

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011

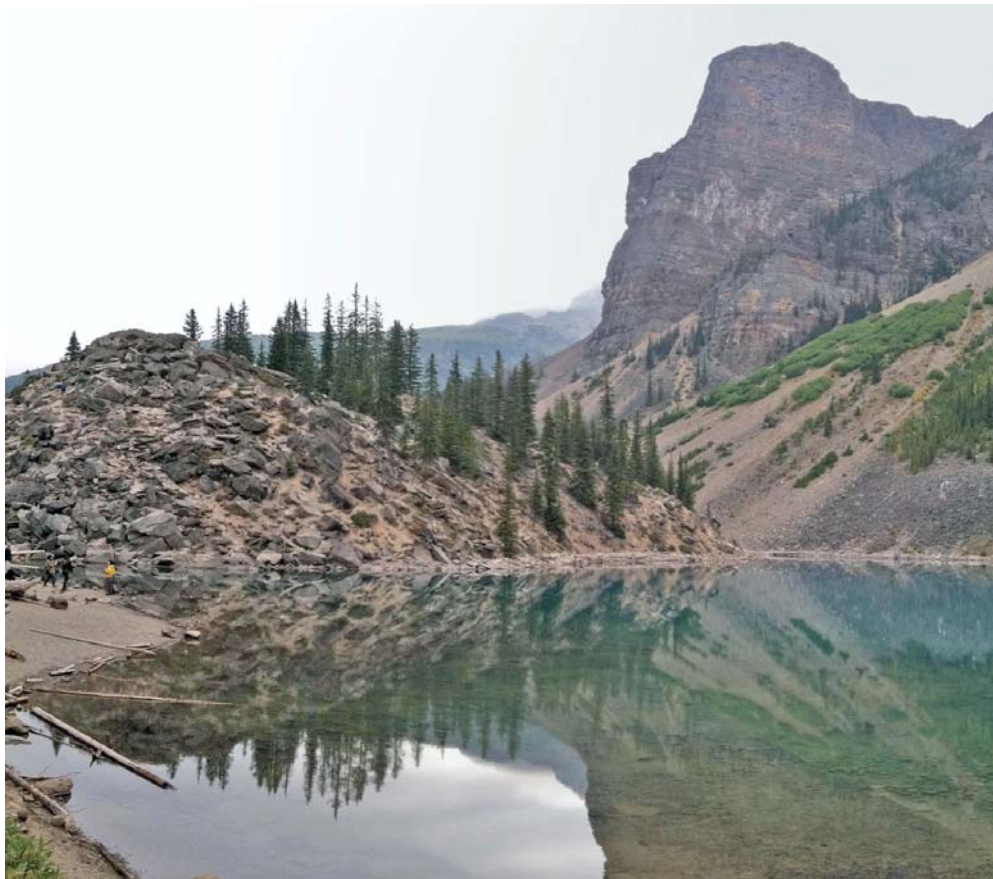
by Sylvia R. Gallagher

Photographs by Jim & Sylvia Gallagher

Part VI

9:30 pm, Thursday, September 15, 2011
KOA, West Glacier, MT

Tuesday, Sept. 13, dawned overcast and gray, but we decided to drive up to Moraine Lake anyway. Last time we were there, the weather was similar and I had been hoping to see it in the sunlight. When we got there, we discovered that a huge lodge and parking lot had been constructed where there had been nothing but a small parking lot before. However, it's a tasteful-looking facility and allows more people to enjoy the area. The lake itself is just as it was, except for the fact that some potential photo sites are marred by a lot of rental canoes in the foreground. We took some pictures of the lake and the signs that interpret the geology of the area, but I think our slides from our previous trip will turn out to be nicer. I don't think it was quite such a dark day. [Later: That was true, but a few of these were pretty nice.



Moraine Lake showing terminal moraine
Banff National Park, AB

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Moraine Lake
Banff National Park, AB

On our way to Moraine Lake I had spotted some plants with brilliant red leaves. On the way back we stopped and I got some pictures. They turned out to be Red Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos rubra*--related to the Manzanitas.

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Red Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos rubra*
Moraine Lake Rd., Banff National Park, AB



Red Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos rubra*
Moraine Lake Rd., Banff National Park, AB

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Then we went back, hooked up the trailer, and got on the road just before the 11:00 check-out time. We headed westward down Hwy. 93 through Kootenay National Park, making only one stop along the road, Marble Canyon. I had used some photos from a magazine in my Mountain Birds workshop of Black Swifts nesting in that canyon. I recalled that the article said the nests were easily viewed from the trail. They don't really build nests, but just use the moss-covered ledges of the steep canyon walls. I did indeed see many potential nesting ledges and would love to be there during the breeding season. The interpretive signs along the trail only discussed the geology, which is pretty interesting, but didn't mention the swifts.

