

To those of you who actually read this, we apologize for its length. Many of the things we include are for our own benefit, because we know we'll forget.

Day 1 -- Tuesday, May 19 -- Kearney, NE -- Mile 678

We left home at 6:50 AM (not too bad considering our target was 6:00) with a pretty-damn-well-packed Honda Fit. The weather was clear, sunny, and later-on, very windy. The Fit got a record 40+ mpg (obviously wind-aided) on the drive north through OK, KS, and into NE on I-35, I-135, and US 81. Then we turned west on I-80 and the 40 mph south wind nearly blew us and the 18-wheelers off the road. It was a serious driving challenge to stay pointed west! We stopped around 5:40 PM and stayed in a new Holiday Inn Express in Kearney, NE, joking that it will probably be the nicest room on the whole trip.

Day 2 -- Wednesday, May 20 -- Sheridan, WY -- Mile 1311

We left Kearney about 7:40 AM (central time) and headed west on I-80 to Cheyenne, WY and then turned north on I-25 and finally I-90 west to Sheridan, WY. For the first 100 miles, we fought the same cross winds as yesterday but then it calmed down quite a bit. We stopped around 5:30 PM (mountain time) at a reasonably decent Quality Inn. This was short of our goal today because we stopped at a Wal-Mart for an item we thought we forgot. Patty has been seeing extra floating and blurry things since Saturday and it seem to be aggravated by driving and light. When we walked right by the optical portion of Wal-Mart and saw that an optometrist was there, we decided to have him take a look. He was quite thorough and diagnosed it as vitreous detachment. Apparently this is common with aging, and can, on rare occasion lead to retinal detachment. He said it was very wise to have it checked out, but he's pretty sure the retina is fine. The "floaties" are debris that will last for a few weeks. It's annoying, but Patty's vision is still fine. Oh yes, we drove by Cloud Mountain here in northern Wyoming. It's over 13,000 feet high and was covered with lots and lots of snow along with heavy thundershowers. We even saw a few small patches of snow by the freeway. The elevation in Cheyenne was over 6600 feet which could be about as high as we get on this trip. The email and unfinished business from work is tapering off at last and it's starting to feel like vacation at last. Still haven't found time to read anything. There is just too much to see during the day and too much work to catch up on at night. Everyone in the nation ought to drive through every state in the US at least once. It puts a completely different perspective on where our food comes from and it simply gives one a better understanding of what the U.S. really is. This is why I wanted to DRIVE to Alaska. Getting there may be one of the best parts of the trip.

Day 3 -- Thursday, May 21 -- Lethbridge, Alberta -- Mile 1874

We left Sheridan about 7:00 AM (the high school girls soccer team was quiet all night) and took I-90 west (mostly north) to Billings, MT and spent most of the day driving in sunshine through the wide open spaces of Montana. We've driven through these states several times before but are always amazed with the vastness of the views and the amount of "big sky" that you see. It makes Texas seem closed-in by comparison. Seeing snow-capped mountains off to the west makes it even more impressive. From Billings, we got off the interstates for about 250 miles, on Montana 3 northwest, US 12 west, and then US 89 north

to Great Falls, MT to I-15 north up through Shelby, MT and the Canadian border at mile 1815 of the trip. Another 65 miles on route 4 put us in Lethbridge for the night at a Premier Inn and Suites (kind of dumpy, but adequate). On Highway 89 in Montana we went a few miles extra to get into the mountains and went over a pass of about 8000 feet, probably one of the highest places we will be on this trip. We got to see snow right by the road, so it really felt like "the mountains". It was quite beautiful. We had dinner at the Montana Cookhouse - - real food with vegetables and nice after granola bars for lunch.

Day 4 -- Friday, May 22 -- Jasper, Alberta -- Mile 2272

We had a simple breakfast at the hotel and headed for Calgary on Highway 3 (once we found it) and later Highway 2 past a lot of very nice farms. The density of houses/farm buildings was noticeably thicker than we saw yesterday in Montana -- some very nice and occasionally an unexpected junkier one -- but not many of those. We followed the Garmin GPS system through Calgary. She took us through a number of odd turns and she ended up in the glove box a couple times today! We desperately needed to stop, but Calgary seems to hide its gasoline stations. When we finally found one, the pumps were full and Patty was already frustrated after she made a close-call, Dallas-style left turn. Bob later informed her that the intersection had been a miniature traffic circle. Patty, who originally thought Canadians certainly did not design a route through Calgary as convoluted as the Garmin, might not be so smart after all. Why would anyone put traffic circles in brand, new sections at the edge of town? Eventually, we found a gas station after we had left Calgary far behind when we were back on the prairie with the spectacular Canadian Rockies ahead of us. Though we've been to Banff and Jasper twice, we had never arrived on Canadian Highway 1 from the east.

We did not take a lot of time to sight see on the drive, but the sights we saw just from the car were incredible. The weather started off near freezing this morning, but rose rapidly, probably to the high 50s with a beautiful clear, blue sky to set off the heavy amounts of snow on the mountains. We took lots of photos from the car, but dummies that we were, we never thought to charge the camera batteries. The best surprise was finding Lake Louise frozen over with only a little thawing at the edges. One young couple was disappointed because they wanted to see the clear, unique blue color. I suppose that is a good point, but we loved seeing it this way. Other lakes along the way were also frozen. We were also amazed to see frozen waterfalls from the towering cliffs and equally impressed by the very small amount of water in the usually roaring turquoise-colored rivers. Many of the side roads and short trails to overlooks were closed because of the snow. So the Canadian Rockies will probably see us again, and next time we will spend some time on the wetter British Columbia side where there are still more national parks. Oh yes, we must mention that we had our first encounter with animals on the road just past the Athabasca Icefield (glacier) -- a family of three (mom, dad, and baby) mountain goats.

Tonight we are at the Lobstick Lodge in Jasper. We stayed here a number of years ago on our way to the Inorganic Rings conference in Banff. On that trip we had Beth, Andy, and Patty's parents with us. We had dinner at the Jasper Brew Pub and then bought a few items for breakfast and lunch tomorrow. It's the same store we frequented on our last two visits when we had kitchens in our lodging.

Day 5 -- Saturday, May 23 -- Prince George, British Columbia -- Mile 2523

Today was our lightest day so far (boy is that nice!). We ate breakfast in our room in Jasper, and took into account that we would gain an hour when we crossed into BC and changed to the Pacific Time Zone. Again the weather was absolutely beautiful and a bit warmer than yesterday. We drove west from Jasper on Highway 16, the Yellow Head Highway, a completely new stretch of road for us. We drove part of this Highway from Edmonton to Jasper in 1999 with Patty's parents and the kids on our way to the IRIS conference in Banff.

Our first stop was for construction and we feared that we would be following an 18-wheeler through beautiful mountains. Fortunately, the construction wait was short and appeared to deal with a few fallen rocks. Even more fortunately, the traffic spread out nicely and we had the road almost to ourselves most of the day. Our first stop was for Mt. Robson (elevation almost 13,000 feet), the highest point in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. At the small visitor's center the view was incredible with only a bit of a cloud near the very snow covered top. We learned that seeing the top of this mountain, which is on the wet side of the mountains, is a very rare treat. As an example of the sparse crowd, there were only a handful of cars in the parking lot. Our next stop was for Rearguard Falls. It was a short walk from the car to this wide, cascade-like falls. Only a very few of the heartiest salmon make it up these falls, which we found surprising since we've seen videos of bears catching salmon on larger falls. Down the road a bit was the only example of an inland rain forest. These are usually near oceans, but conditions in this part of BC and the surrounding mountains are unusual. The very large and old fir trees are quite noticeable, but we only viewed from the car because the trail was covered with snow and the signs indicated that the trail was slippery in ordinary summer conditions. Patty also voiced a concern about bears, especially since there was no sign of any other people around despite two cars in the small parking lot. Her suspicions were confirmed when we saw a bear on the shoulder of the road just a short distance down the road. An oncoming car had stopped, but the bear left quickly when a second car came down the road. We had lunch in the car beside a large stream (where the bathrooms were locked). It was interesting to note how seldom a car came by. This is where we began to wonder just how Prince George, a city of over 72,000, gets supplies. Indeed we went to a wonderful grocery store, better than the Kroger's at home. Apparently the railroads are the source of supplies and Prince George had a rather large railroad district on the east side of town.

The trip to the grocery store was prompted by a pleasant surprise (a full kitchen) when we walked into our room at the Sandman Hotel. This was quite good timing since we arrived at 2:30 and had plenty of time to shop and cook and clean up. We have TV, a kitchen, and the internet, so this is not exactly a tough trip --- so far. Prince George is not the prettiest of towns and appears to be industrial and practical. The roads and parking lots seem dusty and many of the people are just a bit "different". We had to deposit a quarter in a slot to get a grocery cart, but with help from a friendly local, we learned how to get it back when returning the cart. It's a very clever system that we ought to use in the US. We bought gas, and there were plenty of bars on the windows and no way to pay at the pump. Finally, we were approached by a young guy while we were removing our groceries from the car in the hotel parking lot. Bob thought he wanted cash, but Patty thought he was asking to siphon some gas from our car so he could make it to a station. We sent him on. Though we have clothes and food in the car, even the annoying Garmin joined the other electronics in the room tonight.

Day 6 -- Sunday, May 24 -- Dawson Creek, British Columbia -- Mile 2785

We left the hotel quite late at about 8:30 after having breakfast in the room. Traffic was surprisingly heavy relative to yesterday for the entire route. In one of the lonelier stretches we got a very good view of a bear about 50 yards from the side of the road. It was completely oblivious to us and we got a few photos and video. The highlight of the drive was Bijoux Falls which was right beside the road. It was curious that it looked like so much water in the falls, but so little as it drained away in a small stream. There were also some very nice Steller's jays. We usually are not interested in birds, but these were very nice with a royal blue/navy blue color and they were quite fearless of the few of us who were at the stop. Everyone who seems to be tourists are Canadians and our Texas plates (or all the bugs on our car) attract quite some notice. Although we bought supplies for sandwiches yesterday, and iced down our small ice chest for the first time this morning, we ended up having lunch at an A&W in Chetwynd, the chainsaw sculpture capital of the world. Once again, we were surprised to find such a big town with so many businesses. This is why we needed to drive to Alaska. There is a lot to see and there are lots of people here and we'd never really know that without being here.

