

Just about the only bird seen commonly around town is the raven. Up here they seem much shaggier than at home. I suppose they have a heavier plumage for winter, or perhaps they only seem that way because their plumage is worn and they're molting. Also, I have yet to hear one "croak." Here they have all sorts of strange loud high-pitched whistles and gargles. I've heard ravens down south do that occasionally, but not to the exclusion of croaking.

We drove over by the sewage lagoons and looked for birds. Saw Orange-crowned Warbler (the first we've seen on the trip), Fox Sparrow (eastern race) plus a few other species. Jim may have gotten a couple of shots of an American Tree Sparrow on a wire, but it was rather distant and too high up for a good photo angle.

After we had hooked up and taken the trailer back downtown to the dump and water station, it was nearly noon. So we decided to patronize a small cafe that advertised muskox and caribou burgers. I had muskox and Jim had caribou. Unfortunately they were literally cooked to a crisp, so I still can't tell if I like muskox.

After lunch we topped off our gas tank (67.7 cents per liter--somewhat less than Eagle Plains) and set off down the road. The Hubbards had left shortly after breakfast, but not without urging us to visit them at their home in northern Florida when we go to Mobile in April for the ABA Convention. [We didn't. In fact, we never saw or heard from them again.]

It was a beautiful day, so Jim made up for the cloudy day two days ago when we came in by taking a number of scenic shots of the delta area--various tree species, a bog, a "drunken" muskeg forest with the trees tilted at crazy angles from frost action, a couple of lakes, etc.

We're amazed at all the lakes we see that are naturally dammed. We'd like to know the geology of the land which contains all these "hanging lakes." I suspect the permafrost is what holds the water in.

At one pretty lake we frightened a mother Pintail with a coterie of half a dozen chicks. She fled

with them out into the middle of the lake. Suddenly we saw a lot of splashing out there and put our binoculars on the scene. A Pacific Loon, which we had not noticed, came up in the middle of the family of Pintails. It proceeded to chase the mother back over to the edge of the lake, the babies trying their best to keep up with her. When she was out of the way, the loon dove again and came up right under the one chick which had not been able to keep up with the rest. The loon strangled that chick, then got hold of it by its neck and swam with it under water a ways. It came up and toyed with it for a time, then swam off and left it floating there dead. We decided that the loon did not want to eat either the adult or the chicks and that the whole behavior was territorial. We were sorry that our stopping to photograph the lake sent that family out into harm's way in the middle of it.

At Midway Lake (midway between what?), we saw tents being set up for a music festival to be held this coming weekend. The other day I asked an Indian who works in the information center nearby what kind of music they would be playing. He said it was country music. I asked if it was southern U.S. country music and he replied, yes, that kind of music is very popular up here.

Sign at the road to the dump in Ft. MacPherson: "Nuisance Grounds."

We decided we'd try to get across both ferries today, because then we wouldn't have to wait for them to start running at 9:00 a.m. But when we got past the last ferry, we found no place to park until we got near here. By then it was close to 6:00.

Just about then I spotted a ptarmigan beside the road. It turned out to be another Willow, but this time it was a pair with four chicks. The male hung around a while then flew off with a great display, almost as though he were trying to lure Jim to follow him. Jim, however, knew there were others there and was able to slowly walk up to within 15 feet of them. Since she had chicks, the mother froze instead of fleeing, and so did the chicks. The mother even averted her head from him, apparently knowing that her large black eyes were somewhat conspicuous. Jim got pictures of the whole family. The half-grown chicks remained absolutely motionless (although in plain sight) even when Jim walked within three feet of them. When it seemed that they were not going to move, Jim started to reach down to pick one up. But that did it! They all exploded into flight and easily flew over the 10-foot high roadbed to the other side of the road.

There were also Long-tailed Jaegers flying around the same area. I suspect they feed on baby Ptarmigans if they get a chance. We stayed around quite some time while Jim tried to photograph them in flight. He got some distant shots, but nothing that really pleased him. But it will be a new bird for his life list. He only counts the birds he succeeds in photographing. [Actually they were quite sharp, so when digitized and cropped years later were pretty nice.]

It's curious that the most pelagic of the jaegers is the one which breeds farthest from the sea. The Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers breed close to the ocean. (I saw them on the tundra near Point Barrow in 1975. The Long-tailed was there, too.)

It was 7:30 pm by the time we finished that jaeger project, but fortunately our present parking area turned up only a mile farther along the road. I started this day's log while my chicken was cooking and am just finishing it up after dinner at 11:00. Fortunately it's only 10:00 by Yukon time, which we'll hit a few miles farther down the road. (I still try to live by the clock, but it's hard.)

When I talked to Mother on the phone yesterday, she asked if the rear of the trailer was as caked with dust as that of the bus we took to Alaska in 1975. I replied that it was not. But today we got a real load of the stuff. We had a strong headwind, and I think that made our air-speed greater than it usually is. This created a stronger vacuum on the flat rear end of the trailer. We could hardly see light through those rear windows. However, it was just dust. I took a whisk broom to the worst of it, then wiped the rest off with a dry cloth, and they looked quite good. Fortunately the windows close really tightly, for there was no dust inside.

Jim just went out to the truck after his cameras, which he always brings into the trailer at night. Despite the fact that he stuck most of them in to me through the little hand-opening in the screen door and only made one exit and one entrance himself--*and very quickly*--he must have let in a dozen mosquitos. The breeze has died down and they're just as thick around the windows outside as they were down by the creek. The tundra is so wet everywhere that I don't suppose it matters where we

stop. We'll really be glad when mosquito season is over, but I'm afraid we'll have to put up with the pests for another month. After we finish another Great Curtain Shake and Mosquito Clap, we'll wash off the Muskol and go to bed--and hope we aren't awakened by that tell-tale singing in our ears.

Same place

7:45 p.m., Thurs., July 4, 1991

Today is July 4. I don't think we'll have much of a celebration--being on a wilderness road and in Canada. We were in Inuvik on July 1, which is Canada Day, their equivalent of the U.S. Independence Day. The people of Inuvik celebrated it only minimally. There was a bike decorating contest for kids and an Elks Club barbecue, but that was all. Of course, fireworks were out of the question!

This morning while we were eating breakfast I spied a wolf loping down the road. It was a pearly gray with quite a bit of white around the jaw. Jim tried to photograph it through the glass, but without success. It was a dark cloudy morning and the animal was pretty far off, so it probably wouldn't have turned out anyway. I was really impressed by its easy gait. It's feet hardly seemed to touch the ground.

Another reason Jim didn't get a photo of the animal is that he didn't want to step out of the trailer without his DEET (insect repellent) on. The air is very still, and he just counted 135 mosquitos on one window alone.

Mother asked me an interesting question when I talked to her a couple of days ago: "What do the birds do at night when there is no night? Is there any difference in their degree of activity?" The answer is that their activity (based on amount of singing heard) seems to vary subtly with the amount of light. The sun is lower in the sky and the air is cooler around midnight. The birds seem to sing less then. When we were farther south and there was a real diminution in the amount of light (never total darkness, though), I could hear the dawn chorus if I awoke in the night around 2:00. But the period of heightened activity continued until around 10:00, before lessening for the middle of the day. So the answer really is that if there are dramatic changes in the amount of light, there will be dramatic changes in bird activity. If the changes are subtle, then the birds seem to behave just as the people do up here--feed and move about when they feel like it and hide and sleep the rest of the time.

Nr. Blackstone River, just south of Northern Ogilvie Mtns., YK

7:30 p.m., Fri., July 5, 1991

Yesterday we did a lot of driving and got the Eagle Plains behind us. They are probably the poorest in birdlife of any part of the Dempster. We awoke to cloudy skies, but there were bright places here and there, which made for rather dramatic pictures--we hope. We took quite a few in the Richardson Mountains as we drove slowly down out of them. We saw nothing interesting in the way of birds, despite both of us constantly watching the roadsides for signs of life.

I think the breeding season is nearly over up here. I would certainly advise anyone coming up here to get started up the road sometime during the first half of June. When I remember that the first fall shorebirds are starting to arrive at home in early July, it makes sense.

After we got up onto the Eagle Plains, it got cloudier and started to rain a bit. To make matters worse, the road crews were out watering the road, then sprinkling it with calcium chloride. This chemical holds moisture in the liquid state and is used to keep down the dust. But when it is freshly spread on a wet road, then splashed up onto a vehicle which already is coated with a thick layer of dust, it makes ONE HORRENDOUS MESS!!! When we stopped at the Eagle Plains Hotel to get gas and water and dump our gray water, the windows of the trailer were so mud-spattered that we could hardly see light through them. (Jim took pictures, so you'll be able to see how we looked.) It was so bad, we decided to eat lunch in the restaurant there and wait until we stopped for the night to clean the windows. We saved a little money on gas by dumping in 15 of the 20 gallons of gas we had

bought at the start of the highway, and then filling up. We saved out one of the full 5-gallon cans--just in case we decided to do a little driving back and forth.

We wanted to spend the night close to where the highway descends from the Eagle Plains to the Ogilvie River, at the north base of the Ogilvie Mountains. But we drove a long time not finding any decent pulloff. Furthermore there was a stretch of road along which trucks were driving back and forth carrying large rocks to dump in the edge of the river to protect the banks from washing away. These truck went very fast and raised a lot of dust. (By then we were out of the rain and the road showed no signs of recent treatment with calcium chloride.)

We found a flat gravel bed not far from a little pond, and Jim threw bucket after bucket of water on the trailer's doors and windows, and then we squeegeed them off so we could see out of them when we finally stopped for the night.

We continued on, trying to look over the scree slopes for Rock Ptarmigans and Gyrfalcons, but we were getting tired. Finally we were so close to Engineers Creek Campground, that we decided to head for that and be done with it. It was 6:00 when we stopped. We feared all the long sites would be occupied when we got there, but there were lots fewer people than when we went up. Perhaps the threat of rain in the Ogilvies had deterred people from driving up that far.

It rained moderately for an hour or so in the early evening, which washed a little more dirt off the truck and trailer--but not much. Unfortunately it tended to wash the dirt from above the windows down onto them. At least it seemed to leach the calcium chloride out of the mud, so we mostly had dry mud instead of wet mud this morning. That doesn't look quite so awful. We'll be glad to get to Klondike Junction (the start of the highway) and use their carwash. We hadn't planned to do it then, because we have about 200 miles of gravel road to go after we leave Dawson, but we can't stand it the way it is. Besides, calcium chloride accelerates corrosion of metal and should be removed as soon as possible.

This morning dawned with low clouds, but they gradually dissipated as the day wore on. We drove at a snail's pace through the heart of the northern Ogilvies, including Windy Pass, the highest section. The temperature was in the low 40's, and there was a brisk wind. We were thankful for this, for it kept the mosquitos at bay. We put on our long underwear and heavy jackets and caps and did quite a bit of walking.

We did see one mother ptarmigan with about four well-grown chicks. I think they were Rock, which would be life birds. Her bill did seem smaller than the Willows we'd been seeing and her head and neck didn't seem quite so red. The habitat was a bit ambiguous. There were scree slopes nearby, but the birds were in tall willows along the highway culvert. The Birder's Handbook says they eat willows, too, and that the male usually deserts the hen as soon as the eggs are laid, while the male Willow usually sticks around. There was no male around, while we've seen males with all the other ptarmigans we've found. So I *think* I found my life bird. Fortunately Jim got a few pictures, so I'll make my final decision when I get home and compare the bill size with that of the other ptarmigans we've seen. So that's as close as I've come to a life bird on this trip! No sign of a Gyrfalcon.

Because the last two days have been rather long, we decided to stop after we'd covered only around 25-30 miles. We found a nice wide gravel road heading off into the trees towards the Blackstone River. Since it's always chancy to drag the trailer down some unknown road for fear we won't be able to turn it around, I walked it to the end--about 1/4 mile--and found that there was a way to turn around--barely. So we drove down here and are backed up to some ponds which are backwaters of the river. There are lots of gravel berms here and there, so some sort of man-caused disturbance has occurred here in the past, but the plants are so tall on them that it's obvious that nothing is going on now. All we saw was a campfire ring that looked as though it was used recently by some passing motorists. Anyway it's very pretty here and very secluded. In the foreground are lots of River Beauty (sometimes called Dwarf Fireweed) and a dozen or so other wildflowers. Behind that are some fairly tall spruce trees, and beyond that are the tall slopes of the Ogilvie Mountains.

We took long naps, then I went out and figured out what all the wildflowers were. For once I have a flower book that has yet to fail me. **FOR THE RECORD (AND ANY INTERESTED**

BOTANISTS), HERE ARE THE FLOWERS I'VE FOUND IN YUKON SO FAR:

Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum scheuchzeri*) - all over tundra. I have a bouquet of it mixed with Tall Fireweed on the dinette table now. It keeps quite well, but the fireweed, which I picked yesterday, doesn't.

Bistort (*Polygonum bistorta*) - a lovely bunch of tiny pink blossoms on the end of a long stem - buckwheat family

Arctic Dock (*Rumex arcticus*)

Moss Campion (*Silene acaulis*) - spectacular pink mat in rocky tundra

Northern Monkshood (*Aconitum delphinifolium*)

Mountain Marsh Marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*)

Tall Delphinium (*Delphinium glaucum*)

Iceland Poppy (*Papaver nudicaule*) - cultivated & has gone wild here

Tansy Mustard (*Descurania sophoides*)

Roseroot (*Sedum roseum*) - very pretty dark maroon flowers

Spotted Saxifrage (*Saxifraga bronchialis*)

Slender Saxifrage (*S. exilis*)

Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*)

Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*)

Prickly Rose (*Rosa acicularis*) - abundant everywhere, the provincial flower of Alberta

Dwarf Raspberry or Nagoon Berry (*Rubus acaulis*) - lovely big pink flowers

Northern Sweet-Vetch or Wild Sweet Pea (*Hedysarum mackenzii*) - very fragrant. I had a bouquet of this, and it lasted very well.

Showy Locoweed or Showy Crazyweed (*Oxytropis spendens*)

Wild Flax (*Linum perenne*)

Fireweed or Willow-herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*) - the typical tall fireweed

Broad-leaved Fireweed, Dwarf Fireweed, or River Beauty (*E. latifolium*)

Northern Labrador Tea (*Ledum palustre*)

Northern Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium boreale*)

Tall Lungwort or Bluebells (*Mertensiana paniculata*) - very common in boreal forest. We saw lots of it in Alberta, too.

Alpine Forget-me-not (*Myosotis asiatica*)

Woolly Lousewort (*Pedicularis lanata*) - lots prettier than its name, has large showy rosy flower heads, snapdragon family

Gorman's Penstemon (*Penstemon gormanii*)

Yukon Bellflower (*Campanula aurita*)

Common Yarrow or Milfoil (*Achillea millefolium*)

Dwarf Hawk's-Beard (*Crepis nana*) - a very showy ground-hugging composite of the dry gravelly slopes, seen in high Ogilvie Mtns.

Fleabane Daisy (*Erigeron acris*)

Spearleaf Fleabane (*E. lonchophyllus*)

Black-tipped Groundsel (*Senecio lugens*)

That's 33 species. I hope to see lots more flowers before the summer is over.

By the Blackstone River, farther south and higher up
5:00 p.m., Saturday, July 6, 1991

We lingered in our lovely secluded campsite most of the morning today. Jim photographed the setting with most of his "other cameras"--in between sessions of feeding the Gray Jays and photographing the Solitary Sandpiper, who sat on top of a spruce tree and yelled at us whenever we came outside. That bird apparently had chicks somewhere in the vicinity and didn't want us to look

for them. I got the best recording yet of that species, since there was little wind.

While he was doing that, I botanized a little more and added the following species to my list:
Alpine blueberry, also called bog huckleberry, bilberry or whortleberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*).
I'm looking forward to finding some of these berries ripe so I can pick them. I think they ripen in August.

Capitate Valerian or Mountain Heliotrope (*Valeriana capitata*)

Tall Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium acutiflorum*)

Alpine Arnica (*Arnica angustifolia*)

Alaska Wormwood (*Artemisia alaskana*)

Deflexed oxytrope or pendant-pod crazyweed (*Oxytropis deflexa*)

An even two dozen species were present at that campsite, although some of them I had encountered first at other spots. This was the first place where I took the time to exhaustively examine every flower I laid my eyes on. I had Jim photograph some of the showier ones.

Last night was the coldest night we've had since we left the U.S., and there was a thin film of ice on the ponds around us. This made a real dent in the mosquito problem, so we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves as we pattered around outdoors.

We drove out of the campsite around 11:00 and hadn't driven half a mile when we spotted another ptarmigan sitting at the edge of the road, just where it starts to slope down. Jim almost refused to stop, thinking it was just a large rock, but I insisted. This time it was really and truly a ROCK PTARMIGAN. That bird just stood there and let Jim get really close to her. Meanwhile I got out my scope and examined it fully. The smaller bill and duller plumage really clinched that life bird for me. [When I got home and examined the photographs, I found that the first bird had indeed been a Willow Ptarmigan and the second one the Rock that I was searching for.]

Jim finally got too close for comfort, so the ptarmigan oozed off into the bushes and we got back into the truck to drive off. We were just about ready to leave when I saw the bird again just a bit farther down the road, so we stopped and Jim shot it some more. It had several partly grown chicks, which were very active and continually darting in and out of cover, but he may have gotten a few shots of them, too. (Here again is an example of an adult bird serving as sort of an attention-grabbing decoy for precocial young.)

Jim again got closer and closer to the bird, until I decided I should take a picture of him photographing the bird. That wasn't the best time to try to learn how to use a strange camera, but I thought I'd give it a try. He yelled a few instructions at me and I even managed to change to a longer lens and take it with his 300 mm lens. I hope I held it steady enough. [The pictures were fine.]

We drove on a few miles farther, when Jim spotted a pair of Willow Ptarmigans, whose heads were just peeking above the tundra vegetation. He decided to take a "long shot" to use sometime as a transition in a program. We had no sooner stopped when on the other side of the road we heard a loud staccato trill which lasted for a couple of seconds, then stopped. This sound was repeated ceaselessly. We had no idea whether it was produced by a bird or a mammal or what. It sounded like it was right at our feet, and after a bit of searching we discovered an Upland Sandpiper doing that same kind of attention-grabbing yelling that we've encountered with Solitary Sandpipers and Lesser Yellowlegs. This time it had no tree to yell from, so had to do it from the ground.

Jim slid down the steep 10-foot gravel road embankment and approached the bird. It, too, held its ground, although it moved around a bit. He finally crouched down and even gave his "cringing" performance. This emboldened the bird and made it come closer. He got his first really good photos of that bird, too, and I recorded it as well. His photos will be better than my recordings, for the wind had gotten up by then.

All in all, it was an outstanding day. In addition to those highlights, I also recorded my best Lesser Yellowlegs--right beside the road before the wind got up. We saw an adult Bald Eagle circling over a lake, but it was too far away to photograph. The day was beautifully clear, so Jim got a lot of scenics. It had been cloudy on the way up.

I doubt we drove more than 25 miles today. We're parked for the night at the same spot by the Blackstone River that we used on the way up. It's not as private as last night, but it's flat and fairly far from the road dust--and up-wind, too, thank goodness. I love the view and sound of the bubbling river, which is really just a large creek here.

Tombstone Mtn. Campground
7:02 pm, Sunday, July 7, 1991

My remarks about no dust proved wrong after the wind changed. We must have had a dozen big trucks drive by, each leaving a dense cloud of dust behind it. Unfortunately it was too warm to have the windows closed. The traffic did diminish to almost none by bedtime, though.

Again we found the Ogilvie Mountains so fascinating that we only managed to drive the same 25 miles we did on the way up.

We awoke to a red sun shining through smoky skies and realized that those fires near the start of the highway must still be burning. It turned out that there had been lots of sparkling days while we were up north, and the wind had just recently blown the smoke back up here again. Unfortunately we were unable to get any nice photographs of these, the most spectacular of the mountains along the Dempster.

The birding more than made up for the smoky haze, though. Jim is in seventh heaven about the 7 or so rolls of film he exposed today.

We had barely started down the highway when we spotted a dark form in the middle of the road ahead. It had to be either a piece of truck tire tread or a bird. It turned out to be a bird--an American Golden-Plover. (The Lesser Golden-Plover has been split. The *dominica* race is now American Golden-Plover, while the *fulva* race has become Pacific Golden-Plover. The American may be a life bird. I must check my records when I get home. I know I've seen the Pacific. [At home: It was a lifer.]) That crazy bird just stood there in the middle of the road while Jim approached it for photos. It was apparently trying to distract him from a nest or chicks down on the tundra somewhere. Since he was far from the site, it did not need to perform the broken wing histrionics. Somewhat later we caught sight of a second one which had some dark flecking in the white areas. We assumed that to be the female. She was doing a lot of calling, so I got out and recorded her. Her call was rather similar to the "tlee-oo-ee" of the Black-bellied Plover, but seemed higher and thinner. Jim climbed down onto the tundra and was able to approach her rather closely for photos. He tried to play "warmer and colder" with her and locate the nest or chicks, but was unsuccessful. Neither bird ever gave a broken wing act, so we concluded he was "cold" all the time.

We continued a bit farther (at about 10 miles/hour) and stopped where there were some 6-ft-high willows on either side of the road. Lots of Savannah and a few American Tree Sparrows were *sip*-calling away in the bushes. I caught a glimpse from about 15 feet of a bird which was a dead-ringer for a Brewer's Sparrow. That bird does occur in the southwest corner of Yukon in a sand-dune area, but not up here. I saw the finely streaked crown and nape, pale area around the eye, pale gray plumage, unstreaked breast which could only be that bird. However, the bird was back-lit, and my look lasted only about 10 seconds. Despite pishing and listening and looking for the better part of an hour, I could not get another look at it. So I'm afraid that bird will have to go the way of Jim's Song Sparrow on the way up--a bird we let pass and do not try to report. A bird that rare would have to be seen *very well* and, better yet, photographed.

We continued on to a place where a river separates and meanders between a lot of gravel bars. I had found Semipalmated and American Golden Plovers there on the way up, but it had been starting to rain and was getting late in the day, so Jim didn't want to go out there then.

This time we put on our rubber boots and spent a couple of hours out there. The American Golden Plovers were there, but flighty. Fortunately Jim already had them under his belt. The Semipalmated Plovers in breeding plumage obviously had "something to hide," for they stayed close to us all the time, pretending to feed as though nothing was amiss. But they called all the time and

didn't flee from us. I got some good recordings, including sounds when one ran aggressively at another. Jim got photos, then wandered off to try to get a Spotted Sandpiper we'd seen.

When I proceeded a bit farther, suddenly the Semipalms sprung into all sorts of injured-bird histrionics. They couldn't have been 10 feet from me when they did it. So I yelled at the top of my lungs for Jim, and he finally heard me and came. At first they wouldn't perform for him, and he started to leave, but I insisted that he go to the exact spot where I had had the most energetic performance. It worked. But try as we might, we could not discover the nest. How it could be concealed on that bare gravel with just a few scattered Dwarf Fireweed plants is beyond me.

I went back and fixed lunch, while Jim resumed his Spotty patrol and also finally succeeded in photographing the Arctic Ground-Squirrel. We haven't found any of those guys willing to come very close, let alone have their tails fondled.

