

Trip from Texas to Colorado - Spring 2006

by Sylvia R. Gallagher

Part 5

9:00 p.m., Wed., May 24, 2006

Bellaire USFS Campground, Red Feather Lakes area, CO

After a hectic morning, we're now in a lovely campsite for the upcoming Memorial Day weekend.

Last night I stayed up until 11:00 trying to get my diary edited to send to Nancy. She said she'd be home before the weekend. The file was extra large because I was all ready to send her an installment when she emailed me that she was going away for a couple of weeks. My computer kept giving crazy messages and locking up, so I'd have to reboot. This computer is a cheapy with an Intel Celeron processor, which I suppose is the problem. I tried to remember to save frequently, so I wouldn't have to redo too much editing when it coughed, but I was forever getting so wrapped up in my editing that I'd forget to do it. Then when I rebooted and reopened the file, I had a hard time figuring where to start doing the editing over again.

I gave up at 11:00 last night and then spent an hour or two on it this morning. I got up at 5:00 and did it before breakfast. Again I had the same problems, but finally I got it right.

To top off the frustration, I had no sooner gotten to sleep last night when some guys brought in a fifth-wheel and parked it in the site next to us. They jabbered away in Spanish for an interminable length of time. Finally I yelled at them out the window to be quiet, but don't know if they understood, for the racket continued a little while longer. I think they had brought the trailer from some storage facility for people who were to arrive today.

We got away at around 8:45 and headed for the Wal-Mart in Greeley. I had a prescription to fill, so the timing was perfect. Their pharmacies open at 9:00. I like using those pharmacies on the road, for I can do my grocery shopping while the prescription is filled. (Most Wal-Marts are Super ones, unlike the one in Huntington Beach, which doesn't have a grocery department.) I know people are down on Wal-Mart for monopolizing the market, but in some places that's all there is these days.

We drove through the Fort Collins metropolitan area on more horrible roads (freeways and town streets equally bad), stopping for gasoline and propane. We were really happy to be headed north on US-287 and be out in the country again. At the little village of Forks we turned left on the road to Red Feather Lakes. It looked like a little byway and I had wondered how it would be to tow our trailer on it. It turned out to be a beautiful road, and we only had to use low gear a couple of times near the tops of hills. We were amazed at how many widely spaced mansions there were along the road. It wasn't until we got almost to the turn-off to our campground that we entered the National Forest. There's a village of Red Feather Lakes nearby, but we didn't go to it. It's supposed to have a general store in case we forgot anything.

I really pored through the Trailer Life and AAA camping guides trying to find a nice campground for the Memorial Day weekend. I discovered this one listed in TL, but not AAA. The book said it had 21 sites with 15-amp electrical hookups and doesn't take reservations. (Any campground taking reservations would probably be completely

reserved.) I hoped that the reservations part had not changed since the book was printed, and it hadn't. There were only one or two sites occupied besides the host's, and after driving the loop twice, we picked out a really nice one. It has a little brook on one side and some shrubs as well as the pines and aspens that most of them have. I think I know what kind of pines they are, but will check the book tomorrow. We were pleased to discover that the old 15-amp electrical boxes had been replaced with new ones that accommodate 15, 30 and 50 amp plugs. Ours is 30. To top it off, Jim can even get several TV stations to come in. And the price is only \$12.50 a night with our Golden Age Passport.

We got here around 12:30 p.m. and by the end of the afternoon half the sites were taken.

We've walked around the campground a bit with Toby, but haven't checked out the lake, which supposedly is within walking distance. I don't even know where the trailhead to it is. There's also a road to it and a day-use area.

Not too many birds yet, but the first one I saw I take as a good omen. While I was bringing stuff into the trailer from the truck, I looked up and saw soaring just above the treetops a Northern Goshawk. [We never saw it again.] It was so close I was able to ID it easily with my naked eye. Binocs. were elsewhere. The rest of the birds we've had so far are more ordinary mountain species. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are singing their "chubby cheeks" song most of the time. Hermit Thrushes were singing just before sunset. The only species to find Jim's birdseed has been a Steller's Jay. It's a different subspecies from those in California. Mountain Chickadees were active all around the trailer most of the time I sat outside this afternoon, and I heard American Robins, Yellow-rumped Warblers (saw an Audubon's), and perhaps a few others.

It's marvellous to be up out of the heat. The lowlands are headed for 90+ degrees in a couple of days, but it should stay in the 70s here at 8600 ft. It didn't get out of the 60s today. I've really been looking forward to being in the cool, dry high country. We just relaxed this afternoon, enjoying it all.

9:00 p.m., Thurs., May 25, 2006

Bellaire Lake Campground, Red Feather Lakes, CO

It was great to have a really cold night again and to snuggle up under our electric blanket. It got down to 34 degrees. The morning was clear and calm, but a slight breeze got up in the afternoon and the sky became up to half cloudy by late afternoon. A few drops of rain fell--just enough to make me come inside. But that was OK. I was glad to watch the news. We get three stations from Cheyenne, but only one comes in really well. The other two are tolerable. NBC, CBS (good), and PBS. It sort of seems like cheating to be sitting in a beautiful USFS campground and watching TV, but we really do like to keep up on the news when we can.

This morning after breakfast I walked the short road to the lake, which turned out to be next to the tent-camping sites. I hoped there would be more birds there than in the campground, but there weren't. I did hear a House Wren singing a learning subsong, but it switched to calls before I realized what I was hearing and decided to record. The only bird whose presence was due to the lake was a Spotted Sandpiper.

I wished I had taken my camera instead of my tape recorder. I did take a flower book and a tree book and spent most of my time figuring out a few of each. As those of you who did my mountain workshop know, I've developed an interest in conifers and discovered five species in this area. Lodgepole Pines are the most common. They're supposed to be a different variety than in the Sierra/Cascade chain, but the book didn't say

what the difference is. I thought the bark seemed yellower and more flaky than I remembered and the prickles on the cones longer, but don't know if that's really true. Douglas-Firs are second most common. There are scattered Ponderosa Pines, but we're a little high for them to be dominant. Also present in one place next to the lake were a few Limber Pines. In California I associate them with high, dry places, e.g. Mt. Lassen or the White Mtns. Here they were on a rocky south-facing slope. The final conifer was Common or Dwarf Juniper, which is actually a shrub. It's in our campsite and very fragrant, especially when in the sun. The other two trees were Quaking Aspen and Scouler Willow. These deciduous trees have their leaves less than half of their fully developed size. It's still springtime here.

The fact that we're so high and it's still springtime may be the reason there aren't a lot of birds, especially in the deciduous riparian areas. In areas like that in California, you can usually hear a dozen or more birds, even in the middle of the day. I'll have to see what happens as we get later in the season. We plan to be in the Colorado Rockies throughout June.

My flowers were:

Low (Creeping) Oregon Grape, *Berberis repense* - beautiful yellow flowers, prickly holly-like leaves like the larger version found farther west.

Squaw Currant, *Ribes cereum* - a shrub

Golden Pea, *Thermopsis montana* - showy yellow flowers

There was also one more, which seemed to be in the Figwort family (probably a *Mimulus*), but I couldn't find it in the meager supply of Rocky Mtn. flower books I have. It's a ground-hugging mat of a plant and grows in open, sandy areas. The largest clumps of it I saw were about six inches in diameter.

I got back to the trailer around 10:00, and we drove into the little village of Red Feather Lakes, where I visited the Red Feather Trading Post, a general store with an amazing assortment of necessities for such a small place. I bought a small flower book (all they had), a DeLorme atlas of Colorado, a couple of books to read, and a package of fresh mushrooms. They had a good supply of groceries. Jim bought the *Denver Post*. We like that paper.

I sat outside in the late morning and part of the afternoon, but it was a little chilly. The highest temperature I noted on our thermometer was 67 degrees, but it may have gotten warmer than that when I wasn't checking.

I fixed mashed potatoes for dinner. I knew it would take longer to boil them than at home, where I usually allow 12 minutes when they're peeled and sliced one-half inch thick. Here at 8600 ft it took 20 minutes.