After crossing the mountains and seeing a good deal more snow (there was a big snowstorm here a week ago), we arrived here in a huge farming valley --- not at all what one would expect for a place called Dawson Creek (population 11,000). The actual creek here in town is more like a very small ditch and where we crossed it, I saw no water at all. There are quite a few new hotels here and after pricing the Pomeroy Inn which had an indoor water slide, for which we had no interest at all, we landed at what seems to be a brand new Days Inn. This is by far the largest, nicest, cleanest room we've had so far and it was completely unexpected. There is a brand new Wal-Mart across the street, several other readily recognized chains, and a much larger tractor dealership than any within 50 miles of where Patty grew up. We went "downtown" and took a few photos of the mile zero signpost and the Alaska hotel (which definitely made us city slicker/non-historical types quite appreciative of our elegant room). Tomorrow we officially start the Alaska (Alcan) highway, but it's been a very interesting trip just getting here!

Day 7 -- Monday, May 25 -- Fort Nelson, British Columbia -- Mile 3074

Today was generally an easy drive on the first 285 miles of the well-maintained Alcan highway (BC route 97 --- the same road as we were on yesterday from Prince George to Dawson Creek). Most of the terrain was rolling hills through lightly forested country interspersed with a few small farms and lots of gas/oil drilling and pipeline operations. There were a lot of nice views of the Rocky Mountains off to the west. We will cross the mountains again tomorrow on what is supposed to be the most winding and slowest section of the Alcan.

Just north of Dawson Creek we took a 5-mile side loop on a section of the original Alcan highway, crossing a curved, wooden trestle and deck bridge very high above the Kiskatinsaw River. It is the only original timber bridge on the whole route that is still in use today. Seeing things like that and reading about the history of the Alcan highway makes the whole engineering feat all that more amazing. The entire 1500 mile road was constructed in about 8 months time in 1942 by the US military after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as an essential over-land supply route. About 35 miles north of Dawson Creek, we crossed the

Peace River on a long, steel-decked, suspension bridge after stopping at a look-out point for some very wide, impressive views of the Peace River valley farming area. Patty's grandfather, a lifelong farmer who first farmed in North Dakota and later in south Texas, always talked about moving to the fertile land in the Peace River Valley, so this was a special treat for Patty.

After a quick pit stop in Fort St. John (another surprisingly large town, pop. 18,000), we drove the rest of the largely deserted highway with only two other stops --- one for coffee at the Buckinghorse River Lodge (the kind of place we would look at and then keep on driving in most places) and later at a deserted turnout at milepost 232 where we ate bologna and cheese sandwiches for lunch. We stopped for the night (at 2:00 PM!) at the Woodlands Inn, another surprisingly nice hotel, in Fort Nelson (pop. 5,000).

Day 8 -- Tuesday, May 26 -- Watson Lake, Yukon Territory -- Mile 3401

Wow! What a day with all sorts of unexpected beauty. After a fairly ordinary drive yesterday, today was equally extraordinary. Our Milepost book doesn't go for superlatives but maybe the loggers in that book aren't as crazy about the mountains as we are. We left Fort Nelson at about 8 after a quick breakfast in our room. We were lucky we stopped early because, by the look of the parking lot at about 8 PM, we were lucky to have secured a nice room in a brand new motel. There were ample numbers of business-type pickups that were clearly related to the extensive gas and oil fields in the area and the large number of 18-wheelers, all of which dwarfed our little Honda Fit!

Bob drove over the Summit Pass and the Summit Lake area. This pass, at slightly over 4000 feet, is actually the highest point on the Alaska Highway. The road was considerably narrower in the pass, but still very tame relative to some of the mountain passes we've been over in the US. It was rather overcast, but we still had nice views of this extremely rocky area. We also saw our first Stone Sheep which are a much smaller, brown-colored mountain goats and we also saw three or four caribou. The sides of the road (called a verge here) are generally very wide (maybe 25 yards one each side), so it is easy to see animals. Until today, Patty was starting to wonder if we would ever see all the animals the books said we should see because we are so early in the season and the sides of the road are generally covered with a dry (frozen) hay-like grass.

Our first stop was the Toad River Lodge right across from the airstrip which had a peeling sign that said "Airstrip. Keep Off!" That's when we saw a very small old airplane. The Lodge was much better than the place we stopped yesterday and there were several people waiting to use the pay phone. It was impossible not to hear that the calls were business calls from vacationing bosses. The place was very clean, very friendly, and the food looked quite good. Even the cabin-like rooms were the best we'd seen outside of the towns.

Patty started driving after the stop, and soon we had a short 9% grade downward. The road narrowed considerably as we drove around Muncho Lake. This glacial lake was stunningly beautiful since it was covered in ice which accentuated the turquoise color of lakes in western Canada. Only the edges were beginning to melt. In fact the lake looked as if there were waves because of snow on top of the ice. It was an "exciting drive" since the road narrowed to the width of about 1 and 1/2 lanes and the center stripe was invisible. The water/ice seemed only inches below us and the virtually perpendicular rock walls on the other side were covered with nets to help prevent loose rocks from hitting the road. We stopped at an overview well above the lake that was every bit as beautiful as places we've

seen in Glacier National Park. Our camera battery began to play out at the point and we discovered that our other one was still charging in our hotel room back in Dawson City, BC!

The third stop of the day was at the Smith River Falls. Patty used her driving skills learned on dirt roads around Nordheim, to navigate a very harmless 3 mile round trip of dirt road. The falls were worth every single pot hole and, if there had been any, mosquitoes and maybe even bears! We walked down about 60 wooden stairs and about a quarter mile down a trail to get a closer look. There were only two cars when we got there and we were alone when we got back from the falls. We ate lunch in the car here since it was a bit cool in the fairly strong breeze. The sky had almost completely cleared by this point.

The last stop of the day was the Laird River Rapids. These were HUGE and quite impressive. In addition to serious rapids, the geography traps swirling water and there was a tremendous accumulation of large dead logs, etc. which clearly indicates that the water level we saw was much lower than it is sometimes.

We made it to Watson Lake at about 4:30. Because this town is much smaller than any thus far (pop. 1500; but I don't know how they found this many), the lodging is generally older. Knowing we would get here later, led us to check lodging out on the Internet last night. The results were not promising until we found two great reviews for a small place (10 rooms) called "A Nice Motel". The photos online were indeed nice, but one can never truly trust them. So we drove up to the gas station with a dirt lot like almost every place we've seen in the past two days, including Fort Nelson, went into a very neat and orderly tiny grocery store, and checked in. Only the photos of the outside and the inside of this place can truly show the contrast. The room is a perfect little place with a kitchenette. Patty is convinced the entire place was done via IKEA and there is no doubt that the proprietor has wonderful taste.

Day 9 -- Wednesday, May 27 -- Skagway, Alaska -- Mile 3725

Left our IKEA room at Watson Lake at about 8:30. Our first stop was the Rancheria Falls. It was a short walk to see these very nice falls, which are really two falls with one on one side of a huge island and another on the other side. An interesting feature was the long walk on the very substantial wooden bridge for over the forest floor for most of the way. Our next stop was an overlook of the Nisutlin Bay Bridge, the longest water span on the Alaska Highway. There was only one other car/camper and they were from Arlington, TX. In general, the traffic was even lighter than we have seen on previous days. We did not see an oncoming vehicle for about 50 miles at one point. We also had a few stretches of dirt road which were labeled construction zones, but they were far better than any dirt road we had ever seen. The road bed was essentially the same as the highway, and much smoother than many highways.

We took a shortcut via Tagish to Carcross (Yukon 8) to meet up with the South Klondike Highway which goes from the Alaska Highway to Skagway. We stopped by the Teslin River in Tagish and quickly ate lunch in the car. The Klondike Highway went from Highway 2 in the Yukon, back into British Columbia, and finally into Alaska right at the White Pass Summit (3292 ft). This drive was truly incredible and dwarfed much of the fabulous scenery we've seen in the past week. It was very cloudy, it sprinkled a bit, and it was extremely windy. The most memorable point, however, was the large amounts of snow and the frozen lakes with wind-swept snow on the ice. I suppose this diminished the usual summer beauty of the colorful lakes such as Rainbow Lake, but for us it made it all very magical. Fortunately, we get to return to the Alaska Highway via this route by car in a

couple days, and, if things go as planned, by the narrow gauge White Pass Railroad on Friday. It seems downright cold here, but it's only about the mid-50's as opposed to low 40's on the pass.

We are staying at the Mile Zero Bed and Breakfast in Skagway. It's a few blocks from the craziness of a gazillion people from the two large cruise ships docked here. It's sort of a combination motel/B&B and the owner has been quite helpful. We ate right near the boat dock where we will take a 12 hour round-trip excursion to Juneau tomorrow.

Day 10 -- Thursday, May 28 -- Skagway to Juneau, Alaska -- Mile 3725

There simply are not enough superlatives to describe our day today. In a sense it was a bonus day since a slight miscalculation gave us one extra day before the train ride to White Pass. Between the weather and the right excursion, we were about as lucky as travelers can get.

At breakfast here at the B&B, we met Edith, Ken, and Oliver (from Alberta, between Calgary and Edmonton) who were also taking the Fjord Cruise to Juneau. We left Skagway at 8 AM on a 65-foot catamaran and almost immediately the captain and several others saw a humpback whale spout. The boat was stopped, but the humpback never showed up again. We stopped at Haines to pick up more passengers, but even with the new total of 25 - 40 passengers, we had the luxury of some extra seats, which made it easy to move around and view the scenery. Even with some pretty heavy clouds, there was no doubt that there was a continuous range of mountains on both sides, some rising 7000 feet straight up from sea level. We were on the Lynn Canal which is actually 1800 - 2000 ft deep fjord, a U-shaped channel with steep sides that match the nearly perpendicular rise of the mountains.

