

Fall road trip

September 26 – October 11, 2007

California, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon

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## **Monday, October 1, 2007**

### Wyoming

Here I sit, in front of the famous Morton's Barn along Mormon Row, looking at the Tetons in the background as countless others have before me. A storm is approaching from the west, pouring clouds over the Grand Teton, a granite massif rising above Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Today is my second rest day after a three day backpack along the Teton Crest trail, 39 miles of high Rocky Mountain splendor.

I decided to roll up to Jackson as part of a multi-sport adventure and to get away from it all for a few. The contract work I'd been doing had been waning for the last few months, so I figured it was time to sample the open country before returning to the grind.

This was all decided on the Sunday, September 23, only 2 days before I took off for 2 weeks. The original plan was to fly up to Jackson, spend a few days backpacking and return to San Diego. From there, I would make the second leg of the journey, a few hundred mile bike ride around the San Juan Islands in the Puget Sound outside of Seattle. After adding up the cost of the last minute flights, transporting a mountain bike through the outrageous air transport system and renting cars, the trip cost rapidly surpassed \$2,000. Not wishing to break the bank on flights and cars alone, I decided to do it the old fashioned way and drive the whole trip. It's only 16 hours from Temecula to Jackson.

Geared up for a multi-day backpack, a road trip, a photography assault and a hundred mile road ride, I left Temecula at 8am on Tuesday. The original plan was to leave at 4am, but the last minute nature of the trip conspired against me. That, or the waiting to the very last minute to matte and frame two prints for my aunt and grandfather, might have had something to do with my late start.

## **Tuesday, September 25, 2007**

## Utah

Driving with traffic at 85 miles per hour is not the most fuel efficient way to go, but it does keep you from being run over. It was a straight shot from Temecula up the I-15 to Idaho Falls and then a two hour night crossing of Teton Pass into Jackson. Fortunately, I have very understanding family who don't complain when I show up at midnight, two days after I announce I'd like to visit for a week. That tendency must make me the annoying family member, the one who pops in unannounced.

### **Wednesday, September 26, 2007**

## Wyoming

Today was gear up day. Off to the grocery store to buy my food stock. I finally found some bars that seem to be half way decent to live off of. At least, I thought so. The high protein powerful bars really end up making you hungrier as your body just needs a carb load. Apparently, anything over 6 grams of protein per hour actually causes trouble.

An hour over at Teton Mountaineering was well spent to get a feel for the local mountain conditions, what to expect and to purchase some bear spray. It seems a little crazy that a tiny can of pepper spray is able to repel a rampaging 300 pound bear. Maybe, after the bear laughs because you've sprayed yourself in the face because you fired it into the wind, you might throw the bottle and hit the laughing bear in the eye, making it run off. Then again, maybe not.

Aunt Nancy treated me to a supper at Bubba's, a great barbeque place located just west of Jackson town center. It was a great meal of hearty ribs and gravy, especially since I was to be living off bars and dehydrated food for three days.

### **Thursday, September 27, 2007**

Up and going early is the key to a good backpacking day. Today is going to be a long one because I have to set up my return transportation prior to beginning the hike.

The original plan was to catch the shuttle service from String Lake back to the Granite Canyon trail head. This arrangement allows

backpackers to hop in their waiting ride and leave right after finishing the backpack. That idea wasn't speaking to me, so I came up with a second plan. Since I'd brought my mountain bike to ride the San Juan Islands, it occurred to me that I had the means to make a fully self-supported trip.

I went through the park entrance at 6:30am and had my bike locked up at the String Lake parking area shortly thereafter. I made sure to lock both wheels and the seat to the wood rail bike racks. This helped ensure that my entire bike was present when I came to it on Saturday. Immediately, I hopped back in the truck and headed out of the main park entrance and on to the Moose-Wilson road. At this time of the morning during off-season, there is no ranger at the entrance in the morning, so you can get in and out quickly.

By the time I had filled my Platypus bladders, loaded my backpack, and stowed things in the truck, it was 8am by the time I hit the trail. It was a good thing I picked up my backcountry permit yesterday at the fancy new Moose visitors center. I didn't want to be backpacking into the night with the large fauna here.

The first couple of miles up into Granite Canyon are an absolute pleasure compared to the straight up starts found at Mineral King in Sequoia National Park. All the while, I enjoyed the blazing yellow aspens, the haunting melody of elk bugling in the otherwise silent forest and the crispness of the air. The sound of elk is unearthly and might frighten one if the source wasn't known. This ethereal serenade was a strangely comforting companion compared to the synthetic rubbing sounds of my silicon impregnated nylon backpack. A magpie was my trusty companion for a while, likely looking for a handout or a wilderness buddy.