The canyon was produced during the uplift of the Rockies, when "marble" (actually a mixture of calcium and magnesium carbonates, so partly dolomite) cracked open when a part of the old seafloor buckled upward. A creek found its way into the crack and is slowly cutting it deeper. The place is really very beautiful without any swifts and well worth a stop.



Marble Canyon
Kootenay National Park, BC

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Possible Black Swift nest sites
Marble Canyon, Kootenay National Park, BC

We continued down the Kootenay River valley, then over a mountain ridge, and ended up at Canyon RV Resort in Radium Hot Springs. The RV park was nearly full, probably because the national park campground in that area was closed all season for refurbishing. Actually it's a *very* nice RV park and set in a deep canyon with a creek running through it. It's been nicely landscaped with typical riparian canyon trees on turf. Lots of flowers--English ones--have been planted; Canadians love flowers. In fact, all the motels and even the gas stations, in town have hanging baskets of flowers, mainly petunias, so the entire resort town is very attractive. The principal attraction is the hot springs. I hope they don't live up to their name and actually have radium in them. Although that used to be considered healthy and a cure for all sorts of diseases from cancer to arthritis, it's not anymore.

I looked up the place on the internet and finally discovered that the concentrations of radium and its radioactive decay product radon are "inconsequential." However, the amount released would be unhealthy if one lived with it every day in their home.

Wed., Sept. 14, was a day of driving and shopping. We had 214 miles to go, which doesn't seem far, but many of the roads had grooves where truck tires made depressions and when we drive on them, our truck wants to swerve back and forth, so Jim has to keep the speed way down.

We stopped for lunch in the trailer along the way and got to Kalispell, MT, around 2:00. I had searched for WalMart on the internet, but Google Maps led me astray. It turned out it was leading me to the old site. Fortunately Jim caught sight of the new store as we were driving along and we turned around. I asked the checker how long they'd been in their new

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building and she said since June of last year. Google Maps showed that property as vacant land! Just shows that you have to be careful.

We tried to exchange our left-over Canadian currency at a bank, but they said they'd only change money for customers of that bank. That was not the case in Canada. There we could go into any bank and change from American to Canadian. I had seen a Bank of the West (my bank) a few miles back, but we were too tired to go there. [Later: After we got home, Jim took the money to his bank, but they would only exchange the paper money. We still have an awful lot of loonies--dollar coins. Anyone going to Canada and willing to take them off our hands?]

We had been planning to stay in Kalispell that night and do our shopping the next morning, but after we got all of it done we decided to press on the last 35 miles to West Glacier, our destination. It was nearly 5:00 when we were situated in our campsite--a long day for us and we were exhausted.

I had emailed former birding students of mine, Dave and Sue Duncan, who now summer in West Glacier and winter in Yucca Valley. We've kept in contact for many years and I hoped we might get together with them. It turned out that the next few days are good for them and they've invited us to their house for breakfast tomorrow. They had things to do today and so did we. This morning I washed a load of clothes--enough to get us home--and also bathed Toby.

After that we drove to the Glacier National Park headquarters, picked up brochures and bought a book on day hikes in the park. After lunch in a nearby restaurant, we drove out the main park road as far as the Trail of the Cedars, a 0.7-mile walk through an old-growth forest. One of the signs said the last fire there was in the 1500s, based on tree dating in the area.

I absolutely loved that walk, especially when I saw on one of the signs that Pacific Yew was growing there. That's a conifer that I'd never seen in the wild before, and I've come to love conifers ever since I started teaching mountain workshops. (I had seen cultivars at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden in Claremont, but that's not the same thing.) None of the trees were labeled, so I had to find my own. At first, I mistook Western Hemlocks for the yew, but soon realized my mistake and kept hunting. Finally I found them commonly along the return (east side of the creek) portion of the trail. One, and only one, had a single red "cone", which looks more like berry--round and bright red with a single seed that is visible from below. I was thrilled and photographed it every which way.

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Pacific Yew – fruit and foliage from below
Trail of the Cedars, Glacier National Park, MT



Pacific Yew – foliage from above
Trail of the Cedars, Glacier National Park, MT

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Western Hemlock – foliage
Trail of the Cedars, Glacier National Park, MT

I also photographed everything else I could find--Western and Mountain Hemlock, Western Red-Cedar, Western Mountain Maple, and a few shrubs. The trail went between rock walls along Avalanche Creek and at the upper part of the trail, you could look upstream and see where the creek cascaded through a colorful, narrow gorge.

The day was overcast and the forest was incredibly dark, yet my iPhone succeeded in photographing everything I asked it to. Some of the photos are a bit grainier than my usual images, but still quite satisfactory. At no point did it tell me there was too little light for a photo. Yet again I'm impressed by what that handy little thing can do. The Avalanche Gorge was the darkest, yet the picture came out fine.