8:15 p.m., Fri., May 26, 2006
Bellaire Lake Campground, CO

Temperature got down to 34 degrees last night. The highest temperature I noticed today was 71 degrees. The day dawned clear and calm, but clouds started forming in the early afternoon, so the high of the day was around noon. In the afternoon there was intermittent cloudiness and once a very short sprinkle of rain--just enough to send us indoors for a while.

I walked around for about 3 hours this morning. I had Jim drive me to where the road to the campground cuts off from the through county road and walked back to the campground via the lake. I suppose it was about a mile by the road, but I wandered around in the edge of the forest several places. I heard--and saw poorly--a Dusky Flycatcher. It

could conceivably be a Hammond's, but the habitat was better for Dusky and I'm pretty sure I can tell the two apart by voice. I got nice recordings, so will find out for sure when I get home and plot the sonogram. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet also gave me a nice solo.

I took my camera this time instead of a backpack full of books. I took photos of all the trees enumerated yesterday and some of the flowers, including that *Mimulus*(?) species that isn't in any of the books I have. I really must look for something better. Perhaps I'll be able to at Rocky Mountain National Park. After I got back to the trailer, I also photographed the beautiful blue Pasqueflowers (*Anemone patens*) growing right beside it.

Did little the rest of the day but enjoy the area. The campground is full, but since the lake is only used for fishing from the shore and nonpowered boats, no rowdy types are attracted here for the holiday. The sites are widely separated, too. There are lots of families, including some three-generation ones. There are a couple of double sites which accommodate two RVs (and cost double), and it looked as though the grandparents came out a few days ago and staked out the sites. The younger generations arrived after work tonight. All license plates are Colorado, no doubt from Ft. Collins and other nearby towns.

9:00 p.m., Sat., May 27, 2006 Bellaire Lake Campground

Today was the warmest since we got here. I didn't check the thermometer when we got up, nor did I note the high. There were very few clouds this afternoon, and nothing remotely threatening. The sun was shining on our thermometer, so it wouldn't have given an accurate reading, but I'd estimate the high was in the mid-70s.

I fixed pancakes this morning. At 8600 ft, they were the lightest I've ever made. Lots of fun!

Our only activity of any significance was a drive down to Rustic, which is on SR-14, the highway through Poudre Canyon. We wanted to see if the dirt road was OK to tow our trailer on. It's nice and smooth, but has about two miles of steep downgrade and hairpin turns, but Jim thinks there will be no problem using it. It's only 7.6 miles long and will save us about 60 miles. This road is on the Colorado State map, but a portion of it is not on the AAA map.

Everywhere we were in the Roosevelt National Forest, there were people camping beside the road or off on little side roads. Some of these places are actual marked campsites, others seem strictly informal. Of course, all the regular campgrounds are full for the holiday weekend. I don't know if people need a special pass to park there, but there were no signs to that effect.

The area is criss-crossed with old logging roads--in various states of disrepair, I suppose. A popular activity is to drive these with ORVs. Several parties in our campground have these vehicles, but most folks are just here to gab with their relatives and friends and to fish. We saw several young boys proudly returning to their campsites with their catch of one or two fish. Jim was sitting fairly close to the camp road and took pains to admire the fish. They beamed.

I finished my Indigo Bunting embroidery (I'm pleased with the iridescence I achieved) and picked out threads and started work on a Scarlet Tanager. Including it, I only have four squares left to do on my Birds of North America quilt. Then it'll take a year or so to piece and quilt it--all by hand (I'm a purist).

People always want to know how long it takes to embroider a square. I've been mentioning when I finish each block in my log in order to try to answer that question. I started the Indigo Bunting on May 14, so the answer is about two weeks for a relatively

simple bird in an uncomplicated setting (in this case a bit of green grass). The Sharp-tailed Grouse was typical of the complicated ones. I started it April 17 and finished it around May 14, so it took nearly a month. Not only was the bird complicated, but I had to embroider the tangle of fairly tall grasses in which it was displaying. I think the Canada Goose took about that long, too. Even though the bird was only moderately complicated, the picture I used had a reflection in the water, and I embroidered that, too, so it was almost like embroidering two birds, with the reflected image darker and less crisp. [Note added later: I finished the Scarlet Tanager on June 8, twelve days after I started it.]

How many hours does it take to do a square? I have no idea. Even when I have my embroidery in my lap, I may spend a lot of time looking at birds--or may take a break and pick up a book for a while, take a walk, work on dinner, or any number of things. Some days I have no time for embroidery at all; on others I may have it out for six hours or more.

8:00 p.m., Sun., May 28, 2006
Bellaire Lake Campground, CO

Not much to report today. We would have left had we not realized that there would be no other campsites available on this holiday weekend. I slept in until 7:00 and awoke to find Jim watching Sunday Morning on CBS, the only station from Cheyenne that comes in well. So I sat down and watched it, too. Hadn't seen it in years--and it's still as good as ever. I used to watch it every week, taping it if I was going to be away.

After the program was over, I fixed breakfast. Then we drove into Red Feather Lakes Village to get a Sunday Denver Post. On the way back, I had Jim let me and Toby out to walk a short stretch of road, where a neighboring camper had said he'd seen Mountain Bluebirds. I saw none, but will surely encounter them before long on this trip. There was an awful lot of traffic on the dirt road, which had a rather narrow shoulder, so it really wasn't a very pleasant walk. Toby, however, is getting to be a pretty good walker. Thanks to that no-pull harness, he behaves almost like a mature dog. I could even stand and watch a bird without putting a foot on the leash to keep him from jerking my shoulder so badly I couldn't hold my binocs steady. That was not the case before the new harness.

After we got back, I sat outside until lunchtime working on my embroidery and watching the Broad-tailed Hummingbirds fighting over Jim's bird feeders. He has two out now. Until late yesterday we only had females--at least four. (I just saw three at once on a four-hole feeder.) Then a single male showed up, and he was around all day today off and on. Once I saw a courtship display only about 6-8 feet from my chair. The female was perched on a twiggy bush about six inches off the ground, and the male assumed about a 45 degree angle head down facing her and darted forward and backwards toward her from several directions within about a 30 degree angle. All the while his tail was flared somewhat--not as much as with other hummers. The base of the tail seemed broader than for most hummers (hence the name?) and the tip was only about twice as wide as the base. White on the outer tail feathers showed well. His loud zinging feather sound was especially strong. Both males and females give the feather sound when they fly, so you're always aware when one is near. [Note added later: Since we've been in the Rockies, it seems I hear that sound almost constantly no matter where I am.]

I photographed a new wildflower (for me):

Purple Fringe (*Phacelia sericea*)

It's a purple flower with long yellow stamens and grows on a spike about 6-10 inches high with basal and near basal leaves. According to the only book I found it in, the purple fringe is those yellow stamens. Curious.

The day dawned cloudy and the temperature didn't seem as cold as it has been. It cleared off partially by mid-morning and became reasonably warm, probably high 60s. Just before noon, dark clouds formed and it began to look really threatening. Jim put away the chairs, etc. I think the predicted cold front came through during the early afternoon hours. We had only a couple of very brief showers--barely enough to wet down the top of the picnic table and make spots all over the dusty windshield of the truck. But the wind has become quite strong and the treetops are really whipping around. The temperature had gone down to 40 degrees by 7:00, when I last checked. It may get down into the 20s tonight, according to the newspaper. Needless to say, we stayed indoors all afternoon watching the clouds passing by and reading that nice, fat Sunday paper.

8:30 p.m., Mon., May 29, 2006
KOA, Grant, CO (Listed in TL under Walden)

Jim spent the morning photographing Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. He especially wanted to get the male. After he finished shooting a lot of film, he got out the digital camera. We looked at them on the screen of the camera and they seemed very nice. He hasn't gotten the computer out yet.