After the magpie gave up and I had left the cacophony of unseen elk, the sounds of a cool morning in the Rockies enveloped me. A slight rustling of aspen leaves, chirping of birds unfamiliar to me and the far off sound of running water were my companions. With visions of grizzly bear attacks dancing in my head, a quick check of the bear spray was done every 5 minutes. The Rockies have a greater assortment of dangerous critters than the Sierras, so my usual sense of hearing was heightened to the point of paranoia.

Hearing a rustling in the brush just ahead of me, I practiced the non-politically correct famous maneuver referred to as a Chinese fire drill in trying to get at my meager weapon. Ready, I rounded the corner and

expected to be turned to brunch. What I saw made my heart skip a beat. There, right before me, was, well, a trail maintenance crew. Confident that those nice people weren't there to make a meal out of me, I discretely holstered my defense. Fortunately, the trail crew hardly took note of me or my hand behind my back hiding my bear spray. My ego was now fully in check and I excused myself past the courteous group and moved on. So much for the thoughts of death just an hour into my trip.

The rest of the hike up Granite Canyon was beautiful and uneventful. Reaching Marion Lake in the early afternoon, I ran across a couple doing the same trip as I, just in "several more nights", as they referred to it. They were traveling with luxury items like folding chairs and comfy pillows. Though nice for the moments they are used, carrying the extra weight for their short-lived use has negated the niceness for me, as I've adopted the ultra-light philosophy. Though, I do think about sitting on something more comfortable than a cold rock or a sap covered log. I headed on to Death Shelf, the rocky (maybe limestone?) shelf that marks the terminus of Death Canyon.

Death Canyon is suggested as a side trip, described in the Hiking the Tetons book, and it was easy to see why. With the canyon backlit by the mid-afternoon sun, only silhouettes of canyon shapes were visible. The sun beams obliterated the detail, leaving only the suggestion of shapes and details made up by one's mind.

The chasm was a gently sloping bowl at the bottom of Death Shelf, leading to dramatic cliffs a mile away on either side. Death Canyon reminded me of the general topography of Kings Canyon National Park in California. The sides of Death Canyon have the same ice scoured sides, a remnant of glacial movement that ground the landscape into a reminiscent alpine slide for giants. With the early fall sun still hovering over the canyon, I headed over Kit Fox Pass, onto the widest and flattest section of Death Shelf. The trail was pleasantly smooth and rolling, unlike harsh steep grinds of other sections of the Teton Crest.

At 4pm, I reached the group camp area of Death Shelf and I began looking for an area to bed down. With the convenience of time, I was able to find a tight wind-shielded area to set up the tarp shelter in a cluster of trees. The group of trees shielded me from the cool breezes on three sides.

Placing the food and backpack in the handy bear box for the moment, I wandered around and explored the area a bit. Normally, I would be

crawling into camp at 8pm on a regular backpack, but with only 13 miles covered today, I had the chance to sit around and watch the landscape change as the late afternoon sun skirted across the dramatic cliffs towering over me.

Just past 5pm, the couple I had met earlier came up to a cluster of trees a quarter mile away and began setting up their camp. They had a good sized tent with them, so I began to see why they were taking more days for this trip. Though, I again admit that having a roomy tent is tempting. It's only tempting to the point that I compare the  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound shelter I was carrying versus the 7 pound shelter across the meadow. Only the occasional flutter of distant laughter permeated the silence of the now darkening aquamarine sky.

Once the sun fell below the horizon, I brought the alcohol stove to life and boiled water in a few minutes and mixed it in with my Trader Joe's potato flakes, making a hearty meal to replenish my tired body. After a long day of hiking and living off energy bars, this otherwise simple potato meal tasted more like home made Yukon gold mashed. It became clear that the so-called protein energy bars left me unsatisfied, though feeling full. It seems that these "Marathon Energy" bars really just are not energetic. They just didn't cut it. Comparatively, the bars that still looked like food or were made from something that once resembled food fit the bill much better than the seemingly synthesized bars.

With visions of waking up to black bears licking my face and grizzly bears sitting on me just because they can, I feel asleep quickly. I was sure a passing pan-faced brown bear was not interested in a purple nylon covered, down feather sleeping bag surrounded backpacker as a midnight meal. At least that's what I kept telling myself.

### **Friday, September 28, 2007**

Awaking shortly before sunrise, I was greeted with cool blue sky light dancing off the cliffs at my camp. Soon those cliffs were illuminated with the welcoming rays of warm sunlight. Getting up and shaking the pine needles from my bedding, I began preparing for the second day of my trek.