It was 2:00 by then, so we decided not to drive all the way to Dawson, so here we are parked in the spot the Hubbards had last time--right under the Merlins' nest. The Merlins are actively hunting for food for one or more well-grown downy chicks. We saw one perched in plain view "carving" a probable Robin nestling to feed its young. These campground Merlins are something one would have to travel a long ways to duplicate. They pay little attention to the campers underneath them.

It's 8:30 now (and after dinner). Jim is on his eighth roll of film today, and since the sun has not yet set, there's no telling when he'll quit. We may stay here tomorrow night, too, if he can figure out how to get some water out of the river and into our trailer tank. (It's good to drink, the sign says.)

Same place

8:35 pm, Monday, July 8, 1991

Sometime in the middle of the night last night it started to rain, and has been doing so off and on (mostly on) all day. Since Jim wants very much to photograph that Merlin nest in the morning sun, we decided to stay here one more night. If the weather behaves as it usually does, it should be *different* tomorrow than it is today--whatever that may mean.

So we spent the day in the trailer, reading the books about the north country that I've been buying. Jim got his rolls of film ready to mail when we reach Alaska. He's planning to mail five rolls every day. On no day will any two of the five rolls be ones he exposed in the same place. His photos are very precious to him, and he doesn't want put all his eggs in one basket--like mailing his 60 odd rolls at one time. So I can see us: Every day we'll be dragging the trailer all over some small town trying to find the post office. It'll be a chore, but I agree completely with his strategy.

The highlight of our day today was a visit from Julie Frisch, the widow of Robert Frisch, who wrote the book, *Birds by the Dempster*, which we've found so helpful. I had made an annotated list of the birds we saw along the highway and given it to the folks in the little nature center here, and she wanted a copy, too. (A copy is appended to this log.)

She's thinking of revising the book on her own and was happy to get my input based on our two weeks on the highway. Apparently very few birders in the local area do much birding on the Dempster, so our findings would be very useful. It seems strange, as a total stranger to an area, to be adding info. which the local folks are not aware of. It really brings home to us what a wilderness this is. We're so used to the multitudes of birders in Southern California. Anyway, I'm happy our findings will be used.

She's a charming person, and we had a nice chat. She's also trying to get a contract from the Yukon Department of Tourism to prepare a detailed guide to the Dempster Highway. They have a short guide, a draft copy of which we took along with us. We gave her a number of suggestions of things we had wondered about as we drove the road. [We redrove the road 20 years later--see diary on this website--and found she had indeed written the books she planned, and again met her, along with her daughter, working in the beautiful new visitors center--no more scroungy old trailer.]

Same place

11:20 am, Tuesday, July 9, 1991

The day dawned nice and sunny, so Jim decided to set up his blind and try to get photos of the Merlins coming and going from their nest. He finally succeeded in getting the male, but still would like the female. Unfortunately the clouds are coming back, so he may not be able to.

After breakfast I decided to take the truck back up to North Fork Pass, about six miles north. Julie Frisch had said that Wheatears are seen rarely along the road up there. I had no success with the Wheatears, but did take about a roll of scenics. The rain at our elevation had been snow just a bit higher. There was even a light dusting on the vegetation at the top of the pass; I took a photo of snow on a patch of fireweed. Unfortunately I didn't realize until I had driven on that Jim had his polaroid filter on the camera. I had wondered why some of the scenes looked so dark through the view-finder. Anyway I'm afraid the pictures won't be any good. I took the filter off and drove back down, but by then the clouds had obscured much of the scene, the foreground was in shadow, and the wind had blown most of the snow off the fireweed. (I really should use that camera more often, so I'd know how it works.)

We've spent quite a bit of time watching the Merlins. The male seems to do all the hunting, bringing food for both the female and the large chick. The male is quite light-colored, while the female is quite dark. Both seem to fit the characters for Taiga Merlin, (*columbarius* sub-species), though.

The temperature outside right now is 43°, and Jim is pretty cold. One thing good about the cold is that it has almost completely cleared the area of mosquitos and other insect pests.

I don't know how long we'll stay here. Frankly I'm ready to move on to Dawson City, but I can understand Jim's desire for good photos of those Merlins.

One of the naturalists, Leslie Piercy, in the little nature center expressed an interest in purchasing some of Jim's photographs. We intend to get several prints made and send them without charge.

GuggieVille RV Park, Dawson City, YK

10:00 am, Thursday, July 11, 1991

Jim finally tore himself away from the Merlin project at about 1:30 p.m. Tuesday. He was disappointed not to get a first class picture of the female Merlin, although he did get something when we were there the first time. He was cold, the clouds were starting to solidify, and 2:00 check-out time was fast approaching, so he gave up.

We drove to Dawson in a couple of hours. The fires at the start of the Dempster Highway were pretty well out--just a few bits of smoke here and there. I guess the rains had helped. We were amazed to see that the tussocks of blackened grass all had crowns of 3-inch high new green grass all over them. Two weeks after the fire, yet!

GuggieVille RV park is named for an old mine in the area, I think. There's a sign out by the road, but we have yet to stop and read it. Right now it's raining again, or I'd check it out now.

[Later: We finally read that sign. It was named for the Guggenheim family, which owned one of the large companies that finished extracting the gold from the area. They had their shops and supply depots on this site.]

We spent yesterday morning washing. I washed clothes while Jim washed the truck and trailer.

Then in the afternoon we wandered around Dawson. The first order of business was to get tickets for the Gaslight Follies last evening. The box office opened at 1:00. Then we went into a little jewelry store, where Jim bought a gold nugget charm for his mother's birthday. It turned out that the sweet, vivacious young clerk in the store was the heroine in the evening's melodrama. She told us that most of the actors in the show are college students from various places. By combining acting in

the evenings with clerking during the day, she will go home at the end of the summer with a good part of her year's college expenses earned.

The rest of the afternoon we wandered around down-town Dawson. I visited the gift shops, while Jim drove around town taking pictures. I didn't buy much--just a book on recognizing wild berries.

I was disappointed that there has been almost no progress on restoring and opening some of the early buildings. In fact, at least one of the buildings which Mother and I visited in 1975 was no longer open. The Bank of Commerce building down by the waterfront, with its assay office, had been an interesting one then. Today it looks as though it is slowly sinking into the permafrost.

One thing that may have caused a major setback was a flood in May of 1979. The ice in the Yukon River piled up into a major jam, and the river backed up, flooding the entire downtown area a foot or two in depth. They've now built a 6-foot levee to prevent that from happening again. The gravel top of the levee makes a nice place to stroll.

The Gaslight Follies last evening was lots of fun. They do two shows, instead of just one, as they did in 1975. Last night's was a full-length melodrama. The acting was excellent, and we enjoyed it thoroughly. We're going to go to the show tonight, too. It's a vaudeville program.

We had thought we'd only spend two nights here, but there are still a number of places we have yet to visit. We'll certainly go to the museum downtown and, if the rain ever stops, drive out the Bonanza Creek Road to where it all began with the staking of the first rich claims in 1896 by George Carmacks and his Indian companions, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie. The gold had actually been discovered by Robert Henderson, but Carmacks betrayed his confidence (some say) and staked his claim first.

Most people know of the massive gold rush that followed--the last major gold rush in the world. The terrible trail of '98 over the Chilkoot Pass between Skagway and Lake Bennett, when men had to make trip after trip over the pass to carry the requisite 900 lb of gear, then the long trip on a home-made raft down the Yukon River was the most popular route, but there were others. Some people (who could afford it) went entirely by ship to the mouth of the Yukon in western Alaska, then up the river. There were also a couple of all-Canadian routes for the patriotic sort. One particularly hazardous one involved floating down the MacKenzie River to its mouth near the Arctic Ocean (where Inuvik is now), then up the Rat River, portaging over a high pass, then floating down the Porcupine River to the Yukon and *up* the Yukon to Dawson. Many didn't make it before the winter set in.

The first gold was taken out of the streams by men who staked small claims and used low-tech methods. Later these claims were consolidated and reworked by more and more thorough methods. Today the entire area is covered with the huge gravel piles and ridges left by the mammoth gold dredges which finished the process. The last gold dredge stopped in its tracks in 1965, although there are a few small-scale operators still working. Most people have given up on finding the Mother Lode, if there is one.

Dawson City has had major fluctuations in population. During the peak of the gold rush, it had around 30,000 people. Most lived in highly impermanent structures--whatever they could throw together--for they had no intention of staying any longer than it took to grab their fortune. Lots of people simply dragged their Yukon rafts ashore and lived atop them in tents. Others put up various sorts of shacks. The best housing was log cabins.

After the gold rush ended, there was a gradual decline in the population. The "last boat" up the Yukon to Whitehorse every September was a poignant occasion, as old friends parted for the last time. The population reached its lowest number in the early 1930's, when only a couple hundred people remained. Then as the Depression continued, gold took on more value and the large commercial gold-extracting companies moved in. Today there is a permanent population of around 1500-2000 people. This is, of course, greatly augmented by the summer influx of tourists.

Mother will recall the "hotel" where we stayed when we were here in 1975. It was just a row of small mobile home units lined up end to end. Today, on the same property, I think, there is a large gray clapboard hotel, called the Westmark. It fits into the town very nicely. We've seen Westmark

Hotels in several towns we've visited. I think they're owned by the Westours Company, the largest tour company up here and the one we traveled with in 1975. Certainly they're where all the bus tours stay. I'm so happy we're not on a bus tour. That 1975 trip made me swear off them forever. We were made to feel like so many head of cattle. We'd paid extra for separate rooms, but were often forced to double up. I'd certainly recommend that anyone contemplating a guided tour to Alaska select one of the smaller companies, not Westours. (There are birding tours.)

I'm going to save this for several days till we get to our first U.S. post office. You'll probably get it sooner that way, and it'll cost me less on top of it.

Walker Fork BLM Campground, 14 miles E of Chicken, AK

7:22 pm, Friday, July 12, 1991

After more than two months on the road, we finally made it to Alaska.

Yesterday afternoon after finishing up the printing of the log, we went into Dawson City to the museum. They had a number of interesting exhibits, including a completely furnished version of a Sourdough's cabin and of a living room as it might have looked early in the 1900's, when everyone who was "someone" in town had to be right in style with everyone else--even if the style was three years behind Paris, or even San Francisco. We also watched a very scratched movie on the Chilkoot Trail--one I think I saw on TV 10 years or so ago.

The vaudeville show at the Gaslight Follies was not as good as the melodrama the night before. They tried to present the '90's from a "contemporary point of view." Unfortunately many of their skits came off more like TV skits of 10 or 20 years ago. When they tried to get a bit intellectual with their humor by doing an excruciatingly long take-off on Shakespeare, who was apparently popular here in the '90's, they lost me completely. Only in the second half, when they attempted to be more true to the entertainment of the period, did I really enjoy myself.

This morning we awoke to more cloudy skies, and it rained while I was fixing breakfast. It had stopped when we finished eating, so we took the 9 mile road up Bonanza Creek to look at the tailings left from the gold dredging. The place looks like a disaster area, with huge piles of gravel everywhere. One of the huge gold dredges is still there and being restored as a tourist attraction.

It was 11:00 (check-out time) when we pulled out of GuggieVille Campground. We had to wait for a couple of ferry crossings before we got across the Yukon. It was close to noon when we finally got across and up to the top of the grade. (We stopped a number of times for Jim to take panoramic shots of the town, the Klondike River, etc.)

After stopping at a roadside rest area to fix lunch, we drove westward on the Top of the World Highway. It was 66 miles to the Alaska Border, and 13 miles later we picked up the Taylor Highway. The Canada portion of the road was fairly good, but not nearly as good as the Dempster. It had quite a few chuck-holes. The Alaska portion was much worse. It was narrower and much rougher--almost constant chuck-holes and rocks protruding up from the roadbed. In addition, it had a lot of steep grades, which we had to take in first gear, both up and down. It was very slow going; we probably averaged around 20 mph. We covered 26 miles of it and have 82 more to go before reaching paved road.

Jim had been intrigued by the idea of driving up to Eagle, but that town is 65 miles north of this highway and probably on similar (or worse) roadbed. His interest cooled off rather quickly by the time he had driven the 13 miles between the border and the junction to Eagle. Eagle is a historic town on the Yukon River and only sounded mildly interesting to me. We're in a BLM campground on the Walker Fork of the Forty Mile River--a river which has been heavily dredged in many places for gold. Our campsite is right near a small ramp down to the river. We thought it would just be used for putting canoes into the water, but much to our disgust, along came a truck a bit bigger than a pickup truck. It parked headed down towards the edge of the water and proceeded to use its engine racing at full blast to power some sort of mining equipment. Apparently the entire river is staked out into mining claims. I guess this guy's claim is right here! We were thankful that he only ran the thing for

an hour. The local people sometimes work at all hours of the day or night, because it never gets dark.

While eating dinner we found Slate-colored Juncos (ad and juv), a juvenile White-crowned Sparrow and an Orange-crowned Warbler that had so little yellow on it that I almost mistook it for a Tennessee--until I was able to see that its undertail coverts were yellow. We may stick around tomorrow and see if Jim can photograph them.

[He got excellent photos of the juvenile Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow. I've used them often, and they've been published once or twice.]

Klutina Salmon Camp, Copper Center, AK

7:58 pm, Tuesday, July 16, 1991

The last several days have been so uneventful that I didn't bother to write them up daily.

We spent most of the next morning in Walker Fork. I walked around the campground looking for birds and looking at wildflowers. I found very few of the former, but several nice new ones of the latter. The new ones were:

Dune Goldenrod (*Solidago decumbens*)

Liquorice-Root or Bear Root (*Hedysarum alpinum*) - a vetch, pea fam.

Kotzebue Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia kotzebuei*) - saxifrage fam.

The birds in the boreal forest are few in both number and variety. Now the ones that are there seem to be quieting down as they finish up the breeding season.

We left around 11:30 and drove the 14 miles or so to Chicken for lunch. The road was quite narrow and rough, so it took us nearly an hour to get there.

Chicken is the *only* community between Dawson and Tok--a distance of around 250 miles--but it isn't much of a place. About all there is there is a scattering of decrepit buildings. We ate lunch (hamburgers, not chicken) in a cafe that looked as though it was put together by Walter Knott for a tourist attraction, but I actually think it came by its "architecture" naturally. It consisted of several tiny buildings all attached and strung out in a line--gift shop, liquor store, saloon, cafe. Each one seemed to be using its neighbor(s) for support.

One tale about the origin of the name of the town, Chicken, is that the old-timers wanted to name it Ptarmigan, but couldn't spell that.

We continued on down the road after lunch. At first it seemed to be getting better, and we had perhaps 15 miles of wide, fairly smooth gravel, but then it narrowed again. It wasn't quite so narrow as it had been earlier, but it more than made up for it in roughness. The Alaska Highway Dept. crews "repair" the road by spreading on top of it a mixture of rocks, gravel, and dirt--just the way it comes out of the gravel pit--or streambed. Many of the rocks are bigger than soft balls, but are rarely as round. (We passed through one stretch where they were spreading that very material on the road.) Furthermore they don't seem to do that very often, for potholes are almost unavoidable. Jim drove the road at an average of about 20 mph, but to me as a passenger even that seemed way too fast.

About 14 miles short of Tok we finally reached the paved Alaska Highway. What a relief to be back on smooth road for a change.

But our miles of pounding on that "gravel" were about to catch up with us. We had gone perhaps 12 of those 14 miles when a man in a pickup truck signaled for us to pull over. He informed us that we had a flat tire on the trailer! (It's impossible to feel flats on the trailer as we drive along, but Jim had stopped to look over the tires not too long before we came to the end of the dirt road.) Fortunately there was a good place to pull completely off the road right there. (It seemed to be an abandoned business property.) So Jim, tired as he was from all that driving, set about jacking up the trailer and changing the tire.

Then as he let the trailer down to the ground, he discovered that the other tire on that side would not bear the weight. Why it hadn't gone down before, we don't know. So he had to jack it up

again and change that tire, too. Were we ever glad we had two spares!

We drove on into Tok and were thrilled to discover a Grizzly Tire Store, which had lots of tires of our brand and size, so we bought 2 new ones. Amazingly enough they cost us about \$10.00 less apiece than Jim had paid for the originals at home just before we left on the trip. Then the man in the garage pointed out to Jim that the tires were not exactly parallel, which was caused by a bent axle. We decided that, besides the awful road, this might be part of our tire wear problem, so we figured we had better wait for them to order a new axle. Since it was then Saturday evening, they couldn't order it until Monday, nor install it until Tuesday. So we went on down the road about 3/4 mile and found a lovely campsite at the Sourdough Campground. Widely spaced sites with lots of trees between them were delightful, and practically unheard of were the full hookups. It was kind of nice to be able to use a bit more water for washing and showers--something we can't do with our 20 gallon gray water holding tank.

Sunday morning Jim glanced at the tires, and, believe it or not, a third tire was low. So off it came and was duly replaced at the Grizzly Tire Store. He's going to replace the fourth one with a matching spare that we brought with us, so we should get home with no problem. We only have a couple hundred miles of gravel road (plus whatever construction zones we encounter), and they are in Canada, where the roads are better than in Alaska.

We ate a couple of meals in restaurants in Tok, but neither was particularly satisfactory. The first was a dinner at a salmon-bake restaurant. "Baked" salmon up here means grilled over charcoal, flavored with some sort of wood, usually poplar. That part is fine, but unfortunately this salmon had been marinated in some sort of a sweet sauce, which I did not think went with the fish. To top it off, the only lemon they had was that awful preserved lemon juice that comes on those lemon-shaped plastic bottles.

The second unsatisfactory meal was the sourdough pancakes we had at the little restaurant in connection with our Sourdough Campground. They were tough, scorched on too hot a griddle, and not the least bit sour. But we're going to keep trying to get good ones someplace up here.

We spent the two days resting and doing a bit of shopping. After the hectic pace of the past several weeks, that was actually rather welcome. I did add several new flowers to my list:

Through-wort or Throughwax (*Bupleurum triradiatum*) - bright yellow, parsley family

Northern Bedstraw (*Galeum boreale*) - madder fam.

Rough Cinquefoil (*Potentilla norvegica*) - rose fam., sort of weedy

Elegant Poison Camas, Mountain Death Camas or White Camas (*Zygadenus elegans*) - a very pretty member of the lily family. On the base of each of the 6 petals is a chartreuse spot, which contains the deadly poison. I think this poison was used by the Indians on spear heads or something, but my book didn't mention it.

For various reasons which I don't understand, they didn't find out until Tuesday (today) morning that there were no axles to fit our trailer anywhere in Alaska. So we decided to continue on with the one we had. It's only slightly bent.

In order to save Denali National Park for a bit later in the season, when some of the crowds of people will have gone home, we decided to head south and visit several coastal towns first. So we drove south on the Glenn Highway to Glennallen, where we continued south on the Richardson Highway, which terminates in Valdez. The day was overcast and it rained a bit, but still we could see the massive Wrangell Mountains to our west. We were sorry not to see them on a clear day.

We're camped in a private campground by a popular salmon-fishing river. Nearly everyone else in this nearly-full campground seems to spend the entire day fishing, either from shore or from powerful boats run by the people who own the camp. We were lucky enough to get a site off at one end with only a pile of trash between us and the river! The other sites were jammed right next to one another.

The river is very deep and swift, so there are few places where a fisherman (or -woman or -child) can wade, and certainly a small outboard motor could not buck the current. They're catching the bright red sockeye salmon--but not in very great quantities.

Right outside our trailer are:

Strawberry Blite (*Chenopodium capitatum*) - cute 1"- diameter clusters of minute crimson berries. Leaves edible, but not the berries. I don't know why they name it "blite." Couldn't find the word in the dictionary.
Siberian Aster (*Aster sibiricus*)

Valdez Glacier City Campground, Valdez, AK

4:31 pm, Wednesday, July 17, 1991

We didn't linger long in the campground this morning--just long enough for Jim to take some photos of the people cleaning their early morning catch of fish and of the Herring Gulls eating the leftovers.

We continued on south the last 109 miles to Valdez. The scenery was spectacular, especially the last part through the mountains. Unfortunately we encountered clouds and scattered drizzle through that part, but even so we enjoyed it very much. I hope it'll be sunny when we drive back up the road. We made a number of stops for pictures, including the Worthington Glacier, which one can walk up to--if one is more sure-footed than I, that is.

We got into town around 3:00 (or even sooner, if you count the fact that the City Limits sign for Valdez is around 20 miles up the road). The campground we chose is off on a side road and seems like it is out in the country. In fact, there are "Beware of Bear" warnings all over.

After unhitching the trailer we drove into the main part of town to do a bit of shopping and to look the place over. We found several places where photos seem possible, especially of the Arctic Terns which fly back and forth over the harbor and the Glaucous-winged Gulls that hang around the fish plants. Jim got a life bird--Northwestern Crow. That means, of course, that he managed to photograph it--in the rain, foraging atop a dumpster!

We hope the weather will clear up. If so, we may take a boat trip to the Columbia Glacier. We inquired, and they still have openings for most trips in the next couple of days. We have no intention of going if it's raining, though. Photos would be impossible, and the mountains would be shrouded in clouds, so we couldn't see the beauty of this country. I saw it once in the rain--in 1975--and have no desire to see it again that way.

Sea Otter RV Park, Valdez, AK

5:03 pm, Thursday, July 18, 1991

This morning dawned cloudy, but it was not raining, nor did it rain all day. It was quite bright, and occasionally we saw glimpses of sun shining through very tiny blue spots. Most of the mountain tops which surround the narrow fjord-like inlet where Valdez is located were visible off and on all day. Their glacier-clad tops really make for a dramatic setting.

We drove up the pot-hole filled road toward the Valdez Glacier, but were stopped by the lake at the terminus. It looked as though the glacier itself has retreated quite a bit in the last few years. In fact we could barely see the top of it from the end of the road. The lateral moraine and the edge of a mountain slope were in the way.

Then we went back down to the harbor area. Jim stood on the edge of the water beside the road shooting Arctic Terns and whatever else came by. I took a walk out on an old road on the shore of a sort of peninsula that jutted out into the marsh. The peninsula was obviously a natural feature and had probably been an island before they brought in rocks and gravel to make the harbor. The little gravel road went between the shoreline and a steep 50-foot boulder-strewn slope, covered with vegetation. There were various trees and shrubs, so it was quite attractive. Unfortunately I saw very few land birds, none particularly remarkable.

Despite the habitat looking perfect, the only shorebirds I saw were three Whimbrels. There were lots of Gulls (Glaucous-winged, Herring, Mew, Black-legged Kittiwake) and Northwestern

Crows. In fact a pair of them took offense at my presence on the trail and for 50 yards they flew at me screaming their hoarse, high calls. They almost hit my head several times. (I hadn't taken my tape recorder with me because there were so many engines and other man-made sounds. However, those crows were so close, I think they would have drowned out all the urban sounds.

After a lunch of delicious fried halibut and chips at a local fast-food restaurant, we returned to the harbor area. This time we looked again at the RV park out on the end of the wide outer breakwater. It looked too nice to pass up, so we rented a site immediately and went back and got the trailer, happily forfeiting the \$5.00 we had paid for another night in the wooded city park campground.