It was 31 degrees last night and didn't warm up above the low 50s today. Brrr! But I'd rather have this than heat. The morning was sunny and breezy, but Jim was sitting in the shade. Several times he came into the trailer to warm up before going out again. Except for taking Toby for a walk around 10:00, I stayed indoors. I've already explored the entire area and gotten some recordings when the wind was calm, so there was no point in braving the chill.

We ate an early lunch and then drove 55 miles to our present stop. We took the eight-mile road down to SR-14 with no problems on the steep, curvy stretch. SR-14 ascended gradually along the Cache la Poudre River to Cameron Pass, 10,273 ft, then descended perhaps ten miles to 9200 ft in the minuscule settlement of Gould, where the KOA is located. The KOA is small and located in a lodgepole pine grove. The place was almost empty, but we learned it had been full all weekend, as we expected. We got a very nice site, #25, which looks off into a slightly open area of forest. Gray Jays have already discovered our offerings, but are playing coy about being photographed. They have the whitest heads of any of the subspecies of Gray Jay in North America. Jim photographed them once before--in Leadville in June, 1990--and the photos were very good, but not excellent.

There are quite a few turnouts, picnic areas, campgrounds (some still closed), etc., in the vicinity of the pass. There is also a Colorado State Forest/Park visitors center just west of the pass. We eyeballed all of these places as we drove by and plan to return to the area tomorrow. According to the ABA guide, there are supposed to be Clark's Nutcrackers, Pine Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, and Boreal Owls in this area. We could use some nice Pine Grosbeak pictures. The Boreal Owl is probably impossible, but it won't hurt to ask in the visitors center.

We got a couple of brochures when we registered here, and the one on the state forest says one of the campgrounds has electrical hook-ups. It's not listed in either TL or AAA camping guides. I saw it as we drove past and it is definitely open. Will have to check it out tomorrow. We might want to move up there after our two nights here are over.

As we neared the pass, the sky gradually became totally cloudy--not bumpy rain clouds, just high, smooth ones. The temperature was 48 degrees when we arrived and unless it clears off may not go below freezing tonight.

8:45 p.m., Tues., May 30, 2006
KOA, Gould, CO

We drove back up to the Cameron Pass area. Our first stop was at the Moose Visitors Center, a facility of the Colorado State Forest/Park. (Out front is a life-sized moose made out of barbed wire. It seems strange, but is actually very beautiful. It was a project of a grandfather, son, and grandson.)

The place didn't open until 9:00, and it was around 7:45 when we got there, but we discovered a lot of bird feeders around back and also a trail along the edge of the forest between it and a willow-filled creek. I walked a ways along the trail while Jim photographed some of the birds around the feeder. There was nothing there he especially needed, but he did get some Cassin's Finches in a tree. Most of his shots of them are on the ground.

Along my walk I found some Engelmann Spruce trees and picked up a couple of cones. Beside the parking lot was what I think is a Blue Spruce. I wonder if it's growing naturally there or was planted. (The tree book says it's sometimes hard to tell Blue and Engelmann Spruce trees apart, so I'll have to hope to see a Blue sometime on a nature trail with a label beside it.) I picked up cones from the two types of trees and they seemed different, but the Blue cone was on the small side--in the overlap area where it could be either. [Later: I really think it's just another Engelmann.]

I bought a two-volume wildflower ID set in the nature center. It's arranged for amateurs like me and I spent a lot of time the rest of the day figuring out a few flowers using it. Volume 1 has lowland flowers, while Vol. 2 has the mountain ones, so you don't have to carry both. Some flowers occur at a variety of altitudes and are pictured in only one book and simply listed in the other, so it's necessary to have both. The books are called "Guide to Colorado Wildflowers" by G. K. Guennel, Westcliffe Publishers. What I got is the 2nd edition, published in 2004. [Later: As I edit this installment, I realize that I have been able to identify all--or perhaps nearly all--of the many flowers I've seen using the mountain books. I really recommend them.]

We drove on up the road toward Cameron Pass, checking out the Ranger Lakes campground, which has electricity. We found its setting not to be very different from the KOA where we are now. It doesn't have any water. The water system isn't functioning at the present. Even when functioning, there is only one place to get it. Furthermore the sites are awfully close together. That wouldn't matter now, for hardly anyone was there, but we're happy with our KOA, although it's considerably more expensive (\$32 vs. \$21).

We stopped at a few scenic turnouts and picnic areas, where I looked at flowers and trees and Jim tried to find birds and wished I'd quit looking at flowers and trees. (He didn't enjoy the drive, although he was a good sport about it.)

There's a county road (#41) that runs about 2 miles east from the KOA along a fork of the Michigan River to a reservoir. (It runs farther than that, but I think much of it is 4-wheel-drive beyond there.) We drove it at the end of the morning just to see what it was like. The river is really only a large creek and spreads out all over the bottomlands, with the assistance of beavers. The area is supposed to be great for moose, except the KOA owner told Jim that all the Memorial Day crowds scared them away, at least for now. Despite that information, we drove it after dinner just in case. No luck. We'll try again first thing in the morning. (It costs \$5 per vehicle to explore that area, but the pass is good until noon the day after it's purchased. Our Golden Age pass doesn't work there, because it's a state forest, not national.)

We got back to our trailer in time to fix lunch. In the afternoon Jim sat outside

hoping the Gray Jay that greeted us yesterday would return, but it didn't. I drove back up road 41 with my new flower books and identified and photographed several right beside the road on a south-facing slope:

Lodgepole Lupine (*Lupinus argenteus parviflorus*)

Cushion Phlox (*Phlox pulvinata*)

Starwort (*Stellaria longipes*)

There was one other in the rose family that I couldn't find. When I got back to the trailer, I discovered that within each color, the author has put shrubs and "herbs" in separate sections. I think what I had was a small shrub. It looked a bit woody. I'll check it out tomorrow. I didn't photograph it today because it was too far up the slope, but it won't be for mountain-goat-Jim.

On our morning drive, I also found a patch of beautiful yellow Avalanche Lilies (*Erythronium grandiflorum*).

I'd like to walk the entire two miles of road 41 in the morning, but don't know if I'll make it. It's 9200 ft here at the KOA and somewhat higher at the dam. The road isn't all down-hill either. There seem to be quite a few birds in the willows--finally. I heard Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrows, saw Yellow Warblers, and think I heard MacGillivray's Warblers.

We may not have had any moose on our after-dinner drive, but while we were eating dinner, three Mule Deer does wandered slowly by our site, grazing on the nice fresh grass as they went. We've seen so many White-tailed Deer on our trip, it was amazing how much bigger Mule Deer are. I also think these are bigger than the ones in California. (The book just said coastal ones are smaller, but I don't know how far inland "coastal" extends.) Toby didn't catch sight of them for quite a while, but when he did, he started barking. So we put him in his kennel for the duration.

8:45 p.m., Wed., May 31, 2006 Elk Creek Campground, Grand Lake, CO

A long day and I'm exhausted, but here goes.

We got up at 5:00 this morning and drove the same road we did last evening, but no Moose. Then we came back and had breakfast.

After breakfast I had Jim take me up to the dam for the North Michigan River (Creek in some sources) Reservoir, and I made it back to the KOA without having Jim come and get me. I carried my recording gear, camera, and new flower guide. Although the creek noise was loud some places, it was surprisingly quiet in others. I got several nice recordings, including some mixtures. In addition to the birds heard or seen yesterday, I added Wilson's Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker, Hammond's Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, and a few others. Got really nice recordings of the Lincoln's Sparrow song and adequate ones of several others.

I actually spent most of my time looking at and photographing the flowers. Getting down on the ground--and, especially, back up--with my tape recorder and microphone draped across my shoulders is not easy at 9500 ft. New flowers were:

Pin Cherry (*Prunus pennsylvanica*) - the shrub I had trouble with yesterday

Mountain Tansy Mustard (*Descurainia richardsonii*)

Broadleaf Arnica (*Arnica latifolia*)

Mountain Candytuft (*Noccaea montana*)

I got back to the trailer around 10:30, having spent three hours moseying down that road.