Retrieving my cookware and food from the bear box, I noticed no bear tracks in the moist dirt. Somewhat disappointed by the lack of a bear visitation to justify the expense and weight of the bear spray, I began

the morning routine of heating water for the oatmeal and brown sugar energized with powdered milk breakfast.

The air was still and crisp. The clouds belied the direction of a storm system headed my way. Today's forecast was only for light puffy clouds and a slight breeze. The smell of warm oatmeal brought me back from my meteorological observations and I stirred the mash. The alcohol fuel stove, made of a soda and beer can, sputtered out just a minute after my meal was cooked. Soon, the nutritious mix was gone and energy returned to my body. Holding the warm titanium pot, while eating breakfast, provided the perfect amount of heat to get the hands moving.

By the time I was packed and prepare to depart the group camp area, only silence came from my campmates on the knoll a quarter mile away. It was very apparent why they'd be taking a few more days to do this trip. Sleeping in is a foreign concept in a backpacking trip with the time and distance I set for myself.

Mt. Meek Pass was blustery and windswept with only gravel and a hard packed trail as landscape features. A solo hiker headed south on the Teton Crest Trail and I exchanged a few comments but didn't chat too long due to the biting wind cutting into both of us. As he walked on past me, I took a few shots of him contrasted against the wide open space for a sense of scale.

Once over Mt. Meek Pass, the trail heads into the deceptively shallow Alaska Basin. The perspective afforded on the south edge of the basin makes the area appear flat and easy to cross. However, once you begin down the trail into the area near Teton Creek, the full size of Alaska Basin can be seen. The area is massive and deep and did somewhat remind me of the stark landscapes in Alaska.

The walk up past Sunset Lake and Hurricane Pass is significant. Really, walking up to the lake is fairly reasonable but the slope changes after that and converts to a classic Sierra grind. This Teton Crest Trail does keep one honest after all. Once half way up the south slope of the pass, the grandeur of Alaska Basin can be seen and fully appreciated. Trees here are gnarled and sparse, with thin vegetation covering the areas not already covered with rocks. The place has a serene harshness to it.

Up on Hurricane Pass, the winds weren't too strong, though they were cold. The breezes peaked at 20 miles per hour. Really, not bad

considering people have reported gale force winds or worse up there. After cresting the pass, one of the big payoff views of the Teton Crest Trail reveals itself.

In the cul-de-sac of South Cascade Canyon, the sheer cliffs abutting the backs of the Grand and Middle Teton as well as Teepee Mountain are visible. In the moment that Schoolroom Glacier and its strangely circularly uniform emerald green pond are visible, one might think the scene spread out under the partially cloudy sky might have been taken from the end of the Ice Age.

Craggy rocks, stunted spruce trees and a blanket of jade green vegetation cover the upper canyon floor while a few fir trees tenuously cling to impossibly steep locations along the canyon walls. Feeling the temperature and cold winds, one almost expects to see a saber tooth cat prowling a small herd of mastodons inside the canyon. The place just has an otherworldly feel to it.

From the north side of Hurricane Pass, the trail drops rapidly along the walls of South Cascade Canyon down to the more gentle slopes of the canyon floor. Once at the cusp of the canyon, all 13,300 feet of the Grand Teton is obscured by the steep cliffs, strange as that seems. This really gives you a feel for the depth of the canyon to hide an entire mountain in just a half mile.

After a few quick miles, I found the junction to the north and main sections of Cascade Canyon. Now, it was decision time.

Earlier in the morning, while kneeling under my tarp tent, I felt a sharp pain near my Achilles tendon. It felt as though someone had crushed the area with pliers. My legs weren't under any load at the time and, at least I thought, I wasn't in a strange position other than flexing my foot. I felt dull pressure in my foot while walking, but nothing worrisome.

Also, the weather had deteriorated markedly, filling the sky with threatening clouds. The hope for the next few hours was to get above the freezing altitude so I could be in potential snow rather than rain. There was no thunder indicating severe weather, so after carefully considering the risks, I chose to forge on up North Cascade Canyon toward the first group camp. Should things turn very bad, I only had to go down the canyon to escape.

On the way up through the official camping area of North Cascade Canyon, I only saw one other person wearing a red bandana, far off in the bear berry brush, in one of the more open campsites. The group camp icon on the National Geographic Grand Teton waterproof map is placed marked much farther east than the actual site. The previous day, I had also discovered that the turn off for the North Junction in Grand Teton National Park was mis-marked as well. Everything else seemed to be spot on, though.

I reached the group camp around 5pm, giving me plenty of time to choose a prime campsite out of the worst weather, well protected by spruce and pine trees. This provided more safety inside of my ultra-light tarp tent.