As I write this, I'm looking out at the entrance to the harbor. The rocks which slope down to the channel are only 8 feet from my window. I've been sitting here for several hours watching the traffic in and out. The gulls and terns sail by, too, hovering in the wind right outside the window. In the background across the inlet I can see the tank farm and other facilities where oil tankers are loaded from the end of the Alaska Pipeline. All around are the precipitous peaks of the mountains. It's supposed to rain tonight and tomorrow, so we may wait out the showers right here. I certainly can't think of a more interesting place to spend a rainy day.

There's a fish market over by the entrance to the RV park, and I bought some fresh salmon to cook for dinner. They also had lovely fresh halibut, sole, and red snapper, so I suspect we'll feast on fish dinners as long as we remain here.

8:00 p.m same day.

Update on the "Things Seen Out the Window" list: several sea otters floating around all the time, 2 Bald Eagles that came in and landed on the breakwater at the opposite side of the channel, a Marbled Murrelet fishing in the channel.

The salmon was wonderful. I think I'm going to have a hard time leaving this place.

Same place 2 days later

9:17 am, Sunday, July 21, 1991

Well, the sun finally came out. I'm sitting here on the bed in the trailer looking out at spectacular Valdez Bay, with the water sparkling and the snow-dotted mountain-tops jutting boldly up into the blue. Jim's outside trying to decide whether to have his camera rigged to shoot flying Arctic Terns (fairly close) or diving Marbled Murrelets (rather far out on the water). He'd rather shoot the terns, because flying birds are a real challenge. I'm afraid the Murrelets are more of a frustration than a challenge. They come up most anywhere, take a breath, then dive headed for who knows where, only to repeat the process. When fishing they spent nine-tenths of their time underwater--which makes them rather difficult to photograph! There are several of them around, in various stages of transition from breeding to winter plumage. I told Jim they might be more inclined to pose if he'd call them by their right name, rather than "little poop" and other such appellations which he has resorted to due to his frustration in trying to photograph them.

Friday was cloudy, but fairly bright with occasional tiny peeks at blue sky. Most of the mountain tops were clear of clouds, so the day was a study in shades of slate blue, silver and white, with occasional spots of golden sun here and there on the mountains.

In the morning we drove around the bay toward the pipeline terminal. They admit no visitors to the terminal itself, except on tour groups, and we didn't care to take one of those. Along the way we crossed the outlet stream from Valdez Glacier. There gulls, ravens and (Northwestern) crows were swarming over the gravel beds, feeding on the dying salmon, which had just spawned.

Farther on we came to a large salmon hatchery. There salmon native to that "stream" return and are "milked" of their eggs. These are fertilized by sperm from the males. The hatchlings are kept protected for various lengths of time (a year for silvers, several months for the larger species) and then released.

Of course, no fishing is permitted around the hatchery--except by gulls (previous species plus Bonaparte's). There were lots of them, and Jim photographed them for a while, but it was really too dark to get first-class pictures.

A bit farther along the road, fishing *is* permitted, and so is free parking for as long as you care to stay. The wide gravel roadside was lined for a couple of miles with RV's of all descriptions. There the people were mostly fishing from shore and doing quite well catching salmon for their own use.

On the way back we found a Bald Eagle nest with a couple of nearly grown eaglets in it. The light was poor, but Jim tried to get it anyway with his 1000 mm lens on a tripod.

We returned to the trailer around noon, because we had our name in for another site with a better view. It was ours if the former occupants didn't renew by noon. They didn't, and we moved. Unfortunately we later found out that the site next to it, which had no number, was also open for rental. The numbered sign had just fallen off and not been replaced. So our view wasn't perfect. Luckily the neighbors have a motorhome built on a pickup truck and use it for transportation. They're away most of the day.

I went over to the fish market and bought some halibut and salmon and made a delicious fish chowder for lunch. The recipe was in a Salmon Cook Book that I had bought, but, true to form, I modified it a bit. We finished off the day with fillet of sole for dinner--dipped in egg and flour and sauteed.

Yesterday the weather finally cleared, with just a few clouds lingering over the mountaintops. It was glorious, so we decided to take one of the excursion boat trips in the afternoon. We bought our tickets for the 2:00 sailing, then went back over to the salmon hatchery. Along the way we stopped at the eagle's nest for a while, but the light was still wrong--needs to be done in the afternoon. Jim photographed gulls for a time and also got a few long shots of a group of female (and possibly immature) Harlequin Ducks. The latter he did under protest, but I really wanted photos of female Harlequins--even at a distance--because we do not have them in the slide Library.

In the afternoon we took our boat ride. The RV park has an ancient bus in which they took us to the boat dock. We were happy to leave our truck in the relative security of the RV park, rather than in a parking lot near the boat terminal, where anyone would know we were gone for 5 hours. The Lulu Belle was an elegant cruise boat with beautifully polished wood panelling and Persian-design rugs laid over all-over carpeting. Even the screws which fastened the railing together had their slots all oriented the same direction! We elected to ride outside in deck chairs. There was plexiglas (or something) below the railing, so we could see both above and below it. Unfortunately the railing itself was placed so the shoreline was right in front of my eyes unless I slouched down or sat up abnormally straight.

Along the way we saw scores of small commercial salmon-fishing boats. They each have a huge net which they use a powered skiff to unfurl about 100 yd out from the boat. The skiff usually uses its motor to hold itself against the shore, or at least stationary, while the fishing boat makes a big circle, paying out the net until the circle is completed. Then the net is reeled back onto the boat, cinching up the net until only a small portion of the net containing the fish is left. This is then hoisted up and dumped into the hold of the boat. The various fish processing plants in town have larger boats which go out and buy the fish from these smaller vessels. Fishing is apparently only permitted on certain days, for last evening there was a steady stream of boats coming into the harbor, and this morning only the sports-fishing boats went out. I'm sure they don't all stay home on Sunday because they're good Christians observing a day of rest!

We didn't see much wildlife along the way--just a few eagles in the distance (one nest) and some Steller's Sea Lions relaxing on a buoy. Of course there were always a few gulls flying around.

Our main destination was the Columbia Glacier. I'm sure Mother will remember our visit to that in 1975. We were on the Glacier Queen traveling from Whittier to Valdez with a stop at the glacier. It was a miserable rainy day then, but still the glacier was most impressive. When we rounded the bend we saw a low wall of ice ahead of us with the wrinkled dirty ice field sloping up behind it. As we steamed closer and closer the "low" wall turned out to be a 300-foot high cliff. Although the boat

stayed at least 1/4 mile away from the precipice, it seemed as though we were right under it. During the half hour or so that we were there, we watched (and heard!) many enormous chunks of ice shear off from the cliff and crash into the water. Their "ripples" really set the boat to rocking. It was a thrilling and somewhat intimidating experience.

All that has changed completely now. In 1977 the glacier started a rapid decline. The first thing that happened was that a crack developed clear across the glacier about 3 miles back from the cliff face. Then sea water seeped into the crack, which accelerated the melting of the ice. So it began breaking up into huge chunks. These chunks could not float freely out to sea though, because the terminal moraine blocked them.

When a glacier moves down a slope, it grinds the rock into gravel and even dust. This gravel pile is pushed ahead of it all the way. When we were looking at that cliff which was the toe of the glacier in 1975, the cliff face extended as much as 2700 feet under the water, but the gravel moraine wouldn't have been nearly so far below the surface. When the glacier started to recede, this ridge of gravel prevented the ice from moving out to sea until it had broken up into pieces small enough to float over this terminal moraine. Since 90% of any piece of floating ice is under water, that means pretty small pieces.

Yesterday we saw glimpses of the sheer glacial cliff face from 3 miles away, but over a sea of jumbled-together icebergs between us and that face. It was easy to see the location of the terminal moraine 60 ft below the surface of the water. In front of it were small widely scattered pieces of ice. Behind it were big chunks all massed together. The boat was able to cross the moraine in one spot where the ice had parted a bit. The captain called out the depths from his instrument as he did so. But we were only able to sail a few hundred feet into that one little embayment. He told us that in 1988 the ice shifted enough so they could go up to within 1/4 mile of the glacial face for a while that summer.

Even though it did not have the excitement of our 1975 experience, it was interesting to see how the glacier has changed. The jumbled up icebergs behind the moraine were popular with Harbor Seals. Lots of them were flopped out on the ice napping. The Black-legged Kittiwakes were common, too, and we were told that they wait for a bit of ice to break off and then converge on the fish that the crash stir up.

On the way back we saw Bligh Island (named for Captain Bligh, who later became famous for the Mutiny on the Bounty) and the tower warning ships of Bligh Reef where the Exxon Valdez ran aground in 1989. Our boat captain had nothing but scorn for the ineptitude of anyone who would run a boat aground in that wide expanse of water.

He really defended the oil industry for its good housekeeping practices around the terminal. He said that the presence of all those healthy sea otters, whose fur can't stand the least bit of oil, is a good indication of a healthy marine environment. Incidentally the oil spill did not wash up into Valdez Arm. Instead it washed out into the more open waters of Prince William Sound.

Our captain did not defend the Alyeska Company (oil consortium) for its lack of preparedness for oil-spill cleanup, however. Apparently they had become complacent and gradually dismantled the clean-up equipment that they had had at first. After the spill they got better prepared again in a hurry! In fact, right across the little harbor opening from where we're situated is a large old oil tanker, which is just docked there ready to go out to pump the oil out of a tanker that might be in trouble.

The oil terminal is located within the city limits of Valdez. Because of that, the taxes it pays have given the city more money than it knows how to spend wisely. They've built a huge dock for containerized cargo, along with a half-dozen grain elevators. There's very little demand for large amounts of cargo in Valdez, and so far no one has figured out how to grow grain in Alaska. There's also a huge convention center in town, but apparently little demand by conventioners to come to this city of 3000 or so people, where it snows 10 times as much as it does in Anchorage and where it rains more often than not in the summer. Other more appropriate signs of these riches are all over this quite attractive little town.

Certainly the influx of cash came when they really needed it, for the town had been totally

destroyed in the 1964 earthquake/tsunami and relocated in a safer site. Pipeline construction and the hoards of rough characters who came up here to work on it also caused major changes in this formerly sleepy fishing village. But things have settled down now, and there is now a balance between fishing and oil-terminal activities--plus tourism.

The inflation of pipeline-construction times has ended, too. The prices here seem comparable, and perhaps somewhat less, than those we found in Tok. I still remember what we paid in 1975 for a hamburger--just a plain old dried-up hamburger--\$5.00, and those were 1975 dollars.

Our neighbors--the ones blocking the view--just came back from fishing and gave us four lovely *big* silver salmon, all beautifully cleaned. (Silver salmon, sometimes called Coho salmon, are the smallest species. I've been served one whole salmon at home in restaurants.) I'm going to make another pot of fish chowder with one, use one for dinner tonight, one tomorrow night, and freeze the fourth.

Same place

9:11 pm, Sunday, July 21, 1991

The sun has just set--behind a tall mountain, not the true horizon. But out on the bay there is still sunshine. I just returned from a little walk along the waterfront. On the water were literally hundreds of gulls in a feeding frenzy over a great school of fish that must have been 100 yards long. The Black-legged Kittiwakes were hovering from 1 to 10 feet in the air and diving down, while the larger Glaucous-wings were able to make little surface dives. Neither species was penetrating the water more than a few inches, though. There were probably other species there, too, but they were hard to identify from that distance, and these two were the majority of the flock. What a lovely sight they made, with the still sun-lit mountains behind them. Jim took pictures, but of course his stills could not capture the shimmering motion of those hundreds of gleaming birds.

Same place

8:38 am, Monday, July 22, 1991

This morning another of the unpleasant side effects of a pipeline terminal in this narrow fjord is more than evident. The air is very still and the sky overcast. But instead of the crystal clear view of the mountains across the way, the image is marred by an ugly white band about 1/3 of the way up. It's the smoke from the stacks of the oil tankers docked across the bay. Whenever the air is still, the inversion layer traps the pollutants right below it, but this morning it seems more evident than we've seen it before. I'm sure all the little fishing boats here in Valdez Harbor contribute to the smog, but it always seems worse where the supertankers are docked.

Tolsona Wilderness Campground

14 mi. W of Glennallen, AK

4:49 pm, Monday, July 22, 1991

After breakfast this morning we drove back over to the vicinity of the Bald Eagle nest by the pipeline terminal. Jim had met a woman there the previous day who showed him another raptor nest. She said it was "a Gyrfalcon or Peregrine or something." Jim looked at it with the scope, but chicks, even well grown ones, are hard to ID. When he told me of it, I doubted it was either of those falcons, for they prefer a more open habitat with tall cliffs and/or open tundra. I thought it might be a Goshawk. Anyway we wanted to find out for sure.

When I put the scope on the nest, the chicks were indeed hard to ID, since they still had much of their down. They seemed very chunky, though--more like Buteos, but which one? It wasn't until we finally caught sight of an adult, which seemed to be chasing two Bald Eagles away from the

vicinity of the nest, that we had a hint. Still it was a problem. The bird was chocolate brown with some white flecking on the head and on the back/scapular area. The flight feathers were nearly white, but with a broad dark terminal band on the tail.

Finally I caught sight of Harlan's Red-tail in the book. Of course! That bird has practically no red on the tail, but otherwise resembles some of our Southern Calif. dark-morph Red-tails. Furthermore, that's precisely the race which breeds in Alaska. It was a first for me, but not for Jim. (He can't count it, because he didn't photograph it. Of course, it's no longer considered a full species.) The nest was too far away from the road to photograph, and if he had approached it closer, he'd have been lower down and at a still worse angle. Besides, the terrain was very brushy and looked wet.

After that excursion, we returned to the trailer, hooked up and left. We retraced our route up the Richardson Hwy. to the junction with the Glenn Highway at Glennallen. Then we headed west about 14 miles toward Anchorage. We found a very nice campsite in a private campground 3/4 mile north of the highway. It's located along a crooked little stream, and we have a nice site almost hanging over the water. I took a little walk around the grounds a while ago, but unfortunately the mosquitos have the birds outnumbered at least 1000 to 1. In fact, I only saw one bird, a Wilson's Warbler. Besides that, the only birds around seem to be the Cliff Swallows nesting over on the office building. I'm afraid there aren't enough of them to make a dent in the mosquito population.

Homestead RV Park, Palmer, AK
8:16 pm, Tuesday, July 23, 1991

Another day of driving today brought us to Palmer, heart of the Matanuska Valley. The sky was mostly cloudy, but with periods of sunshine. The scenery in the foreground was mainly spruce forest--sometimes fairly tall, sometimes stunted tipsy muskeg. In the distance most of the way we could see the spectacular Chugach Mountains.

We stopped for lunch at one of those roadside establishments with every service for the traveler. This time I was amazed to see chimichangas on the menu, so ordered one. It was delicious. In fact, Mexican food is not at all hard to come by up here. I stocked my freezing compartment with several dozen tortillas before I left home, but they're available in all the Alaska groceries along with a good selection of salsas.

We stopped at a muskox farm--one of only one or two in Alaska. I wanted to buy myself a qiviut scarf--made from the highly insulating underhair of the animals. It's supposed to be 8 times warmer than sheep's wool. I had been sorry that I hadn't gotten something made from that yarn when we were here years ago, so this time I gulped and paid the price (\$150) for the lovely hand-knit scarf. They do not sell the yarn. It is knit up by the Eskimos as sort of a cottage industry. The patterns are all very intricate and and lacy. The yarn cannot be dyed, and is available in only one color--muskox brown--but that was the color I wanted anyway.

Palmer is in the heart of the only agricultural area in Alaska. The Matanuska Valley was settled by homesteaders from northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan in the 1930's. They grow lots of vegetables of various kinds, but most are not ripe this early. The growing season is short, but the long days make up for it, and the size of the vegetables is legendary.

We stopped fairly early because we wanted to have the brakes checked on the truck; they had been chattering. It turned out they were fine, so we'll proceed south tomorrow. Maybe the vegetable stands will be open when we return this way in a couple of weeks.

Williwaw Campground, USFS nr. Portage Glacier, AK

7:10 pm, Wednesday, July 24, 1991

We spent the day poking around Anchorage, looking over places we might like to return to without the trailer on our way back north--if the sun's shining. I have a book on *Bird-finding in Anchorage*, but some of the parking spots looked as though we might not be too happy heading into them with the trailer in tow. We did find several places, though, that we might like to check out in more detail on our return, when we'll leave the trailer in an RV park.

We also did a little shopping and had lunch in a rather good Chinese restaurant. Jim bought a nice down jacket at a Burlington outlet store for about half of what they want for them at home. He'd tried to get one there, but could find nothing he even liked. His only jacket is one he bought in pre-birding days, and it has two bright diagonal stripes across the front. So he frequently freezes rather than wear it in his blind. His new one is black with brown trim, which is better looking than it sounds.

Then we continued on south toward the Kenai Peninsula towns. We didn't get very far, though. We headed up the spur road toward the Portage Glacier and are in a wooded site in a U.S. Forest Service campground. It's been drizzly and blustery ever since we got here, so we just holed up until tomorrow. I wonder if our wind was a williwaw, which the dictionary defines as "a sudden violent gust of cold land air common along mountainous coasts of high latitudes." That certainly fits where we are. The only problem is with the word "sudden." It's been blowing just about all the time for several hours.

We'll take in the glacier tomorrow. The rain is apparently just an afternoon phenomenon.

Texaco Station "RV Park," Seward, AK

4:00 pm, Friday, July 26, 1991

Yesterday morning dawned bright and clear, and the weather has been the same ever since.

We strolled around the campground and took the little nature trail for a couple of hours in the morning. We apparently timed it just right, for all the birds were just getting up into the sunshine and preening as we walked. They paid no attention to our presence right next to them. Jim photographed both a Fox Sparrow and a Golden-crowned Sparrow on branches in full sun. The Fox Sparrow seemed to be a juvenile, for although the plumage pattern was much the same as an adult, the feathers seemed looser and more fragile-looking, in accord with jv plumage. The Golden-crowned was a gorgeous adult with no hint of black flecking hiding its golden crown. I've never seen one looking that beautiful, but then I don't think I've ever seen one this time of year either. Although black feathers usually are stronger than paler ones, I suspect that in this case the black feathers are longer and so wear away. By this time, almost a year since the bird molted in late summer last year, the clear golden crown is no longer hidden.

We also saw juvenile Yellow and Wilson's warblers. Jim got photos of a couple of the Yellows. They were in varying stages of molt from their grayish jv plumage to their yellower adult plumage and were quite blotchy. We finally got away around 11:00 and drove up to the glacier. It has receded quite a bit since Mother and I saw it in 1975 from the train. In fact we could barely see it from the view points. In one place, one half of it was hidden by the side of the mountain. In the other place, the visitors center, the icebergs, which it had calved, loomed up so high that the front of the glacier was barely visible. In another 20 years, if it continues to recede as it is expected to, it won't be visible at all from any accessible spot, including the beautiful visitors center. There is a boat which goes up to the face, but we couldn't see spending \$19.50 apiece for a one hour boat ride on a tiny lake at the foot of a glacier.

Around noon we headed on south to Seward, a distance of around 80 miles through some of the most beautiful scenery I've ever seen. Each bend in the road presented a vista of a new jagged mountain peak, dotted with patches of snow. As we got a bit farther around the bend, we could see the lower slopes of the mountain with their bright green meadows intermingled with darker green

shrubs and trees. Then when we thought the scene couldn't possibly improve, a lake or river would appear at the bottom. The road was quite good, although there were some narrow stretches. At least the frost heaves were almost nonexistent.

Seward is sort of a resort town with just one RV park with hookups. But the city has ample parking for RV's in gravel lots at various spots along the water front. There is only one dump station and water source in town, so we headed for that, intending afterwards to find a waterfront site.

When Jim got out to dump the gray water and fill the tank, he was shocked to see that one of our wheels was crooked. The wheel bearings had given way completely and it looked as though the wheel was about to come off. I don't know how many miles it had been this bad, but anyway we managed to haul it three blocks farther to the only repair garage in town and are now ensconced in their back lot, surrounded by several junky relict vehicles. It's really not as bad as it sounds. We're hooked up to electricity, have no near neighbors and can see the mountains and water 100 yards away across a little park area. (There is no development right on the waterfront in most of Seward, because that area was destroyed in the 1964 tsunami.)

The wheel which was destroyed when the bearings gave way is on the bent axle that I mentioned in an earlier installment, so we *have* to replace that axle now. It took most of the morning today for the garage to locate a replacement axle, which turned out to be a little different size from the one that the man in Tok thought we should have. For a while they thought they couldn't find one at all, so Jim called the Prowler company at home and lined up one just in case. When they did locate one, it seemed to be a different size from what we thought we needed. The mechanics seemed so uncertain of what they were doing and how they were measuring for the axle, that Jim called the Prowler company in Portland again to be sure they were ordering the right thing. It seems they are, and it should get here Monday. I suppose they'll install it Tuesday.

So we're here in Seward for a few days, but there seem to be plenty of things to do. We spent the whole morning worrying about the trailer and anticipating sitting here for who knows how long waiting for an axle to be shipped up here from Portland. Now that things are more or less settled, we decided to enjoy the town and its environs. Jim went down and bought us tickets for the all-day boat tour of Kenai Fjords National Park on Sunday. They promise both species of puffins plus other sea birds. I went down town and actually spent some money in the shops. (Not being the "born to shop" type *at all*, I usually walk right in and right out of gift shops.) We're going to eat most of our meals out while we're here, because we don't have any way to empty our gray water where we're situated. I hope we do better than we did for breakfast this morning, though: tasteless dried-up pancakes, over-cooked egg and so-so bacon. Maybe the "Yakkety-Yak Eatery--Home Cooking" (really!), a generic store-front cafe that I spotted down-town will turn out to be where the locals eat. We'll try it tomorrow.

Same place

1:41 pm, Monday, July 29, 1991

Saturday was an absolutely gorgeous day. We spent it doing odds and ends here in Seward, wishing we were on the excursion boat. We did find some birds of the local race of Song Sparrow, which we mistook for Fox Sparrows at first, they were so big and so dark. Their longish, fairly narrow bill then made me want to call them some sort of blackbird, but finally I had to conclude they could be nothing but Song Sparrows. Jim got quite a few photos, so I'll be able to ponder the matter further when I get home. I suspect I'll have to read the descriptions of the various races in Bent's *Life Histories of North American Birds* to decide for sure.

We had dinner in a forgettable restaurant downtown--one of the worst combination seafood platters I've ever had, and the service was poor to boot.

Sunday dawned overcast and dreary, and it drizzled off and on all day. What a disappointing day for a boat ride. We ate breakfast at the Yakkety-Yak Eatery, which had been OK on Saturday. On Sunday, though, it took the apparently inexperienced fry cook 40 minutes to cook our breakfast and prior to that the food for just one other party of five people.

Because of that, we did not get our pick of seats on the boat. However, when the drizzle drove lots of people in-doors after a couple of hours, we got better seats. It was rather cold and damp out there, but we endured, especially since the skipper allowed people into the pilot room occasionally to dry off and warm up. (I think it was probably against regulations, because he made everyone clear out shortly before landing.)

The sights to be seen were well worth the long 9-hour trip--jagged mountains with their tops lost in the clouds; several glaciers including one tidewater one (Holgate), which calved off some nice big chunks of ice while we watched; and small islands with towering sea cliffs hundreds of feet high.