We passed nice waterfalls bringing down melting glacial ice and soon slowed down to view Stellar sea lions on rocks. Unlike the sea lions on the Pacific in the lower 48, this is an endangered species. The huge and aggressive males and their harems were clearly distinguishable and our captain stopped the boat so we could hear the cacophony of noise they were making. Several flocks of birds flew with the boat early in the morning. This is a major migratory path, but the birds are currently in a holding pattern, waiting for the lakes farther north to thaw. (We certainly noted that they were all frozen farther north.) We also passed dolphins which only the captain could see, a light house which we photographed later, and a number of glaciers including Rainbow and Davidson Glaciers.

The sky was quite overcast, but a few spots of blue sky were appearing by time we arrived at a private dock about 35 miles north of Juneau (Aldersheim Wilderness Lodge). This is the only road north of Juneau and it ends about 40 miles from the city. A bus was waiting on this beautiful site and our driver, Bill, turned out to be a most unusual tour guide as well. We conclude that he is a typical Alaskan, i.e., a complete individual. He filled us in on all sorts of stuff, including his personal encounters with bears, in a very laid-back manner. It was his first trip to get passengers from the Fordland Tours, so he was pretty confused about where to go. Indeed, he took us right through the narrow and pedestrian crowded streets of Juneau pointing out the historical sites, the capitol, and the governor's mansion. The long drive from the dock to the city took us through very green rain forest with huge trees, and we learned that the pretty yellow lily-like blooms that Patty had been admiring across Canada is skunk cabbage. The leaves grow very large and this smelly plant is a favorite of the bears.

We had about 2 and half hours on our own in downtown Juneau. We ate lunch at the

Hangar on the harbor, then walked up Seward St. where we found another battery for our camera in a tiny store chaotically stacked with what looked like second-hand computer and stereo equipment. The store was very small (maybe 10 x 10 ft) and very crowded. The eccentric shop owner seemed to know his business and we were amazed when he pulled a used battery out of a box from a hidden shelf. He was a bit like the shopkeeper that sold Harry Potter his wand and Bob thinks that he might have had Harry's wand in there somewhere in that shop.

We walked uphill (away from the crowds) to the state capitol building and governor's mansion (a big deal here in Juneau since last year). As we came back downhill, we made our way through congested sidewalks filled with literally thousands of passengers from several cruise ships in dock, past endless souvenir and jewelry stores, and finally found a spot near the library to sit, drink a soda, and enjoy the now completely blue sky behind Juneau's mountain. The weather was beautiful and relatively warm.

We then took the bus to Medenhall Glacier, just north of Juneau. Here we only had a short 40 minutes during which we walked to overlooks and we listened a bit to a ranger who had photos of the glacier in the 1960s when it was significantly larger. Then we walked rapidly toward falls, but we could not quite make it all the way and still catch the bus. We made it as far as some of the "icebergs" in the pool below the glacier. A close-up of a sample of glacial ice showed that it is a curious 3-D puzzle of completely clear ice that is 200-300 years old.

The bus then took us back to the catamaran. On the return trip, there were only about 15 passengers, so it was almost like a personal tour. The views were magnificent with clear, blue sky accentuating the snow covered mountains and the now smooth and glassy water. We saw orcas (Patty managed to get some distant photos of them), harbor porpoises, and fast Dall porpoises, thanks to the keen eyes of the captain who pursued them all. Patty was lucky enough to get a glimpse of a humpback whale (tail only) twice. There was more action by all the wildlife this late in the day. We saw several sea lions out in the water; an eagle swooped at one point and was snapped at by a sea lion who jumped at it; and a bald eagle sat high on a ship mast in Haines harbor. We saw the lighthouse in exquisite late afternoon light and the light on mountains over Haines was stupendous. An interesting smoked salmon chowder was served on this return trip. By the end of this 12-hour day, we felt like our fellow passengers and the two crew members were old friends. Skagway was a ghost town when we returned at about 8:30 PM, since all four cruise ship were pulling out of the harbor.

Day 11 -- Friday, May 29 -- Skagway, Alaska -- Mile 3725

The description of today is COLD and WINDY! As we write this log, Weather Underground says it's 48 °C with winds at 20 mph and gusts to 40. We can hear it here in the Milezero B&B. While our jackets are fine, we could use some hoods or warm caps.

This morning we plotted out our next couple of days, and then went to the National Parks Service Visitor Center for the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway and watched the 30 minute video about the White Pass and Checkout trails used by the gold rushers to make their way out of Skagway. Then we shivered as we waited for the steam engine powered train on the White Pass Railroad which took us over White Pass to the Fraser stop. While most of these trains are diesel powered, this is a special train that is run only twice a week with today being the first run of the season. It was a cold trip with only what appeared to be an old wood stove in the front of the car. It sprinkled, snowed, and was generally quite overcast for the trip, but the ride was a snow-covered fairytale land, just as it

was on Thursday when we drove over it to get into Skagway. Building this narrow gauge run in only 26 months is truly an engineering feat and it has been recognized as such by a civil engineering group or two. Despite the weather and the difficulty getting good photos with so much steam from the engine and rain splattered windows, we saw some beautiful sites. When we got back we quickly snapped a couple of photos of some of the restored buildings in downtown Skagway which are mostly shops for the cruise ship visitors, and got coffee and tea at Starbucks, the only quickly recognizable name in this town of thousands of visitors by day, and only 300 residents year round. From our host at the B&B, we have learned much about the area, including shopping in Juneau, ferries, airplanes, and medical care. After making a few phone calls from our room, we ventured out in our very dirty little car to eat dinner at the Stowaway where we possibly had the best halibut and salmon ever. Tomorrow we are hitting the road again and heading for Dawson City in the Yukon Territories -- just like the gold rush people, but not on foot in the snow carrying 2000 pounds (a year of food) over the pass in about 40 separate trips, as those guys did.

Day 12 -- Saturday, May 30 -- Dawson City, Yukon -- Mile 4184

It took a while to leave the Mile Zero B&B even though we went to breakfast at 7. It was about 8:40 before we left. Tara, our host, was just great. At breakfast, we had another nice visit with her and her father and met her fiancée. In fact, Tara gave Patty a big hug before we left. The weather was not quite as bitter cold and we saw a trace of blue sky before leaving Skagway. The White Pass was actually more visible today than when we drove in and certainly better than on the train yesterday. In fact, it had snowed more but at elevations higher than we were. We could see it on the trees.

Other than the Klondike Highway and White Pass, it was actually one of the less eventful days since we focused mostly on driving the 440 miles to Dawson City in the Yukon Territory. Most of these miles were almost due north on Yukon Highway 2. Generally, the mountains are much smaller, the valleys are wider, and the streams are enormous. We saw a number of places where forest fires had occurred as indicated by signs listing the year of the fire. Clearly, there are many and they are big fires when they occur. There were several excellent views of the Klondike River and the Yukon River, and several others, all of which drain into the Yukon River which ends up in the Arctic Ocean. We saw no wildlife and very, very, very few cars, e.g., only one 18-wheeler in over 400 miles. We can easily say that we have never been in an area with so few people. In the 300 miles after leaving the Alaska Highway, there were only two small settlements, Carmacks and Pelly Crossing, totaling less than 700 people. Even Dawson City has only about 1800 people. And yet there is a long dirt road (almost 500 miles) up to Inuvik on the Beaufort Sea in the Arctic Ocean. This really drives home the size of the Yukon, which doesn't even get its own map in most road atlases.

We arrived in Dawson City at about 6:30 P.M. Pacific Time and made a quick stop at the visitor's center to check on road condition for tomorrow. Then we drove up to something called the Dome, a very high "hill" that overlooks the Yukon River Valley and Dawson City. There is a huge gathering on this hill every year for the Summer Solstice. We walked around town and took some photos of the historic gold rush buildings, before eating a late dinner. All the streets in town are gravel, so the town has a very rustic feel, but on closer look, many of the buildings are very well-maintained. The wireless internet doesn't reach our room in the Westmark Hotel, so this log and today's few photos will have to wait until later.

Day 13 -- Sunday, May 31 -- Tok, Alaska -- Mile 4373

Today we took on our first significant length of gravel roads and we successfully made it across the "Top of the World Highway". [All roads in this north country, both US and Canada, seem to have a name, perhaps because there are so few of them.] We started out on the free ferry across the Yukon River in Dawson City. It took only a few minutes to cross this mighty river, and the ferry, which runs 24 hours a day, often crosses with only one car. We saw what appeared to be a fox on the opposite side, but it showed no fear of the people waiting for the ferry, even those on a motorcycle. Several miles of the road were paved, but were broken up badly. Eventually it became very nice gravel road, with only a few small stretches of broken pavement. Rest stops were outhouses, but they aren't too bad since they are not used much. We did not see another car for the first 37 miles, and very few after that. Nonetheless, there was still more traffic than yesterday. We are disappointed that we are seeing so few animals on these deserted roads. We did see a very big rabbit (a furry version of a jack rabbit) and two marmot type animals that we have yet to identify. This was definitely the "high" road, since it seemed to follow the tops of the hills (not quite mountains by Alaska standards), and the views were often 360 degrees of "purple, blue, and green" hills with snow-capped mountains on the horizon. Much of the road was across tundra even though the elevation at the highest pass was only about 4500 feet. After about 65 miles, we re-entered the US at the most northerly US-Canada border crossing. The border is only opened 12 hours a day in summer and the population here is 2 --- we suppose this is one Canadian and one US official. We speculated on just what one has to have done to "earn" this extremely remote assignment!