Instead of carrying a full tent, my shelter simply consists of a small plastic ground sheet, a 5' x 7' silicone impregnated nylon tarp, a few hollow aluminum stakes and retroreflective Triptease guy lines. The entire shelter weighs 1 pound, 5 ounces. As much as my Western Mountaineering down Megalite sleeping bag. With the convenience of a little time, it is possible to find a very well sheltered area to shield me from the chilling winds of the coming storm.

With the looming storm, I was going to have the first bad weather test of a shelter I have relied on for years. I have been remarkably lucky in the past and now it was time to pay my dues.

The Mountain House pro-pack chicken tetrazzini really hit the spot as the gray skies darkened to a deep slate and then finally to black. I bedded down and fell asleep quickly.

### **Saturday, September 29, 2007**

Once or twice, I awoke to shift around and relieve the pressure on whatever numb body part I was laying on. Arms really start to complain after they have been used as a pillow for a few hours. Each time I awoke, a few drops of rain struck my tarp while in the distance I could hear a slow but constant storm soaking the forest. Working to find a great shelter paid off, as the surrounding trees blocked almost all the rain.

After a fairly long night, the meager sun began lightening up the otherwise leaden skies. Knowing that heavier weather was on the way, breakfast was quickly cooked and the decision to continue on was

made. Should things become untenable, it would be easy to turn back and escape Cascade Canyon to Jenny Lake and relative safety.

Donning full rain gear, consisting of a blue Marmot Precip jacket and shell pants and Outdoor Research gaiters to protect my body while a black trash bag was used to keep my backpack out of the freezing rain, I headed up the trail. The immediate objective was to gain enough altitude to get into the frozen precipitation to keep dry. However, the small annoyance of the Achilles yesterday had grown in intensity, slowing me down. Also, the need to keep the hiking speed down to avoid potentially life-threatening sweat caused me to constantly adjust my speed.

The wind driven rain forced me to stop and turn my back to the driving wetness more than once for minutes. Soon, the effort paid off and the rain turned to grapple and slush. Another 10 minutes of hiking brought me to a mix of frozen rain, grapple, hail and a few flakes. Thing improved when the wind died or was blocked by rocks and trees. Now that the sky was dropping no rain on me, I wasn't getting soaked. It was only getting colder. It's been years since I'd camped and hiked in wet conditions. I've been in plenty of snow storms but no rain. That's just a reflection of living in California and last minute trip planning. You have a much better chance of avoiding adverse weather.

As the rain completely stopped, replaced by snow, my spirits improved. The only thing that cut into my enjoyment of the moment was when the wind picked up to a roar and blasted ice and snow into my face, making forward progress impossible. But, as the wind slackened, I let out a wild laugh at the thought of continuing on into the storm, moving uphill toward Lake Solitude.

The wind was swirling the snow around to the point that it was impossible to make out the far shore of small Lake Solitude. My self picture at the Lake Solitude sign of 9,038 feet tells the story. Wind, snow and temperatures well below freezing gave me a taste of the real Rockies storm experience. Again, I reveled in the moment and laughed out loud at being attracted to such challenges – the tougher, the better. I yelled into the wind, gave a Jack Nicholson crazed, maniacal laugh and faced into the blasting gale with outstretched hands. Now things were turning fun!

Going up toward Paintbrush Divide, the wind was to my back and pushed me along uphill. My shell jacket and hood protected my head

and neck from the icy sting of blow snow. It finally paid off carrying all this bad weather gear.

Hauling up the south face of Paintbrush Divide took longer than I'd anticipated. Once, it appeared I had reached the crest, arriving at a saddle looking down the opposite side of the hill. As the trail turned again to continue upward, hopes of an easy ascent and keeping under the clouds were dashed. It was a good half hour to the top. Fortunately, the trail direction allowed me to keep my back to the wind, making the bad weather bearable.

On top of Paintbrush Divide, the storm clouds completely obscured the trail, making it difficult to follow the path. Falling snow had also nearly obliterated the difference between being on the trail or lost. It looked as though another half foot of snow will make this traverse a route finding exercise. As the clouds blew over and opened up on the divide, the way became clear again.

Voices floated up the trail to me and I glimpsed four backpackers coming up the north side of Paintbrush Divide. It was immediately obvious the south approach was far easier and it was educational to watch this crew struggle up the deeper northern slope snow.

Going down the steep, ice covered loose rock trail was respectably treacherous. One or two parts turned into a Class II scramble, required me to turn around and kick step into the snow and climb down. Very careful attention was paid to foot placement. Going up in these sections is much easier. It appeared as though much more snow on this side of the slope will make an ice axe and crampons necessary.