On the latter, the various species of sea birds nested. The most conspicuous were the Black-legged Kittiwake colonies with their grass nests attached who knows how to almost imperceptible outcroppings. There were also Murres--mostly Common, but I may have seen a few Thick-billed--which nest side by side on the rocky ledges. Flying back and forth to the sea were the puffins--both Tufted and Horned--whose nests were hidden back in the crevices. Other notable birds were Rhinoceros and Parakeet Auklets, whose nest sites I did not pin down. The Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, the one potential lifer that I thought I had the best chance of finding, did not appear. The skipper, who knew his birds quite well, said he'd only seen a couple of them this season.

In addition to the seabird colonies, there were lots of birds all over the waters en route. We also saw Steller's Sea Lions, Harbor Seals, Dall Porpoises and one Humpback Whale. Jim shot lots of film, perhaps more than he might have on a good day because his shutter speed was so slow. Sometimes one frame comes out good when he shoots several in a row of some dark subject.

Monday morning, when I was doing the laundry, a woman asked me if my husband was the one with the long lens. It turned out they had been on another tour boat an Sunday and had seen Jim's lens when the boats were close together at some of the important sights. They had seen me at the wildflower talk the other night and remembered me. Unfortunately I did not recognize them. Anyway her husband had been lamenting the fact that they were not on the same boat we were, because he wanted to talk photography with Jim. He is a retired portrait photographer from Florida, now free to photograph whatever he wants to. After he wandered in to see how their laundry was progressing, I sent him over to our trailer to chat with Jim. He also told us where to find Great Gray Owl in Denali N.P.

The couple were travelling with her sisters, who were in another RV. They were unhappy because the sisters wanted to keep moving, while they wanted to linger longer in various places. They plan to come back again on their own and do it at their own speed. Lots of people are a bit timid on their first trip up here and feel the need for a buddy. Actually there are so many other nice RVers around, that I doubt that they'd be stuck anywhere for very long before someone would stop to help. In fact, the lonelier the road, the more likely the assistance.

We had dinner at the Chinese restaurant in town. Every small town in the northwest (U.S. and Canada) seems to have one Chinese restaurant. This one had just about the best Chinese food I've ever eaten. The sweet-and-sour chicken had been deep fried in the lightest, crispest batter imaginable. The chicken chow-mein was stir-fried just right, and the flavor was delicate, not bland as it so frequently is. Only the egg foo-yung was unremarkable. It was all preceded by 3 types of appetizers, including fried shrimp in the same batter as the sweet-and-sour chicken and a hearty won-ton soup. We think we'll go back there again tonight. It's 2:00 now and our axle has not yet arrived from Anchorage, so it's obvious we won't be ready to travel today.

Waterfront RV Park, Seward, AK
7:38 pm, Wednesday, July 31, 1991

We ate dinner Monday at the Chinese restaurant and didn't change our mind about its quality. We had a set of totally different dishes, and all were seasoned and cooked to perfection.

Our axle arrived about 3:30 Monday, but they didn't do anything with it until Tuesday, when it took all day, because it didn't fit quite right and had to be modified. We stayed pretty close to the

trailer all day, except for going out to lunch. Jim wanted to keep track of what the mechanic was doing. Besides, the weather was pretty awful--drizzle and light rain most of the time.

They finished up around 5:30, so we decided to eat dinner in the trailer where we were, then go dump our gray water and find a waterfront site. It was the first meal I'd cooked for several days, but since we knew we could finally dump our waste water, we decided it was OK to dirty some dishes.

We're in a site which backs up to the open water of Resurrection Bay. The city of Seward filled in the land where the tsunami of 1964 washed away so many buildings and converted perhaps a half mile of waterfront to nice spacious RV parking. There's a tsunami warning siren in town that is tested at noon every day, so I guess we're pretty safe next to the water.

Last night the rain increased from light to moderate, and this morning the clouds were so low that we could barely see across the bay. We decided it would be no fun to drive across the Kenai Peninsula in such weather, so we stayed here in the trailer all day, and the rain kept up absolutely steadily until around 5:30, when it began to decrease. It's not raining now, but the forecast is for more for the next several days. This is apparently normal weather for this part of Alaska, so I guess we should just take it in stride.

When the rain stopped, I looked out the window and saw two or three shorebirds--Spotted Sandpiper, Red Knot (juvenile in nice fresh plumage) and possibly a third species. The Red Knot had me calling it a Ruff at first, because its underparts were such a warm buff and I could seldom see the head shape because it was asleep. (It's still there asleep and has been so for nearly 2 hours.) When I put the scope on it, its feather pattern could only be that of a Knot. Jim got all the photos he wanted, although the light was not the best. The third species, if there was one, was a glimpse I got through the steamed up window. It seemed fairly lanky and had a fairly long, possibly decurved bill. And I thought I saw an orange rump. When I looked up that combination of marks in the book, it could only be Bristle-thighed Curlew! But my look was so awful, I have no intention of claiming such a sighting unless I see it better. (It would be a life bird.)

Ninilchik Beach, AK

4:26 pm, Saturday, August 3, 1991

My Bristle-thighed Curlew did not pan out. I even took a walk along the water front in the light rain the next morning looking for it.

This was more than made up for by what Jim spotted while we were eating breakfast. He had the water view from his seat at the table and spotted a bird flying just above the water which did not fly like anything he'd ever seen before. It seemed a bit like a shearwater in that it skimmed the water, but its flight was more fluttery with only occasional glides. Sometimes it picked stuff up off the water, too. Finally it flew close enough for us to see plumage patterns. It was the Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel that I had hoped for on the boat--a life bird! [When I returned home in Sept., I discovered it was the big #600!] When it lit on the water and flapped its wings repeatedly, the ID was clinched. I got an even closer look when I took a walk looking for the Bristle-thighed Curlew.

We left Seward around midmorning and headed over the mountains to the Cook Inlet side of the Kenai Peninsula. We had intended to stay in either Kenai or Soldotna, where the road struck the coast, but the only places to stay were urban RV parks with jammed together sites. So we just ate lunch there and drove on down the coast road, looking for a nicer place to stop.

We found it at Clam Gulch State Park. It's billed as the best place along this coast for razor clams, and we hit it at just the right time--for us. There were no low clamming tides immediately upcoming, and, besides, the critters were spawning, when their quality isn't supposed to be so good. The result was that we had the park to ourselves Thursday night and shared it with one other group on the opposite side of the loop last night.

I would not have liked it at all had it been full, though. There were three parking lots in a big loop, and the sites were about 12 feet wide, one right next to the other. There were no hook-ups to possibly justify jamming them in like that either. That seems to be the way with Alaska State Parks.

We drove through another park a few minutes ago where the sites were more traditionally laid out, with 40 or so feet between each back-in site. The only trouble was that where most states would mark each site for one party, Alaska had them marked with two or three numbers so as to be able to jam more people in. The park had very few people when we were there, however. (They're all jammed full by the fast-flowing rivers, where salmon fishing is at its peak.)

Anyway we enjoyed our stay at Clam Gulch. We chose a site at the end of the lot that no one ever used even for day use. We thought we were going to have neighbors for a while though. A big motor home drove in around 8:00 and plunked itself down in a site only three away from us, when it could have had any one in the whole lot. After a few minutes, what did they do but move over still closer to us! All the while they kept their engine running. We couldn't figure out what they had in mind, except that they might have been afraid to be alone in a campground. Just as we were getting resigned to having a noisy neighbor, they drove completely away. We decided they were afraid to be in a campground with only one neighbor, for fear we might do something dastardly in the middle of the night--or something. Anyway we were glad to get rid of them.

This experience came after another unpleasant neighbor we'd had the night before in Seward, so we were especially sensitive. A mother with a couple of early-teen-aged kids came in around 9:30 and parked right next to us, again in a nearly empty lot. She left her engine running for 45 minutes and showed no sign of turning it off. Sometimes people run engines briefly because they generate 120 volt electricity to run microwave ovens, etc. Other times people run them for an hour or so in the middle of the day to recharge batteries. But at that time of night, we didn't know what it could be. It was certainly impossible to go to sleep with that thing roaring in our ears. Jim made a pretense of trying, but I got up and read for a while. Still the thing roared on. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer, so I got dressed and went over and asked them how much longer they were going to run their generator. (I could tell as I approached the thing that they were just running it to watch TV! Haven't they ever heard of 12 volt TV's?)

It was obvious that the woman had a guilty conscience, for she replied in the most drippy, insincere, saccharine tones, "Oh, I didn't know it would bother you. We'll leave right away."

I think she was hoping I'd say, "Oh, it's OK, please stay." But I didn't. I just said firmly, "Please do!" and walked off. Shortly thereafter they drove out of the parking lot. I don't know where they ended up, but there were 3 or 4 other similar waterfront RV lots in Seward.

Quite a few birds were present at Clam Gulch, and many of them picked right up on Jim's feeding set-up. There were lots of White-crowned Sparrows, Gray Jays, a few Dark-eyed Juncos and Lincoln's Sparrows. Many of them were juveniles, most of which I could identify, but one bird really had me puzzled. It had an orange lower mandible like a Fox Sparrow, but very little streaking on the breast. (The *Nat. Geog.* guide doesn't depict the jv. Fox Sparrow.) The bird was slightly larger than the White-crowns. It might have been a jv Golden-crowned because we both saw a hint of gold on the forehead, but we saw no adults of that species. It might even have been a jv. White-crowned younger than those around there, but I thought they had entirely pale bills. Anyway Jim took lots of photos of the thing, so I suppose I'll have to try to figure it out when I get home to more references. [Later: It was a Fox Sparrow, subspecies *sinuosa*. Fox Sparrows cannot be aged after they molt out of their downy chick plumage.]

The beach at Clam Gulch was reached by walking or driving down a steep dirt road. I thought it would be a nice Oregon-coast-type of beach with mudflats exposed at low tide. But no! The entire beach just above the high tide line was lined with commercial fishing operations. Each one consisted of an extremely ratty old trailer surrounded by a pile of junk. (Jim read a remark that the state flower of Alaska should be the rusty oil drum. There were a few of those there, too.) Some of the trailers looked as though they were never moved. One was mounted on a platform 6 feet off the ground.

Everywhere we go in Alaska, every homesite, especially the rural ones, seems to be surrounded by a collection of everything that might remotely possibly have some use sometime in the future. After our extended stay in ship-shape Canada, it's really disgusting. And to have their public beaches so blighted is especially intolerable. Alaska really cries out for more regulation and cleaning

up of its environmental assaults. I'm afraid the state has attracted too many people with the frontier mentality. Most of them came up here only recently. Just because they happen to reside here now certainly should not give them license to rape the state. It's a *national* resource.

We left Clam Gulch around 10:00 wondering where would be a good place to spend Saturday night. We'd heard that Homer was a popular place on weekends for people from Anchorage. We hadn't driven very far when we saw a sign for Ninilchik State Recreation Area. We took the side road, which went down to a fairly picturesque (for Alaska) harbor and free overnight parking on the spit. Since there weren't too many people there, we decided to stay. We talked to a man who said that the place fills up on clam tides, but this week-end is not one of them. (A clam tide is an exceptionally low tide.)

We're parked parallel to the water, and Cook Inlet is around 75 feet away across a stretch of rocky beach. Across the water we have a spectacular view of a range of snow-capped peaks, dominated by two 10,000 ft volcanos, inactive Iliamna and recently active (1989-1990) Redoubt. The latter made the news when it blasted ash all over Anchorage. Jim had his heart set on photographing Redoubt, and has gotten quite a few nice shots today.

We were afraid for a while that it was going to disappear in the fog, for around noon a fog bank appeared at the base, and gradually rose until only the tops were visible. Then it approached us and enveloped us in fog. To our surprise, a half hour later we began to see the bottoms of the volcanoes and a few minutes after that it was all clear. The whole process took perhaps an hour. Right now we can see both peaks with clouds behind them and an occasional one obscuring parts of their flanks. Jim is hoping to take some nice sunset photos--if he can stay up that late!

After a late lunch (I made more salmon chowder with the last of the fish we were given in Valdez.), we drove around the little village, which consists of three distinct districts: old Ninilchik, original Ninilchik and present-day Ninilchik, the latter spread out along the highway. The highlight was a charming 1900 Russian Orthodox church high on the hill overlooking the tiny harbor. The village dates from Russian times. (In case you've forgotten your history, the Alaska Purchase was in 1867.)

Just heard an interview with Alaska Governor Walter Hickel on public TV. He noted that 85% of the state's revenue comes from "things we hold in common" such as Prudhoe Bay. They're putting some of that into what they call the "permanent fund," which will be invested for the future. The rest is spent as it comes in. I don't know what the proportions are. The state has no sales or income tax. From the looks of the public highways, they could more taxes to improve them.

Land's End RV Park, Homer

3:57 pm, Sunday, August 4, 1991

Jim did indeed stay up to photograph the sunset at intervals as it appeared and disappeared among the layers of clouds. It was never more than merely a burnished golden, because they don't have any smog to color it up. We got to bed around 11:00.

After a late breakfast we wandered around the Ninilchik harbor and spit area. The tide was fairly low, and we found quite a few sandpipers feeding on the mud at the edge of the harbor. Nothing earthshaking, but Jim got nice photos (I think) of juvenile Semipalmated Plover, Western and Least Sandpipers. Frequently by the time they get to Calif., many of them have started to molt to basic (winter) plumage.

I spied a group of female/immature Harlequin Ducks dozing on the bank across the little channel, so we drove over there and Jim crept up on them. He said he got a few photos before they swam off.

Around 11:30 we took off and drove the last 30 miles to Homer, the last town accessible by road. Although there were a few RV parks right in town, it looked as though those out on the end of the five-mile-long spit might be more interesting, so we drove out there. It started out as a causeway with a sand/gravel beach on one side and mudflats on the lee side. There were occasional parking

areas. We almost turned around and headed back, though, for when we were about half-way out, the place started to look like Coney Island North. No amusement parks, but all sorts of junky looking gift and food shops plus a small boat harbor, assorted fish-processing plants and the ferry terminal. But I was determined that we see the whole thing, and we ended up at the very end of the spit in the second of two RV parks. We have a fairly nice site not much farther from the water than the one we had last night at Ninilchik. We're not parallel to the water, but at least the sites are diagonal. So many of the places have sites absolutely perpendicular to the view. The hookup (electric only) sites were all taken, so we dumped our gray water, forgot to fill our fresh water (!), and parked. [This RV park was in connection with a hotel. When we returned to Alaska 20 years later, the RV park had been replaced by more hotel rooms.]

Homer is situated on Kachemak Bay, an inlet off of Cook Inlet. The spit (originally a terminal moraine for a vastly receded glacier) seems to jut about half way across the bay. Boats go around to the back side to reach the little harbor.

We had no sooner sat down to lunch when Jim (who had the view seat) started spotting all sorts of sea birds right off shore. By the time we finished lunch we had seen just about all the species we had seen from the boat trip out of Seward. Unfortunately the drizzle we had been having for a couple of hours decided to turn into a legitimate moderate rain, or Jim would be out on the shore with his camera right now watching for whatever came by. Here's what we saw: Common Loon, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel (again!), Pelagic and Red-faced (I think both) Cormorants, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Murre, Marbled and/or Kittlitz's Murrelet, Horned and Tufted Puffin. Of course there is the usual assortment of gulls, etc. Forecast is for clearing weather for a couple of days, so we're optimistic about the photo opportunities here.

The rain seems to have stopped now, so I guess I'll go wipe the water droplets off the windows so I can see out.

Same place

10:37 am, Saturday, August 10, 1991

Nearly a week has gone by since I last wrote this up. We've been so busy enjoying Homer that there has been little time. We've loved our site here overlooking the bay. After a couple of days the people in the very end site moved out, and we took their site. Never have we had anyone right next to us, and most of the time no one for several sites down. These no-hookup sites are obviously not very popular. People can park RV's for less money in the city-run parking lots. Besides, they encounter another park first before they come to this smaller one, which is not too plainly marked. We love it and just "hold our noses" as we drive past the Coney Island stuff on the way out here.

The first couple of days were cloudy, but bright. Jim enjoyed standing on the beach front and photographing the various birds from shore. We also drove to the end of the paved part of the road along Kachemak Bay. It ran along a gentle slope above the water--most of the time at least half a mile from the bay. From the road we could see the glaciers across the way with hay fields in front. I don't know who eats the hay, for we saw no horses or cows.

Wednesday dawned bright and sunny, so we decided to take advantage of the unusual weather and sign up for a boat trip to Gull Island. It's a breeding colony just across the bay from where we're parked. It took the boat perhaps 15 minutes to get over there, and then we spent an hour or so nosing right up to various parts of the rock. Jim shot about 8 rolls of film of Puffins (mostly Tufted, but a few Horned), Common Murres (no Thick-billed here), Pigeon Guillemots, Black-legged Kittiwakes (super-abundant), Glaucous-winged Gulls, Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants--these being the 8 species that nest on the rock. Most of them had pretty well finished breeding, but we saw a few nearly-grown chicks of most of the species.

It had been a very poor breeding year and most of the birds had abandoned their eggs because fishing had been poor. Some of the burrowing species' nests had been flooded out by heavy rains in June.

The boat captain, LeRoy Clendenen, was by far the best we've encountered on our various boat excursions. He's a serious birder and has really studied the birds of the bay. There were two other birding couples on board, too. (Actually only the husband of each was serious.) It was obvious that the captain was glad to have some serious birders along with him, instead of the usual complement of people who just want to see a puffin and an eagle. He went out of his way to chase down both the Marbled and Kittlitz's Murrelets until we could really see the distinctions. (Address: Kachemak Bay Adventures, Capt. LeRoy W. Clendenen, P. O. Box 124, Anchor Point, AK 99556, (907) 235-6313.)

There was a Bald Eagle perched in lonesome splendor on one spot on the island. Capt. LeRoy explained that the large raft of Murres and Kittiwakes which we could see out on the water had been displaced by the eagle.

We enjoyed the morning ride so much that we decided to take his afternoon trip to Seldovia. It left half an hour after we got back from Gull Island--just long enough for Jim to pop back to the trailer for more film. The Seldovia run was 2 hours over, 2½ hours there, and 1½ hours back. On the way over we took a longer route and passed between various lovely islands and the mainland. At one place we nosed up to a family of Black Oystercatchers resting on the shore--two adults and 2 nearly grown juveniles. They were the first breeding record for them in Kachemak Bay.

Seldovia is a small fishing village on a little inlet still farther south on the Kenai Peninsula than Homer. It used to be the main town along this coast, but when the highway was put through to Homer, it became the more important town. So Seldovia retains the charm of an early 20th century fishing village--no Coney Island there, and no McDonald's either. We ate a late lunch in the only cafe in town open at that hour--very good fish and chips, and horrible service! We had the wrong waitress.

The name Seldovia is a corruption of a Russian word for "herring cove." There used to be a species of herring twice as big as the present ones. The Russians set up a cannery in the bay there where the fish bred. They of course ejected the cannery wastes right into the bay--and ruined the spawning grounds for the fish, which are now extinct.

On the return trip we took a direct course back to the Homer Spit--over more open water. The highlight of that trip was another life bird--the Aleutian Tern. We had seen them fairly well at other times during the day, but since they're somewhat hard to tell from the Arctic Tern, I was happy finally to get a really good look at one. (The jv. Aleutian looks a bit like the ad Arctic, and the ad Aleutian looks a bit like the jv Arctic.) Other interesting birds were a Northern Fulmar and several large rafts of Red-necked Phalaropes. Right outside the harbor we found a jv. Sabine's Gull.

Before entering the harbor, we spent 15 minutes or so by the city dock, where hundreds of Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels were swirling around over the surface. We'd seen them on earlier trips in or out, too, but they seem to be most numerous in the evening. Jim shot film like crazy, and hopes he got a few really good photos. They're so graceful as they skip over the water with their feet dancing on the waves.

Thursday was another nice day, and Jim wanted another go at those birds on Gull Island, so we took that trip again. Saw nothing new, but at least Jim had a feeling of satisfaction that he'd not missed anything critical.

Tuesday afternoon as I was browsing through the local bookstore, I came across a brand new bird-finding guide to Homer and vicinity, by George West. So that meant that we had to stay another day or so in order to check out the spots mentioned in the book. We even ran into the author, a retired biology professor from Univ. of Alaska, Fairbanks, and had a nice long chat with him as we waited for the tide to go out on the mudflats.

The mudflat at the very beginning of the spit is about the best place for shorebirds. The area is nearly flat, so when the tide goes out, there's only about a half-hour when the birds are concentrated near shore. Most interesting species by far there was a group of half a dozen Hudsonian Godwits. Jim spent quite some time stalking them and had almost despaired of ever getting very close, when for some reason one of the birds started working its way toward where he was standing. The light was right, and I think he got quite a few shots. It even stayed around while he changed film.

George West told us there were Rock Sandpipers on the rocks a bit farther out along the spit, so we drove out there and Jim captured them, too. They're back quite early this year. I wonder if their nests failed, too.

The mudflats and rocks had lots of other birds which we see regularly in California: Western (abundant) and Least Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plover, Black and Ruddy Turnstone, Wandering Tattler.

All in all, it was a very good two days. Jim got 8 or 10 life birds--new birds photographed. I don't think he got my Aleutian Tern, though. [He *did* get the Aleutian Tern.]

Each day we've been here, the tides have been more and more extreme. It's been fun seeing the appearance of more and more of the sand-bar below where we're parked. And last night at the highest tide, the water came up practically under the rear end of the trailer. (We were asleep then, but the seaweed line and wet rocks this morning attested to it.)

According to the newspaper, last night's high was 21.5 ft and this morning's low was -4.6 ft. The tides get more extreme the farther from the equator you go. I don't know why. In addition, the tides in Cook Inlet are even more exaggerated. Homer is not too far up Cook Inlet. The tides in Anchorage are much more spectacular--2nd only to the Bay of Fundy.

We've eaten dinner out several times. We ate fish and chips at a cafe on the boardwalk. We also ate at the Porpoise Room, a nice seafood dining room overlooking the entrance to the harbor. Both of these were only fair. Then someone told us we should try the dining room at the motel, which our RV park is associated with. It was excellent, so we've decided to go back there again this evening. We both had prime rib the first time, but I'll probably have fish tonight.

Since today is Saturday and no time to be seeking a new place to camp, we've decided to stay over one more day here--and when Jim went to pay the bill, it turned out to be free, since it'll make a week.

We'll be sorry to leave this interesting and beautiful spot. It seems as though no matter when we look out, the scene is different. The tide may be up or down. The mountains across the bay change hourly as the sun moves around the sky and the clouds come and go. It's beautiful when it's clear and sunny, and also beautiful when the clouds turn the greens and blues to a more subtle study in shades of silver and turquoise.

Golden Nugget Camper Park, Anchorage

8:23 am, Monday, August 12, 1991

Our setting is *much* less interesting here in this mundane urban RV park in Anchorage. No real complaints, though, and it's nice to have full hookups for a change. I took a shower using all the water I wanted to last night. No water shortage up here!

Saturday night we returned to the Land's End Motel restaurant. I had the Captain's Platter, by far the best fried fish I've ever eaten. Each piece was fried in the lightest tempura-style batter you could imagine. Jim had the prime rib again.

We drove the 225 miles up here from Homer yesterday. It was a gloomy day with intermittent light rain. The only interesting thing we saw was a group of White (Dall) sheep--ewes and youngsters--right beside the road. We were in Chugach State Park, just south of Anchorage where the road follows a narrow shelf between the vast tidal mudflats of Turnagain Arm and the precipitous cliffs of the park mountains. The animals obviously come down near the road frequently, for there was an especially wide shoulder there and "DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS" signs here and there.