As Patty had predicted, the US dirt road was no match for the Canadian road. First of all, it was more brown-colored than white and much of it was a coarse, sharp, rocky gravel -- great for tires! It was also just plain rougher and the next 40 to 45 miles went very slow and became pretty narrow and very rough near the end. Indeed, had we been going the other direction, we are likely to have turned back, IF, we had ever found a place to turn around! Finally, 108 miles after we left Dawson Creek (ca. 3 hours later), we arrived in Chicken, Alaska. Now how many people have ever been to Chicken? There were 3 places to stop and we chose the "famous" one in the Milepost Guidebook. It was a family-run gift shop, liquor store, saloon, and cafe. I asked where the bathroom was and they pointed to the outhouse. Indeed, we have used our share of those in the remote parts of this trip, but those were the more modern, park-service type. This was the homemade variety just like a few I saw when I was growing up, and the design is not the most accommodating for girls. There is also no phone service in Chicken, which caused a problem for some European tourists who wanted to use credit cards in the gift store. While we bought a few postcards and a soda (no Diet Dr. Pepper in this place, though we've seen it in lots of places thus far), we passed on the chance to get t-shirts that said "I got laid in Chicken".

The rest of the trip to Tok, Alaska was on the Taylor highway, a paved road, but not of the good quality of the Alaska Highway. We have now missed some of the Alaska highway, but we'll be driving most of that portion later this month on our way to Haines to catch our ferry. Tok is on the Alaska Highway, and we'll complete the rest of it on our way to Fairbanks tomorrow. We are staying at our first real "motor hotel" of the trip which we've managed to avoid thus far, but it DOES have Wi-Fi so it could be a lot worse.

Day 14 -- Monday, June 1 -- Fairbanks, Alaska -- Mile 4675

We had another day with fabulous mountain views. We drove the last leg of the Alaska Highway from Tok to Delta Junction. It was such a beautiful clear day and we could see the Alaska range to the south so well that we decided to drive south just a ways on the Richardson Highway which we planned to do later in the trip. With mountains, we have learned that clear days are rare. Even as we drove only 25 miles, the clouds began to move in. We still saw some awesome, completely snow covered peaks to the southwest. It's almost impossible to stop taking photos. As evidence that it is still late spring/early summer, there was even snow in the river delta. But summer is indeed near since we captured our first mosquito in the car -- a very juicy one, we must say. Along the Richardson Highway, we also saw the Alaska pipeline for the first time. It is as impressive as it is made out to be and even more so after reading about its construction. It is 4-ft in diameter and bent to be flexible, supported on Teflon coated beams so it can move smoothly in earthquakes (last big one in this region was in 2002; 7.9 on Richter scale), and the posts supporting the beams have fins to keep the beam cool so the permafrost around it does not melt. We are not quite sure how the latter works.

We returned to Delta Junction and stopped at the visitors center (every town -- even the very little ones have a visitor center) and took photos of the end of the Alaska Highway as well as bought stocking caps for our next encounter with the wind blowing over glaciers and water. Then we drove on to Fairbanks where we spent the rest of the afternoon doing laundry and getting the car washed.

Before dinner (at a Chili's, next to a Wal-Mart and a Lowes, just like home) and a grocery store run, we drove 8 miles north of Fairbanks to another viewpoint of the Alaska Pipeline. (This will be actually be our most northerly point on the entire trip.) Unlike the earlier viewpoint on the Richardson Highway, this was an open area where you could walk under the pipeline and get a true sense of its scale. There were some interesting displays describing a lot about the engineering of the pipeline, etc. Tomorrow, we head south on the Parks Highway about 100 miles to the Denali National Park area, hoping that the good weather continues.

Day 15 -- Tuesday, June 2 -- Healy, Alaska -- Mile 4790

With a load of clean laundry, new groceries, and a clean car, we headed south on the Parks Highway from Fairbanks. Much of the scenery was views of first the flat, meandering Tanana River valley and then the Nenana River to the east and boreal forest which is intermixed with brush. This was the most traffic we have encountered, but still far less than anything we have seen since the craziness of Calgary. Soon the Alaska range became increasingly visible and we were treated to many nice views. We arrived in the Denali area at mid-afternoon, bought gas, and then went to the Park where we picked up our bus tickets for the ride into the park and then stopped at the Denali Visitors Center where we watched a short movie. We saw our first moose cow (at last) in the area of the visitors center.

Then we drove back north and checked into the Faith Hill B&B near Healy, AK. This was an interesting place nestled in the typical brush and thin forest about 2 miles east of the Parks Highway and 12 miles north of Denali. Like many places in Alaska, this B&B is under construction. The building season is short, and many people are eking out a living with multiple jobs and activities. We picked Faith Hill because of the "new" in the ads, but we learned that this only means "new" managers and not necessarily new buildings. In this

case the owner lives in California and the place is managed by people living on site. We could see the Healy coal mines from which coal is sold to South Korea. At the suggestion of the managers, we had dinner just down the Parks Highway at Rosie's, the only place the locals can eat in the winter. The food and atmosphere were good and quite a contrast to dinner at Chili's in Fairbanks the previous day. When we returned, we met Karen, a semi-permanent summer resident at Faith Hill. She is a ranger in Denali, and like our hosts, has lived in Alaska for many years. We learned a lot from her about various things in the park.

Day 16 -- Wednesday, June 3 -- Healy, Alaska -- Mile 4917

We left the B&B at 6 AM with a breakfast packed by our hosts. We shared it with the now prevalent mosquitoes (which must arrive 20 minutes after the last freeze) as we waited for the shuttle bus in Denali. Only these "school" buses are allowed to go past mile 13 in the park, where the road becomes gravel. At this point in the year, the buses only go as far as the Eielson Visitors Center, 66 miles into the park, but this was still an eight hour round trip including four longer stops. There were some narrow, sharp curves with what seemed to be only loose dirt at steep angles dropping literally thousands of feet to valleys below, but the scenery was awesome (we need a better word, but there aren't any in these chemists vocabulary). To make everything even better, it was a beautiful day with almost no clouds around, very little wind, and temperatures that must have reached 70 degrees. There is only a 35 % chance of seeing Mount McKinley because at over 20,000 feet, it is usually under clouds. We saw it and we saw it really well, even from about 60 miles away, and eventually at the Eielson Center we viewed it from 34 miles. In addition to its height, the size of the base is massive and it is all the more impressive because we were viewing this from a relatively low altitude. Even the highest point on the road was ca. 4000 feet. This is, however, only part of the amazing range of mountains that form a long chain peaking at Mount McKinley, and there were countless new and different panoramic views at every turn of the road. We took over 90 photos and still passed on many other opportunities.

The buses are a good way to see the park not only so everyone can look and no one is stuck driving, but also because there are then many sets of eyes looking for wildlife. Clearly, we have probably passed innumerable animals on the nearly 5000 miles we have driven so far. Unless the animal crosses the road, or is within 30 feet of the road and if there is no forest in that distance, we are unlikely to see them! There were several people on the bus with "eagle eyes" who saw things we would never have seen. As a result we saw a lynx on the snow, which was actually identifiable with our binoculars, caribou (which we would have seen on our own), a moose calf separated from its mother, a moose cow, and countless snowshoe hares. The part many others on the bus saw was a couple of bears on the side of a very distant mountain. Though one man tried desperately to get us to see them, we remained blind indeed.

After we returned to the park entrance, we caught another bus for a short ride to the Denali Kennels where we saw the huskies and a short demonstration about the use of dog sleds in the park. We ate a small dinner before leaving the park, returned to the B&B, checked our email, and visited with some new guests from Alabama. At about 7:30 PM we drove back to the park on the hopes of seeing more wildlife in the "evening" hours (more on twilight later). We drove to mile 13 and saw nothing, but it was nice to get out and walk a few steps along a river though there were several other people in the area. This was also the place where we had seen the moose calf that had been separated from its mother for a couple of days. As we were leaving, we saw a ranger and several cars parked along the road. We

assumed everyone was watching another animal we were too blind to see, so we asked the ranger. She told us someone had seen a bear chasing a moose calf and she was there to prevent the people from trying to intervene. It's hard to imagine anyone trying to stop a hungry bear! The policy of the park is to let things happen as they would in nature, including forest fires, and there are many, many warnings that things that visitors might see could be unpleasant.

Day 17 -- Thursday, June 4 -- Paxson, Alaska -- Mile 5089

This was expected to be either one of the best or worst days of this trip. Despite some raised eyebrows from our hosts and the ranger, we were off to drive the Denali Highway from Cantwell east to Paxson. About 110 miles of this 135 mile road, is gravel but the guidebooks said it was one of the most scenic drives in Alaska and in many ways, as good as Denali Park. We quickly learned that the guidebooks are correct and that gravel roads are not as bad as "city slickers" make them out to be. Indeed, the Denali Highway is in much better condition than most of the gravel roads we know about in South Texas. We suspect that part of its reputation is the fact that it is closed during the winter and the fact that there are so many mountains in Alaska that the locals just look out their own window and don't take time to go looking for more mountains like we do. We drove very slowly and changed drivers often with many, many stops for countless photos. Sometimes we even stopped in the middle of the road, because traffic was less than light after the first 20 to 25 miles during which we did see some gravel trucks and other road equipment being moved. The only slight inconvenience was the fact that there was only one "rest" area at about mile 80, over 3 hours into the drive at our pace (not even rustic lodges like we saw on the Alaska Highway), and a large amount of dust collecting on the rear window and in the door frames of the car. It is so dry that this fine dust flew inside and out every time we opened the door. The views, however, were worth every single particle of dust!

We certainly drove this highway in the right direction because the scenery got better with every mile. The road runs alongside the Alaskan range, a continuation of the same range of mountains in Denali Park. Early on, we got one last glimpse of a very distant Mt. McKinley, which was visible on this beautifully clear day, but it was so white that it looked much like clouds on the horizon in our photographs. We started out in forests catching glimpses of the mountains to the north, but this became more brushy as the elevation got higher, and eventually turned to tundra. Often we drove over eskers, which we learned are huge mounds of glacial debris. That makes for a narrow road with significant drop-offs on both sides. Eventually we went over the second highest pass in Alaska at only 4050 feet. Some of the mountains we saw during the day were Mounts Deborah (12,333 ft), Hess (11,940 ft), Hayes (13,883 ft), McGinnis (11,400 ft), and Moffit (13,020 ft). All were covered with snow and were beautiful against clear skies. We also got an excellent view of the McClaren Glacier far across an expansive valley formed by the McClaren and Sustina Rivers. There weren't many signs for these points of interest, but it didn't really matter since we had all this amazing scenery almost to ourselves. We did meet a car at two other rest stops, and, as seems typical, everyone was very friendly and full of information to share.