The group of four coming up to meet me looked like they were carrying enough gear for a week. But, they revealed they were only out for one night, sleeping at the Holly Lake, going over Paintbrush Divide, past Lake Solitude and back down Cascade Canyon. Will was heading up the group of three women, two on their first real backpacking trip. What a deal they had signed up for. This was quite the maiden voyage for those two young women.

Now it was all down hill to the trail head at Leigh Lake. I picked up speed to take advantage of the momentarily clear conditions. The entire canyon was soon enveloped in a cloud-filled fog blanket, making it impossible to see the purported grandeur of the canyon. The trade for that loss was the absolute silence of the forest, save the noises I

made. It was a surreal experience, being only able to see a short distance but knowing I was surrounded by the vast emptiness of Paintbrush Canyon, bathed in diffuse cool blue cloud light.

All the way down, a light snow fall kept me company, dampening the forest sounds even more. It was a wonderful way to welcome the fall season. Later on down the trail, several couples and families passed me, headed toward Holly Lake for the day. That lake seemed to be the day hiking destination, as everyone was interested in how much longer it was to the lake. As I was rapidly hauling down hill, I was unable to provide an accurate measure, so I randomly under-guessed to keep the people happy. No one wants to hear they still are far away from their destination in these conditions. More than one couple was just wearing jeans and nylon windbreakers. That's rather brave considering the current weather.

Down at the lake junction, the trail flattened out to a rolling grade and made walking much easier, as my Achilles was starting to develop a warm, almost burning sensation, indicating a more serious problem was developing. Once over the bridge spanning String Lake, a sharp stabbing pain struck my foot and slowed me to a hobble. Whatever was going to happen just did, only one measly mile from the terminus of my backpack. So close. Had I taken a slower pace, whatever just happened might not have. Life is full of those events of speculation. I hobbled over to my bike and prepared to ride back down the park. 26 total hours of actual hiking had brought me these 39 miles through the most spectacular scenery.

Amazingly, all the parts of my bike were still attached to the cable and I didn't lose my keys. Things were looking up. Even though the bike ride through the park was permeated with teeth-gritting pain every 5 minutes, the ride was downhill along the park road. All the while, weathered threatened to open up on me. As I rode along, like I did in the Bristle Cone Pine forest in California, I realized riding is an awesome way to see parks. It's much faster than walking but still far more immersed in the raw experience compared to driving. I resolved to experience the outdoors like this more in the future. That is, when I didn't have shooting pains, making me yell into the wind.

Stopping at the picnic turnout and setting down my gear, I walked around a little bit and snacked, while a magpie came to inspect my momentarily unattended backpack. Perhaps this was the same wild bird who had seen me off three days before? Other than the feathered visitor, the ride down the park and along the Moose-Wilson road was

uneventful. It was good to have the extremely low gears of my Specialized mountain bike, as my nagging injury cut my gear torque to nil.

I returned to my truck parked at the Granite Canyon trail head, shed my backpack and tossed the chariot into the truck bed, then sat on the tailgate and rested for a moment. Reflecting on the past three 13 mile days with two steep runs to keep me honest, clouds bounded down the canyon and overhead, oblivious to my ruminations.

On the way back to Jackson, I stopped at Teton Village for lunch at the Mangy Moose lounge. The French dip sandwich was in stark contrast to the bland bars I'd lived off the previous three days. A bustling lunch crowd piled in shortly after my arrival and the place came alive. It wasn't like the wild Fridays of the ski season, but it was enough to make the mangy moose hanging above my head smile.

The rest of the day was spent limping around and cleaning up gear. With no rain in Jackson, it was easy to dry out gear and spin my body and brain down for a rest. Aunt Nancy treated me a dinner at a great Mexican place to bookend the backpacking trip. Throughout the great mole enchilada, I regaled my experiences and the stunning sights.

### **Sunday, September 30, 2007**

Sunday was a construction day at Aunt Nancy's condo. She needed door locks changed, pictures hung, a computer worked on and other projects looked after. It was good to do the low scale work since I could hardly walk on my right foot. We toured all the different commercial buildings of Jackson to make the necessary purchases and get things installed, cleaned up or repaired.

For supper, we just didn't get enough of Bubba's earlier in the week so we found ourselves there again. This time, I enjoyed blackened catfish and hush puppies. They were a throwback to the January trip through the south with Alf. After enjoying a hearty meal, we returned to the condo and I was out in mere moments.

### **Monday, October 1, 2007**

Anticipating departing for Idaho today, I cleaned up things and got ready. After a discussion of the Photography at the Summit lectures

at the National Wildlife Museum with Aunt Nancy, I changed my mind and decided to delay a day. At worst, it was just a change of plans. At best, an educational set of lectures. The latter ended up being the case.