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Avalanche Gorge
Trail of the Cedars, Glacier National Park, MT

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I spent two hours on that trail; Jim spent one, since he didn't look at the trees. I had just gotten back and we'd started back down the road when it started to rain. As we drove on, we found there had been even more for the road was pretty wet. However, the KOA didn't look like it had received any.

Better quit. It's 10:30--but I had a nice nap after we got back to the trailer around 3:00.

7:45 pm, Friday, September 16, 2011
KOA, West Glacier, MT

This morning we went to Dave and Sue Duncan's home in West Glacier for breakfast--a complete repast of waffles, bacon, sausage, fresh fruit compote, etc. While we were eating--and doing a lot of talking--I was looking out the window at their vegetable garden surrounded by Serviceberry shrubs. There I saw more species of bird than I've seen anywhere else for a long time: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cedar Waxwing

(including a lot of juveniles), Warbling Vireo, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin (juvenile), Downy Woodpecker, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow. Their home backs up to the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, where there is a wonderful riparian plant community.

After breakfast they drove us around to the other side of the river, where there is a dirt road, which we walked for quite a distance. I added Common Merganser, Pine Siskin, Northern Flicker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Merlin (probably, flew by fast) to the list. The only other species I've found in and near the park are two Gray Jays in our campground and a single Varied Thrush call in the Trail of the Cedars yesterday. Oh yes, I mustn't forget the crows that are here and there.

Since we had left Toby in the trailer, we couldn't stay out all day and got back here around 2:00. I spent the rest of the afternoon doing the usual--napping and processing the pictures I took this morning along the river.

I took nearly a hundred photos of about 10-15 plants this morning. Fortunately Sue knew the names of most of them. She even knew the name of the plant I've been puzzling over ever since I first saw it in Liard Hot Springs. It was at Moonshine Lake, too. It turned out to be Wild Sarsaparilla, a species unrelated to the kind that was used for medicinal purposes in the 19th century. However, this species is related to Ginseng and its root was (is?) also used in folk medicine and by the Indians. After she told me what it was, I did find it in several of my flower books, but since the plant doesn't have any flowers this time of year, I had had no idea where to look. Furthermore the photo in only one book showed the geometric pattern of the leaves: three very large compound leaves of five leaflets, sticking out horizontally from a central stem. These leaves turn beautiful colors in the fall (now) and it seems each place I go the leaves are a different color and pattern of colors. The next five images show the plant in various stages of all color.

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Wild Sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*
Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park, BC



Wild Sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*
Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park, BC

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Wild Sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*
Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park, BC



Wild Sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*
Glacier National Park, MT

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Wild Sarsaparilla, *Aralia nudicaulis*
Glacier National Park, MT

The Duncans had told us of a restaurant called The Glacier Grill--about five miles west of the KOA in the village of Coram. It's a relatively unprepossessing family restaurant, but the food was outstanding. Jim ordered a hot beef sandwich, which came with clam chowder. I tasted his chowder and had to have a cup, too. It was excellent. I also ordered a salad with grilled chicken, cranberries, walnuts, feta cheese, bacon, spinach and a choice of dressings. I couldn't resist trying the huckleberry vinaigrette, and it was delicious. The prices were very low, especially when compared with what we've been paying for awful food in Canada and Alaska.

The Duncans also told us that the main restaurant in West Glacier village is good, so we'll have to try it sometime. Tomorrow night, they've invited us to their house to have dinner and meet some of their naturalist friends, but maybe we can take them out to dinner another night before we leave.

Back to my photos.

9:40 pm, Sunday, September 18, 2011
2-Bar Lazy-H RV Park, Butte, MT

Yesterday, Sat., Sept. 17, Jim wanted to drive to the top of Logan Pass and hike up the trail to the overlook where he had photographed Mountain Goats on a previous trip. I had thought he didn't care about doing it, but it turned out he either didn't hear me ask or was thinking about something else, but anyway he was gung-ho to go. I didn't really want to do it

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because the Going to the Sun Highway is very narrow with dropoffs of 1000 ft or more. That road always scares me and the distance to the summit is much farther and has more dropoffs when approached from the west than from the east as we usually have done it. Furthermore, they're doing road construction with delays of up to 40 minutes predicted. To complicate the issue, this was the last weekend the road was to be open for the season from the west. They also had forecast wind, but it wasn't expected to get very strong until around noon.