We drove out of the campground at 11:30 and headed for Grand Lake. I looked at the map and measured against the scale of miles and discovered it is about 23 miles from where we were camped at Gould to Grand Lake. However, in order to get there we had to drive 90 miles. First we went northwest to Walden on SR 14, then southeast to Granby on SR 125, finally north to Grand Lake on US 34. We stopped for lunch at Walden and also bought gas and did a lot of grocery shopping. I hadn't had anything other than the general store at Red Feather Lakes for a week. The lunch and the groceries were both quite expensive, and neither was particularly satisfactory. The lunch was so-so and the grocery store lacked several quite common items. Their meat looked nice, though.

The drive itself was absolutely gorgeous the entire distance. Most of the time we were in North Park, an 8000 ft valley completely surrounded by snow-capped mountains. The valley floor was dotted with ponds, marshes, and wet meadows in many places. (Arapaho NWR is there, but we decided the birds would be those we'd seen in many other NWRs in the west.) A little higher much of the land has been converted to pasture. On the hillsides there is a lot of Big Sagebrush. To complete the scene, towering puffy clouds were over the mountaintops, but not extensive enough to be at all threatening. (They're all gone now.)

Much of the Big Sagebrush shows signs of having been dragged to convert it to grassland for cattle. This is the habitat of the Greater Sage-Grouse, which is declining alarmingly, but which the current administration refused to list as Endangered. Despite the obvious habitat destruction, the ABA Bird-finding guide blames the decline on photographers who get too close to the birds. Let's face it, only a very small number of leks are accessible to photographers.

According to my new (2004) Colorado plant book, Big Sagebrush is now *Seriphidium tridentatum*, no longer *Artemisia tridentata*. I wonder how many other *Artemisias* have been placed in the new genus. Another change that I discovered is that all three of Colorado's tree-sized junipers are now in the genus *Sabina*. Only the Common Juniper, a circumpolar shrub, is still in *Juniperus*. I wonder if all the rest of the North American "junipers" are now in *Sabina*. I don't ever read the scientific botanical literature.

As we drove north from Granby, our eyes were assaulted by a lot of scroungy lakeside tourist businesses--marinas, motels, cafes, crowded RV parks, etc--along Granby Lake. We wondered what the campground I'd selected would be like. It turned out to be quite nice. It's on a slope with Elk Creek running through it. We have a full hook-up site with willows on three sides. Below our rear window, we can barely make out the creek through the willows. On the other side of the creek is a tent-camping area and off to one side is the office of the campground, but it's not a problem.

The campground has recently been purchased by a couple from Newport Beach, and they are assisted in running it by another couple from Irvine. The young man from Irvine, the only one we've met, is exceedingly friendly and shared with us the learning curve associated with figuring out how to run a campground. He also suggested a couple of places we might like to visit locally.

Apparently Jim told him of our fruitless moose hunts, for he told us there are moose wandering the campground grounds regularly, especially early and late in the day, and we might even see one out our rear window. A little while later he came back and said there was one in a grassy patch just past the far end of the campground from us. Jim drove up there and got some poor back-lit photos. I had dinner started and couldn't leave. I do hope to see one or more of them before we leave here. We paid for four nights.

Tomorrow we'll start exploring Rocky Mountain National Park. The entrance is only a short distance north of where we're camped. I've always driven in from Estes Park

before--once or twice with Mother and once with Jim--and skimmed on exploring the western portion of the park. This time we'll be entering from that side. Estes Park has grown to be a huge tourist town, which is also a minus. I hated it last time I was there. The town of Grand Lake is quite small. Haven't seen the main business part of it yet.

8:45 p.m., Thurs. June 1, 2006
Elk Creek Cpgd., Grand Lake, CO

Today was our day to explore the high country of Rocky Mountain NP. We got an early start, as always, so the visitors center was closed, but we did get a park map when we showed our Golden Age pass at the entry booth.

The first part of the road passes through the Kawuneeche Valley, through which the north fork of the Colorado River meanders. On the meadows on either side of the river we saw several herds of elk grazing. We took a look at some of the nature trails along this low section of the drive, but decided to delay walking any of them until tomorrow. So we continued on up to the Trail Ridge portion of the road, which is above the tree line.

At Farview Point we could look down on the valley we had just driven--a beautiful scene. At the viewpoint itself Clark's Nutcrackers and Gray Jays were panhandling. Jim succeeded, finally, in getting some nice shots of this race of the Gray Jay. He didn't need Clark's Nutcracker, but I'll bet he got some anyway.

A little farther along we crossed the Continental Divide, where one side flows into the Colorado R. and the other into the Cache la Poudre, whose waters eventually end up in the Mississippi. By the time we got to the Alpine Visitors Center and store, we were meeting all the people who came up from Estes Park. The visitors center hadn't opened for the day yet, but I browsed the store. Then we continued further, passing the highest point on the road. We stopped at a lot of turnouts and scanned the scene carefully for White-tailed Ptarmigans or rosy-finches (2 species possible here). But all we found were a few American Pipits, most of which were heard only. This early in the season very few flowers were in bloom and the tundra was brown with scattered patches of snow. (We'd actually encountered more snow in the subalpine zone, which is usually the case.) The only flower I identified was Alpine Forget-me-not, (*Eritrichum aretoides*). I saw a couple of other species, but they were down too steep a slope for me to examine closely. The summit of the road is around 12,200 ft, so we didn't have a lot of energy for tackling steep slopes anyway.

About half way along Trail Ridge (the high part), we turned around and headed back down. The steady stream of traffic was becoming a big turn-off. We'll find some other alpine places that are not so crowded in a few days.

On the way back we stopped a couple of places in the subalpine, especially Lake Irene, but the trails were covered with snow. That's supposed to be a good place for Pine Grosbeak, but we didn't see one. The trees there are mainly Engelmann Spruce with a few Lodgepole Pines. The only other stops were for elk. The first was a lone male right beside the road. He had a nice velvety rack, but his coat was pretty moth-eaten. This is shedding time. The other was for one of the herds we'd seen earlier, but this time it was much closer to the highway. We got back to the trailer around 12:30.

After the long day yesterday and our trek to the high country this morning, we were ready for long naps.

Around 6:00 this evening, Jim went down to the main building to take a shower. While he was gone, Toby started gruffing at something outside the window. He does that a lot, and it's usually somebody walking their dog--or even just somebody not walking a dog.

So I told him, "Be quiet, there's nothing out there." But he insisted there *was* something. So I looked out the window and could barely make out a dark gray form on the other side of the willows. Pretty soon, I could see the blackish velvety antlers of a young male moose!

In order to keep Toby from developing full-scale barking, I thrust him into his kennel where he could no longer see the animal. After a brief moment of indecision, I decided the animal wasn't going to crash through the willows, but was going to go around them, so I could safely dash out to the truck for my camera with a 35-70mm zoom. (I don't know how to work any of Jim's.) Even though this is a campground moose and has not attacked anyone, I wasn't taking any chances, so I stayed close to the trailer door. Pretty soon the moose finished browsing on those willows and ambled out into the campground road in front of the trailer. I blazed away with my camera as it headed for more willows across the road. I must have shot half a roll of that animal in various locations, but don't really remember. I was pretty excited.

When Jim got back from the shower and I told him what he had missed, he was really disappointed. Figuring it might still be in the campground, he grabbed the wrong camera and headed out looking for it. Other campers helped him find it. Then he came back for a camera that would do a better job, but by then it was too dark and the moose was gone anyway. Oh well, we still have two more days here, and according to the visitors center, where we are is the better than any place in the park for moose. Our campground is just outside the park entrance.

At dinner tonight, Jim remarked, "I suppose you're going to write up the moose in your diary."

Of course he wasn't surprised at my answer: "I'm going to milk it for all it's worth."

To which he responded, "It'll be butter by the time *you're* done!"

My readers will have to decide if I overdid it that much.