I spent the day hunting wildlife and doing some high definition time lapse video work. The work was not groundbreaking or original, but it was satisfying to be out shooting. Watching people tempt a stomping by the hooves of bison was an entertaining way to spend a few hours, too.

Jodi Cobb and Dave Black proved to be excellent speakers, the former covering emotional and deeply cutting issues while the latter provided drama and carefully planned artistic photography. Jodi Cobb is famous for her articles in National Geographic about love, slavery and the human experience. Dave Black is a renowned sports photographer and has transitioned handily into large scale light painting efforts. Since I had missed the Galen Rowell lectures a few years ago, after seeing the quality of the presentations, I now regretted missing the now passed photographer's lectures. Now I was behooved to remain for tomorrow night's lectures.

Though I don't receive National Geographic magazine any more, I was nevertheless familiar with Jodi Cobb's lecture material. The articles were that pervasive and famous. Her talk was difficult to listen to at times, as people around the audience quietly expressed reactions that exposed their naiveté to the harsh living conditions in much of the world outside of the West. The images were striking enough to hit home to many the experience of the third world.

In contrast to Jodi Cobb's lecture, Dave Black provided the audience with comedic relief, sharing funny stories as he moved through the world of sports to photography more suited to Strobist.com material. He has really done some impressive, large pieces. His lecture was more technically oriented and funny, a welcome levity after the seriousness of Jodi's heart wrenching talk.

## **Tuesday, October 2, 2007**

As the talks last night were just that good, I decided to stay another night past my planned departure. Tonight's lectures were by National Geographic's former editor in chief and James Balog, an environmentally active photographer. If they were half as good as last

evening's material, the change of plans was well worth the interruption.

As today's weather was worse than yesterday, I didn't spend as much time wandering outside of my truck. Plus, searing pain my foot motivated me to change my approach. I did a 4x4 tour up Shadow Mountain, taking off the dirt road and off-piste, justifying the expense of purchasing a 4 wheel vehicle. The pure satisfaction of bounding through sage and rough terrain on Goodyear Silent Armor tires made me smile. It was fun to wander around the countryside with hunters and discover things. There was a grove of trees planted on the north side of Shadow Mountain as experiment of different seeding and planting conditions. One never knows what is hidden deep inside the forest.

My Aunt treated me to supper at the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar. A tasty plate of New York strip was the night's fare, along with a smooth cabernet balanced with garlic mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus. A well prepared crême Brule topped off the evening meal.

Aunt Nancy and I went to the evening lectures and were happy with the talks. Both talks were not as dramatic as the opening night, but stood well enough on their own. It was educational to gain a sliver of insight into the business operation and motivations of the Geographic through the eyes of a chief editor. Balog's imagery of the collapse of glaciers around the world was engaging as well. He did a fair job of avoiding the political implications and strove to take an objective look at the world while still striking an eye for the artistry.

### **Wednesday, October 3, 2007**

#### Idaho

Today was the final day in Jackson and a long traverse to Lewiston, Idaho. After dawdling around town, I hit the road at noon. I ended up with an hour advantage crossing the time zone. It took 11 hours total, with an hour spent in Butte and Missoula, Montana, looking around. Even with exploration, I made good time and arrived at Grandpa's just after 10pm. We stayed up and talked for a while, eating a tasty sandwich after general road food for the day.

### **Thursday, October 4, 2007**

Grandpa had wanted to tour Moscow, Idaho for some time, so we hopped in his Solara and made the short half hour drive up to the town.

We did the old-person drive around town cruise for an hour to get the basic layout. We had lunch at the Convention Center café, a decent mix of Mexican backed by what equated to Albertsons bagged corn chips. The main dish was good enough, though it disagreed with the gastrointestinal machine well after the meal was over.

We stopped in at old town Moscow where I spent time reading about Liz, a woman who sailed around the world on the Spray in search of the perfect wave. This was the surfer-sailor's perfect endless summer. The proprietor of the climbing store gave me some good ideas for adventure in the San Juan Islands. His information ran in stark contrast to the suggestions of great shopping and cute towns described by the early 20's blonde at the Moscow Visitor's Center. This reaffirmed my rule of being careful of whom you ask information from.

Returning to Lewiston, we cleaned up and went out to Macaulin's, a surf and turf, midrange priced establishment. Both the season halibut and my slab of salmon came out well. The meal ended up being cheaper than I'd anticipated, a welcome surprise.

### **Friday, October 5, 2007**

Today was guy work assault day. We spent hours discussing grills, lawn mowers, irrigation systems, hanging wall hardware and overpowered shredders. It was a great day for a grandson and I hope for a grandfather, too. Tools, machines, water and fire. What more could a 33 year old bachelor ask for? Funny you should ask that question.