It's been a long time since we've had electricity, so I'll take advantage of it to print this out to send home.

We plan to do a little shopping today in Anchorage, then head north toward Denali National Park tomorrow. After that, we'll continue north to Fairbanks and then head south on the Alaska Highway.

Same place

11:12 pm, Monday, August 12, 1991

I just finished editing and printing out the last installment of the trip log. Afterthought: Land birds are almost nonexistent here. All we've seen are a few Rock Doves [now called Rock Pigeons] flying over. The same was true in Homer, where a small flock of Savannah Sparrows was about it.

Teklonika Campground, Denali N.P., AK

8:53 am, Saturday, August 17, 1991

We lingered in Anchorage for a couple more nights. We tried to do some shopping in downtown Anchorage, but the merchandise was pretty uninspired. The cute, interesting things I had bought in Seward were not to be found in Anchorage tourist shops. They just had much larger quantities of the same tourist fare I've seen in most of the rest of Alaska. In addition there were, of course, the art galleries and fur stores. Jim was tempted by some of the art work, but didn't find anything that quite suited him.

We went to a gigantic-screen presentation on Alaska. It had a huge wrap-around screen, and we almost got airsick when the camera swooped low over the mountains and rivers. It was quite interesting, but we felt some of the scenes were pretty dark and didn't capture the dazzling beauty of the forested areas. Also, we were shocked by the dirt on the camera (not projection) lens in a few sequences.

We also went to the big museum there. The most interesting thing there was a detailed history of Alaska. We had both recently read James Michener's novel *Alaska*. The museum displays were a good review of that, and it was fun to see actual artifacts of the periods, as well as reproductions of the housing, boats, etc., that they used.

Alaska has had a particularly shameful past. The cruelty of the Russian skin-hunters to both the Aleuts and the fur-bearing creatures they were forced to slaughter is appalling. The Aleuts were literally their slaves. When they showed any resistance, all the males in the community were slain and the boats taken. Most of the women were left to starve and a few of the more attractive ones taken along to serve as sex playthings for the men.

Toward the end of the Russian period a semblance of order and fairness came to the area, as the Russian government began to try to prevent the grossest of the atrocities. But since serfdom was a way of life in Russia, the Aleuts still were the serfs of the Russians.

The Alaska purchase in 1867 threw things back into anarchy again. The U.S. made absolutely no attempt to govern the place until well after the gold rush to Nome in 1899. Laws were passed in 1884 which should have helped, but they were patterned after Oregon's laws and were not appropriate to Alaska. Besides, they were not enforced because the federal government sent up here the most corrupt officials conceivable. They put gold claims into "receivership" for years while conflicting owners battled it out in "court." In the meantime, the "receivers" collected enormous "fees" for their "services." It was a field day for corrupt lawyers. The contrast between the way claims were handled in Nome and the orderly Canadian system in Dawson is truly shameful.

The Russian fur company was replaced by an American one. Since it was not policed as it should be, some of the atrocities that the Russians had finally stamped out returned.

Throughout the latter part of the Russian period and the early part of the American period, American sea captains from New England, as well as some from Great Britain, played their role. They traded with the natives (Aleut, Eskimo and Athapascan Indian), exchanging guns and rum (or molasses from which cheap rum could be brewed) for skins, which they took to China where they received a fortune in Chinese goods to take back to New England. The guns were used by the natives to fight their Russian rulers, and the alcohol totally ruined a people who had never had contact with it. Whole villages starved to death because they were too drunk in the summer time (when the ships came with the liquor) to go hunting and fishing. The whalers impressed the native

populations into service, much as the Russians had done a half-century earlier.

The Russian government had begun to see that their profligate harvest of sea mammals was depleting the population, so they finally began to make regulations to enforce conservation. However, their country was strapped for cash because they were fighting their neighbors in Europe (Crimean War), so practically no enforcement was possible. In fact this cash shortage was the reason for the sale of Alaska to the U.S. in 1867.

This lack of attention by the Russians to the farthest reaches of their empire gave the sea captains essentially free rein to do what they wished in the North Pacific. They practically wiped out the sea otters and seals, as well as a good many of the native people, before the American government finally began to exert a few controls well into the 20th century.

The white man's diseases also helped to decimate the native populations. Syphilis and smallpox were particularly virulent. Even though there were remedies for syphilis and vaccination for smallpox was possible, the Indians were so suspicious of the white man by then that they refused to use his medicine. Only the Aleuts allowed themselves to be vaccinated.

Overlapping and after the period of anarchy came a half-century when the merchants in Seattle totally dominated the territory, getting laws through Congress which forced the Alaskans to depend entirely on their greedy monopoly for all their supplies and for markets for their raw materials. The Jones act of the 1920's required all shipping into and out of Alaska to be on American-owned and American-built ships, which meant Seattle. For Alaskans low prices for exports and high prices for imports were the rule for many decades. Only recently has this control by Seattle businessmen been relaxed a bit.

To this day people up here are still anti-government. Although a few boroughs (counties) have a sales tax, Alaskans pay no state income or sales tax and live on their oil revenues, which won't last forever. Most of them are in favor of oil development in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, because it'll mean a longer period of tax-free existence. Meanwhile the roads, parks, utilities, social problems, etc., cry out for attention. Nothing is fixed in a timely manner. The Canadians may complain about their high taxes, but I think they get value for their money.

Most of the people who came up here for a tax-free existence have arrived recently. They hunt down all the wildlife so you can only see it in a National Park and between times keep their hunting skills sharp by riddling all the highway signs with bullet holes.

We left Anchorage Wednesday and drove up to Denali National Park, arriving around 5:00. We knew we wouldn't be able to get a campsite that late but wanted to get our name in for the next day. We camped that night with a lot of other people in a huge parking area along the main highway overlooking the Nenana River. It was really quite nice, and no one had to be very close to his neighbor.

Denali NP is just as I recalled: some of the most stupendous scenery in the world, but with the enjoyment of it totally destroyed by the regimentation enforced by the park management.

The campground near the park entrance was full for the next night, so we opted for the one we're in, Teklonika. We had to agree to stay at least 3 nights up to a maximum of 14 in order to get it. Furthermore we had to know when we took it how long we planned to stay. Since it was only \$6.00 per night with Jim's Golden Age pass, we signed up for five nights, and will forfeit the difference if we leave early. The campground is 30 miles into the park. We are allowed one trip in and one trip out and were not permitted to start out from the park entrance to drive in until 10:00 am, lest we linger along the road on the way, I suppose. (Check-out time is 11:00.) All other transportation must be by the park bus system (free), which consists of jam-packed old school buses. If we want to go back to the park entrance, we have to take the bus. The catch is that, although we can catch any entrance-bound bus which has room, we must have a reservation a day in advance for a return-trip seat. So we were advised to get outbound tickets in advance for two days away--as far in advance as they would take reservations.

The regulations on the bulletin board say not to dump your holding tank on the ground. How they expect people to stay up to 14 days, make no trips back to the dump station at the entrance, and

not dump their gray water is beyond me. We dumped ours in the bushes this morning. Black (toilet) water is another matter. We'd never dump that on the ground, but can go up to 14 days without doing it, too. (There are portable toilet booths here, so that should not be a problem for anyone.)

Yesterday we took the bus 60 miles out to the end of the road and back. There was a change of buses in the middle, for which we had to get a token and wait--not too long fortunately. I felt like I was in prison the whole way. The only thing the bus drivers will stop for is views of Mt. McKinley (partially cloud-free yesterday) and mammals above a certain size--caribou, wolf, moose, Dall sheep, grizzly bear--and we were fortunate enough to see all of them. Birds are of no consequence, except perhaps an eagle or a ptarmigan. The bus drivers will stop briefly for you to snap a scene out the window, but carefully composed photography is out of the question. There's no getting off the bus to take a picture. If we had glimpsed a bird that looked interesting, we would have had to either let it pass or get off the bus and try to find it, then wait 20 minutes for the next one, which might or might not have seats available. If we had let on that we saw an interesting bird, we would have to have been let off 1/4 mile away, because the regulations say no one can be let off at a "wildlife stop." Whether they would have applied that rule strictly to some little bird I don't know because we didn't get off. All day long we dragged our lunch, Jim's photo gear, and my scope--plus coats, umbrellas, raincoats, etc.

They claim the reason for the buses is that wildlife sightings were declining when they let people drive cars in. That I find hard to believe, having had my best large mammal sightings right beside the road in the most popular U.S and Canadian national parks farther south--Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone, Glacier, Banff and Jasper. I think the reason they run these ghastly buses is that it's cheaper than widening the road, which is one lane in many places.

There are a couple of life birds I might find here, the Arctic Warbler and the Northern Wheatear, although it's a bit late in the season. I think I'll wait and look for them in Nome sometime when we're up here without the trailer. I hated those buses so.

I can't wait to be out of this place, but unfortunately we have to stay until a least Monday morning, because Jim is expecting a shipment of *Dick E. Bird News* newspapers at the park post office. He's become a real booster of that publication and passes an issue out to anyone who will confess to feeding birds in his/her backyard

The campground is, of course, nearly full every night (except for the people who left early), but we were fortunate enough to get a very nice site when we arrived. Of course, feeding the wildlife is also a "no-no", but Jim's doing it anyway. We have a dozen or so White-crowned Sparrows and a small flock of Gray Jays. I saw a Common Redpoll on the other side of the campground the other evening. I wish it would find the birdseed.

When we came back last night after our 10-hour bus ride, we found bird droppings all over the door of the truck and guessed (correctly) that a Gray Jay had taken exception to his own reflection in the rear-view mirror. Jim took a few pictures of him attacking the mirror, then mercifully covered it with a rag, whereupon the bird started attacking the windows, both of the truck and the trailer. Several times we saw him within inches of our eyes right outside the trailer. It seems a strange time of year for a bird to be so territorial, but perhaps now is when they set up their fall territories in these parts and kick the kids out.

Jim's been putting out unsalted peanuts, in addition to the birdseed, and the Gray Jays are storing them deep inside the dense White Spruce trees, instead of on the ground. That certainly makes sense in this land of so much snow.

In addition to the above two species, which are eating our birdseed, we've seen Wilson's Warbler (m, f and jv) and a darling male Downy Woodpecker, which posed in a yellowing willow for Jim to take a roll or two of him. He even stayed put while Jim went back into the trailer and changed film.

Same place

8:00 pm, Sunday, August 18, 1991

Jim is in seventh heaven. The Great Grizzly Bear Hunt is taking place right outside our trailer, and guess who found the bear?!

It all started around 4:30 this afternoon when Jim went out from the trailer to the attached truck to get something. As he was walking back in he spotted an essentially full grown grizzly in the brushy willows around 40 feet behind the trailer. He entered the trailer and softly and, as though he couldn't believe his eyes, said, "There's a bear right out there." I looked out the back window of the trailer and sure enough, there was a bear out there. The beast came up even closer and peered out this side and then that of a small willow 30 feet away. By this time Jim had grabbed a camera (Fortunately they were all in the trailer.) and was standing on the steps of the trailer blazing away at him (or her).

Being a fearless bruin, the bear then approached closer, mouthed the picnic table with his molars, pushed it towards us a few feet with his huge front feet, then strolled over and peeked in the rear window at me. He then ambled around to the dinette window on the side, from which I quickly snatched the thawing chicken. I don't think the bear saw or smelled it (window was closed); he was just curious, for he left within a short time.

Of course, Big Bear Hunter Jim had to get out to see where he went. He hadn't gone far! Jim photographed him again in the bushes 20 or 30 feet away straight out from the trailer--standing on his hind legs staring at him. Fortunately for my peace of mind, he could do all this without straying more than a few steps from either the truck or trailer door.

All this took the better part of half an hour. Finally the beast galumphed off into the bushes. Since the literature asks that all bear encounters be reported and there are lots of tent campers around here, Jim walked up to the campground host's trailer (maybe a couple hundred yards away) and reported the incident. While he was gone, the bear came back and nosed around the tent in the site next to us. Soon after that the campground host arrived in his truck and discovered the bear there. He leaned on his horn, but the bear didn't seem to find that particularly intimidating; he shambled off when he was ready.

A bit after that Jim came back--in the truck of the host.

Before we knew it, I looked outside and saw a young woman with a shotgun right outside the trailer. She was the park "bear specialist." The bear soon reappeared again in the bushes out back, and with my guidance she was able to approach it and spray it with harmless plastic pellets. The bear trundled off then and was not seen again--for about an hour. By that time there were four rangers around, all bearing the same type of firearm. Since the bear circled around our way again, the four rangers are now ensconced on the same picnic table (ours!), shooting the breeze and waiting for the next report. I would have expected them to be scattered all around the perimeter of the campground looking.

No one is very alarmed, certainly not the rangers, but I wouldn't want to be camping in a tent tonight, especially if I were one of the tent campers who had no vehicle nearby for refuge.

The preceding tale of the bear has been by far the most exciting incident in our stay here. And that's the way it really happened. I can't vouch for the version Jim may be telling over the next decade or two, though.

Here's Jim's recollection of the bear story, written on Aug. 25, when we had some free time in Haines:

Jim's Bear Tale

In Denali National Park, a week ago, we got a very close look at a grizzly bear--about 3 feet! We were camped at the Teklanika Campground, which is about 30 miles up the road into the interior of the park. One day in late afternoon I went from the trailer to the truck to get

something. When I got what I wanted, I turned around, took a couple of steps and then looked up to find myself eyeball-to-eyeball with a grizzly bear at about 30 feet. I was 3 paces from the trailer door--a distance which I easily made in one! (And you might say--like a shot!)

Mr. Grizzly fooled around out there for a few minutes, then came into our site. He quickly decided that our picnic table was in the wrong place and gave it a shove to where he thought it should be. He then did a taste test on it by clamping his huge jaws on the table top. It looked like he was trying to take a big bite out of the table top! He soon gave that up and then came over to our nice big trailer picture window by our dinette and placed his nose about one foot from a plate of chicken which Sylvia had placed there to defrost. Luckily the window was closed. I had alerted Sylvia to the presence of our visitor and we both were standing in there, in awe, looking out the window at the bear, which was then only 3 feet away from us. Plucky Sylvia reached out and literally grabbed our dinner chicken right out from under that bear's nose.

The next few seconds seemed like an eternity to us as we wondered if one of those big paws with those five four-inch long can-opener claws was going to come crashing through that ever-so-thin glass. (I was also thinking how fortunate it was that we'd bought a trailer with two doors--giving us each one door to exit through should this beast come in through the window.) Well, anyway our visitor elected not to ruin our day, but took his time lollygagging around the window for about a minute or so, then wandered back out into the forest.

Now for the best part. I usually keep my cameras in the truck, but on this day for some reason I had 3 cameras in the trailer with me. I was able to shoot out the open trailer door at the bear, which was only 20 to 30 feet away. I did, at times, wish I had an extra hand to keep on the trailer door handle to hold the darn door from swinging wide open, as it kept doing, while I was shooting. One camera, an 8008S (the new model) had my 80-200 f2.8 zoom on it and my other 8008 had my 75-300 f4.5 zoom on. (I couldn't have selected better lenses if I'd known the bear was coming!)

Anyway, before it was all over I had emptied both of these cameras of the Kodachrome 25 they contained and shot half a roll of Kodachrome 64 from my third 8008 which I had quickly removed from my 500 f4 lens. I shot everything in the auto-focus mode and it seemed to work perfectly.

Back to the bear story: When the bear left, he went fifty yards or so out into the sparse forest near the campground. I thought I'd better warn the other campers that he was in the area. So, keeping the bear in sight, I went to the nearby sites, but couldn't find anyone to warn. About this time the bear started doubling back on me, threatening to cut off my escape route back to the trailer. But I was able to keep ahead of him so that I could always beat him to the trailer by a country mile if I had to. All this time I was shooting him with the 75-300 zoom. Because there was low brush, he would sometimes rise up and stand on his hind legs to keep sight of me as he kept advancing toward me. I must say that having a grizzly advancing toward you like that is a very exciting experience, even if you know you have a safe-haven within reach! I really think I got some first-rate pictures of him as I beat my retreat back to the trailer.

Anyway, to make a long story even longer, Mr. Bear again wandered back out into the forest and out of sight. I then decided to hot-foot it down to the other end of the campground and notify the campground host so he could sound the alarm. As I was telling the host of the sighting, Mr Bear again appeared, this time on the road between me and our trailer. The host quickly assured me that I was welcome to use his trailer should it become necessary, and he then drove his truck down to where the bear was and tooted his horn--hard! The bear again loped off into the forest and disappeared. About 20 minutes later the host drove up and gave me a ride back to our trailer.

An hour or so later I was back in the trailer sitting in our dinette fondling my exposed rolls of film and marvelling about my good luck in having my cameras ready, that they all were

set properly, that the sun had been out (a fairly rare occurrence in Alaska), that the bear was mostly down-sun from me during our photo session--and lastly, very happy not to have become bear-meat! Unfortunately my reverie was short-lived as I again looked up and out the same window and--Good Lord!--there stood the beast again--almost in the same spot where I had first laid eyes on him! This was definitely getting tiresome! I hollered to Sylvia that "he's baaack!"

Having heard that yelling loudly at a bear is good way to scare him off, I decided I'd try this tack. The bear had moved to behind our trailer and plunked down in the bushes only about 20 foot away. I let out the loudest yell that I could muster through the open rear louver windows. I had a full view the bear's head at 20 feet when I let loose this extremely loud yelling. I must say that either this bear was stone deaf, or in an extremely deep reverie, as he did not give the slightest indication at all that he even heard me! In fact he gave no sign that he had heard anything--not even an eyebrow rose-which was rather disconcerting, to say the least! I, for one, think they can take yelling off the list of things to do when encountering a bear--or at least when encountering a grizzly anyway!

Fortunately my yelling was heard by the park bear control people who had recently arrived on the scene and then came running. A young slip of a girl carrying a large shotgun appeared alongside our trailer. Although the bear was only about 20 feet away from her, she was unable to see it. Sylvia kept giving her directions through the window as to where the bear was, but the big lunk was hidden from her view by bushes. After a tense minute or two the bear rose up where the bear control girl could see it, and she quickly aimed and fired.

This poor bear had spent his entire life (they said he was five or six years old) going where he pleased, sitting where he pleased, and doing what he pleased, and this was the first time that he didn't get his way. It took the sting of a plastic bullet to get his attention and to let him know he wasn't wanted around the campground. The bear control people said that this method works sometimes and sometimes it doesn't. We wondered if it was going to work on this guy when we later heard that he been seen twice again fairly close to the campground that evening. By the way, about half the campers there were camping in tents, not hard-sided vehicles, so there must have been some light-sleeping going on by those campers that night! The bear control people hung around for several hours. In fact four of them stood on our picnic table, shotguns at-the-ready, and peered off into the forest for an hour or so. So ended our bear adventure!

I (Sylvia again) had to get the bear tale off my chest right away. Now back to the chronology:

Yesterday about the only thing I did was take a short walk around the campground and down the road a ways. There are practically no birds around here now. It rained intermittently and looked threatening all the time, so there wasn't much temptation to go very far away.

Today has been a very nice day, with the sky ranging from 1/3 to 2/3 cloud-covered. The clouds were of the non-threatening high type, too.

So we thought we'd take a short bus ride to a different habitat, then walk a ways along the road.

We decided to ride about 8 miles out the road to Tattler Creek, then walk back down the road, as it follows Igloo Creek downstream. The habitat there consists of lots of quite large willows--for this latitude. That, according to the bird-finding guide for the park, is the breeding habitat for the Arctic Warbler. But when we got to our destination, there was a mother grizzly and 3 cubs high up on the hillside, so we were not permitted to get out there. Rules say that no one can be let out at a "wildlife stop." There was no danger, for the bears were far away, but that's the rule. So we got out a quarter of a mile farther where the road had started to ascend up to Sable Pass, maybe 4 miles from the campground.

We had no sooner gotten out of the bus when I peered over the edge of the steep embankment and saw a juvenile Northern Shrike in a bush not 20 feet away. I called to Jim, but he had put down his bird camera and was busy taking a scenic picture. Before he could get his camera

ready an adult and another juv. flew in, but then the whole family flew way down to the stream at the bottom of a 100 ft talus slope. We stood around a while hoping they might come back, but they didn't. This was a great disappointment to Jim, for that is one bird he hasn't yet been able to get on film. (My big disappointment is not finding a Gyrfalcon.)

We walked back down the road, passed far below the feeding grizzlies while there were a couple of tour buses stopped, and went on our way. We did see some not-too-fresh tracks, but no more bears. Also no Arctic Warblers. I hadn't really expected to see one, for that bird apparently doesn't stay around very long after breeding. It migrates westward and crosses into Siberia before heading south for the winter.

In fact the only thing Jim photographed, besides those grizzlies out the bus window with everyone inside jumping around, was an Arctic Ground Squirrel, which had no intention of moving from its little platform on the edge of the road. We also got a few scenic photos of the streambed, the tundra, and the rocky cliffs above. It was a beautiful day for photos.

We got back here around 3:30, and our bear entertainment started an hour later.

Goldhill RV Park, Fairbanks, AK

1:05 pm, Tuesday, August 20, 1991

I was very glad to leave our "concentration camp with beautiful scenery," as Jim put it on one of the postcards he sent. I hated being confronted with regulations and schedules at every turn, and most of all I hated those buses.

The habitats in Denali are very similar to those on the Dempster Highway in the northern Yukon--taiga, tundra, and bare rocky mountain peaks. At Denali the altitude is higher, which makes up for the fact that it is farther south. Although the large mammals seem more concentrated at Denali because there is no hunting allowed, the birds are probably about the same both places. I can't say for sure because we were at Denali after the breeding season and on the Dempster at about the peak. Anyway, if I ever return to this type of habitat, I'll spend it in the Ogilvie Mountains of the Dempster and skip Denali entirely. The only thing that could induce me back to Denali would be if Jim applied for and was given a photographers permit. We saw several photographers driving their own vehicles. I understand only established professional photographers with published work are given those permits.

We left our campground around 10:00 yesterday morning and drove up to Fairbanks, arriving around 4:00. I immediately set to work doing 3 weeks' laundry. I probably should have done it in Anchorage, but our site was far from the laundry room, and rain showers always seemed to be falling or imminent. Since I had 4 loads of laundry, and only 3 washers and 3 dryers were available when I first went in, it was almost 7:00 before I finished. Needless to say, we went out to dinner--a so-so meal in a local coffee shop, Sourdough Sam's.

We had breakfast this morning in the same coffee shop, because they specialize in sourdough pancakes. Again I was disappointed in them. They were too sour this time, tough and heavy. I always compare sourdoughs with those in a coffee shop in Astoria, Ore., which I've patronized whenever I was there for 20 or 30 years. They're scrumptious.

After breakfast we went to the University of Alaska Museum. It was excellent. It was organized by sections of Alaska, and laid out sort of like a map of the state. The political and natural history of each region was outlined and illustrated in each room. Although not very large, it certainly had a lot of interesting things. Unfortunately it was jammed most of the time with bus tour people. When we exited the place there were six buses parked out front.

Although the museum did occasionally mention the cruelty and injustice which have been the hallmarks of the history of this region, they mostly presented more of a booster's picture of the state.