8:30 p.m., Fri., June 2, 2006 **Elk Creek Campground, Grand Lake, CO**

The campground is filling up. Even the short, uninteresting site across the road is occupied. The young folks in the big fifth-wheel in the site next to us took at least a half-hour to get backed into the narrow site to their satisfaction squeaky brakes and all. Now they have to unhook, put down jacks, hook up utilities, extend slide-outs, and all those other things. We wonder if they've ever backed a trailer before. These sites are tricky to get into, and the road is somewhat narrow. (I suspect they borrowed their parents' trailer. It has a Florida license.)

This afternoon I listened to two young couples and their assorted kids and dogs set up tent camps down below us. Every operation had to be discussed in detail and various options considered: where to place the tents, how to set them up, how to inflate the air mattresses, where to place the sleeping bags in the tents (conclusion: diagonally), etc. The wives seemed to have no trouble getting food prepared. Of course, the young kids had to have their interests redirected occasionally. I couldn't see any of it because of the veil of willows surrounding our site, but one man in the group had a voice that carried perfectly, so I always got his side of every conversation--and his side seemed to be the most authoritative part.

Today we stayed in the Kawuneeche Valley portion of the park. I walked two nature trails (one mile each), both of which started out in a forest, crossed a wide, wet meadow and the Colorado River. One of them ended up at a historic dude ranch that was established in the 1920s. The oldest buildings have been maintained, and I think they have

interpretive staff there in the peak of the season, but I had the trail and everything to myself this morning. Got a nice photo of a beaver dam. Of course, the beaver was nowhere to be seen.

Well, almost to myself. I saw one moose from the trail. It was a female and kept watching me and making me nervous, but I finally figured out I was making her nervous, for when I continued on up the trail, she trotted quickly across it and along the edge of the forest for several hundred yards before I lost sight of her.

My most interesting recording was of a single Sandhill Crane bugling. I have lots of recordings of masses, but it was fun to have a solo. The same or a different one flew in close to the parking lot, where Jim was shooting Violet-green Swallows, so he was able to photograph it. It was stained almost completely brown, but had the red and white head of a full adult. Don't know where it spent the winter. A ranger told some people who were also photographing it that it is a migrant headed for Alaska. They don't breed in the park. I looked it up and found they do breed in extreme northwestern Colorado. However, none of the field guides showed the breeding range in the Sierra Valley of California, so I wonder if they don't breed here, too. The habitat looks perfect.

The other nature trail, the Coyote, was less interesting, but maybe it was because it was later in the morning and there were quite a few people on it. It crossed the river, then followed along its course for a half-mile. I learned that "Kawuneeche" is the Arapaho (Indian) word for "coyote." I didn't see any coyotes, but I did see lots of elk in the meadow--all far away.

We had a small, perhaps yearling, female moose near our campsite this morning, and Jim succeeded in getting pictures of her. We haven't seen the big male of last evening, but the hubbub of everyone arriving and setting up camp must be a deterrent. However, the park employee told us that last weekend there were sightings in the park--and it was Memorial Day. I really hope Jim will be able to get good photos. He waited until nearly dark to take his shower tonight.

Weather today just like the last few--low of 31 degrees this morning, high in the mid-70s, which may be a bit warmer than it's been. Same cloud situation. Perfect! It's been 92 degrees in Denver. I guess we'll just have to stay in the mountains until fall.

Later: A few days later the Denver Post had an article on a research study just completed in the Kawuneeche Valley. Apparently having the Colorado River meander through a nearly dry meadow is not the normal state of affairs. There should be far more beavers than there are (30 today, 600 in the 1940s). Their dams would cause the river to overflow producing marshes full of willows, aspens, etc. The researchers feel that the surplus of elk has eaten so many willows that the beavers have nothing to build dams with. They recommend eliminating some of the elk. That's the rub. Open season on any wild animal is a no-no in a national park. So the recommended option is to have rangers or a contractor shoot them at night using rifles with silencers. The final suggestion, reintroducing their natural predator, the wolf, would cause the same outcries from neighbors that it did at Glacier NP.

8:15 p.m., Sat., June 3, 2006
Elk Creek Campground, Grand Lake, CO

We didn't do too much today, knowing that the park would probably be mobbed with weekenders. We did go to the park, but to an area that we didn't expect very many people to know about--but we were wrong. It's Adams Falls, which is accessed by driving through

the village of Grand Lake and continuing on to a parking lot where the paved road ends. We'd been told the trail was easy, but it was quite steep with lots of steps. I wished I had taken my walking stick, but I made it up to the falls without help. I did have Jim hold my hand on some of the taller steps on the way down. My arthritic knees are just not that dependable any more. I need railings, and there were none.

The waterfall was beautiful and the area below it cascaded down an extremely narrow canyon and was really impressive, too. I don't know the name of the creek, but it bordered on being a river, it had so much water in it. This is, of course, the best time of year for waterfalls.

I took my time on the 0.3-mile trail, identifying and photographing some of the wildflowers along the way with no trouble, because they looked similar to those we see in the west. The first one looked a lot like the common Pussytoes of the Sierra Nevada, except it had long stems. Logically enough, it's called Tall Pussytoes (*Antennaria pulcherrima anaphaloides*). The other looked like a *Senecio*, and I was close. It's called Rock Groundsel (*Packera werneriiifolia*). Others were some sort of wild strawberry and a few I'd already seen in Gould. One was extremely tiny, and I couldn't find it in the book, but I didn't try really hard, knowing I couldn't get a decent photo of it anyway with my lens.

The 0.6-mile (round trip) hike today took more out of me than the 2 miles I did yesterday on more or less level ground. After we got back to the truck, we debated going somewhere else, but decided we were just too tired and didn't want to encounter crowds of people. This morning's were enough. So we got back to the trailer around 10:30 and spent the rest of the day loafing. I tried to take a nap, but Toby kept bouncing up and down off the bed. There are dogs down in the tent camping section that he can see out the rear window, where the bed is. I should have put him in his kennel, but kept hoping he'd settle down. In fact, he's barking out the rear window right now.

Around 5:00 I took Toby for a walk around the camping loop and discovered the male moose several sites away. I sent Jim down there and he wasn't back for nearly an hour. I didn't know whether he got cornered by the moose or found someone to talk to. It turned out a little of both. He did get some good shots of the moose, but the sky was cloudy, so he's still not completely satisfied. Then he found a fellow moose-watcher who turned out to have lots more in common with him than that. They shared common ideas about politics and religion, too. And when you get Jim started on either of those subjects, he can talk forever.

We ate an early dinner, because I was grilling hamburgers and feared the clouds might start to leak, but they didn't. A front is supposed to come through in the middle of the night, but is expected to be dry. Today the temperature got up to 77 degrees after a low of 31 degrees last night. This is probably the warmest day we've had in the high country.

Mon., June 4, 2006

Cottonwood Campground & Mobile Home Park, Idaho Springs, CO

No entry.

9:00 p.m., Tues., June 5, 2006

Cottonwood Campground & Mobile Home Park, Idaho Springs, CO

Yesterday so little of interest occurred that I didn't bother to get out the computer. Since we only had 75 miles to drive, I spent a couple of hours in the morning finishing up my chapter in the ABA/Lane Bird-finding Guide to Southern California and mailed it off to

Brad Schram. It has been quite a job, because I had to email folks in Orange County for lots of simple information I could have gotten by myself had I been home--precise street names, mileages between streets, hours when places are open, etc. Lena Hayashi, Nancy Kenyon, and Kaaren Perry helped a lot. But I depended most on Terry Hill for getting information on what exactly they're doing at Bolsa Chica and what it'll be like when they finish. She also got me a lot of the same types of information that the other three women did. I really appreciate their help.

We left around 10:30, drove US 40 over Berthoud Pass, 11,315 ft. This is the highest pass we've ever towed the trailer on, and we were somewhat apprehensive about it, but the Suburban got us over the top like a trooper, albeit slowly and in first gear. After we got down the other side we only had 8 miles to drive eastward on I-70 to Idaho Springs. We wanted to drive up Mt. Evans, so I picked the above campground, because it was the only one anywhere near the road. It's 1.4 miles northwest of Idaho Springs on SR-103. It's in a steep-walled canyon with Rocky Mtn. Juniper and perhaps Ponderosa Pines (haven't checked closely yet) on the south-facing slope and Douglas-Fir, Engelmann and Blue Spruce on the north-facing. There are lots of Blue Spruce, the first truly wild ones I've found, but I'm going to have to look around to find a place to photograph one. The campground has so many utility wires all over the place that I can't get a nice photo here.