As we said, the scenery just kept getting better. Near the east end of the road, we were able to see three huge peaks far, far away (at least 80 miles to the south) in the Wrangell Mountains. The highest one we could see (Mt. Sanford) is over 16,000 feet, but once again, due to distance and snow, these looked much like clouds on photographs. After stopping to see these mountains to the south as well as the mountains to the north, we pretty much

figured it couldn't get any better. And yet, as we went around one more esker, we came upon a view that literally had us gasping. It was yet another set of incredible mountains to the north. This was near the east end of the Denali Highway and in the last 20 miles which are paved and near the intersection with the Richardson Highway. We vowed to go back tomorrow since this is so close to where we will stay in Paxson.

We had trouble finding a place to stay because there really isn't anything on this end of Alaska. Fortunately, we made a reservation at Denali Highway Cabins a few days ago. They have turned out to be a very pleasant (yet costly) surprise. We have our own spotless, modern cabin, with a rushing stream about 50 yards away. The only drawback is that Paxson barely exists, i.e., there is an aging motel with one gas pump and a roadside café (too nice a word) at the intersection of these two highways – period. We gathered our nerve and ordered a BLT at the café where we were the ONLY customers. The ironic thing is that we get decent cell service and we left Beth a voice message from a rock beside the rushing stream. Indeed, the stream was so noisy that we did not hear her call us back. Oh yes, the weather is so warm that our hosts were complaining about the heat. We thought it was *just right!*

Day 18 -- Friday, June 5 -- Paxson, Alaska -- Mile 5468

We slept better than in days – must be the sound of the stream, complete quiet otherwise, and the mountain air. The altitude is about 2600 feet which is high for a residence in Alaska and is just below the tree line. The day started out with clouds and eventually turned into a full-fledged rainy day! This was perfectly fine with us because this was planned to be a day to catch up with the log and to make plans and reservations for the next few days of our trip. School is out in Alaska and rooms are getting harder to find so we can no longer just drive somewhere and find a room.

While many would call this place “rustic” we are perfectly happy with the relative isolation, the view of the mountain, the sound of the stream, the ability to use our cell phones, and with a short walk to another building, the internet. As usual, our hosts are Alaskan immigrants, and like so many Alaskans, they are unique. There is ample construction of a community kitchen since there are essentially no restaurants in Paxson, and huge, unfinished recreation room that we have used to access the internet and our email. It is clear that this is one of the nicer places in the boondocks, striving to become even nicer. The host, Audie (short for Audubon --- no kidding) also leads birding and wildlife tours, much of it by rafting down a stream and seems to have a PhD in some field of biology. Jenny tries to grow things (there was a frost a few nights ago) and has chickens for which she charges \$2 per boiled egg. Both have spent the day working diligently on the remodeling along with two other guys, one of whom stays here in the winter to train for the Iditarod. Alaska does indeed have some interesting people!

We literally spent hours trying to find places to stay in Anchorage and Seward. We are opting for the B&B route because it is less expensive and generally nicer, but we are reading guidebook comments and checking out reviews on the web carefully. So far, we have also found the hosts are very helpful. It still boils down to a lot of time and effort, and we haven't begun to finish even what we had started reading before we left home. We opted to eat the rest of the sandwich supplies from the ice chest for dinner since the place down the road just wasn't what we wanted. If we had come in a couple of weeks, there would have been a new kitchen for us to cook the chicken noodle soup for which be brought supplies from home.

So this was a blissfully slow rainy day for us and the area got some very badly needed rain as well. The weather forecast is good for tomorrow so we hope to see a portion of the Richardson highway and then drive to Anchorage.

Day 19 -- Saturday, June 6 -- Anchorage, Alaska -- Mile 5468

We had another spectacular day, both in terms of weather and scenery. We slept well again in our little cabin and were pleased to see a clear blue sky. We drove north from Paxson on the Richardson Highway. We saw Summit Lake which was still partially frozen, but the melted portion of it gave a wonderful reflection of some smaller mountains. We also saw one very large glacier and a smaller one before real rain clouds took over. There were also some fabulous views of the Alaska pipeline. When it started to rain hard, and the clouds completely hid the mountains, we discontinued our drive about 10 miles short of the point we had driven to on our drive from Tok to Fairbanks last week. At that time, we thought the weather was so good we should take advantage of it and it turned out that we were quite correct. If we had waited, this was precisely the part we could not have seen today.

We then turned around and drove south on the Richardson Highway, past our starting point in Paxson and on to Glenallen. At one point we could see the Alaska range behind us (north), the Chugach range to the southwest, and most impressive of all, two 14,000 to 16,000 peaks in the Wrangell range. These were almost impossible to photograph because, like Mt. McKinley, they were virtually white with snow. We turned west onto the Glenn Highway (AK 1) at Glenallen where we stopped for some very expensive gas (\$3.21 per gallon -- still less than nearly \$4.00 per gallon in Dawson City, Yukon) and some snacks for lunch. The view of the Chugach mountains improved as we drove farther west. We saw another huge glacier, many awesome views of mountains, and lakes. Perhaps the most unexpected was the Matanuska Glacier which was actually quite close to the road -- just across the river and the terminus (that we later learned was 4 miles wide) was slightly below the road. There are some pretty lucky kids who live near here because we saw several signs pointing to Glacier View Elementary School. We were slowed slightly for some construction around mile 92, but it turned out to be much shorter than the 45 minutes posted on the signs.

We arrived in Anchorage at about 5:30 and Jill the Garmin (GPS) took us to the Alaska House of Jade B&B. This could turn out to be the best one yet. Our host, Dee seems like an old friend and has already given us some great advice as demonstrated by a delicious seafood dinner at a restaurant she recommended.

The weather promises to be great tomorrow, so we plan to head north again toward Talkeetna where we hope to be able to see Mt. McKinley from a different angle. We'll be sure to buy gas here in Anchorage because a typical price is only \$2.71 per gallon.

Day 20 -- Sunday, June 7 -- Anchorage, Alaska -- Mile 5860

We spent today driving almost 400 miles on the Parks Highway in a round trip from Anchorage to a few miles south of Cantwell which is 30 miles south of the Denali Park entrance. Our goal was to see Mt. McKinley (Alaskans prefer the Native's name of Mt. Denali) once more. We were quite successful! The views we saw from the south and east were perhaps as spectacular as the views we had from within the park last Wednesday. All of the mountains in the entire range around Denali are indeed spectacular whether it is the larger ones between 13,000 and 17,000 feet, (McKinley/Denali is 20,320 feet) or the smaller

ones nearby. The larger ones are covered with snow and appear semi-transparent and cloud-like. It's sort of like trying to photograph a ghost. The forests are the nicest we have seen in Alaska which is partly due to the fact that the birch and aspen have a complete set of leaves relative to even a few days ago. We also saw some of the nicest mountain streams today which were either clear or had the light turquoise color that the streams in the Canadian Rockies have in the summer. This is in sharp contrast to the streams we have seen thus far which were either almost dry or were murky from silt. In fact, the streams and rivers we saw yesterday along the Richardson Highway were "thick" almost like a half melted milk-shake with an off-white, very light gray color, clearly a result of the effect of temperatures in the 70s. Indeed, we are sitting in our room with the windows wide open and our host was incredulous that it was 78 today here in Anchorage.

Day 21 -- Monday, June 8 -- Anchorage, Alaska -- Mile 6000

Today marks the halfway point in this incredible trip and what a day it was. It started with chores. Bob took the car for an oil change and Patty made phone calls to make reservations for some of the remaining days. At about 1:30 we finally left to do some sightseeing. Since it was a work day, downtown Anchorage did not seem a wise choice. Some other guests had climbed to the top of Flat Top Mountain overlooking the city, but they were still feeling it and it sounded like a lot to take on so late. Since Patty is going to the eye doctor and will have her eyes heavily dilated tomorrow, we decided to check out Turnagain Arm and Portage Glacier, both of which we will pass by tomorrow on our way to Seward. We were incredibly impressed by both. Turnagain Arm is a narrow inlet of water from the bay. The road goes right around the edge of it and the mountains got much higher as we went deeper into this inlet which is about 30 miles long. It's very different than a fjord because the bay is very shallow. In fact the tide was going out as we passed by and there was a very long stretch of sand that looks like a beach, but it is very dangerous quicksand. We heard that no one has ever been rescued once captured by the quicksand. On the other hand, it is a very popular activity to use nets and skim fish from the small amounts of water that remain when the tide is out. We saw at least 10 to 20 people doing exactly that and they brought up fish on every dip. We can't recall from our reading just what kind of small fish these are.

The mountains were quite snow covered and glaciers were everywhere. There was water coming down the steep slopes in several places, but the nicest was McHugh Falls. The entire area was in the Chugach Mountain State Park. We took lots of photos of the mountains surrounding Turnagain Arm even though the light was not ideal. We took the turnoff to Whistler and Portage Glacier. The scenery was awesome at this point -- a combination of Switzerland and Norway, but much better than either. The streams were the beautiful turquoise color, the light was now perfect on the steep mountains, and on the glaciers. The Portage Glacier Visitors center was exceptionally good and well worth the \$3 admission. We took in all we could while waiting about half an hour for the movie and we learned a lot about glaciers, whales, etc. One of the best things was that when the movie ended, the screen rose exposing a tremendous window that looked across the glacial lake, with floating icebergs, directly at Burns Glacier. Needless to say, there were countless photo opportunities in this area. We then drove another mile or two so we could actually see Portage Glacier which has receded tremendously and is no longer visible from the visitors center. (This is really not a problem since at least two other glaciers, including Burns, were quite visible.)