How about a great blackened catfish and locally brewed porter at Rooster's Landing, my favorite restaurant in the state. Situated on the Clearwater River with its own marina, Rooster's Landing is a noisy place but the food can't be beaten. A visit to Lewiston is not complete without stopping here. What a way to end the day.

### **Saturday, October 6, 2007**

## Washington

The drive from Lewiston to Anacortes took 7 hours with an hour stop at Washington's Ginkgo State Park, a massive petrified forest based on an extremely rare species of petrified Ginkgo tree, a species nearly lost to the Ice Age cold and only surviving in China today. The park was fascinating, sitting on bluffs above the skin-chafing wind channeling Columbia River gorge. Had it been a nicer day and had I had a looser schedule, I might have explored more. Bill, the owner of the park rock and trinket store, imparted his wisdom of how it used to take 30 days using grit to cut a three foot thick petrified log outside 28 years ago. Now, he said, one can use a modern diamond saw and cut the stone in a matter of hours. He was a fun, no nonsense character. My amateurish questions amused him and I learned a bit more about the area.

I reached Anacortes well after dark. After a healthy Jack in the Box meal, I found the ferry parking lot. The last ferry had departed at 8pm and it was 10:30pm. Not wanting to drive anywhere, I stealth slept in the temporary parking lot beside the ferry booths. It wasn't a bad night, all things considered.

### **Sunday, October 7, 2007**

Good thing I set my alarm for 4:45am. The parking gates activated and closed at 5am and several cars were already in line. My group boarded the ferry at 5:25am and we were under way right on schedule at 5:35am. The passage through the inky dark sky, surrounded by white caps moving through the San Juan Straits, was uneventful. I arrived on Orcas Island just prior to sunrise.

After bumbling around a bit, I settled on the Orcas Hotel and café for breakfast. I ended up sitting with a group of the back-of-the-bus types from the yacht club. They were a brash group, entertaining me with their daily banter of island activities and pointing out how the ferries were crashing into the wind blockades. Bad weather blew those huge boats around with ease. The waitress told me later that the group came to that place every morning.

I spent several hours with the salty group and didn't get on until well into the morning. I was told by my Japanese information guide to come to the San Juan Islands for the people and so I did. Again, the

information was spot on. As I sit here hurriedly writing the week's events out, the yacht character club shot a few comments toward me. I made sure to share them back, with a smile.

Once I got the group laughing, I began learning about these island folks. They shared that the planned yacht race had been cancelled due to the arriving weather, likely 60 mile per hour winds blasting across the harbor. That crushed my chances of bumming a ride on a sailboat. But, as I learned, there's plenty else to see on the island. I took leave of the cracking jokes and headed off across the island.

Deer Cove, West Sound and their connecting roads are all very country looking. Thick sheets of rain driven by blasting winds buffeted my truck, precluding much foot exploration. Once I hit East Sound, the weather subsided a bit and made it possible to get out and look around. Lunch at Vern's was expensive at \$20 for a Dagwood sandwich and a hot toddy. The view over East Sound made up for the cost, though. The town was small enough to park and walk everywhere. That is, if you are not a hydrophobic San Diegan.

The drive up Mt. Constitution was slow and winding, meandering through the Northwest rain forest. It allowed for the chance to slow down and really see things. The whole mountain was covered in a delicate jade green moss. With gray skies abounding, the cool blue light did not do justice to the possible vibrancy in my mind's eye. The tower on top of the peak has a commanding view of a hundred miles around the bi-national area. That is, if I could see farther than a few feet. But, the winds and clouds pummeling the mountain added to the drama of the experience.

On the way down, the storm finally broke and gave me the great views that I had been teased with in the visitor brochures. Some stills and time lapse video later, I tore off to the southeast arm of Orcas Island for the subtly beautiful sunset.

Back in East Sound, the Lower Tavern served up a decent dinner. The place was slow, but it was Sunday. The tavern was big enough to have a riotous party and could likely hold all the people on the island with room to spare. Done by 9pm and not wanting to sleep in my truck again, I rolled the dice and booked a room at the Outlook Inn. Though the Euro-style shared bathroom rooms were tempting for the low price, I upgraded to a regular room for \$129. Wow, that was one of the nicest places I've stayed at in a long time. There was a wash

basin in the room, a bay window with sitting area, well built amenities and a capable heater.

### **Monday, October 8, 2007**

Today was clear skies with a large storm expected to roll in tonight. I took advantage of the clearing and enjoyed the gorgeous landscape. A pastry breakfast at Orcas Hotel and a wander around the town of Orcas filled out my morning waiting for the ferry. My idea agent will be well paid for this little gem.