The campsites themselves are pretty uninteresting. They're just on a gravel area and very close together. They do back up to the steep north-facing mountainside, though. A beautiful rock retaining wall backs up the row of sites--huge boulders artistically stacked, with green plants growing out of the crevices. Jim learned today that the man who owns the park constructed the wall himself 30 years ago.

Today we drove up to Mt. Evans. The SR-103 portion of the road is OK--has nice guard rails and is in the forest. But when we turned onto SR-5, the spur-road to the top of the mountain, 14,264 ft, the road became narrower, lacked guard rails, and had sheer drop-offs that scared me to death when we had to be on the outside. I can't believe I once drove that road myself with Mother as a passenger. This time I was petrified, especially on the way down, when we were mostly on the outside and were meeting all too many cars--and the outside of the pavement was crumbly in spots. I just closed my eyes or looked at my lap until it was over. Jim really did a nice conservative job of driving; it's just me.

Shortly after we got above the treeline, we started encountering large numbers of Yellow-bellied Marmots--probably more on that road than the total of all the marmots I've ever seen in my life. They were everywhere. In one place the animal was right on the road and looked as though it wasn't going to get out of the way, but just before we got there, it darted down into a hole in the pavement about 2 feet from the side of the road. If the animal had not been there, Jim might not have seen the hole.

We were among the first tourists to arrive at Summit Lake today, 12,800 ft and hadn't been standing around the truck very long when I spotted a coyote. Jim grabbed his longest lens, but the animal was very tolerant of people and trotted right across in front of us. Jim had to keep backing up with that lens. We were amazed at the bushy coat of that animal--much fuller than any other coyote we've ever seen. Jim probably got the best coyote pictures ever and was very pleased. Usually they're much more wary.

Summit Lake, a glacier-carved tarn, was nearly covered with ice. American Pipits were doing flight songs all over the place, ascending from one rock and landing on another some distance away. I tried to record them, but didn't get anything as good as I got last time I was there. Most of the time they were too far away, and then the wind got up. Also, there was a lot of airplane traffic. Denver isn't far away.

I spent most of my time there photographing and identifying three species of wildflower plus a foot-high dwarf willow that had a few "pussies" on it, but no leaves yet. My flowers were:

Marsh Marigold (*Psychrophila leptosepala*)

Fairy Primrose (*Primula angustifolia*)

Snow Buttercup (*Ranunculus adoneus*)

The road between Summit Lake (a misnomer) and the true summit at 14,130 ft is even narrower and I refused to ride any farther. (I drove to the top with Mother many years ago, so saw no need to go again. "Been there, done that.") So Jim went to the top without me. He couldn't remember what the view from there was like, although I told him I'd show him the pictures he took last time when we get home. (I wouldn't ride to the top with him that time either.) Anyway, he took more pictures and was especially pleased with one that had a fairly distant group of Mountain Goats for accent.

We got back down to the treeline area around 11:00. There is a new visitors center that hasn't opened yet and also some nature trails. It's called Mt. Goliath Natural Area. Lots of wildflowers were in bloom along the trails. Some of them may have been planted there, the variety was so great. I spent an hour identifying and photographing a few and never got very far from the building. By then it was lunchtime and there was no restroom there, so I reluctantly left. But we're going to go back up there again tomorrow morning and make that our first stop. By the time we got there today, the clouds were building fast and so was the wind. I'd like to get better pictures of the flowers I identified today--plus figure out even more. It's a great spot. My flower list there today is:

Leafy Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium foliosissimum*)

Charming Wallflower (*Erysimum amoenum*)

Alpine Lily (*Lloydia serotina*)

Alpine Sandwort (*Lidia obtusiloba*)

Some sort of Cinquefoil that I failed to figure out, but it was the most common flower there.

We got back down to the trailer exhausted. Hiking even a little bit at that altitude takes a lot out of you. Also my nervousness about the road was added to it. So after lunch, I took a long nap and worked on my embroidery outdoors the rest of the day.

Last night was pretty cold, but I don't think it got below the high 30s or low 40s. We're at only 7900 ft and there's a heat wave going on. Denver broke its all-time temperature record for the date at 96 degrees today. It was 85 degrees here, according to a thermometer in downtown Idaho Springs. (We still haven't put our thermometer out.) Sky was clear first thing in the morning, but clouds built up, then disappeared after sunset. Scattered thunderstorms were forecast, but came nowhere near us.

8:45 p.m., Tues., June 6, 2006

Cottonwood Campground, Idaho Springs, CO

Another morning on the Mt. Evans road, but this time we did things in a different order. We stopped briefly a couple of places for me to try to photograph Blue Spruce trees, but one of them turned out to be a Douglas-Fir when I picked up a cone. The others were a group on the other side of a small creek with no cones visible either on the tree or on the ground. I know I can get the ones in the campground, but I want some in a wild-looking setting.

We continued on until we were almost to the turnoff for the road to Mt. Evans. Echo Lake is a park run by the City and County of Denver and is in the upper portion of the

montane zone. Yesterday we'd thought it looked interesting, but continued on to the mountaintop. On our return it was crowded with people either fishing (from shore only) or eating picnic lunches. Today we got there around 8:30 and had the place to ourselves for a while.

My purpose in stopping there was the hope that there might be Pine Grosbeaks that were used to people. I knew they occur in the upper montane and subalpine. I only had to walk about 50 ft when I started hearing soft, short, finchy phrases that sounded like the description of the sounds of that bird in the National Geographic guide. Usually that book's descriptions of sounds are somewhat inadequate, but this time there was a nice male on a treetop that wasn't too high to confirm my ID.

I grabbed my microphone to record him and discovered I'd left it on yesterday and the batteries were dead, so I had to go back to the truck and change them. I told Jim where to go, and he got a few photos before his batteries, too, went out on him. He had forgotten to recharge them last night and had to go back to the truck for a different camera. The bird was still vocalizing when I got back with fresh batteries, so I got a few sounds before he flew. We hung around the area an hour or so longer. I got a few more sounds and once saw a male and a female perched together in the top of an Engelmann Spruce too far for a photo. We decided we should get up there earlier if we want good photos and sounds. Even though our experiences were less than satisfactory because of our carelessness, it was only the third place I've ever seen a Pine Grosbeak, and only the 2nd one Jim has photographed. The first one was the female on her nest at Church Creek Meadow in the northern Sierra Nevada--the place I took my Learning Mountain Bird Sounds field trip groups. Those photos were borderline recognizable, but still interesting.

We continued on, turning up the Mt. Evans road. I had Jim let me out at the Mt. Goliath treeline area where there are so many wildflowers. The ranger at the entry booth had told us there were Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep at about mile 5, so Jim decided to go up there and then continue on to Summit Lake. He saw the sheep, but they were not at mile 5 and were too far away for photos.

Meanwhile, I was kept plenty busy with the birds, trees, and flowers. I recorded a nice Lincoln's Sparrow and a distant Fox Sparrow (saw it poorly and it wasn't a Green-tailed Towhee and that's its only sound-alike; wouldn't come to playback) and Dusky or Hammond's Flycatcher (probably Dusky but I always plot sonograms to be sure).

There is a short trail that leads up into a grove of Bristlecone Pines, which I think are a different subspecies from the ones in California. Some of them are quite old, but not as old as California's. I took photos of the trees, foliage, bark, and cones--and picked up a cone to add to my collection.