Anyway, off we went. The delays were just as promised, the construction made it even scarier than ever, and the traffic was horrendous. Worst of all, when we got to the Logan Pass Visitors Center, the wind had already gotten up and it was bitterly cold to top it off. Jim decided there was no way he was going to hike up that hill in that wind, so we just got back in the truck and went back. With all the construction delays we'd had, Jim didn't want to stop anywhere on the way back--not even a place where a bunch of people were looking at something up the mountain with binoculars. I really wanted to stop and find out what they were seeing, but we were at the head of a line of countless cars descending the grade and Jim didn't want to let those cars get ahead of us because some of them might be slow-pokes. (I'd have loved to be behind a slow-poke!) Besides it was approaching lunch time, and he likes his lunch at noon, not 1:00 or later. So off we raced down that hill, with me gritting my teeth, clutching the hand rail in the truck, and trying not to look out the windows at the dropoff. All in all, it was a very frightening morning for me and a worthless experience for Jim.

We ate lunch at the restaurant right in the little village of West Glacier. I had bean soup, which was pretty good, but a bit watery. Then I had an outstanding piece of huckleberry pie, which I shared with Jim. (Jim got a club sandwich "wrap," which he didn't like very well. He had overlooked the word "wrap" on the menu and was disappointed there was no bread. I'm not sure he even knew what a "wrap" was, but now he does!)

That evening we went back to the Duncans' house for dinner. Sue had prepared a lasagne feast, with salad, sauteed mini zucchinis from their garden, bread, and home-made gooseberry pie for dessert. Everything was delicious. They had invited two of their friends over, Jim and Gail Jokerst. Jim is a wildlife artist; Dave and Sue have several of his beautiful paintings on their wall. I was thrilled when he gave me a box of his notepaper with line drawings of half a dozen birds. (His work is on display at a gallery in the park, but we left the next day, so I couldn't go look at it.) It was a congenial group of six and we really enjoyed the conversation that went along with the tasty meal.

I had wanted to take the trail that went past McDonald Falls and to Jack's Lake--a three-mile loop that went through more old-growth forest. So I said we had to stay one more day so I could do that, but this morning dawned dreary and drizzly where we were at the KOA three miles from the mountains. I knew it would be worse up by the trail, so I reluctantly said we might as well leave and head south. So today was just a day of driving. The first part, especially on SR 35, was pretty slow on a narrow road that went right beside Flathead Lake. However, most of the time it was up a steep slope with a lot of trees blocking the view of the lake. It also turned out to be one of those roads where the tires of trucks, etc., had created a depression and a ridge between. We have to drive very slowly on roads like that. The road was winding and had lots of driveways and no passing lanes or turnouts, so for much of it the cars were lined up behind us and unable to pass. Jim always tries to let traffic by, but on that road there were very few places. The road even had official highway signs here and there that said, "Be Polite. Don't Tailgate." I've never seen signs like that anywhere else.

We were glad to get to US 93, which led to I-90. These were much faster roads. We

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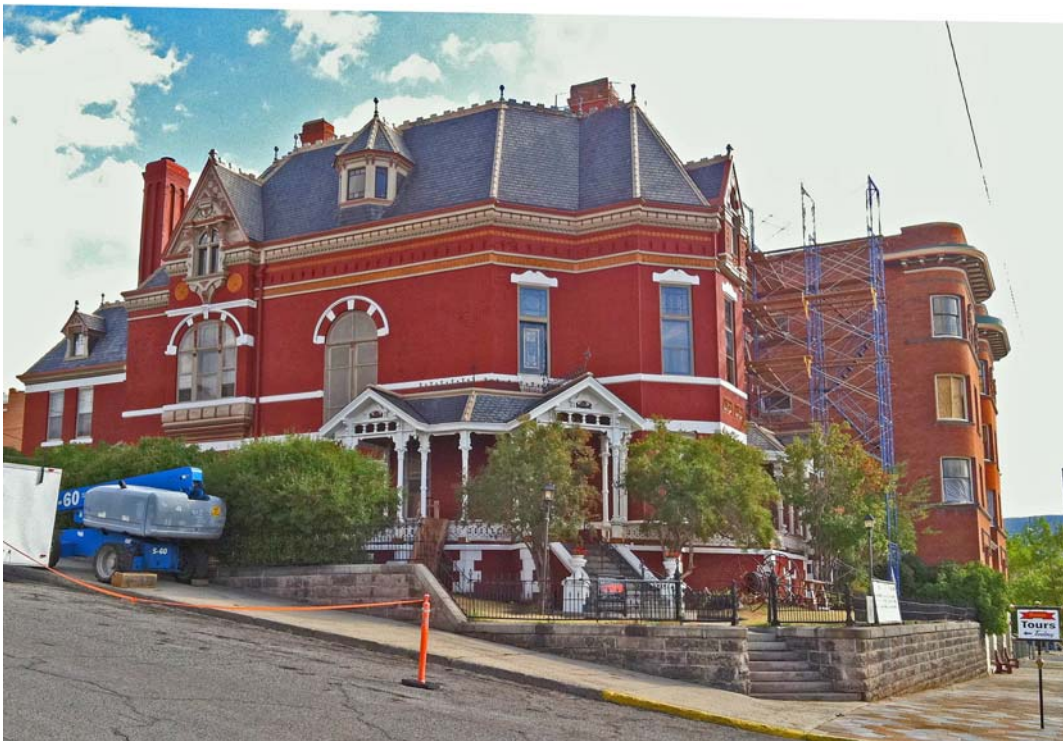
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ended up around 3:00 in Butte. This is a famous old mining town that I've read books about over the years. And this seems like a good time to explore the place. There's a mining museum with displays about the town in the early days, when it was a city of around 100,000; today the population is about one-third that. There's also the famous mansion of the Copper King that's supposed to be the ultimate in early 20th century excess.