All this took a bit more time than anticipated, but resulted in yet another great opportunity. We had checked the time for incoming tide in Turnagain Arm and it coincided completely with getting to Bird Point overlook at the right time on the return trip. Because the Arm is so narrow and shallow the tides (called bore tides) are very large -- up to 6 feet in extreme cases. Today was not one of the biggest or smallest tides, but it was clearly a visible low wall of water (perhaps a foot high, but we were standing at least 100 feet above the bay, so it was difficult to judge). It appeared to be a wave coming in and there was no doubt where the line extended across the bay. As we drove back to Anchorage and more open water, the difference in the depth relative to a few hours earlier was quite noticeable. It will be interesting to see this again tomorrow and one more time when we return to Anchorage from the Kenai Peninsula next Sunday.

We ate dinner in downtown Anchorage where we admired the beautiful huge hanging pots of petunias, fuchsias, and geraniums all over town. Then we drove west toward the bay and past Earthquake Park. We didn't get out because we'd read that the mosquitoes are bad and it was already past 9 P.M. The time is always misleading here.

Day 22 -- Tuesday, June 9 -- Seward, Alaska -- Mile 6174

Dee, our B&B hostess, made us another excellent breakfast and then we packed up quickly and headed for the ophthalmologist. Patty was told her eyes looked OK and that the most likely chance for retinal detachment was now past, i.e., less than 1 in 500. So with dilated eyes, Bob was the driver. There was more water in Turnagain Arm than we saw yesterday, but it was clearly not the peak of high tide. It was another gloriously sunny day and it was actually warm in some places. The drive to Seward was exceptional with turquoise streams, high mountains with snow, and lush forests. We did see another moose cow and calf, but they made a quick pass across the side road that we had taken.

Our main stop was about 3 miles north of Seward at Exit Glacier (we still don't know the origin of that name). We walked about a mile to get a close-up view of it. The blue color was especially visible at this distance. Melt from this glacier yielded a rapidly flowing muddy, light-gray colored stream, unlike the beautiful turquoise lakes below the Portage and Burns Glaciers we saw yesterday. While it was pleasantly cool (not icy cold) right beside the glacier, we removed our light jackets on the walk back to the car.

After we arrived in Seward, we checked out 3 different boat tour companies before we finally decided for the longest one offered tomorrow. Then we checked into Soo's B&B, had dinner, drove through "downtown" Seward, and checked out the tsunami evacuation route. It's a bit curious that we approached the last sign from both directions and it looks like this: ↔ We want to know where to go from this point! Actually it's the highest point on any road in town and it really is pretty far from the water even though it seems rather flat. The only thing behind that sign is a steep ascent right up a mountain. Patty will sleep easier knowing the B&B is just a few blocks from the ↔.

We are at Soo's B&B which is once again very different. This house was built about 7 years ago and was designed by Soo's son who must be an architect. The design is sleek and modern and I should have taken photos. The similarity to other B&Bs is that it is for sale. Many owners are now in their 60s and a B&B is a lot of work!

Day 23 -- Wednesday, June 10 -- Seward, Alaska -- Mile 6174

Today we took a 9 hour round trip boat trip to Northwestern Glacier. We were on a catamaran (nice and stable) operated by Kenai Fjords Tours. Once again the weather cooperated in every way imaginable. It was clear at Soo's B&B where we were staying, but from our room we could see a thick fog over the bay. Nonetheless we could see the tops of the mountains. It was also warmer than expected, though our jackets felt good on the short walk to the harbor. The boat had seats for about 150 people, but we had only approximately 50 on board. This meant we could easily move around to look out any windows that we wanted and it was easy to go outside, which we did very often during the day.

Almost immediately, the thick fog completely enveloped us and we could really only see the very rocky, steep shoreline. This type of weather, however, is great for sighting sea animals and we were greatly blessed in this regard. First we saw two sea otters swimming rather close to our boat. Of all the animals, we have seen these are Patty's favorite and most certainly would be Beth's favorites as well. Indeed, this is the reason Patty would endure the rigors of sea kayaking if she could convince Bob to go.

A short time later orcas were sighted. We literally lost track of the numbers of these we saw during the day. Not long after, we got excellent views of humpback whales and saw numerous flukes (typical dives with classic views of the tails). Since it was warmer than our boat trip to Juneau from Skagway a couple weeks ago, we spent a lot of time on the deck of the boat. We stopped numerous times to watch the whales and many times the captain turned off the motor to keep from bothering them. Along the way, we also saw Stellar sea lions which are simply huge relative to the type we have seen along the Oregon and California coast. This particular species is endangered since they were nearly wiped out here when the Russians occupied Alaska. Countless bald eagles and many, many other birds, including the colorful puffins were also clearly visible, but difficult to photograph. Despite the warnings in the tour books and the fact that the Kenai peninsula, unlike the Inside Passage (e.g., Skagway to Juneau) is directly opened to the Pacific Ocean, the trip was very calm and there was no sea sickness.

About the time we turned into Northwestern Fjord, the sky completely opened up to a perfectly clear blue sky. The captain and boat staff could not quit commenting on the wonderful and very unusual weather. Last year, it apparently rained all summer and we've even heard people say they were ready to leave Alaska or at least ready for winter just because they wanted summer to end! In Northwestern Fjord, the simplest of maps show a total of seven glaciers and at least three of these are tidewater glaciers, which means the ice goes right down to the ocean. The size and scale of these glaciers is incomprehensible by photographs and even in person, it's hard to really grasp the scale of things. We thought we were really close to the glacier only to have the captain tell us we were almost two miles away. He stopped the boat many times just for us to look and contemplate. Unfortunately, there was an extended family speaking another language who simply did not grasp the value of silence, talking softly, or at least not holding conversations with people on the opposite end of the boat. Only during the last hour, when they finally tired, did they quit chattering.

The captain very gingerly made his way through the small chunks of ice which clunked loudly against the hull of the boat and tended to scare many of the hundreds of harbor seals off the ice islands on which they were sunning themselves. These animals are second only to sea otters in cuteness. Eventually the boat stopped for about 20 minutes within 0.3 miles of Northwestern Glacier. We could hear the glacier creaking and groaning and many times we heard the thunder caused by calving of the parts of the glacier both high

and low. We never saw calving of huge pieces we've seen on videos, but even the smaller events were quite impressive. Again, our adjectives just aren't sufficient to describe this.

On the way out of the fjord, we stopped at two other tidewater glaciers. From this point, five of the seven glaciers in the fjord were visible. With the motor off, all we could hear was the sloshing of the floating tiny icebergs, the sound of water rushing down the mountains, and an occasional small calving. There wasn't a cloud to be seen.

The final highlight of the day for us, was stopping in Cataract Cove. We are particularly fond of waterfalls and this was a U-shaped cove of steep cliffs, virtually perpendicular to the ocean, with water streaming down the walls in countless waterfalls. The captain maneuvered the boat so close that we were almost sprayed by the waterfalls. This demonstrates the depth of the water where the rock walls we could see continue for hundreds of feet below the sea. Again, photographs just can't show the size of any of this. As an added bonus, we saw a number of mountain goats on the walls of the cliffs.

We also stopped by several rocky islands to see multiple varieties of birds. As soon as we left the fjord, the sky was again overcast and we saw several pods of orcas and humpback whales. In addition, a group of Dall porpoises played with the boat. They are very fast and kept darting in front and under the boat even up to about 25 knots.

We are convinced that choosing the longest tour offered by any of the three companies operating in Seward was the best choice. It couldn't have been any better, except that along the way, our new Canon camera developed a dark spot near the center of the images. It's two days later, and it doesn't seem to simply be moisture. While we do have our old camera, the resolution is much less, and it does not do short videos well at all. So from now on, we'll have to really imbed this on our memories.

Day 24 -- Thursday, June 11 -- Homer -- Mile 6392

After another great breakfast and meeting more interesting people (CA and Michigan), we drove from Seward to Homer. Today the sky was definitely overcast and we only caught a glimpse of blue for fleeting seconds. It tried to rain, but never released enough to wash the constant and persistent Alaska bugs from our windshield.

It was a quieter day and we only made a couple of stops. One of these was in Kenai, near Soldotna to see a small white wooden Russian Orthodox church built near the turn of the 20th century. There were several other buildings including cabins in this area and it would have made a nice walking tour since the waters of Cooks inlet were also visible, but the weather was very windy and nippy. While we would have attributed this to our Texas metabolisms, even the people at the Visitors Center referred to it as nippy. We then treated ourselves to fast food for lunch since we have seen very little of that since we left the lower 48. We also found a huge Safeway and bought some items to use in the kitchen we are supposed to have in the B&B we will stay at in Homer. We also stopped briefly in Ninilchik, a very small place, to photograph another old Russian Orthodox Church. Though still operational, this one was in need of some parishioner yard work.

Across the bay, we could see the bases of three volcanoes, including Redoubt which erupted a couple months ago. Apparently, it's been quiet since we've been traveling, but here in Homer, our B&B host claims the ash has caused a more rapid melt of the snow on the mountains across from Homer. Hopefully, the weather will clear enough for us to see them on our way back toward Anchorage on Sunday.

We were dubious about spending so much time in Homer, but when we stopped at the overlook on the way into town, we realized it was not a mistake. The bay, Homer spit, the

Grewingk glacier, and nice mountains provide a spectacular view. We are staying at Halcyon Heights B&B and the hosts have ample information on things to do, though sitting and using this computer is one of our first choices. We ate dinner at a very nice restaurant named Homesteads just across the quaint Fritz Creek general store and post office where we ought to go to mail Beth's birthday card.