As we were driving back to our RV park on the western edge of town, we passed the demonstration gardens of the agriculture dept. of the university. We stopped and I walked around them for a half hour or so. Jim pleaded disability because his legs are still sore from our 4 mile walk

downhill a couple of days ago at Denali. Mine still hurt, too, but I didn't let that stop me.

I was amazed at what will grow up here in Fairbanks. The garden was in full sun on a piece of ground gently sloping southward. A wide variety of both flowers and vegetables were growing in small plots. The fragrance of petunias, stock and other familiar flowers almost made me homesick. The vegetable plots also looked nice. The famous enormous Alaska cabbages were there, along with large heads of cauliflower. The broccoli and Brussels sprouts looked less successful, but several varieties of pea vines were covered with nice fat pods. There were even several kinds of sweetcorn, which had respectable sized ears. Since this is the tail end of the growing season up here, it all had better be ready to harvest before much longer.

As I was strolling through the garden a Northern Harrier flew by not 20 feet from my face, then perched briefly on a nearby fence post. On one of the fields below the demonstration garden a large flock of Sandhill Cranes and Canada Geese was grazing. A couple of Rock Doves flew over, so those birds have even made it up here.

We have been noticing definite signs of fall. Even during the four days we were in Denali, the willows around our campsite got more and more bright yellow leaves. When we left the park and descended to lower elevations, the balsam poplars along the road had isolated yellow branches on them. Probably less than 1% of the leaves have turned yet, but I understand fall lasts only about 2 weeks up here.

Another sign of fall is the fireweed. Someone told us that summer starts when the fireweed starts to bloom and is over when the fireweed is finished. Most of the fireweed around here has just a few blossoms at the top of the stalk. The middle of each stalk consists of slender 3-inch long seed pods. At the bottom of the stalk the seed pods are bursting and the fluffy seeds are blowing all over the place like dandelions.

We plan to leave here tomorrow morning and head south. We'll drive down to Haines for a short visit, then return to the Alaska Highway and continue south on it. We plan to take the Cassiar Highway through British Columbia, instead of the Alaska Highway. That way we will repeat very little of the road we took on the way up.

Lake Creek Territorial Campground, Yukon

7:56 pm, Thursday, August 22, 1991

Yesterday and today have been days of driving south on the Alaska Highway. Yesterday was a gorgeous sunny day, and we enjoyed the drive past lovely lakes through the hilly boreal forest. In the distance most of the way we could see the snow-capped peaks of the Alaska Range. Although Mt. McKinley was too far west to be visible, those mountains we saw were also very tall--around 20,000 ft.

We had lunch at Rika's Roadhouse, an early overnight stop during the period when 15-20 miles a day was about all anyone could do. It's now a state historical park, and they serve lunch in a new building near the original roadhouse. The latter is now a gift shop! We'd been taken in by the advertising for the place, and I expected a lovely dining room with white table cloths and delicious food. Instead, it was just a buffet. The homemade soups, breads and pastries had also sounded appealing, but they were a disappointment, too. Oh, well!

We spent the night last night at the Sourdough Campground in Tok, the same place we had stayed five weeks ago on the way up. Tok is at the junction of the loop road around the built-up part of Alaska. We had headed down toward Valdez and then Anchorage from there.

This morning we got a late start, because Gorbachev's press conference after he returned to Moscow from the attempted coup was something we had no intention of missing. After that we cleaned the trailer, because we weren't sure when we'd have electricity again for the vacuum cleaner. So it was 10:30 when we got on the road, and we lost an hour when we crossed the border from Alaska to Yukon.

Most of the day today was cloudy, but we finally got out from under the overcast. We're

camped about 50 miles into Yukon in a nice territorial campground. Those 50 miles were on about the worst paved road we've been on. It was so narrow and the frost heaves were so big that we averaged about 20 miles an hour. I don't expect it to get better very soon, either. The road south of Whitehorse had been pretty good, but I guess there's no incentive to keep this part of the road in top shape. The road down from Fairbanks to the border had had some fairly bad stretches, but never this bad. When we encounter a series of deep frost heaves, our truck/trailer combination seems to bounce higher and higher with each successive bump, so we have to keep the speed way down. They're hard to see, too.

We saw quite a bit more fall color between Tok and the border, but where we are now, there has been little yellowing of the leaves, even high up on the mountains.

Port Chilkoot Camper Park, Haines, AK

5:00 pm, Saturday, August 24, 1991

We continued on down the Alaska Highway yesterday. Most of the road was just as bad as we had had the day before. We found out the reason at the little roadhouse where we stopped for lunch. The owner said that the Canadian and Alaskan governments had agreed to share expenses for the road up from Haines to the Alaska Highway, then northwest to the Alaska/Canada border, since the road is mostly used by Americans, not Canadians. Canada upgraded their part, but Alaska "ran out of funds."

The roadhouse owner didn't believe that last statement and neither do I. As I mentioned earlier, Alaskans pay no state sales or income tax. In addition, they get a dividend every year, which represents their share of the oil profits. There is no reason in the world why they can't use a little of that money to repair the roads. That stretch through Yukon is especially shameful, and it unfairly reflects on Canada, not Alaska.

We spent all day Thursday and Friday playing "hare and tortoise" with a "silver horde." That's what Jim and I call a caravan of Airstream trailers. We had seen at least 40 of them pulling into an RV park in Delta Junction, so we know there were a lot. They all want to go faster than we do, but since they have to stop at every gift shop along the road, they're forever passing and re-passing us. Jim pulls over whenever he gets a chance, but on that road there were very few chances.

One time one of them passed us on a blind curve and nearly had a head-on collision with a large truck. He had to cut in very close in front of us. If he hadn't made it, there would have been one awful pile-up. There were still a couple of those silver soda cans on wheels behind us, and the truck he almost struck was followed by another one the same size.

Since all Airstreams have a serial number in large print on their rear ends, we noted that one. We happened to pull in right behind him at the last gas station before the Canadian border, and Jim did something he rarely does--told the driver off, but good. The man claimed that his buddy, who had passed us just ahead of him, had told him on the CB radio that it was OK to pass! I don't think I'd depend very heavily on that buddy in the future.

Some of the horde members were in the same restaurant where we ate lunch, and we asked them where they were going to stay that night. (We wanted to be sure to stay some other place!) It turned out they were going to Whitehorse. No wonder they were in such a rush. It was 287 miles from Beaver Creek, where they spent the previous night, to Whitehorse. On that awful road, 30 mph was speeding! We probably averaged 20-25 mph.

Fortunately we reached improved road about 20 miles before Haines Junction. I guess that was part of the road that the Yukon had agreed to do. I understand that the rest of the road to Whitehorse is just about that good, too.

We stopped at the Kluane National Park Visitors Center in Haines Junction. We wanted to see their "award-winning" multi-image slide show. It was excellent. I think they used 6 or possibly 9 projectors. The transitions were very smooth, and the music was lovely. No natural sounds, though.

We spent last night at Kathleen Lake Campground, in Kluane N.P., but were disappointed that

the sites were nowhere near the lake. However, they were widely spaced sites in the trees, and the campground was no more than 1/3 full, if that.

Kluane N.P. in Canada is contiguous with Wrangell-St. Elias N.P. in Alaska. Although some of the boundaries of Kluane come right up to the road, there are no roads which penetrate the park. All access is by foot. The campground where we stayed is the only developed one in the park.

We'd been driving all day in cloudy weather, with intermittent drizzle, but it seemed to be clearing up when we got into camp, so I took a chance and went for a walk, carrying my rain gear, just in case.

I took the trail "TO THE LAKE," but the sign didn't say how far away the lake was. It turned out to be a good half hour walk. When I got there the clouds decided to open up, so I ducked into the picnic shelter hoping the rain would stop soon. When it showed no signs of doing so, I put on my rain gear and walked back to the trailer in the rain. I didn't get particularly wet, but what do you do with a wet poncho, umbrella, boots, and slacks in a small trailer? I couldn't even drape them over the shower rod, because I had to take a shower and wash my hair right away so it would get dry before bed time. (I couldn't use my hair dryer because we didn't have hookups.)

There are very few birds in the woods now. On my walk I only encountered one small flock of them--juncos, Yellow-rumped and Blackpoll warblers. There were also a couple of Gray Jays who found Jim's peanuts. Otherwise the forest was very silent. I haven't done any recording for weeks. Even at the seabird nesting colonies, which were quite noisy, recording was out of the question because of the noise of the boat's engine and of all the other passengers' chatter.

Today we drove the remaining 135 miles to Haines. I had thought we were becoming jaded, because lately the scenery hasn't thrilled us as it did earlier in the summer. But this road reawakened our senses. It was truly stupendous. The day was mostly cloudy, but most of the mountains were in view. Sometimes I think having to peer through clouds to see the tops of mountains makes them seem higher than they do on a clear day. To top it off, this stretch of road was excellent, with wide shoulders so we could stop anywhere we wanted too. There was very little traffic, too. Only the last 40 miles--the part in the U.S.--was narrow. It had moderate frost heaves, too.

Probably the highlight of the day was one pond at least 1/2 mile from the road. As we drove by it, we spotted a couple of white specks on the shoreline. We kept driving, hoping to have another view of the pond, but that was not to be, so we decided to turn around. That's always a major project with the trailer in tow, but luckily we didn't have to go far before we came to one of the ubiquitous borrow pits. A borrow pit is where they "borrow" gravel to build the highway. Anyway we just drove into the thing and there was plenty of turn-around area.

Back at the pond viewpoint, there was a wide parking lot, and when I put my scope on the two white specks, they turned out to be swans. Although it was a great distance, I thought they were Trumpeters from the facts that their eyes weren't very easy to distinguish from their bills and the birds carried the bases of their necks resting on their bodies.

Shortly thereafter I spotted five more white specks. They proved to be swans, too. But these had well-defined eyes and carried their necks straight. They had to be Tundra (Whistling) Swans. Then the five white specks swam over to the sand bar where the two other specks were standing, and my identifications were confirmed. The size difference clinched it. And after a few minutes the breeze got up a bit more and erased the slight amount of heat shimmer that had been marring the image up till then. Then I could see the tiny yellow spots on the bills of the Tundra Swans. To cap the scene, there were two Bald Eagles, probably recently fledged juveniles, on the same sandbar with the swans. Jim took photos with his 1000 mm lens and tried to find a way to approach them more closely, but gave up.

It took us most of the day to drive the road, for we stopped frequently for scenic photography. The only other long stop was at a 1/2-mile nature trail up to the edge of a "rock glacier." There had been a glacier there in the past, and it had carried an unusually large load of broken up rock. Due to warmer climate in the recent past, the glacier had receded, leaving a thick layer of broken rock which still had all the wrinkles and grooves of a real glacier.

The last few miles of the road into Haines follow the course of the Chilkat River, which is quite shallow and sprawls all over its flat valley. The edges and more-or-less permanent islands are lined with a broad riparian area with the tallest trees we've seen in Alaska--both deciduous and coniferous. We're getting farther south, and being along the moist coast helps too. This stretch is the one which is so famous for its gathering of eagles in the fall. Every October there is a late run of Chum Salmon. These are a small bony type of salmon, which people don't care to eat if they can get any of the other four types, but the eagles love them. Since there are no fish anywhere else at that time of year, as many as 3500 Bald Eagles have been counted along that 17 mile stretch of the river. They stay there until around January. Right now, though, the numbers of eagles are no different than they've been in all the coastal towns we've visited. So far I've only seen one, but I understand there are several around the harbor area.

Same place

10:25 am, Sunday, August 25, 1991

We checked out a couple of RV parks yesterday and finally ended up in this small one in a dense stand of pines. Fortunately we have electricity, for the site is totally shaded, and it's raining. The electricity is a bit erratic, though, for the circuit breaker blows every once in a while for no apparent reason. Thank goodness the box is right outside the door, so we can go out and turn it back on. The lights flicker, too, but at least it's electricity. We also have water and sewer. Full hook-ups like this are rare in this state, and we hadn't expected them here. The ad in the *Milepost* had led us to believe we'd only have electricity. The other two utilities are new. For this reason the campground isn't as crowded as the others we checked out in town.

Same place

2:22 pm, Monday, August 26, 1991

Since the weather was rainy and gloomy, we stayed in the trailer the rest of the day yesterday. Jim wrote up his own version of our bear adventure at Denali, which surprisingly didn't differ too much from mine. (You've already read it, because I inserted it right after mine in the log when I prepared this final version.)

We ate dinner at a restaurant in the old officers' mess of Fort Chilkoot. This army base was established in the early 1900's and decommissioned in 1946. Today some of the very attractive wood-frame buildings are private homes, others are hotels. We both had the captain's platter, but the fish was apparently baked, and tasted rather flat.

This morning, the sun seemed to be trying to peek through, so we decided to take in the scenery around Haines. We drove to the end of the road north out of town, which skirted the inlet for about 9 miles. Saw several Bald Eagles. The tide was low, but we could detect no shorebirds on the rocks--just gulls, Northwestern Crows, and Ravens.

We also drove about 5 miles south of town to Chilkat State Park, which had been recommended to us by some people at home as a wonderful place to stay. We were glad we had not dragged the trailer down there, for the sites were very small, and we might not even have been able to get the trailer around the narrow loop road through the grounds. Also the last couple of miles to the campground were very steep and bumpy. They were unpaved dirt, and our truck might not have had traction to drag the trailer up the hills.

The setting of Haines is a narrow peninsula between Chilkoot and Chilkat Inlets. High glacier-clad mountains can be seen across both inlets, except when low clouds obscure them, as they have most of the time we've been here.

Forecast is for better weather the next several days--in Anchorage where the TV station is, anyway. If the weather improves here, we'll stay another day or so, because there are lots of eagles around here even now and Jim would love to photograph one in the sun.

I'm mailing off this rather short installment from Haines, for we'll be back in Canada for a couple of weeks or so on our drive south. The last we heard on TV, CanadaPost, which is inadequate at best, was threatening to strike. Whether it does or it doesn't, the mail will probably get to you faster if we wait to mail it when we get back in the U.S. (Jim and I have been in Canada 3 times in the past 5 years. Every time we're up here there seem to be two stories we can count on hearing on the TV: whether Quebec will secede from Canada and an imminent postal strike.)

McKenzie's RV Park, Whitehorse, YK

7:32 pm, Tuesday, August 27, 1991

Today (in Haines) dawned cloudy, but bright, so Jim spent a little while on the point north of town where he thought he might be able to shoot eagles in flight. However, the wind was cold and biting, and only a few gulls flew by. So he called it quits, and we left town about 10:00 to retrace our steps up to the Alaska Highway.

The day was cloudier than when we drove down on Saturday, so we made very few stops. Most of the time it was raining lightly to moderately, and the clouds which shrouded the mountains were dropping snow only 1000 feet or so higher than we were at the passes. The wind was bitter cold whenever we got out, so we had no incentive to linger at the viewpoints.

I spotted a wolf sitting about 40 feet from the highway, where the cleared area met the forest. It would have made a nice photo, but we didn't try to turn around and go back, because we were sure the animal would slip off into the forest as soon as we slowed down.

We stopped for a late lunch at the overlook where we saw the swans on Saturday. This time there were 11, including 2 or 4 Trumpeters and the rest Tundra. We also saw an eagle once. All the birds flew about occasionally this time, so Jim photographed the scene with them in flight in the distance.

Since the weather is so gloomy and cold (with even a bit of snow falling about 30 miles before we stopped.) and most of the birds have left, we decided to make tracks for a more southerly clime. So we drove about 250 miles and got all the way to Whitehorse by 6:00 p.m., having lost an hour enroute due to a time zone change. The road was satisfactory just about all the way, although not as good as the Haines Highway.

Next to the road today we've seen many flocks of 2 to 50 American (formerly Water) Pipits flying up. I think they must be migrating now, for except for a couple of small flocks last Saturday, they're the first we've seen. They breed in the tundra, and probably the cold weather has sent them on their way.

I think Jim and I are both glad to have left Alaska. Although the scenery is beautiful, we were constantly assaulted by the rural blight which is all along the highways. Ever present is evidence of the frontier mentality that there will always be another piece of land for them to do what they will with.

Most "homes," if you can call them that, are shacks surrounded by junk strewn all over the landscape. In our opinion, they've been "built" by lazy bums who came up here to "live off the land." That has a stalwart, independent ring to it, but what it really means is to pay no taxes, contribute nothing to society, kill off the roadside wildlife, and simply be a squatter wherever they want to live.

A small minority have tried to establish roadside businesses, but at least half of them are defunct and moldering away, contributing their bit to the roadside blight. I suspect that even when they were first constructed, they looked so makeshift and ugly that very few travelers were tempted to stop.

We've seen lots of decrepit old trailers beside the road, which look as though they've been parked there forever. Usually they're located beside fishing rivers or streams. They too are surrounded by all sorts of junk. I don't suppose the people live in them in the winter, but it's perfectly legal to camp anywhere they want to beside the road for as long as they want.

These so-called Alaskans, many of whom haven't been up here very long at all, are all for

development of the natural resources to their fullest so they'll continue to get their free ride. I'm sure there are some true conservationists among their number, but they don't seem to be having much influence in today's Alaska. Jim and I both feel that Alaska is too precious a resource to be left solely in the hands of the people who happen to reside here today. The Federal Government must keep them in check.

The Yukon roadsides seem pristine compared with Alaska's. In fact, very few people live along the highways. Those who do keep their places tidy, even if they are old and run-down. Although roadside camping is also legal here, we've seen no sign that the people abuse the privilege. Most campsites look appropriately temporary.

Junction 37 RV Park, 12 miles NW of Watson Lake, YK
9:24 am, Thursday, August 29, 1991

We're at the junction of the Alaska Highway and the Cassiar Highway, BC Hwy. 37, which goes south through British Columbia. We plan to take that road when Jim gets through doing some minor repairs to the trailer.

The weather has been cold, gloomy and unpleasant for several days now. I think we saw a weak sun for a total of five minutes yesterday. We drove all the way here from Whitehorse--about 250 miles--yesterday. We had planned to stop for the night at Rancheria, about 60 miles short of here, but Rancheria is at about the summit of that stretch of road. There was fallen snow all along the highway, and it was actually snowing less than 1000 feet above the road on either side. We were glad that the only precipitation we were getting was rain, which only rarely seemed a bit slushy. It seemed prudent to get out of the mountains in the late afternoon rather than chancing a wait until morning.

The scenery that last 60 miles was beautiful, and Jim even stopped once to take a few photos. He wanted to stop other places, but it was raining most of that time. It would have been fun to get pictures of that area, which he had photographed so thoroughly when we went north on a beautiful sunny June day. Now the meadows are turning golden, and of course the lowering storm clouds, with snow-covered slopes below them were very dramatic.

A-E Guest Ranch & RV Park, Iskut, BC
1:04 pm, Friday, August 30, 1991

In terms of setting and view, we're in probably the most beautiful private campground we've ever visited. We're perched in a nice isolated site overlooking a green meadow which is gradually reverting to forest. All around it rise steep forested slopes, and above them we see a glacier peeking over the edge of a snow-capped mountain top.

We drove all day yesterday down the Cassiar Highway. I suppose we went about 200 miles, including about 40 miles of gravel. Some of the gravel was full of potholes and large rocks, but most of it was very smooth. I hope the remaining gravel stretches--ca. 150 miles--are like the smooth part.

The weather continues to be cold, with snow-clouds only slightly higher than the level of the highway in places. It was beautiful, though, to drive along with snow-capped peaks rising all around us. We had some rain, but also some sunshine, so all-in-all it wasn't a bad day. We'd been told that this highway was a boring drive through the trees. I don't know what was wrong with those people. The scenery was really spectacular. These same people also told us that B.C. people are unfriendly, but so far we haven't encountered any unfriendly ones. [Later: we never did, on any trip.]

Settlements are few and far between along this road, and we found that one or two which advertised in this year's *Milepost* (the "bible" for motorists in the northland) have gone out of business. Fortunately we had enough gas to continue to an open gas station, but it certainly has taught us to buy gas whenever we get a chance.

Campgrounds are also scarce, and here in British Columbia it is illegal to camp beside the

road. We could have parked behind a motel or gas station in Dease Lake, a town about 50 miles back, but we had read an ad for this place in the *Milepost*, so continued on. There was only a small sign outside the entrance, because the government doesn't permit much roadside advertising. We almost missed the turn. The entrance road was a nicely graded, but narrow, winding drive down into a valley. The "office" was merely the door to the home of Al and Elaine (A-E) Adams, who own the place. They've lived here 20 years and could never make a living by ranching their 230 acres. They're pretty far north for farming. Al works for the highway dept., so that probably explains why the entry road was so nice. To help make ends meet, they decided to put in a few campsites and a couple of small cabins. Elaine told us they're going at it slowly, "so as to do it right." They're trying to make the sites fit in without destroying the setting, yet give all sites a piece of the view.

The only hook-up sites (electric only) now are via long cords in the parking lot behind their house, but they plan to develop a small area for hook-ups in the future. We elected to take one of the sites without electricity, which are along a road which overlooks their meadow. Last night we were the only people in this section, although there were 3 or 4 units hooked up in the parking lot.

Al and Elaine only got electricity 6 years ago. Candles and lanterns were their only light until then. They refused to buy a generator because they didn't want to live with the constant roar the things make and "they just eat money." When wired electricity finally came to this area, they hooked up, and even bought a satellite dish, so they could get TV. What an abrupt change that must have made in their lives.

This morning we took a walk through the forest, then across the meadow to a lake and marsh. We'd have gone farther, but rubber boots seemed in order from there on.

We've seen more birds here than we have in a long time. We've come farther south, to be sure, but I think the fact that there are so many edges between different habitats is the main reason. Within view, we can see grassy meadow with large brushy patches. On the edge of the meadow there are willows and above them on one side birches and on the other side spruces and other conifers. Just around the bend in the meadow from the trailer, there is a marsh, a shallow pond, and a small lake, which we have yet to explore.

A few minutes ago I was interrupted in writing this log by the second pass-by of what I'm pretty sure is the same flock of birds. They're roaming around the area, each species foraging in its own way, but depending on the protection of the many eyes of the other birds in the flock. The flock is mainly Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers (at least 25 of them), which flitted through the tree-tops, flying out for flying insects. The Wilson's Warblers hugged the dense bushes near the ground. American Redstarts, accompanied by a single Townsend's Warbler, were a little higher in the spindly young trees. But they weren't all warblers. With them, both last evening and just now, there were a Western Wood-Pewee and a couple of Red-breasted Nuthatches. That may not be all either, but we'll have to wait for the next pass to see what else is there.

Elaine told us that they sometimes see Tundra Swans, Sandhill Cranes and Canada Geese in migration. They like the pond.

We had planned to spend only one night here and then continue scurrying to warmer climes, but we simply can't leave this beautiful spot after such a short stay, so we've paid for tonight, too. A glance at the calendar told us that this coming week-end is the Labor Day holiday, which Canadians celebrate, too. So we don't want to get down south near a city too soon. There we'd have to compete for campsites with all the week-enders. There's no danger of week-enders up where we are.

The only worrisome consideration is the weather. We keep hearing statements, both on TV and from people we meet, like these:

"This is typical weather for October, not August."

"Weather patterns like this, with storms developing around a stationary low in the Gulf of Alaska, are more typical of November than of August."

"This month is proving to be the wettest August on record in Vancouver."