Tonight we decided to save the chicken I'd thawed for another night and eat out. We've been so hungry for well-prepared American food that we've eaten out a lot lately. I got out the AAA Tourbook and selected a likely place. It's called Casagrande's Restaurant and is located in an old warehouse in the part of town that is likely to have an old warehouse. It's decorated with old photographs, equipment, warehouse receipts, etc.--just the atmosphere to get us in the mood for tomorrow's sightseeing. It turned out to be a very popular place and very good. We got a full-course steak dinner for only about \$20 (not including tip). This included soup, shrimp cocktail, a full-pound piece of top-sirloin cooked just as we ordered, potato, and delicious mint-chip ice cream. We brought home lots of steak and potatoes.

4:00 pm, Monday, September 19, 2011
2-Bar Lazy-H RV Park, Butte, MT

We spent the day seeing the sights of the interesting city of Butte. The mining museum turned out to be closed until noon so everyone could go to a funeral, so we went first to the Copper King Mansion in old Uptown Butte.



Copper King Mansion
Butte, MT

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It was a lavish early 20th century creation and we thoroughly enjoyed the guided tour. Especially interesting was the ingenious shower in one of the bathrooms.



Stall Shower in Copper King Mansion
Butte, MT

It is an open stall shower with a clear plastic curtain all around, the latter no doubt not the original. Showers of water are aimed in at the bather from all directions through a labyrinth of highly visible chrome plumbing. There seemed to be a lot of different faucets, so apparently it was possible to have one's favorite combination turned on. Perhaps one of the servants

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prepared it for the bather. Our guide didn't really know all those details. She was a young girl just out of high school, but did a very good job on other facts about the place.

It's impossible to remember all the intricate details of the woodwork, wallpaper, furniture, etc., that were in the place. As with all such houses, the place had become very run-down and the furnishings sold. It was owned by a Catholic order for a while, then just left to moulder. Recently descendants of the original family acquired it and fixed it up. Scaffolding on the outside of the building is evidence that the restoration continues. They've reacquired only a few of the original furnishings, but the walls, ceilings, and floors cleaned up nicely. They earn money to restore and preserve the place by conducting tours and renting several rooms as a B&B. It didn't look as though anyone had slept in any of the rooms last night, though. The prices aren't particularly high for such a place and run from \$85 to \$125 a night. Of course, the bathroom is "down the hall," and I don't think anyone uses that stall shower. I hope the beds have more modern mattresses than in the 1920s.

After touring the mansion, I went to a bookstore nearby and purchased a lot of books about Montana in general and Butte in particular. Then we ate lunch in an acceptable, but unremarkable, Chinese restaurant, also uptown.

In the process of driving around Butte looking for various places, we went by a lot of the original old buildings, both houses and businesses. They were such fun to look at. Many have been lovingly restored, while others are more run-down. Any street will have this assortment.

Butte was originally established for gold and silver mining, but when electrification swept the country, the demand for copper burgeoned and that's the element that made Butte famous. For a time it was an extremely rich source of copper and the entire city is underlaid with a labyrinth of mining shafts and tunnels. The city's motto is, "The Richest Hill on Earth." In 1955 one entire half of the city (probably the "Downtown" because we never found it) was converted into a gigantic open-pit mine, the Berkeley Pit. (The area of the pit and the despoiled land around it seem to cover an area about half that of the current city of Butte, when viewed on Google Maps.) I never learned exactly how that was accomplished, but no doubt there was a lot of politics involved and a lot of poor people displaced. The copper was rapidly removed and mining ceased in 1982. Today the open pit is gradually filling with toxic water, which is expected to reach a crisis level for the city's water supply by 2020, when its level gets up to that of the city's ground water supply. It is also expected to enter the headwaters of the Clark Fork River. Needless to say it is a Superfund Site and plans were made in the 1990s to solve the problem. The internet site I visited didn't detail the prospects for those plans to be carried out or to work if they are.

It's possible to gaze down into the pit, but looked as though we'd have to hike up to an observation platform and we didn't want to take the time or exert the energy. We still had the World Museum of Mining to visit--a more grandiose title than the place warranted, we discovered.