Day 25 -- Friday, June 12 -- Homer, Alaska -- Mile 6440

We decided to take it a bit easier today. After a nice breakfast where we met people from California and Birmingham, UK, we watched our hosts' (Steve and Juxia Scarpitta) video on Wrangell-St. Elias National Park since we are spending a couple of our last days of this trip in this very remote area. The rest of the morning was spent on updating this log. In the afternoon, we decided to go back up the Sterling Highway a few miles to Anchor Point. We missed the turnoff yesterday for the most westerly point in the US that can be reached by highways. On our way, we took the guidebook's and Steve's advice to stop at the Norman Lowell art gallery. We had checked this out on the web and it seemed interesting and we were also pretty sure we couldn't face our host at breakfast tomorrow morning if we had not gone. And so, once again, Alaska surprised us in a most pleasing way. We were the only ones at the gallery and feared it would be awkward when the artist himself would show up. Less than two steps in the door, we knew we'd found a very special place in the wilderness. Even the paintings above the guest book were wonderful. We moved through the first two or three rooms of the gallery in hushed awe. An excellent speaker system with classical music, some very stirring short words written by Lowell, and our own wonder at the marvelous places we have been in Alaska made this a truly emotional experience. About halfway through, Norman Lowell came up to welcome us and it was not the least bit awkward. Two other families briefly visited the gallery while we were there, but we barely noticed. Finally, we spent considerable time picking out a print that we will pick up tomorrow when we have a checkbook. We can assure you that it will be the most expensive thing hanging in our home. It was a very, very difficult decision, but since we could only afford one, we decided it had to look like Alaska as we had seen it in early summer, though an impressionist version was very, very tempting. In our dreams, we would invest in an original! Patty never thought she would find or know a piece of art that she truly liked well enough to even consider investing. We intended to wander around the property as others do to see the Lowell's homestead cabin that they built in 1959, but we were so excited that we totally forgot, so maybe we will do this when we go back tomorrow. (Serious homesteading only ended in 1986 in Alaska and we hear there are still some similar sort of possibilities even now.)

Then we drove a few more miles to Anchor Point and found ourselves in a relatively empty state park right on the beach. We found the sign proclaiming this to be the most westerly point in North America accessible by contiguous road and as Patty snapped a photo of the sign, Beth called. In one of our previous calls to her, we left her a message with the sounds of a mountain stream in the background and this time it was the gentle waves on the beach and the squawks of sea gulls. That is one of the wonders of Alaska -- that we can be virtually alone in wilderness and still be near enough to a major road to have cell phone signal. As we talked, we saw bald eagles within a hundred yards of us on the beach. After the phone call, we moved quite close to the eagles and sea gulls who were arguing over whatever food was on the beach. In fact, we were probably only 50 feet away from several of the fifteen or more eagles. This was one of those little unscheduled "extras" that happen when traveling. Despite the overcast skies, we could see the bases of the three major

volcanoes across Cooks Inlet, and eventually the tip of Mt. Redoubt peaked out through the clouds. Hopefully, we'll get clearer weather when we pass this way again on Sunday.

We finally tore ourselves away from this enchanting spot and drove back to Homer and onto Homer Spit, a very thin pinnacle of flat land (not as wide as many highways in Dallas) extending about 4 miles into the bay. The ocean tries to wash this away, but with a little help from humans, it remains. It is not exactly our favorite sort of beach place. There are many fishing spots and many more tiny souvenir stores full of typical stuff no one needs, and none of it was very neat or tidy. We walked into the famous lighthouse which is a bar with dollar bills on the very low ceilings, but we left after a quick glance, mostly because of the smell. Ironically, a young couple came out right behind us, expressing total disgust with the smoky smell at precisely the same moment as we were.

Our next stop was our B&B where we used our little kitchen to make a simple but welcome meal of pasta and salad. We've spent the rest of the evening reading and doing the photos and log. It has rained just a bit, but the clouds have lifted a bit as well. The forecast for the next few days is similar, but it's not so bad that we can't see most things. We finally have firm plans and most reservations until we board the ferry, so we can ease off the tour books for just a bit.

Day 26 -- Saturday, June 13 -- Homer, Alaska -- Mile 6513

This really was a slow day and it was nice to do some reading. We picked up our print at the Norman Lowell gallery and had a very nice chat with the Lowells about homesteading their place in 1958. We heard stories about pulling the washing machine up the very high bluff on a sled (just him and her), moving all of their possessions from the old highway about 3 miles away, how they couldn't get the small mobile home up the hill which meant selling it and building a cabin. We also saw the original cabin and even the temporary housing that Patty's family had while their house on the farm in Nordheim was built, was pure luxury by comparison. We also saw the Lowell's fairly large vegetable garden and gardens of flowers everywhere. It gave us a real insight into the toughness and work it took to move to Alaska.

Then we checked out the bay again, but it was covered with fog despite the clear blue skies, so we did not see the volcanoes -- one more chance tomorrow. We then went to the Sea and Island visitors center and watched a short video. This might be the first place that left us a bit disappointed on this entire trip, but then we may just be getting tired of traveling. However, we are not yet ready to sell the Honda Fit and fly home. We are looking forward to the road to Valdez and Kennecott. We drove by another museum and some galleries, but it was starting to rain and we opted for reading in the room. For dinner we tried the Café Cups, but the menu was mostly beef and the place had a few too many beads (including on the menus) for us so we went to Fat Olives. Café Cups completed our image of Alaska. Homer is where the flower children have grown old.

Day 27 -- Sunday, June 14 -- Anchorage, Alaska -- Mile 6774

After breakfast with guests from England, Arizona, and Australia, we had an uneventful drive from Homer to Anchorage. It sprinkled a bit and we still did not get to see the three volcanoes across Cook Inlet. The traffic was quite heavy since it was the end of a weekend and there is much for residents of Anchorage to do on the Kenai peninsula. Fishing

is by far the greatest attraction, both in the ocean all along Cooks Inlet and the Homer area and also on the freshwater streams. In fact, along Cooper Landing every single turnout was parked completely and precariously full and there were literally hundreds of fisherman standing close together (maybe 10 to 20 feet) or in boats. It looked like ants. And we finally saw a large bear walking beside the road (our first bear in Alaska). Unfortunately, we did not get to stop since there were cars behind us and stopping fast would have been unsafe.

When we got to Anchorage, we found a nice laundry and had 3 loads completed in less than an hour and a half. Bob also got our very dirty car washed. We returned to the wonderful House of Jade B&B where we stayed 3 days last week. It was almost like returning home and we even met up with four of the same guests. This time we also met Dee's husband Yves. We had one of our best dinners at Humpy's in downtown Anchorage and then we had desert with Dee, Yves, and their other B&B guests. This is certainly not a standard B&B. Keep this one in mind if you ever go to Anchorage.

Day 28 -- Monday, June 15 -- Valdez, Alaska -- Mile 7076

It took us a while to say goodbye and get packed up at Dee's this morning. We smelled the blooming lilac out front and took a couple of photos of her flowers which had grown considerably over the week between our visits. Then we drove back down the Glenn Highway. There were noticeably more flowers than when we drove this same road in the other direction about 10 days ago and everything seemed generally greener. At Glenallen, we turned south on the Richardson Highway toward Valdez. Unfortunately, the largest mountains in the Wrangell Range were not even as visible as when we saw them on the last drive (Sanford, 16,000 feet; Wrangell, and Drum) because of thick grey clouds. When we stopped at the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor center, we could even hear the thunder. It is a rare day when there is a clear sky over these mountains. Hopefully, we'll get a few more of those, but according to the locals, the weather has been exceptionally good for the time we have been in Alaska. As we drove farther south we had a great view of the Worthington Glacier where some people actually took off from the viewpoint and climbed around on it. They are mere specks on our photos so this gave perspective regarding both the size and our distance from the glacier. We saw several other glaciers as well, and the mountain views were absolutely spectacular, even with a lot of clouds. The shapes of some of the mountains remind us of Switzerland. Just after crossing Thompson Pass (which is really not a big deal since it is less than 3000 feet above sea level), we went through a very narrow canyon where we saw two superb waterfalls -- Bridal Veil and Horsetail (ordinary names but extraordinary falls). These are only about 13 miles from Valdez and are so good that we will probably drive out to see them again tomorrow.

We checked into what might be our last B&B on this trip -- the Brookside Inn about a mile from the center of Valdez. This is in an old house with a freshly mowed yard (not too many of those in Alaska) and we are watching for the bears they have seen in the yard. It is raining lightly and we hope it gets this over with before tomorrow. Valdez is really quite small and there weren't many restaurants to chose from. This is typical for Eastern Alaska and is quite a contrast to Homer.

Day 29 -- Tuesday, June 16 -- Valdez, Alaska -- Mile 7125

Today we visited with our host Suzy at the B&B and learned that the bear from the woods behind this 110 year old house was laying in the driveway when one of their friends drove by on his way to work this morning. Apparently there are also two cubs here as well. We keep looking but don't expect to be lucky enough to see the bear. It would be a real bonus for our trip. We spent well over an hour at the Valdez museum and then visited the miniature (train size setup) version of Old Valdez before it was relocated after the 1964 earthquake. We watched about a 45 minute video about the earthquake which included some moving interviews with people who were here when it happened. The tsunami killed 32 people on the wharfs and the entire town dropped about 9 feet so the tides moved in the following fall. This happened on Good Friday. It is particularly ironic that the Exxon Valdez tanker hit a rocky island near Valdez on Good Friday, exactly 25 years later. Our host says people do mention that every year near Good Friday.

We then drove to the old town site, but it is completely grown over with brush. Next we drove to the other side of the channel for a view of the town of Valdez across the channel. It is now located on stable rock instead of wet silt. This road ends at the terminus of the Alaska Pipeline. We had a bite to eat to empty out the ice chest and then drove about 10 more miles back up the Richardson Highway to see those spectacular waterfalls again. This time we found even more of them, but only the two mentioned yesterday have official names. We would have gone farther but it was as cloudy, or more so, than yesterday, so it wasn't worth it. It was also much colder by mid-afternoon than it was this morning.