The rest of the morning I spent working on more wildflowers. The variety there is wonderful. I identified the following new ones:

Low Penstemon (*Penstemon virens*)

Frosty Ball (*Cirsium scopulorum*)

Rose Crown (*Clementsia rhodantha*) - still in bud

Alpine Clover (*Trifolium dasyphyllum*)

These were by no means all. A couple of others I tried to figure out hastily, then gave up. It was getting close to lunch time. Besides, leaning over at awkward angles to photograph tiny ground-hugging flowers at 11,500 ft really compresses the lungs. After each photo, I'd have to huff and puff a while before I could take another--and I always try to get several of each plant. So I still want to spend more time at that location when we go back up there.

There is a nice restaurant and a somewhat junky gift shop at the junction of SR 103 and SR 5 (the road to Mt. Evans), and we stopped there on our way back. Food was quite

good and the dining room was very attractive with large windows overlooking the mountain scene and hummingbird feeders outside each. It used to be a lodge, but they no longer take overnight guests.

Clouds and wind were much less of a problem than yesterday. They didn't start until after lunch, when we were on our way back to the trailer. High temperature in Idaho Springs was in the mid-80s. With the breeze it was comfortable to sit outside in the shade of the trailer. Jim stayed inside with the A/C and TV on. This place has cable TV and he's been playing catch-up on the news on CNN (Lou Dobbs, especially), PBS NewsHour, ABC News, etc. I content myself with what I get from the Denver Post, which we buy whenever we can.

I fixed a pork chop and rice dish for dinner--one of those recipes where you brown the meat, then add uncooked rice, seasonings, and liquid and cook until the rice is done. This time I cooked and cooked and the rice just wouldn't get done. I had boiled some plain rice last night and had no problem. I just added a little extra water and cooked it 25 minutes instead of 20. I'm not sure why this rice wanted to stay crunchy, but it could have been that the water kept evaporating away in the broad-surfaced skillet, even though it was covered. The other reason may be the salt in the dish. Salt affects the osmotic pressure of the liquid and may have prevented the water from penetrating the rice. There was actually a little too much salt, because I finished up a jar of chicken base and didn't measure the 1 tsp the recipe called for. (I know that when I make split pea soup at home, I have to add the salt last--after the peas have cooked to mush. If I add some at the beginning, those peas take forever to cook.)

We've about decided to stay here through the weekend if they have room. We still want to go back to Mt. Evans once more, Loveland Pass and perhaps Guanella Pass, and to a quilt museum in Golden. This seems to be the best place from which to go to all these places. RV parks are surprisingly scarce in this area, so even though this place has its drawbacks, it'll do.

8:45 p.m., Wed., June 7, 2006
Cottonwood Campground, Idaho Springs, CO

We drove down to Golden to visit their Quilt Museum. I had picked up a brochure on the place when we entered Colorado. It's sort of small, with only two rooms for display of quilts--and two more for a shop. Each room has a theme and the displays in each revolve every three months. This time one room had a group of small wall-hangings all made by one woman. She works from photographs of people engaged in various activities. Her work is machine applique and very good. I enjoyed seeing how she did shadows, water, and in one piece pavement. There she got whimsical and quilted each section of sidewalk (between shadows of people's legs, etc.) with a different motif that had nothing to do with the picture. It just gave different textures.

The other room had crazy quilts. Although that genre was invented in the post-Civil war period, these were of more recent construction and showed various approaches. They were interesting, but only one or two showed the really elaborate display of embroidery stitches I've come to expect on that type of quilt.

I was glad I went to see the place, but I wouldn't go much farther out of my way than we did to visit it (about 25 miles each way). The one in Paducah, Kentucky, is worth a major detour. It's the project of a national quilting organization--I forget the name. This one is sponsored by a local group and really a credit to their dedication.

Since the museum didn't open until 10:00, I gave Toby a bath before we went. He

tolerates the bath and the blow-dry, but still hates being brushed. Fortunately his fur is so silky that it wasn't at all tangled. Still we should brush him more often, for he looks so nice then. I say "we" because Jim has to hold his head or he bites at the brush and sometimes connects with the hand that holds it.

The temperature was 98 degrees in Denver today, another record. It was 85 degrees in Golden around 11:00 when we left there to drive back up into the mountains. I think the temperature here topped out around 85 degrees. It was comfortable sitting outside, but indoors the A/C is necessary because of greenhouse effect.

I finished my Scarlet Tanager block this afternoon and picked out threads for a Northern Cardinal. That's not really one of my favorite birds, but it was Mother's, so I decided to put one on the quilt in her honor. I forget what state I matched it with, but it was one in which I didn't have any special birding experience. (There are a handful of eastern states like that, and I just picked eastern birds that are colorful for those states.)

There's a Black-headed Grosbeak in our campground that sings a song so fast that the individual phrases can't be identified. It sounds like a continuous warble. I had to see the bird to be sure that was what I was hearing. I guess it's because it's the peak of the territory-establishing season.

9:15 p.m., Thurs., June 8, 2006
Cottonwood Campground., Idaho Springs, CO

I'm getting a late start writing up today's account because I had to duplicate some Pine Grosbeak sounds off Stokes Western tape for Jim to use tomorrow to try to bring the bird in for photos at Echo Lake.

This morning we drove to Loveland Pass. This is the high point of the part of US 6 that bypasses the Eisenhower Tunnel on I-70. Trucks carrying oversized loads or hazardous cargo have to take this highway, so it's been maintained in quite good condition. And there weren't an awful lot of those trucks. The pass is 11,990 ft and is just above the treeline.

The day was clear to start with, but before we were through up there the usual puffy clouds had formed. By afternoon it was totally cloudy. I didn't note the temperature, but it wasn't overly cold or breezy. Denver has been having a heat wave and I suppose the high country is warmer than usual, too.

This is the place where Jim successfully photographed White-tailed Ptarmigans when we were here June 10, 1990--almost exactly 12 years ago. Today he tried to find them again, but without success. To do so, he had to climb about 100 yards of steep trail to a place where he said it leveled off on a ridge. He said he had no trouble climbing so long as he took it slowly. (I'm so thankful his heart is in good condition. He has a funny anomaly for which the LAPD gave him lifetime medical when he retired, but it's never bothered him, and today would certainly have been a test.) He said he did shoot a few American Pipit frames.

One bird species that I found interesting was a pair of Mountain Bluebirds, which I saw while he was up on the ridge. I've always thought their name was a misnomer, for they're usually on high, open plains, but these were on steep tundra and truly birds of the mountain.

That trail is not my kind of trail--too much dropoff, sometimes on both sides, for my acrophobia. Besides, I found a wonderful patch of wildflowers right off the highway. Of course, being tundra flowers, I had to get my eyes and my camera practically on the ground to photograph them well--and then hold my breath waiting for the wind to stop briefly so I

could depress the shutter. So I was huffing even while sitting still. My flowers were:

Hall's Beardtongue (*Penstemon hallii*)

Alpine Clover (*Trifolium dasyphyllum*) - also on Mt. Evans Rd.

Alpine Avens (*Acomastylis rossii turbinata*)

Rock Primrose (*Androsace septentrionalis subumbellata*)

Mountain Candytuft (*Noccaea montana*)

After Jim returned from the "mountaintop," we drove on another half-mile to Pass Lake, which is just north of the highway at the end of a 200-yd-long paved road. We didn't go there last time. I'm not sure why, but perhaps the road was still covered with snow then. Anyway it's a beautiful little tarn and is still pretty much covered with ice. The mountains all around it were all mostly snow-covered. I got carried away taking pictures of the lake, the mountainsides, and the willows that were starting to bloom. Some just had pussies, while others had tiny flowers on them. Blooming in the snow-melt water next to the lake were Marsh Marigolds and a new flower for me:

Globeflower (*Trollius albiflorus*)

Both of these flowers are in the buttercup family, but there are differences. The Marsh Marigolds are white, while the Globeflowers are pale yellow. Petals and leaves are different, too. Both are very large and showy.

We took Toby with us today, for I was pretty sure I'd not want to venture far from the truck. I kept him with me at the top of the pass, and Jim took him while I was photographing at Pass Lake. And some of the time he just had to sit in the truck and wait. I had just bathed him yesterday and he looked really handsome, so I took a lot of pictures of him on the tundra. I hope some are nice. He's a real wiggle-box and exceedingly frisky when out on a leash.