It's a re-creation of a mining village. The buildings seem to be re-creations, but the contents are antiques that illustrate all the activities that went on in such towns. It was fairly interesting, but it was not possible to enter most of the buildings. We just had to peer through the windows, and the interior was dark and the reflections on the glass made viewing difficult. Other buildings had a small glassed-in area that you could walk into and then look through more glass at the contents. It was never possible to see any item up close and really study it. All we could do was get the general effect of what the bank, millinery shop, railway depot, hospital, photographer, assay office, etc., etc., looked like. The re-created town is build right

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next to an actual old mine shaft and the 100-foot tall superstructure is still there. The museum also takes people down into the old mine, but we didn't want to do that.

I know they have a lot of great stuff, but the interpretation leaves a lot to be desired. I took a lot of pictures through the glass, but I had to put my camera right up to the glass to prevent reflections and couldn't aim it the way I wanted to. I suspect I'll delete a lot of the pictures. I also took pictures at the Copper King Mansion, which I suspect will be better. [Later: They were, but many of my World Museum of Mining ones were better than I had hoped. However, some of them showed the reflections I was trying to avoid and others were slightly out of focus, either due to shooting through glass or to the dark room the subject was in.]

5:15 pm, Wednesday, September 21, 2011
Circle L Mobile Home and RV Park, Layton, UT

Yesterday, Tues., Sept. 20, was a day of driving south on I-15. Most of the drive was very easy with little traffic and very good pavement. Only when we got into Utah did the traffic increase and the pavement deteriorate. The scenery was mainly verdant, pastoral valleys with low spruce-covered mountains on either side. Occasionally we'd be along the river or creek that carved the valley. After we got into Utah, the mountains on the east became higher and more spectacular, while the other side of the valley just wasn't there, replaced by the vast Great Salt Lake, which we couldn't see. We drove over 400 miles, a lot for us, and didn't get in until almost 5:00. But we wanted to be situated in order to go birding in the morning.

We stayed at the Golden Spike RV Park in Brigham City. Most of the sites are shaded by huge Fremont Cottonwoods and we had a nice shady one. The park's drawbacks are that the sites are extremely close together and seemed to have more than their share of gargantuan, glaring-white RVs, which dominate the scene and tower over our small, old Prowler. The one I viewed out the dinette window while eating was about as long as is legal, whatever that is, and it had four slideouts, three on one side and one on the other. It looked grotesque with them all sticking out, for the swirls painted on the side (on all new RVs these days) were all broken up by the ins and outs of the slide-outs. Ugly! The other drawback was that our site backed up to an extremely busy highway not far from a traffic signal, so all the traffic was either slowing down for the signal or speeding up after passing it. The night was warm so we had to have the windows open and the noise was pretty bad. We may try the KOA next time, but it is farther away from Bear River NWR, our reason for stopping there.

This morning, Wed., Sept. 21, we drove to Bear River National Wildlife Refuge. They have a large new (2005) interpretive center just west of I-15 at Forest Ave., only one mile north of the off-ramp where the RV Park was. The old center was on the main part of the refuge farther west, and it was flooded out a couple of decades ago when the water level of the Great Salt Lake became abnormally high. This one is in a marshy habitat and is constructed to actually float up and down if the water level is high. Another interesting feature is a deck with a set of huge baffles that are curved in a parabolic shape. You are supposed to be able to stand on the deck and hear all the marsh sounds very well. We didn't try it, for there seemed to be very few marsh sounds.

We didn't take time to look at the displays carefully, but they were very attractive and mainly designed to educate the general public about the over 200 birds in the refuge. We were anxious to drive to the refuge. It turned out that the loop road around the refuge itself

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was closed for bridge construction, but we were able to drive the twelve miles out to the refuge, and based on past experience during the breeding season, that was where most of the birds were. This time we saw very few, but did have two experiences that made up for it.

At one point I looked ahead and saw a small white animal crossing the road. Puzzling! What could it be? I was driving and approached it carefully and we could see that it was shaped like a weasel, but it's too early in the fall for a winter coat. Jim told me to pull closer and let him out close to where the creature had disappeared. He then walked up and stopped where he thought the animal might be. He stood there for about five minutes and was just about to leave when the all-white animal crawled out of the knee-high marsh grass and lay down only two feet in front Jim's feet! Luckily, Jim was using his 100-400 lens which allowed him to photograph the creature even at that close range. He said when he backed up a little more to shoot it at a different angle, the creature began again to crawl toward him. Having recently read a book about rabies-infected mice killing early homesteaders in Canada, Jim began walking backwards toward the truck, keeping ahead of the creature following him--but still shooting photos, of course. When he got to the truck, he jumped in and the animal disappeared underneath the truck. We didn't want to run over it, but I started the engine and was happy to see it run out and stand beside the road as we drove off. During all this close-up viewing, we were able to see that the animal was indeed a Long-tailed Weasel and a true albino. It had a pink nose, eyes, and orbital ring. And Jim's photos were superb!