"There was snow on the highway north of Dease Lake this morning." This last statement was

about the road we just came over yesterday! Dease Lake is only 50 miles north of here.

Oh, well. It's really much too early for winter to arrive for good. Maybe we'll have beautiful weather next week. So far, although it's been cold, we haven't had a night below freezing. We lived through temperatures as low as 9° on our Dec., 1989, trip to Texas, and had freezing days as well as nights for a week or more.

Same place

2:32 pm, Friday, August 30, 1991

The flock of little birds has apparently completed its circuit of our little branch of the meadow and is streaming back across. I heard the hearty little "thip" calls of the Yellow-rumps and looked out. There in the withering fireweed not ten feet behind the trailer was a Red-breasted Nuthatch. It was hanging up-side-down, feasting on aphids (or something) which were thick on the underside of those fireweed leaves--not exactly the meal you'd expect a nuthatch to eat, but lots easier to come by than the usual grubs under the bark of trees.

Meziadin Provincial Park, BC

8:44 am, Monday, September 2, 1991

Today is Labor Day. But we're so far from any large metropolitan areas that, although there are a few local folks here for a holiday weekend, the campground is only about two-thirds full.

Saturday dawned clear and sunny, with only a few clouds. It was glorious after all the gloomy days we've been having. We lingered at A-E until around 10:00, enjoying the place in a "new light." Jim, of course, had to retake a lot of the scenics he had taken when it was cloudy.

Then we set out for our last stretch of unpaved road--scheduled stretch, of course; we could easily encounter construction zones. The first 50 miles or so turned out to be paved, a much greater distance than had been labeled as such on the map. It looked as though it had recently been done. Then we hit the gravel. At first it was fairly smooth, but the farther we got, the worse it became. The recent rains had washed all the dirt away from between the stones. Sometimes it was impossible to steer around all the potholes or avoid all the large rocks. The last 10 miles were the worst. They were a construction zone and were very wet and muddy. No loose rocks, but lots of ruts, mostly transverse, which we had to go over at around 2 mph to keep from bouncing.

To make matters worse, our nice sunny day had clouded over as the seabreeze turned the moist air into rain clouds as it surmounted the tall peaks of the coastal mountains. So we had intermittent rain from around noon on. It wasn't raining when we went over the worst part of the road, but it was obvious that it had been a short while earlier. We were (and still are) a muddy mess when we got here. The only reason we aren't as muddy as we were that rainy day on the Dempster is that we couldn't go fast enough to splash it up so high on our sides. And neither could the trucks we met! Also there seems to be no calcium chloride this time, for this mud has dried. Dry mud doesn't show as much as wet mud, but it'll still be a job to get off.

We drove 157 miles and got here around 5:30. Subtracting a half hour lunch stop, that gave us an average speed of 22.5 mph. for the day. Since the first half of the road was pretty fast, you can see how slowly we had to go near the end.

The scenery was absolutely glorious the entire way, which helped to make up for the bad road. Whoever was not driving, and trying to calculate the flattest stretch of road for the next 50 yards, could look at the scenery. The mountains of the coast range were on both sides of us as we traveled along the valley. No lowering snow-filled clouds this time--the temperature was not that cold--but there were still lots of old snow fields and occasional glaciers. In the foreground we had rivers, creeks, lakes, marshes, with the deciduous foliage just barely starting here and there to turn golden.

For one long stretch we passed a logged-over region. According to the *Milepost*, there had been a bad attack of spruce beetle a few years ago, which killed all the trees. So the wood had been

harvested. New trees have been replanted, but they are so small that they don't show above the fireweed--acres and acres, square mile after square mile, of fireweed. It must have been spectacular when it was in bloom. Now it is living up to its name, for the leaves are turning a fiery red, which also makes for an impressive sight. (The actual origin of the name of this ubiquitous northern plant is that it is the first plant to grow after a fire.)

The only wildlife we saw were an occasional group of ducks in eclipse plumage and one black bear disappearing into the forest.

Our campground is a provincial park on the edge of Meziadin (accent on the "a") Lake. Since the lake-front sites were rather close together, we selected one a bit farther back, but we can still see the lake from the rear window. At least, we can now that Jim has washed the mud off the windows. The rest of the trailer will have to wait for an established RV washing station.

Jim's bird-feeding operation has brought us a blue brigade of Steller's Jays--the first we've had at our feeders, although we saw some in the distance at Haines. This race has unusually black heads and upper parts, with just a hint of a pale eyebrow. The brilliant blue checkerboard of the wings and tail glows as beautifully as on Steller's anywhere.

For the first day or so we had only one jay, but then yesterday afternoon we had up to five around. A couple are juveniles who haven't yet gotten the idea that their parents aren't going to feed them any more. They stand in the middle of the pile of birdseed on the table and flutter their wings and open their gapes. All this elicits from the nearby adult is a violent attack. But the stupid kids just don't seem to get the idea.

The jays, of course, are carrying off far more food than they are consuming. I watched one this morning stuff his crop so full that he couldn't close his mouth. He kept trying in vain to pick up one more sunflower seed. That was a bit difficult when his mandibles couldn't be brought closer together than 3/8 inch.

Yesterday we left the trailer here and took the 40-mile, beautifully paved(!) spur road out to Stewart, B.C., and Hyder, AK. Stewart's claim to fame is as the northernmost ice-free port in Canada. It's certainly the northernmost end of the coastline in B.C. Despite the fact that they bill themselves as the "Friendliest Ghost Town in Alaska," Hyder's real claim to fame is that it is the only U.S. city(?) anywhere near here. It's certainly the southernmost spot in Alaska accessible by road.

I think we'll always remember the day's trip as the day of the bears. As we started out from our campground, we drove first along Meziadin Lake, but left it shortly and were traveling through a steep-walled valley with glacier-topped mountains on both sides. Then we came to the first "bear," Bear Glacier, which we could see not far away across its terminal lake. It is perhaps the bluest glacier I've ever seen, and the sun was out, too. (Glaciers usually look bluer when it's cloudy.) Jim, of course, photographed it from every angle and with all his "other" cameras and lenses.

The remaining 25 miles were along Bear River. Parts of the drive were between steep cliffs. The walls were not smooth and sheer, but rather composed of all sorts of rock out-croppings. Near the water these were covered with the most beautiful natural rock garden plants you could imagine. Bright green mosses and foot-wide maple-leaf-shaped Devil's Club predominated, but there were even small trees growing from the crevices, too. On our way back Jim set up his tripod and photographed them. (On a tripod he could use a longer exposure time and smaller lens opening, thus achieving greater depth of focus. Photographers call it "stopping down." Besides, it was pretty dark for hand-held photos.)

As we approached Stewart, the valley widened out and the river became one of those braided channel affairs which are so typical of the north country, where the rivers seem to carry more rock than water. The water level was very high and in some places looked as though it was held back from the road only by the dikes. I'm sure the record-breaking August rains combined with the usual summer-time melting of the ice fields were responsible for it.

Stewart is an ugly town of around 2200 people. The nicest homes are small frame structures, but many of the lots contain mobile homes of uncertain antiquity. Then there are the structures which seem to have been assembled from whatever was at hand.

The main source of employment seems to be logging. I started to say "lumbering," but that would be incorrect, for all the logs seem to be shipped intact, probably to Japan. We saw a huge crane with a pair of jaws picking up mouthfuls of a dozen or so logs from the bay and stacking them on a large ship, the Haida. The ship had no city named on it, but since Haida is the name of a local Indian tribe, it must be a B.C. vessel. So perhaps they're being shipped to a lumber mill elsewhere in B.C.

Stewart was originally established as a mining town, and in the early part of this century had a much larger population. Sizeable quantities of copper, lead, silver and gold were taken from the area, but no one ever struck a true bonanza.

The town is located at the end of a very long fjord called the Portland Canal, which extends out around 90 miles in a southwesterly direction to the Pacific Ocean. The U.S.-Canada border runs down the center of the canal.

We drove right through Stewart and around the northeastern end of the Portland Canal. Two miles farther on we came to the international border, which had a sign over the road, "WELCOME TO HYDER"--and there the paved road ended and the gravel began. No customs house stopped us from entering the U.S. that way. (When we returned to Canada later, there was a sign directing people arriving from any place other than Hyder to "REPORT TO CANADA CUSTOMS IN PRINCE RUPERT." Since Prince Rupert is 125 miles away as the Northwestern Crow flies or the Killer Whale swims, and 284 miles by road, I suspect not very many new arrivals bother to comply.

Hyder (population 80) is funky little town, but has a certain charm. There were a few of the same sorts of whatever-was-at-hand buildings as we saw in Stewart, but there were also lots of steep-roofed houses which looked as though they were built for or by forest gnomes. Since Hyder averages 24 feet of snow in the wintertime, the steep roofs seemed appropriate. We drove slowly through the town, looking around. As we were about to turn around and go back in what looked like the last wide parking lot in town, we saw a sign in that motel's parking lot, "DON'T TURN AROUND HERE." I guess everyone turns around there, and they were tired of it.

So we kept driving and soon were out of town. Since the gravel road was nice and wide and no bumpier than the one we had driven on the day before, we decided to continue a ways. It was a beautiful scenic drive along the braided channels of the Salmon River. (I wonder how many Salmon Rivers there are.)

A mile or so up the road Jim got out to take a picture of the river and the mountains behind. He discovered the river was full of salmon. (I read in the *Milepost* that they were chum salmon--just about the largest anywhere. Chum salmon are the least choice of the five species. Many people think they are only good to feed to the dogs, hence the alternative name, dog salmon.) As Jim was trying to photograph the salmon, I looked up the road and saw our third "bear" of the day. This time it was a real one, a black bear. It was crossing the road and heading for the river and its salmon. Jim snapped a couple of pictures of it before it disappeared into the smallest clump of brush you could imagine. We stayed around the area a while and drove back and forth, but that bear never showed itself again, yet we knew it was still in that 50 foot long stretch of brush between the road and the river bed.

With that bit of encouragement, we drove farther up the road. At one spot there was a parking area where Fish Creek entered the Salmon River. We could watch the salmon spawning in the clear waters of the creek bed. (The river was cloudy with glacial silt.)

The road then seemed to be following Fish Creek, rather than the main river. At least the water was clear. Most of the time we couldn't see any water because the brush on the 15 foot strip between the road and the creek was so tall. But finally we came to a clear place. On the other side of the narrow creek, there was another bear intently watching the water for salmon. We stopped behind some bushes just beyond the clear place. Jim got out and snuck back a few feet and shot practically a whole roll of film of that bear. He got frame fillers with his 500 mm lens and was walking in air the rest of the day.

We saw several more bears along that same stretch, and Jim shot a few "long shots" for lead-

ins in a show we might put together sometime. We must have spent 2 or 3 hours along that stretch of creek.

We've seen spawning salmon lots of places on this trip, but this was the first place we encountered any bears feeding on them. Lots of bear warnings, but no bears! This time there were no warnings. Once I thought I was about to see a bear warning sign, but this picture was of a bear with a ranger hat on and was captioned, "Only you . . ."

By this time it was approaching 2:00, and we were getting pretty hungry, so we drove back into Hyder and had hamburgers in a local saloon.

That brings me to the reason for Hyder's continued existence. It serves as a place for Canadians to take advantage of cheap American prices. The liquor tax in Canada is so high that they pay 3 or 4 times as much as we do for booze. So you can imagine that the bars in Hyder are popular with the loggers from Stewart.

Gasoline prices are 2 or 3 times as high in Canada as in the U.S., and we saw a gas station just being installed in Hyder. When we bought gas in Stewart on our way back, Jim found the attendant to be very glum and surmised he was worried that his gas sales would plummet then Hyder opened its station.

We stopped at a roadside produce stand in Hyder. Despite the rain shower that was occurring then, it was doing a rousing business selling fruits and vegetables that had been trucked up from Washington--about 1000 miles away by road. It's illegal for Americans to bring things from the U.S. for resale in Canada, and although we've seen American produce in the grocery stores, it's at Canadian prices. I guess there must be some sort of duty. It is legal to bring sealed shipments through Canada into Alaska, though, without paying the tax, and that is what these enterprising folks had done. They claimed their sweet-corn had been picked Friday--2 days ago. I didn't buy any of that because I only want corn that was picked 2 hours ago, but I did buy some peaches, tomatoes, bell peppers, and cabbage, and the prices weren't bad, considering. I also may have avoided the 15% sales tax that they pay in B.C.--7% national G.S.T. and 8% provincial--although I'm not sure I'd have had to pay it on food.

When we paid our bill for lunch at the saloon, which incidentally had a rather attractive, but of course funky, restaurant at one end, there was a sign up on the mirror behind the bar asking, "What is the only town in Alaska with a Canadian area code?" I, of course, knew it had to be Hyder. Their phone service is from a Canadian company.

I then asked the waitress about their postal service, for I had seen a post office in town with a U.S.-blue mail box rather than a Canada-red one out in front. I wondered if they depended on Canada Post for their mail. She said, "No, we get our mail a couple of times a week from Ketchikan, weather permitting. A float plane flies it in and lands in the Portland Canal."

The "weather permitting" part combined with the uncertainties of CanadaPost almost got her into trouble once, though. She received her telephone bill (mailed in Canada by that Canadian phone company) and her cancellation notice for not paying said bill in the same mail! I forgot to ask her where the bill had been mailed. I wonder if it was from Stewart--two miles away.

Well, it's 10:30 now, and it's time I drew this rather lengthy installment to a close so we can mosey on down the nice paved highway. It's a beautiful sunny day, now that the morning lake fog has burned off.

Prince Rupert City Campground, Prince Rupert, B.C.

5:25 pm, Wednesday, September 4, 1991

We moseyed only about 100 miles to the Cassiar Campground in Kitwanga, which is at the junction of the Cassiar Hwy. and the Yellowhead Hwy.

We made a couple of stops, the first where the highway crossed the Ness River on an old one-lane wooden bridge, whose construction Jim found quite interesting. There was an elderly Dutchman selling Holland items at the parking lot there, which we found rather incongruous up in that country.

He said he was from Prince George, several hundred miles from there.

I bought a jar of hot pepper sauce, which I thought was a strange item to be from Holland until I realized that the Dutch had strong ties historically both with Spain and with Indonesia ("Dutch East Indies"), both areas which like their food hot. I haven't tried it yet, but the man said they usually use it on rice. [Later: I put a tiny bit of it in a Spanish rice and pork chops dish, and it was hot! I suspect it'll take a long time to use up that jarful--a whole pint.] [Even later: I never use much of it and finally threw it away.]

Jim bought a bag of licorice. He said it was terrible and, "That imported stuff is always awful." When I asked him why he bought it, he said, "I hoped this would be different, and I can't resist anything sweet. Besides, I love licorice." He certainly won't get any help from me eating it. I even hate what he calls good licorice.

Our other stop was at the Indian village of Kitwancool, which had a lot of old totems on display. (Kitwanga means "place of many people." Kitwancool means "place of fewer people" and got its name after many of its population were "killed in a raid." The Milepost didn't say who was raiding whom.)

The totems were beautiful and really looked antique. One was the "hole in the ice" totem, which is supposed to be quite famous. It has a large hole in it with a lot of people standing around. Actually their feet are all at the edge of the hole and their bodies radiate out all around the hole, so it looked as though they were lying on the ice. I noticed that lots of the totems had adults holding smaller people, presumably children. I'd like to know what story element that depicts. Unfortunately there were no interpretive signs by the poles.

Incidentally, totem poles were not religious icons, but rather illustrations of clan legends and favorite family stories. The only colors that were used on them were red and black. Only when the Indians started trading with the white man did they obtain blues and greens and yellows.

We got into Kitwanga around 3:00. We could have gone 60 miles farther to Terrace, but since the campground had a high-pressure car wash hose, we decided to pay the \$12.00 they wanted for 30 minutes use and get the worst of the Cassiar crud off the truck and trailer. We look much better now, although there are little black specks of tar all over both vehicles. To get those off will take a long session with some sort of organic solvent.

Jim and I had a discussion as to which was worse, Cassiar crud or Dempster dirt. I vote for the Cassiar stuff because of the tar, but Jim hated that gummy Dempster calcium chloride-laced mud with a passion.

Yesterday we drove the 150 miles to Prince Rupert. The day started out with clouds and a slight mist, but by the time we got here, it was absolutely pouring. It only let up for about 10 minutes right after we got here so Jim could unhook without getting wet. Wasn't that nice?

The last half of the road was labeled scenic on the AAA map, but the clouds were so low that we really couldn't appreciate it at all. We were hoping it would be nice on the way back, but they're forecasting rain again tomorrow.

Today was absolutely beautiful, though. We took advantage of the clear weather this morning by driving back along a bit of the road and photographing the beautiful scenery. Prince Rupert is on a large island on the coast and is surrounded by channels dotted with tiny islets covered with tall trees. There were also a few lakes with trees and stumps on the far side which were reflected in the clear water.

We (I say "we" because I was the director and Jim was the photographer.) took what I hope will be an effective series of photos: At one place there was a tall long-dead spruce lying in the water with its gnarled weathered moss-crowned roots protruding up from the base of the trunk. When you looked at it in the still water, the water line was absolutely invisible, and it seemed as though you were looking at the entire root. I tossed a stone into the water generating ripples, which dissolved the reflection, but kept the top part clear, of course. Jim photographed the stump from a tripod, first with the clear image, then after a few rocks tossed into the water nearby distorted the image. We'll try dissolving one slide to the other with our multi-image equipment. It should make an interesting effect.

We visited an old salmon cannery in Port Edward, about 10 miles from Prince Rupert. Although no longer in operation, it's the oldest remaining cannery on the Pacific Coast and was donated by the company to a group (I don't know whether it's government or private.) to restore as a museum illustrating the way salmon was processed in the early days. It was interesting, but they still have lots more to do before it really shows what they want it to.

Segregation was the order of the day in the early salmon industry. The handout we received when we arrived described it in such an interesting fashion that I'll quote it:

Management, directly responsible to the plant owners, were usually of Euro-Canadian background. They served as managers, bookkeepers, storekeepers, net bosses and engineers. Their families lived in the most prominent housing.

Chinese workers, who came without their families, lived in the Chinese bunkhouse. Under a contract system to the plant owner, they were responsible for the processing of the salmon from the time it arrived on the dock to where it was tinned and boxed for shipping.

Japanese people worked as fishermen, boat-builders and carpenters. They lived in separate cottages or, as single men, in a bunkhouse.

Indian families lived in the Indian village. They worked as fishermen and shoreworkers (in the net industry, the cannery, warehouse and in boxing up the canned salmon).

In those early days the four ethnic divisions were happy to be in their segregated communities--comfortable with their native culture and language. Even so, they worked together in as much harmony as seems to exist in today's world.

I found that last sentence amusing, for it glosses over a lot. We have recently read James Michener's *Alaska*, in which he describes all sorts of ethnic strife in those salmon canneries. Each group was jealous of its "job description" and didn't want any other group encroaching on what they perceived to be their tasks. The bosses had so much trouble with the Chinese, who fought among themselves as well as with the other groups, that they tried to eliminate their grip on the cannery by inventing what was called an "iron Chink" to replace their labor of removing the heads, tails and entrails from the fish. These machines were in use for a time, but one of the museum employees told us that the fish in modern canneries are prepared by crews of people, mostly Indians now. People are faster and don't mangle the fish as badly as the machine.

We got back to the trailer around 1:30 and had a late lunch. After a short nap, I walked the trail right in our campground. It went through the woods and along a stream and by a pond--really very lovely. I think the thing that impressed me most about it, though, was the aromas which I suddenly realized I've been missing all summer. Today is probably the warmest day we've had for many weeks. The temperature is unusually warm--in the low 70's! (It's been a very cool summer all over the northland.) The sun's rays on the sodden landscape brought forth the piney scent of the trees, the musty, mushroomy scent of the forest soil, the sweet fragrance of the maturing grasses in the clearings, and many others. It almost made me "homesick" for familiar areas farther south, like the Oregon coast or the Redwood Highway.

Prince Rupert is an attractive city of about 17,000 people. It's built on hilly ground, and it seems as though most homes have some sort of view of the water.

Mother, Gil (my brother) and I were here in 1957, and I tried to locate the hotel where we stayed. As I recall, it was an ugly blocky concrete structure of a half-dozen or so stories, and I think I found it. It looks as though it's had a face lift since then and is still a nice hotel, called simply the Rupert Hotel. The only thing I recall about our 1957 stay is being awakened out of a sound sleep in the early dawn of a northern summer night and told to climb down the stairs from some upper story, because the hotel was on fire. We did as we were told and exited the smoky place, somewhat shaken. It turned out not to be much of a fire--just a lot of smoke from a burning mattress set afire by a drowsy smoker.

Gerry's Trailer Court, Houston, B.C.

7:41 pm, Thursday, September 5, 1991

When we awoke this morning our lovely sunny day yesterday seemed just like a pleasant dream. The sky was overcast and dreary again. So as we drove back on the highway along the Skeena River, we still were unable to see the beautiful scene. Only occasionally did a mountain top peek out higher up than it seemed possible for a mountain to be. We were really disappointed, but the forecast is for this kind of weather for the next several days. So we got an early start (for us these days, 8:30) and drove back through the rain. The farther east we got, the lighter the rain, but the entire day was mostly cloudy.

After we passed the junction for the Cassiar Hwy. 150 miles back, we were on new road for both of us. We left the Skeena River at Hazelton, and then followed a tributary of it which is probably the main river, it just lacks the name Skeena. It's called the Bulkley R. The last 50 miles (of our 260) were through pasture land--the first farms we've seen, except for a few isolated ones. The drive was uneventful, except that we stopped to have our rear set of trailer brakes checked, because they smelled hot when we stopped for lunch. It turned out they were OK, and so were the wheel bearings. One of the sets of springs was slipping so the leaves were no longer one directly atop the next, so they installed a bracket to hold them in place. We detected no odor the next time we stopped, so it's hard to know what we smelled.

Our present trailer park is nothing to write home about (but I'm doing it anyway, you'll notice!). In fact we almost didn't stay when we first drove in the gate. It contains the worst group of moldering old trailers surrounded by junk you could imagine. But since there didn't seem to be another spot very soon, we drove on in and found a fairly nice section for overnights in the back, occupied by nice RV's. Jim's going to skip the shower though, for he has pronounced it "scuzzy"--a favorite word of his.

The owners of the place were most disinterested in collecting their \$12.00 camping fee. When we drove in, there was no one home. Still no one home at bed time. Finally, in the morning when no one had come around to collect the fee, Jim went over to the owners' house with the money.

When he paid for our space, the owner remarked that the birds seem to be migrating south early this year, especially the waterfowl. She thinks that means an early winter. That confirmed our impression farther north, where it looked as though winter was about to arrive.

I added up the miles this morning, and we have 2500 miles to go to get home (from Prince Rupert). It's almost 1000 miles from Prince Rupert to Vancouver by road, but only about 400 miles by air. We plan to go down U.S. 101. If we average 250 miles a day, that doesn't leave many days for sightseeing, if we're to get home by Sept. 24. Who knows, though? We may put on steam near the end.

Cache Creek Campsite, Cache Creek, B.C.