On our way back on I-70, we got off and drove around Georgetown, an old mining town with Victorian stores and houses, many of which have been restored. Now the main shopping street is a full of attractive shops and tourists. Their money, of course, financed the restoration.

As we were driving up I-70 from Idaho Springs first thing this morning, we'd seen three or four Mountain Sheep right beside the road, but couldn't stop on the freeway. On the way back, signs directed us to a place off the freeway to view the mountainside in that same general area, but we saw no sign of the sheep. They'd have been too far to photograph from there anyway.

9:00 p.m., Fri., June 9, 2006

Cottonwood Campground, Idaho Springs, CO

We spent the morning at Echo Lake working on the Pine Grosbeak. The tape I made didn't do any good; the bird came it when it felt like it and not when the tape was played. Jim said he got some pretty good shots, but would have liked one on a spruce tree. He almost had a shot going once when I was standing there, but the bird just wouldn't get out of the shade of the branch just above it. (It was feeding in spruce buds.) The Engelmann Spruce trees there are very dense.

Just about the time we arrived (6:45 a.m.) a man with a couple of teen-age boys came in to go fishing in the lake. To avoid the noise of their talking I wandered as far from them as I could in the park and was able to get one really nice recording and several quite good ones of the bird. They included an extensive song and several types of call, both perched and in flight. I tried playing back my recordings, but they paid no attention to them either. There was intermittent breeze/wind, and my best recording came when the wind

died down for a few minutes. The others had rather loud wind in the trees--mostly spruce, but a few Lodgepole and Limber pines.

I tried to get more Cordilleran Flycatcher sounds, but all they would do is "tree-yip" and a short high call. I never heard the three-parted song that is their counterpart of the Pacific-slope's. (Actually the "tree-yip" and high calls are also counterparts of Pac-sl calls, but lower pitched. The "tree-yip" is more disyllabic.) Just before we were leaving I figured out where they were nesting--atop a wooden beam inside a stone storm shelter. I discovered them flying in and out the big windows. I had been looking on the beams, based on our experience at Blue Lake in the Warner Mtns. of northeastern California, but Jim actually found the barely started nest.

My other interesting recording was the soft trills of a male Spotted Sandpiper courting a female. He spread his wings a bit and fluffed out his feathers while he was doing it. This sound was different from the loud alarm calls I usually hear from that bird. Those can carry clear across a mountain lake. Unfortunately Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers and squirrels were vocalizing at the same time and the wind was pretty strong by then.

It's interesting that five Corvidae are common at that location. In addition to the two in the previous paragraph, Common Ravens, American Crows, and Gray Jays are also present. I've been surprised to find crows in places like that--almost to treeline in rugged mountains--but we've found crows and ravens together many places in the Rockies.

We quit shortly before 11:00 and had a second breakfast at the Echo Lake Lodge. Service and food were so-so. This evening we went into town (Idaho Springs) intending to try out a Mexican restaurant we'd seen advertised. It looked so uninviting that we ended up at an attractive Chinese place nearby; I forget the name, but it's probably the only one in town. Most of the appetizers were excellent (ribs tough with uninteresting sauce), won-ton soup very good, but the two entrees we chose were exceedingly bland. The place was very attractive, and the very young Chinese man and woman serving us were delightful. Both spoke strongly accented English and were apparently new in this country.

The temperature got down to the mid-40's last night and, surprisingly enough, was about that up at Echo Lake. Our campground is in a narrow canyon, so I suppose cold air settles down in it. As we were driving from 7,900 ft to 10,600 ft the temperature rose to the low 50's, then decreased again. It didn't warm up much up there during the morning. When we got there it was almost totally cloudy, but it gradually cleared off, then high puffies started forming. The breeze and lack of sun made it pretty chilly standing around.

8:15 p.m., Sat., June 10, 2006 **Cottonwood Campground, Idaho Springs, CO**

Today was our last day in Idaho Springs. I debated whether I wanted to drive all the way back up to the Goliath Natural Area at the start of the Mt. Evans road and finish working out the flowers there. Some were in bud when we were there a few days ago. However, I decided to spend the time in the lower elevations nearer our campground. We'd just been driving past all that interesting habitat. (Jim didn't care what we did, so it was up to me to decide.) As we were driving SR-103 up to Mt. Evans, I'd noticed a dirt road off to the right that said "West Chicago Creek Campground 3 miles." So I thought it might be fun to explore that road.

But first I wanted to get some photos of Blue Spruce trees. I took some along SR-103, but it was hard to get utility poles and wires out of the pictures. The dirt road also had lots of homes, but the wires were easier to get out of the pictures, so I finally got my trees in their natural setting. Blue Spruce is the state tree of Colorado, and a mature specimen is

really impressive--a tall, symmetrical, full "Christmas tree."

About the first two miles of the road run along the creek, with willows in the flatter areas. There are several ponds, some beaver-made and others manmade. The only new bird for the trip was an American Dipper, which seemed to have a nest in an aluminum pipe culvert serving as the outlet of one of the man-made ponds. The bird flew out of there and then foraged in the creek for a while.

The canyon with West Chicago Creek runs east and west, with the north-facing slope dramatically different from the south one. The north-facing slope has mostly spruce (probably Engelmann mainly) and aspens and is densely wooded. The south-facing one is much more open and grassy with scattered Ponderosa Pines and Rocky Mountain Juniper. (The Colorado flower book I've been using prefers to call it Red Cedar since it's no longer in the genus *Juniperus*. I personally don't think that's any better, for it isn't a cedar either; all true cedars are old world trees. Furthermore, there are other species called Red Cedar--or sometimes Redcedar. Why compound the error and confuse the issue further?)

After two miles, the road takes off upward steeply in a series of switchbacks, then ends at the campground, which was full. It wasn't a very interesting-looking campground either. The sites are quite close together, and there's little vegetation between them. Quite a few people had towed trailers the size of ours up there, but the road was awfully rough, steep, and narrow. We decided we'd never want to take ours.

We took Toby with us, so after we drove back down the steep road with the switchbacks and were back along the creek, I had Jim let us out and we walked downhill 1.4 miles along the creek. There were lots of flowers beside the road, which runs entirely along the north side of the creek and is thus on the south-facing slope. I took photos of all but one of the new flowers I identified, some as we were driving up the road and others as I was walking back with Toby. (Of course, I had to put my foot on the leash to keep him from scambling all over the flowers I was trying to photograph.) Here's the flower list:

Sticky Geranium (*Geranium viscosissimum*)

Mountain Balm (*Ceanothus velutinus*)

Colorado Loco (*Oxytropis lambertii*)

Leafy Cinquefoil (*Drymocallis fissa*, formerly a *Potentilla*)

Rydberg Penstemon (*Penstemon rydbergii*)

Tall Chiming Bells (*Mertensia ciliata*)

Colorado Columbine (*Aquilegia coerulea*) - no photo, for it was too far below me in the creek bottom. A huge blue and white columbine, it's twice as large as any other I've seen. No wonder it's the state flower. I hope I'll encounter some more somewhere and get photos. I also plan to try to buy some seeds.

Maybe it'll grow in our columbine patch on the north side of our 2nd house.

I wasn't tempted to try to carry my recording gear because the creek was very noisy and there was quite a bit of wind. Besides, I thought Toby deserved a nice walk--hadn't had one for a while. Recording and walking Toby don't mix very well.

We returned to the campground around noon and found two gigantic units--a motor home and a fifth-wheel--maneuvering with difficulty to back into the two remaining cramped spaces in this camping area. We'll be glad to leave this campground. Hope the next one is more spacious and less crowded. Jim hasn't even tried to attract birds here.

Temperatures today much like the last several. Sky clear first thing, cloudy for several hours during mid-day, then clear again in the late afternoon.

Tomorrow we head for Leadville, which is away from the Front Range, where we've been throughout this installment. This seems like a good stopping place. Will mail it today. (My computer behaved perfectly during this editing process, thank goodness.)