Long-tailed Weasel – albino
Road to Bear River National Wildlife Refuge, UT

Later we went back to the visitors center and showed them to the volunteer at the desk. She was aware of the animal, but no one had seen it well enough to confirm that it was an

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albino. She went to the back room and out came three staffers, who viewed it excitedly. Jim will email them a couple of his best pictures. [In retrospect, I wonder if the poor thing wasn't seeking the shade of Jim's form and then of the truck. Albinos have weak eyes.]

The other interesting thing was a huge flock of swallows that were swirling about and then landing on the road in tight groups. The road had brand-new blacktop pavement, but I don't know if that had anything to do with it. I was finally able to approach them close enough to identify them and was surprised to discover that the flock had at least three species: Barn, Tree, and Cliff. Jim was able to pop off a couple of shots of the mixture. Why they were on that particular stretch of road--and on the road at all--is a puzzle. They were still in the very same place on the way back, too.

We ate lunch in a bakery and sandwich shop across the street from the RV park, then hitched up and drove 35 miles south, in order to be close to the road out to Antelope Island State Park, where we plan to go tomorrow. Our current location is mainly a mobile home park, but they advertised a few RV sites in the Trailer Life Guide, and we are now situated in a quiet, shady one. Although we're close to a train track and a freeway, the main noise we've heard this afternoon is the occasional roar of military aircraft from the Air Force base not far away.

4:45 pm, Thursday, September 22, 2011 **Circle L Mobile Home and RV Park, Layton, UT**

Last evening we ate at a brand new (open less than a week) Mexican restaurant almost directly across Main Street from the RV Park. The name of the place is sort of generic; the sign just says "Cantina" in big letters and "Southwestern Grill" in small ones. It's actually not just a cantina, but a very attractively decorated general Mexican restaurant with moderate prices and a varied menu. We enjoyed it, although some of the items were better than others. The chiles rellenos were so-so and the sauce was too sweet. The tacos and enchiladas were fine. They have a salsa bar with an incredible variety of them. They served us a dish of the "mild," which could have been sweeter. I tried an avocado-cilantro one, but it had too much onion and was too tart. The Margaritas were very good; I had a peach and Jim had a traditional one. Tonight we're going to try a seafood restaurant we caught sight of on our way back from Antelope Island.

This morning we drove the eighteen miles to Antelope Island State Park, but I think the mileage on Google was measured from the headquarters and it was only twelve miles to the start of the causeway, which was where we began birding.

There was an incredible number of birds visible from the causeway. I could have gotten out my scope and identified more, but since we had only a limited amount of time, we confined our efforts to those that might be photographable. With considerable guidance from me, Jim, who is as indifferent to gulls as he is to plants, got a lot of shots, a few (one?) of which I hope will have both California and Ring-billed adults facing the same way in the same light. I really need more than the one photo I have of the two species showing the darker back and wings of the California. We'll see.

It was interesting that when we started out the causeway, the gulls were almost exclusively adult Ring-bills, but as we got near the end, there were more and more Californias until the numbers were almost equal. Some of the Californias were immatures, but I didn't try to age them. Studying gulls takes lots of time.

Other species present by the thousands were Red-necked Phalaropes and Eared Grebes. They were all too far out on the water for photos. Blackbirds--Red-winged, Brewer's, and Yellow-headed--were here and there along the way.

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011

When we got on the island, we drove some of the roads looking for land birds. We saw (and I heard) lots of Western Meadowlarks doing their songs and their "quirk" calls. I also saw a small flock of White-crowned Sparrows.

The best sightings of the morning were mammals and Jim got photos of all. First was a Plains Bison (not Woodland Bison as in northern BC) lying down out in a field amidst some tall sunflowers.



"Plains" American Bison
Antelope Island, Great Salt Lake, UT

Jim got out of the truck to get a slightly closer shot of the animal but that caused the Bison to rise up and face him. That convinced Jim that it was time to get back in the truck quickly and do his photography out the window. But the Bison continued to stand there staring at us, *hard!* So, after a couple of quicky photos, we decided it was time to move on.

Next was a beautiful male Pronghorn standing beside the road. This time Jim got out and walked up the slope to get a side view. The animal stood absolutely motionless for a long time staring straight ahead. We began to seriously consider the possibility that the park people had put a mounted specimen out there to educate the public, but then he turned his head just a little bit, then a little more, and finally walked off. Later in the morning we saw two more, which also were in no hurry to leave the scene. It's amazing how unafraid these animals can become if they're not hunted. Most places when we come across Pronghorns and stop, they run away instantly. (We saw a lot of them in farmers' fields as we drove south from Butte two days ago, but we didn't stop because they were pretty far away and we were on the freeway.) Jim's photo of a male Pronghorn standing in a field of sunflowers with the Great Salt Lake in the background is one of our favorite photos of the entire trip.