4:37 pm, Saturday, September 7, 1991

Sagebrush! Fall rabbitbrush with its dusty yellow flowers. Yellow pines scattered on the slopes! Twenty miles back we came down a 1500 foot grade in 10 miles and were suddenly in the Great Basin again. I then realized how tired I had become of spruce trees and balsam poplars, which are the hallmark of the boreal forest where we have been almost constantly since we got part way up Alberta back in May.

Our campground here is along a streambed, and the trees here look like the typical Fremont cottonwood of Utah, not the balsam poplar of the boreal forest. I wish I had brought my western tree book to check for sure. There are also quite a few large willows.

Last night we stayed at the Canyon Creek Campsite in Hixon, which is a few miles south of Prince George. It was a nice campground and was run by an energetic little flea of an Aussie. We drove in the driveway of the place, saw the sign for the office, but before Jim could even decide

where exactly to park, out ran this friendly, businesslike, wiry little man of around 40 years of age. "I'll just jump in my truck, and you can follow me. We'll settle up out at the site," he said. Jim barely had time to tell him that, unlike most people who want a site as close to the john as possible, we prefer one way out in the "boonies."

He led us to the third site from the end of the line, but we went on and pulled into the last one. He warned us there might be more highway noise there, which was why he hadn't taken us to that one. We stuck with our choice, which was fine with him. He pulled his receipt book out of one pocket and his wallet out of the other, and handled the transaction at the picnic table.

All the rest of the evening we saw him either running or trotting around that campground. No wonder he had no meat on his bones. At the pace he goes--along with the constant cigarette hanging from his mouth--I don't predict a long life for him.

It was a nice campground, but no birds around except robins and juncos, so we pulled out this morning and headed on down the road.

Today's drive was mostly through the Fraser River Valley, with agricultural land (hay and grazing mostly) on the valley floor and logging on the slopes. There were small towns frequently, and in between them farmhouses along the road, which is the only road through that area. (There is apparently a similar situation on the other side of the river, except that the road there is mostly unpaved.)

Weather started out clear, but clouded up and rained a bit in the afternoon. I know that isn't normal here, for we noticed that many of the farms had overhead irrigation equipment for watering their fields.

Have you noticed that the last two places we've stayed call themselves "--- Campsite" rather than "--- Campground?" I thought last night's place was perhaps an Australian usage, but all down this valley we've found that term used. Nowhere else in our travels have we seen this. The usual usage is "campground" for the whole establishment, which is divided up into individual "campsites."

By now most of the tourists on the road and in the campgrounds are local folks, many of them hunters. We rarely see an out-of-province license, except perhaps Washington or Alberta. Surprisingly enough most of the Alberta (not B.C. because the license fees are lower in Alberta) vehicles turn out to be rentals driven by Germans! They are intrepid travelers and love to explore the out-of-the way places, just as we do. Many of them are very friendly and love to converse with us North Americans. The ones who avoid our glance, we suspect, do so because they don't speak much English.

Lake Goodwin Resort, nr. Stanwood, WA

8:16 am, Monday, September 9, 1991

Yesterday's drive was so interesting that I didn't get the "drowsies" once. When we left Cache Creek, we were soon driving along the Thompson River. Lovely views of the river with its terraced banks rising high on either side met us at every bend. The landscape was more Great Basin sage brush and rabbitbrush. Looking up the slope we could see scattered yellow (Ponderosa?) pines, gradually becoming closer together and giving way to what looked like the spruce forest we'd become so familiar with up north.

When the Thompson River merged with the Fraser River, we then followed the latter for many miles, including through the famous Fraser River Canyon. Although the sheer walls of the canyon were spectacular, it was hard to see down in the canyon because of the trees. Despite the fact that the AAA map only showed the stretch from Boston Bar to Yale as scenic, we found the part north of there more beautiful.

We were especially intrigued by one place where there were two railroad bridges. It looked as though two lines were trading sides of the river there. Apparently one railroad established its roadbed first and decided to cross over at that point. That meant that the later company had to take the opposite side all the way--and cross over there, too.

The river valley widens out from Hope on, and that, too, was beautiful--brilliant green fields surmounted by steep dark green mountain slopes.

We crossed the border just south of Abbotsford. I had picked out a promising RV park immediately south of the border, but we got there around 2:00, and Jim said he wasn't ready to stop yet. So we filled up our gas tank with (relatively) cheap U.S. gasoline and continued down Interstate 5.

I found a couple of pleasant sounding RV parks which were 5.5 miles off the road and beside a lake. But the directions seemed to be for drivers from the south only, but we had to try to find them from the north. Since all we had was a Washington state map, that proved to be a good trick. But we had a nice drive on some of the back roads around Stanwood before arriving back at the freeway. We even thought we saw an RV park off in the distance, but could never find a road that went to it. The countryside reminded us greatly of the farmed bottomlands and adjacent hills around Watsonville, CA.

It turned out that the exit for the parks was 2 miles south of where we got back to the freeway, so we took that and found them without difficulty. One was jammed with RV's, so we selected the other and are backed up to a pretty resort lake. Jim said the showers were rather run-down, but didn't complain about the water supply.

Two Greater Yellowlegs were running around like crazy birds in the edge of the lake. It reminded me of something I heard or was told--I forget which--when I started birding: "Lessers run around like crazy, while Greaters feed sedately." I've found that to be false over the years. Either species can feed either way. I guess it just depends on what they're feeding on. Jim says they're chasing tiny fish in the clear water.

As soon as I get this installment edited and printed out, which will take a couple of hours, we'll get on the road again. We plan to cut over to the coast at the south end of Puget Sound, then drive down U.S. 101 all the way home. I don't know how long that will take, but I may not mail another installment on the way.

Lake Sylvia State Park, Montesano, WA

9:37 am, Tuesday, September 10, 1991

We didn't get on the road until about noon yesterday, because it took me most of the morning to edit and print my last installment of the log for mailing. CanadaPost had been ordered back to work while their strike was mediated, but I imagine things were in a huge mess because they'd been out for a week or ten days. (The public employees of Canada are now out on strike, too. That country really has a militant labor force, and they've found in the past that by striking they can get the Parliament to give them what they want, because their constituents complain about the lack of services, even though they don't seem to be particularly sympathetic with the strikers.)

It was 2:00 by the time we found a coffee shop for lunch and did some grocery shopping. (I had a long list because I'd delayed all unnecessary purchases until I was back to U.S. prices.)

The rest of the afternoon--until 5:00--we spent on the freeways of the Everett-to-Olympia megalopolis, which includes Seattle, Tacoma, etc.

We took the I-405 bypass road plus a couple of state highways, which are also freeways. These were all a few miles east of I-5. We thought we would avoid the traffic that way, but there was still plenty of it, although it moved at a good speed most of the time. The only redeeming feature of the long drive was the splendid view we had of Mt. Rainier all the way. It was a cloudless day, except for a narrow belt of clouds about half-way up the mountain.

By the time we got past Olympia and were headed across the base of the Olympic Peninsula, we were ready to stop. We checked out a couple of private RV parks. One had bright security lights about every other site (like the neighbors installed in their backyard, Mother), so we rejected that. The other turned out to be a Camp-Coast-to-Coast membership park, and we'd have had to agree to listen to an hour-long sales pitch in order to stay there. We've read enough about those membership

places to know they're not for us.

A few miles farther brought us to this lovely, but small, state park nestled in the tall trees of the coastal rain forest. With a name like Lake Sylvia, it had to be nice, didn't it? It certainly is sylvan, so maybe that's where it got its name.

There are a fair number of birds in this park, for a change. We're especially taken by the Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, which seem to be all over the place. I hope Jim can get a picture of the immature Hairy. He also saw a Pileated flying high over the treetops, but the chances for a photo of that here are pretty slim. He still has never photographed that bird.

It was a balmy, totally calm, insect-free evening, and we sat out in our chairs beside the trailer while I cooked hamburgers on the grill. We've had very few nights like this on our trip. In fact, I've rarely dared start the grill, either because of the rain (falling or threatening) or, earlier in the summer, because of the mosquitos. I suspect we'll eat lots of summer-type meals when we get home. Jim can't wait for some of that white sweet corn from our favorite vegetable stand in Santa Ana (Fairview at Civic Center Dr.).

It's 10:00 now, and the sun still hasn't gotten down into our site, although it's 50 feet away. There is a steep mountain right east of us. The woodpeckers are not here now, but Jim is off on the other side of the campground looking for them in the sunshine. If they don't show up pretty soon, we're leaving.

KOA, Astoria/Warrenton, OR

2:10 pm, Wednesday, September 11, 1991

The woodpeckers didn't show up, so we left around 11:00. We drove out to the coast and around the south end of Gray's Harbor. The road most of the way was a half mile or so from the ocean and through trees and small towns, so we got no ocean views. South of there we traversed the east shore of Willapa Bay. By then the coastal morning fog had burned off and we thoroughly enjoyed the sun sparkling on the ripply blue water. All along the edge salt-marsh plants were protruding above the surface. (Part of this shoreline is protected as Willapa Natl. Wildlife Refuge.) We didn't see very many birds, though. That was just as well, for the road was so narrow we couldn't have stopped if we had wanted to. There were very few turnouts.

We crossed the long bridge over the mouth of the Columbia River to Astoria and then set about finding this KOA. The book said to take U.S. 101-Alt. as the first order of business. We drove half-way to Seaside before deciding that no road was labeled 101-Alt. So we retraced our steps, deciding to try to find the entrance to Fort Stevens State Park, because the place was supposed to be opposite that. All sorts of confusing signs directed us there, but frequently we couldn't tell which corner the signs referred to. Besides, Fort Stevens State Park has many entrances to many unconnected portions, as I know from past visits up here. Finally we ended up in Warrenton and asked a gas station man where the place was. He directed us to it; we were at least five miles away. When we finally got here, we found the place, which bills itself the Astoria/Warrenton KOA, actually to be in Hammond! When Jim complained to the desk clerk, he replied flippantly, "We have lots of characters hiding out here, so we don't want it to be too easy to find." We were annoyed, to put it mildly. This is the first campground on the entire trip which has not had those little blue trailer park signs directing us to it from the main highway. (That was even true of that pair of parks back in Washington that we had so much trouble finding. Our trouble there was our own fault for trying to find a short-cut.)

The KOA was well worth searching for, however. The 45-ft site width listed in the book had made me insist that we persist in the first place. All sites are full hook-up, and each row of sites backs up to a substantial row of native trees and shrubs.

We were disappointed in the birds, for all we could hear or see were crows. There was a strong sea breeze, which kept getting stronger all the time. I made the mistake of trying to cook chicken on the BBQ, and I must have rushed outside every two minutes and squirted a total of a pint

of water on the coals from my bulb baster to keep them from flaring up in the wind and burning that chicken to a cinder.

Now for the real reason for the stop in Astoria: SOURDOUGH PANCAKES! I searched all over Alaska and Yukon for good sourdoughs. Most places didn't have them at all, and in the two places we tried them, they were terrible. Since I've enjoyed that delicacy at the Pig'n Pancake Restaurant on almost every visit to the Pacific Northwest in the past 25 years, I decided I had to have them yet again--to see if they were as good as I remembered.

We discovered that there is also a Pig'n Pancake restaurant in Seaside, but we decided to drive to the one in Astoria. We were not disappointed! They're thinner than the typical buttermilks, and not quite so light--but oh, so tender, and with just the right amount of tangy sour taste. They serve you eight small pancakes, and they're scrumptious with berry syrup.

We got back to the trailer around 9:00, and while Jim was hooking up, I wandered along the back of the empty trailer sites beyond us. One group of trees was suddenly alive with feeding Cedar Waxwings and Purple Finches. They were going for some dark red fruits. I'll have to look up what kind of tree it is when I get home. [Cascara, *Rhamnus purshiana*] Since we have no good pictures of the western race of the Purple Finch, I set Jim to work. After a while, we decided it would be worth while to stay here another night and try to get that bird on film. He got the female (or immature male--they look alike), which we needed the most. But it would be nice if he could also get the adult male. I tried to record their *pip* flight calls, but had no sooner gotten my tape recorder out than a lawn mower started up. The birds only come by occasionally, and there's a Sharp-shinned Hawk around, too, to keep them wary. But we're still hoping. [He didn't get it.]

Since Jim had the trailer practically hooked up when I called the birds to his attention, we decided to move over to the site in front of the birds' tree, just in case someone else might take it. I told him he needn't unhook this time, since we wouldn't be doing any driving. His reply: "If we're going to stay over another night, I'm going to have some more of those pancakes!" And after all the guff he's been giving me about coming to the Oregon coast "just for Astoria sourdough pancakes!"

Home

3:22 pm, Tuesday, September 17, 1991

After our second sourdough pancake breakfast on Thursday, we headed on down the Oregon Coast Hwy, U.S. 101. It seems as though each time I drive it, it's more and more built up, especially the northern part. Furthermore, we were surprised to find that September is one of the busiest months of the year on that coast, and practically every other vehicle on the road is an RV, too. We were spoiled after being in the northland after the season was over and found the crowding turned us off and made us want to head for home without dallying anywhere.

We spent Thursday night at Carl Washburne State Park, half-way between Yachats and Florence. We got almost the last long site, but since all the sites there are very nice--and full hook-ups, too--it didn't matter. Our closest neighbors were on their second night ever out with an RV. They had purchased a nice-looking, but obviously used because of its old-fashioned paint-job, fifth-wheel, but the woman hastened to clarify, "We'd really rather have one of those buses." (Those rigs cost the better part of \$200,000.) I don't know what they thought of our mid-sized, low-cost Prowler, which looked somewhat the worse for having been pelted with rocks and spattered with tar from over 1000 miles on unpaved roads. But I don't really care. (She sure had a cute dog, though!)

After we got in, I took a three-mile walk along one of the forest trails that fan out from the campground. Since most people take the one to the beach, I practically had my trail to myself. It was so beautiful and peaceful, with the late-afternoon golden sun filtering through the leaves and needles of the trees, and illuminating the foliage on the forest floor. I don't think there's anything more lovely than the intricate variety of leaf structures in a northwestern rainforest.

The next day the morning fog burned off early, so we could enjoy the most beautiful part of the Oregon Coast. Jim got carried away taking scenic photos. Those sea stacks really turn him (or his

trigger finger) on.

We spent Friday night at Harris Beach State Park in Brookings. Here we were not so fortunate in our site. Its setting looked lovely, but it turned out that the highway was less than 100 feet away. To make matters worse, a large group of ca. 12-year-old kids and their adult counselors occupied three sites right next to and across from us. A few adults had arrived shortly after we did and rented the sites, then a couple of vans full of kids got there around 8:30. After much commotion of setting up tents and unfolding sleeping bags, the kids went to bed before 10:00. But their elders sat around the picnic table yakking until 1:00 a.m.! Of course the picnic table was right outside our bedroom window.

After that experience, we were really ready to head for home, so drove steadily most of the day Saturday, ending up at a very nice KOA, about 1.5 miles west of Willits on the highway to Fort Bragg.

It really felt good to be back in California. Even though I thought I never wanted to look at another conifer again, the majesty of the redwoods is irresistible, with the sun's rays shafting down through the fog. The Roosevelt Elk were lying in their usual field begging to be photographed. Since Jim has a faster lens now than he had last time we were up here, of course, he didn't try to resist them.

But I think what made me feel I was actually approaching home was the dark green oak savannah with the grasslands shimmering gold in the September sun. Our campground in Willits was in just such a setting, and it has a nice nature trail that makes a half-mile loop up through the Valley oaks, into the conifers (species to be looked up later) and back down. Jim took a couple of rolls of habitat shots of the area. We'll probably use some in our California multi-image show, whose production unfortunately must wait until after the publication of the Orange County Breeding Bird Atlas! [We never made it.]

Birds of the area were old friends that I haven't seen in a while either: Scrub Jay, Acorn Woodpecker, Rufous-sided Towhee, California Quail, etc.

Sunday we headed on south for the Golden Gate, intending to spend a day or so photographing the hawks from the highlands on the north side. (This is perhaps the prime fall hawk-watching site on the Pacific Coast.) That was not to be, for the entire area was fog-bound, and the forecast was for more of the same for the next several days.

So we continued on south, fighting for over an hour the incredible traffic jam that is San Francisco (San Franciscans won't let a freeway mar their city.) and ending up at the Cabana Holiday RV park in Prunedale, seven miles north of Salinas.

Yesterday we drove on home, encountering at all coastal locations the same fog we'd seen at the Golden Gate. And it's foggy here, too.

We got home a week earlier than we had planned, caused by a combination of the early snow in the north country and the crowds in Washington and Oregon.

Right now I'm taking time out from mountains of laundry, a dirty trailer to unload and clean, a house with spider webs in every corner and dangling from every ceiling, and four months of mail to sort through. I always dread coming home from a trip. But in a few days when we have time to collect our thoughts, I suspect I'll really be glad to be home.

Thanks to Gil (my brother) and Jill (his daughter), for looking after the house, paying the bills and stacking up all those little yellow film boxes so neatly on the breakfast table! Thanks also to Carolyn Honer for filling orders from the Sea and Sage Library of Nature Slides. Without their help, we couldn't have had such a lovely long trip. Incidentally, Gil, we drove 13,173 miles, but that's the only statistic I can give you. [Gil is noted for taking long auto trips and keeping countless statistics.]

I hope all of you who have read this little travel diary have found something in it to interest you. I tried to put into it things that would appeal to the varied readership it might have--plus a few things that I alone might want to remember sometime.

Trips are great, but having friends and relatives waiting at home with whom to share them make them even more fun.

Home, Dec. 31, 1991

I've finally gotten through sorting through and cataloging all the slides and sounds. Jim got 22 "life birds" by his definition--new birds photographed. I recorded sounds of 25 birds I didn't have before. The most interesting were the three I got at Winston Churchill Provincial Park that I had to identify by listening to commercial tapes after I got home. They were Black-throated Green, Blackburnian and Connecticut Warblers.

BIRDS ALONG THE DEMPSTER HIGHWAY

June 25 - July 7, 1991

Specific locations for the more unusual species are given. Kilometer designations are based on official highway signs, not those in the various pieces of literature, which we found could vary by several kilometers. Left and right refer to side of the road while driving north.

A. Klondike Highway to Tombstone Mountain Campground - no list made.

B. Tombstone Mountain Campground to roadside rest at about km 108.

(June 26, 29; July 7)

Green-winged Teal - nr. outfitter's camp
American Wigeon
Lesser Scaup
Harlequin Duck - nr. outfitter's camp
Oldsquaw (has been renamed Long-tailed Duck) - pond near km 82
Bufflehead
Red-bred Merganser - nr. outfitter's camp
Northern Harrier
American Kestrel
Merlin* - Tombstone Mtn. Camp - breeding pair
American Golden-Plover* - several places (distraction display seen)
Semipalmated Plover* - nr. outfitter's camp (distraction display seen)
Lesser Yellowlegs* (distraction display)
Spotted Sandpiper* (distraction display)
Least Sandpiper* - nr. outfitter's camp
Red-necked Phalarope - Blackstone R. Crossing
Mew Gull*
Arctic Tern*
Alder Flycatcher
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker - Tombstone Mtn. Camp
Say's Phoebe*
Cliff Swallow*
Gray Jay*
Common Raven
American Robin*
Yellow Warbler*
Wilson's Warbler*
American Tree Sparrow*
Chipping Sparrow - Tombstone Mtn. Camp
Savannah Sparrow*
Fox Sparrow, Red
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco - Tombstone Mtn. Camp
Lapland Longspur
Common Redpoll*

We found the best areas to be the Tombstone Mtn. Campground and the gravelly river bed just north of the outfitter's camp. We checked gravelly river beds elsewhere and found very little. Many of the rest of the birds were right beside the road, which we drove at about 15 km/hr for long periods so as not to miss anything.

C. From just north of roadside rest on Blackstone Uplands to and incl. Engineers Creek
Campground (June 27, 28; July 6)

Red-throated Loon - Blackstone R. crossing
Horned Grebe - pond on right past km 128
Green-winged Teal - Blackstone R. crossing
Northern Shoveler
Canvasback - Blackstone R. crossing
Lesser Scaup - Blackstone R. crossing
Oldsquaw - Blackstone R. crossing
Barrow's Goldeneye - pond north of Lake Chapman
Red-breasted Merganser
Bald Eagle - near Chapman Lake
Golden Eagle
American Kestrel
Willow Ptarmigan*
Rock Ptarmigan* - about km 138
Lesser Yellowlegs*
Solitary Sandpiper*
Spotted Sandpiper*
Upland Sandpiper* - N end of Blackstone Uplands, about km 127
Least Sandpiper
Common (now Wilson's) Snipe - found dead on road at about km 125
Mew Gull
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker
Say's Phoebe
Cliff Swallow
Gray Jay*
Common Raven
Ruby-crowned Kinglet - feeding jv
American Robin
Bohemian Waxwing
American Tree Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco

We searched diligently with my Questar scope for the Gyrfalcon in the Windy Pass area, but to no avail.

D. From just past Engineers Creek Camp to and incl. Eagle Plains Hotel
(June 28, July 4)

Golden Eagle
American Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon - high on cliff on the left at km 224.3
Spruce Grouse - about km 323
Lesser Yellowlegs
Northern Hawk Owl* - km 231.7
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker
Violet-green Swallow - many nesting in crevices on cliff at km 210

Cliff Swallow - many nesting under natural overhang at km 224.3
Common Raven*
Gray-cheeked Thrush*
American Robin
Northern Shrike (?) - jv seen poorly, if at all at S end of the Eagle Plains
White-crowned Sparrow

E. Eagle River to NT border (June 29, July 3)

Northern Harrier
Common Raven
American Pipit*
Savannah Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow

F. NT Border to James Creek hwy maintenance station (June 29, July 3)

Harlequin Duck
Long-tailed Jaeger*
Common Raven
Savannah Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow

We searched long and hard for the Wheatear in the vicinity of the border, but were unsuccessful.

G. James Creek to end of Peel Plateau (June 30, July 2)

Northern Pintail
Lesser Scaup
Willow Ptarmigan*
Surfbird - about 3 km N of James Ck.
Long-tailed Jaeger*
Short-eared Owl
Alder Flycatcher
Bank Swallow
Common Raven
American Tree Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow

Wolf - at James Creek

H. Peel-Mackenzie Delta from near Peel R. ferry to and incl. Inuvik

Pacific Loon*
Northern Shoveler
Lesser Scaup
White-winged Scoter - about 6 on lake about 15 - 30 km S of Inuvik
American Kestrel
Northern Harrier
Mew Gull*
Herring Gull*

Glaucous Gull* - Inuvik dump
Northern Hawk Owl* - ca. 10-20 km N of Mackenzie R. ferry
Short-eared Owl - 5 to 10 birds seen in both taiga and tundra, seems quite common in this area
Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker
Gray Jay
Common Raven
Tree Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Gray-cheeked Thrush*
Swainson's Thrush*
American Robin
Yellow Warbler
Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco
Common Raven
Orange-crowned Warbler
Fox Sparrow, Red*
Lincoln's Sparrow
American Tree Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow - heard singing where the road ascends the bluff N of the Mackenzie River ferry (not in Frish's book on *Birds by the Dempster*)
White-crowned Sparrow
Harris's Sparrow - breeding near N end of bypass road in Inuvik per G. Yaki, who was leading a birding tour. We did not look for it.
Pine Siskin

70 (possibly 71) species seen.

*Species photographed (we hope) by James R. Gallagher and/or recorded by Sylvia R. Gallagher.