It was fun to ride the ferry back to Anacortes and be able to see the surroundings, feeling the biting wind. I met Tim and Kathy Pratt, an entertaining couple who kept me company, sharing stories about living in the San Juan Islands area. After spending an hour with them, I concluded that life and the speed of things is very different here than back home.

I debated returning to Idaho or heading south, but at the must-make-a-decision point in Seattle at the I-94 and I-5 interchange, the south bound route ended up being the way to go.

### Oregon

I arrived at my good friends' Ray and Esther's place in Portland at 5pm. They treated me to a generous dinner at Saylor's Steak Restaurant and we chatted the night away. Really, I made fun of my parents doing this and here I am. Nothing like eating tasty crow.

### **Tuesday, October 9, 2007**

Ray left for work very early and Esther fixed up a big batch of biscuits and gravy sized for a lumber jack. Being an engineer desk jockey, it was tough to put the whole meal down but I did my even best.

Looking for ideas of things to hit in Oregon, my international idea agent came through with a text message suggesting visiting wineries. With Esther's help, we found a couple of promising options in southern Oregon.

Driving down Oregon was an uneventful experience. After passing a couple of wineries, I settled on visiting the Willamette Valley Wineries.

A general tasting beyond the normal few glasses was served up while I swapped travel stories with whoever would fill my wine glass. Afterward, I wandered around the vineyard and made a few images in the Strobist.com style. These shots were the best I've come up with yet in a vineyard. It was satisfying to start hitting the mark in something that has vexed me for some time.

After missing the exit to the winery suggested restaurant in Ashford, I ended up at Denny's on a random exit along Interstate 5. Down in Medford, I found a Super 8 motel with an 80 foot water slide to play on for the evening. It was fun. However, splashing around in a cold pool with kids running around all night earned me a very sore throat in the morning.

### **Wednesday, October 10, 2007**

This sore throat is the second time on this trip that I've had to deal with sniffles. I must be stressed about starting the new job on Monday. I've had plenty of sleep and haven't run things too hard since the backpack, so that was the only conclusion.

The continental breakfast of pastries, juice and fruit at the motel was perfect. I miss sitting in a little bookstore café in Paris and Krakow. Sitting in a motel lobby just doesn't have the same feeling. Rain began coming down outside, just as it was time to depart.

### California

Driving through the Siskiyou mountains was scenic, with patchy fog and dramatic rain showers along the way. I stopped in Yreka for a man breakfast at Black Bear Diner, one of the best restaurant chains in the American West. A quick text message to Google gave me the phone and address, making finding Black Bear a snap.

A stop at Lake Shasta found me in an annoying internal all too adult debate. It was 11am and taking the tour of Shasta Caverns would put me at home well past my stupidly arbitrary return time of 10pm. Why in the world I got that time stuck in my head is impossible to pinpoint. Growing up, I remember questioning adults where these times came from and never received an acceptable explanation.

Now, being an adult and just going through it, I realize that these times are arbitrarily made up and there really was no reason,

especially as I did not have to be up for anything in the morning. I hated myself for falling into that stupid thinking I despised all those years ago.

Finishing my introspective analysis, I retooled my personality while sitting in my truck for the moment, arguing out loud with myself and then, satisfied, went and bought a ticket to see the caverns. Really, when was I going to be back here to "see it later." There is no later.

A cat that had eaten the canary smile passed over my face as I purchased the ticket. Even if the tour turned out poorly, the pure satisfaction of resisting that idiotic impulse was well worth every moment of the experience.

Shasta Caverns was well worth stopping at. I could taste the enjoyment of the experience. Unfortunately, my Achilles and sinuses still bothered me. Still, I couldn't get the stupid smug smile off my face. I didn't want to.

The next 11 hours slipped by quickly, my mind absorbed with audio books and listening to Willie Nelson belt out "On the Road Again" in my mind. The funny jittery feeling came rushing to me as I finally rolled home, making me feel as though I had been away from the house far longer than I actually had. Driving to those far away destinations is just different than flying.

I arrived home at 12:45am on October 11, 2007, after 2 weeks, 2 days, 3,845 miles and two wonderful visits enriched by understanding and tolerant family members.

## **Epilogue**

### **Thursday, October 11, 2007**

It felt strange to drive to places I normally fly to. It tacitly felt as though I'd literally just swung by Jackson and just drove across the bridge from Washington to visit Grandpa in Lewiston. It was as though I had not gone on a trek, and yet I had. This was different. Perhaps my travel soul had no problem keeping up with a truck compared to a jet? I'm not sure, but such a short trip never felt to wonderfully long.