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011



Pronghorn
Antelope Island, Great Salt Lake, UT

Finally, as we were driving through the campground to check it out, we saw a Coyote in some fairly tall brush in one of the unoccupied campsites. Jim shot a lot of pictures, but whether any will be clear shots remains to be seen.



Coyote
Antelope Island, Great Salt Lake, UT

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011

The day was completely clear and the morning was cool; it warmed up to 80° this afternoon, hotter in the trailer. Along the causeway and on the hillsides of the island were every color from green through olive to the yellow of the fall Rabbitbrush and tall Sunflowers. It was beautiful.



Shrubs and marsh
Antelope Island, Great Salt Lake, UT

6:00 pm, Monday, September 26, 2011
Home.

Thurs. evening, Sept. 22, we ate at McGrath's Seafood Restaurant in Layton. It was on the northeast corner Main Street and the road that we had taken off the freeway--0.8 miles north of our RV park, don't recall the name of the street. It's a conspicuous, large place. It was excellent. Jim had a mixed fried seafood platter and declared the coating to be the lightest and tastiest he had ever eaten. I chose sole dipped in chopped filberts with a caper-dill sauce. It was also wonderful.

The last three days were spent driving home. On Friday, Sept. 23, we got a late start because Jim had to go to Home Depot for a part and then use it to fix the hitch on the trailer. We wanted to start after the Salt Lake City rush hour was over and I think we did, for the traffic went at full speed. I was a stressful drive until we got past Provo, for there is a construction zone between Salt Lake & Provo that must be 30-35 miles long. The lanes are narrow and they zig and zag back and forth erratically. We have to drive in the right lane with our trailer and that lane is forever becoming an "Exit Only" lane with little notice. Of course, many people refuse to slow down and let a trailer in front of them, so we always sweat it out to see if we can get over before we're forced off the freeway. Once two lanes exited, so we had to move over two lanes. I was just as nervous as Jim, for I watch for the "Exit Only" signs and he just tries to stay in the narrow lanes and do the moving over when I tell him.

We drove as far as Cedar City, because we didn't want to descend to hot St. George. We stayed in the KOA. It's pretty shady, but the trees in our site were in the front end of the site and the rear where we had to park to make room for the truck in front were in full sun for several hours. The temperature was around 90°.

Trip to Yukon and Alaska

Summer 2011

Saturday, Sept. 24, we drove to Barstow's KOA, which is east of town. (We often stay there.) The temperature was 98° when we arrived, but the site was pretty shady, so the AC soon cooled us off. And the outside temperature cooled off nicely outside as soon as the sun went down.

Sunday, Sept. 25, we drove about 140 miles home and got here around 11:00. I chose Sunday morning because I figured the traffic would be as light as it ever is. It was a good decision, and we were especially pleased at how few trucks we saw.

Afterthought: I've used Google Maps on my iPhone a lot to find routes and calculate mileages to the next stop. But I've learned not to depend on it blindly, as our WalMart search in Kalispell and the following experiences illustrate:

When we were in Butte, Montana, we were at an RV park a few miles west of town near a freeway exit. We wanted to go to the World Museum of Mining, which is right at the west edge of town. The official directions were sort of round-about, so I checked Google. It told me to take a road called Bluebird Rd., which went across the grasslands. This road wasn't on the city map I had obtained in the office, so I was suspicious. When we looked for it in the morning, it turned out to be a very narrow dirt road--almost a two-tracker--and had a barricade about 100 yard from the junction. Needless to say we took the roundabout route. From the other end, near the museum, it looked just as unprepossessing.

When we were in Layton, Utah, I caught sight of a Mexican restaurant across the street from the RV park and north a little ways. I wanted to find out if it was reviewed on Google and then clicked on "route." Well, the restaurant was on Main Street, but the businesses on the east side Main Street backed up to the I-15 freeway. Instead of telling me to turn left out of the RV park onto Main Street, then drive 200 yards and turn right into the parking lot, Google told me to drive 0.8 miles back to the freeway onramp, get on the freeway and return to the restaurant on the freeway. I suppose we were expected to park on the freeway shoulder and climb over the fence.

Trip mileage. We drove 11,777 miles with our dear 25-year-old Prowler tagging along faithfully most of the time. (Occasionally we'd take day-trips with just the truck.) We had just one flat tire as described in the diary, and it was on the truck, not the trailer. Trailer tires are usually the ones that go. Of course, we also had to buy a new windshield.