Day 30 -- Wednesday, June 17 -- Kennecott, Alaska -- Mile 7250

We tally up one more spectacular day. Although we started with another very overcast and drippy day in Valdez and a similar drive to Chitina where it was really quite cold and windy. Now, as we sit here in the Kennecott Glacier Lodge in the middle of the Wrangell St. Elias National Park, the sky to the south is clearing and the evening sun is making the Chugach Range glisten. There are simply no photos that can capture the beauty of this view!

Our first stop of the day was in Chitina (population ca. 105, pronounced "chit-an" by the locals) which we reached on the Edgerton Highway that goes east from the Richardson Highway. We were surprised to see so many small farms along this road -- farms have been a pretty rare sight since leaving the Peace River Valley in British Columbia. Perhaps this is why Valdez built grain elevators which have actually been a "joke" since grain doesn't grow here. These fields were only grasses used for hay. Chitina was not one of the more picturesque little towns, but it was authentic and a bit like some places in South Texas. We were early for our flight so we took a look at the McCarthy Highway which begins in Chitina and goes to McCarthy. It is 60 miles of dirt road and we originally intended to drive it, but finally decided to splurge on a flight into McCarthy instead since we have already proven our worthiness by driving 200 miles of dirt road. We were early so we sat at the McCarthy airstrip (not airport) for a good while. We watched the bright yellow, fully restored, 1948 Davenport Beaver make an extremely smooth landing. We were a completely full flight with 6 passengers and the pilot. We all wore head phones so we could hear a few comments from the pilot as well as talk to everyone. Of course, this was a completely new experience for us, and it was delightful. It would have been nicer if the weather had been clear, but we could still see all sorts of interesting things. Most noteworthy is the Kennecott Glacier which we

circled over so we could see the turquoise water pools, the cracked ice, and the strange "hills" of ice covered with dirt and rock. The flight only lasted about 30 minutes, and it was never ever the least bit frightening. If we get really lucky, it might be clear when we leave, and we will be able to see some of the larger peaks, particularly in the Wrangell range.

A van met us at the McCarthy airstrip where we waited in a small building (maybe 10 x 10 feet) where Wrangell Mountain Air keeps spare parts so we could get out of the rain. It was about 5 miles of very rough dirt road to the lodge. After checking in, we went to the local park visitor center and then walked through the main street of Kennecott which is essentially a ghost town. Kennecott was the location of some of the richest copper mines in the early 20th century, but the veins of copper became unprofitable and the mines shut down in about 1938. Most of the buildings are as there were left, but several are being restored by the National Park Service. It is very interesting and we hope to learn more on a tour tomorrow.

At this lodge, dinner is served family style, so we had a great conversation with a newlywed couple from Toronto. Both just completed med school and are specializing in neurosurgery. They are here waiting for clear enough weather to be flown to the Bagley Ice Field for four days of camping and climbing on the glaciers. Now that is some honeymoon! After dinner, we watched a slide show presented by Wrangell Air. It was some awesome photos taken by Don, the guy who flew us in, but presented by another of their bush pilots. She was an impressive woman. Among the most memorable photos was that of the mile high cliffs that literally rise straight up from the valley, rivaling Grand Canyon in many aspects. Indeed the size of this park is 6 times that of Yellowstone or the size of New Hampshire, Vermont, and Connecticut combined. There are four mountain ranges in the park: Chugach, Wrangell, St. Elias, University. In the slide show, we saw glacier after glacier after glacier and all were huge. There is even one that is advancing (growing) instead of receding. There are places no one has ever been in the park and mountains that are not yet named. Indeed, there are guides that you can hire to take you to places no one has ever been. And this is only the U.S. side of the park. There is more in Canada in Kluane National Park.

The best part of the day is the evening since the sky has cleared to the south and the Chugach mountains are illuminated by evening sun. What a place to spend some of our last days in Alaska -- at least this time in Alaska.

Day 31 -- Thursday, June 18 -- Kennecott, Alaska -- Mile 7250

What an amazing place this is! This morning we had clear blue skies and could see forever. By 5 P.M. it was raining. Both have advantages.

After breakfast, we took a tour of the copper mill that sits beside the lodge. Copper was discovered here in ca. 1900 and Kennecott was begun a couple years later and lasted until 1938 when the last train left town and the place was totally closed. Copper prices had plummeted in the Depression. The tour was well worth the \$25 ticket since we learned a lot and we went through all 14 stories of this building. It is the most impressive façade, so the National Park Service has decided to reinforce it so it will not fall. They are restoring a few buildings, but many will be allowed to fall. We had a very knowledgeable guide and we learned much about how the copper ore was purified. It was by, today's standards, very tough working conditions, but it was still better than life for the actual miners in the tunnels farther up the mountain. The engineering was the most modern there was despite the remote location. It is small wonder that people usually only stayed for the 6 months required to get

their travel expenses reimbursed. We climbed down many a treacherous staircase in this place.

The next building we visited was the ammonia leaching plant. Apparently this was a completely new process and was actually very experimental for ca. 1916. It is now the process used to purify copper ores. Of course, we were immensely interested in this since the process involved huge reactors (thousands of gallons, ca 20 feet tall and at least 20 feet in diameter). The sad thing is that this building will not be restored. It's time for the American Chemical Society to step in and encourage the Park Service to at least reinforce the building to prevent collapse. Complete restoration would destroy the authenticity, but letting it collapse is letting some important chemical history disappear.

By contrast to the harsh working conditions in the mines and mill, the managers and skilled workers had a very modern life. They were allowed to bring families, there were modern cabins with running water and electricity generated here in Kennecott, schools, a recreation hall showing the most recent movies, and even a tennis court. In some ways, Kennecott was more accessible then because there was a train from here to Cordova to ship out the copper.

Kennecott Glacier is right under the lodge, though it looks more like a desert or lunar surface since this portion of the glacier is covered with dirt and rocks that fell onto the ice eons ago. It is a treacherous mix of loose rock over ice with wicked crevices so no one goes on it. There are, however, tours that take novices out onto the white ice portion of the glaciers for a fee. We felt that having been on the glacier near Jasper, BC years ago was sufficient, so we opted to simply walk the trail to Root Glacier after lunch. This glacier meets Kennecott Glacier a couple miles from here. We walked approximately a mile and half through a brushy road, but our bear fears were minimized by the fact that there were other people along the trail, occasionally. (This place is far, far from crowded since accessibility and lodging are very, very limited). We enjoyed a long stop at Jumbo Creek which was essentially a waterfall/cascade and decided this was better than approaching another glacier which we have done on numerous occasions thus far.

Rain was imminent but we made it back to the lodge before it started. It was nice to simply read until dinner. There are no TVs anywhere as well as no internet service, and we discovered that phone service in the only phone available to guests is all but nonexistent. Apparently Verizon works here, but our cell phones will not. The wired line was awful and we tried for over 15 minutes to make a credit card call. Indeed we tried multiple systems and cards, to no avail. The front desk let us use their line for a few minutes, but the connection was garbled probably due to the rain. It was nice and cozy in our room with rain on the metal roof and it gave us time to read for fun, a pleasant change from tour books and email. Hopefully, we will get some nice clear weather again tomorrow before we leave. Hey, at least we got to use our water-resistant windbreakers for the first time.

Day 32 -- Friday, June 19 -- Tok, Alaska -- Mile 7460

It rained all night, and this morning we could not even see the base of the mountains anywhere. Since it started to rain shortly after breakfast, we couldn't bring ourselves to pay \$20 to get driven the 5 miles of extremely bumpy, dirt road down to McCarthy which we heard was a weird "end-of-the-road" old town like Chitina. So we read until check out time, had lunch, and caught our van. The van to the air strip was a slow ride due to all the water and the large pot-holes. This time we were the only two on the plane and our pilot, Bill, was quite talkative. We forgot to ask the model of the plane, but it was a great ride. Patty got to

sit in front, only to discover that it's almost impossible to see over the high instrument panel. Everything was great, except it was sprinkling a bit when we left and the clouds were hanging very, very low. About all we could do is look at the scenery straight down below. The flight took about 35 minutes. We are glad we did not drive since we have heard stories of people having from 2 to 5 flat tires on the round trip, although others say they drive it all the time and a truck hauls food to the lodge about once a week. And flying one those planes is a lot of fun --- not the least bit scary.

It was good to get back to our little car to which we are now deeply bonded! It turned out to be what seemed like a long drive to Tok. We called from Glenallen and got the last room at the "wonderful" Young's Motel so we weren't stressed by the slowdown from the heaviest rain we have seen on this entire trip.

Day 33 -- Saturday, June 20 -- Haines Junction, Yukon -- Mile 7755

This turned out to be one of the most difficult drives so far. Several Alaskans told us that the Alaska Highway was in bad condition, but we had been impressed with the stretch we had driven early in this trip. Well, today we drove the "bad" stretch from Tok to Haines Junction. We had to wait for construction within minutes of leaving. Then we quit seeing construction, but the road had lots of frost heaves. Once we passed into the Yukon again, it really got bad. Oh yes, we had to wait at least 15 minutes at Canadian Customs, though we haven't figured out why it took so long since we were sitting behind a huge camper. This has certainly changed from a few weeks ago when those huge things were few and far between. There were long stretches of gravel roads with lots of loose rock, but at least the pot-holes and frost heaves weren't in the gravel sections. It took almost eight hours to cover the 300 miles. The road was really good for about the last 50 miles, so in a couple years, things should be better. We have now driven all of the Alaska highway, except the 100 miles between Whitehorse and Haines Junction in the Yukon. We missed this section by going north to Dawson City and into Alaska near Chicken via the Top-of-the-World Highway a few weeks ago. Since this involved about 100 miles of dirt road, we feel it's made up for the missed 100 miles on the Alaska Highway. We considered going on, but we'd would have had to turn around and come back. After today's drive that 200 mile round trip isn't worth it.

Though the road was bad, the scenery and weather were terrific. As the day went on the skies became clearer and once again we saw mountains against blue sky. Even these small "foothills" (ca. 8000 feet) on the edge of Kluane National Park are impressive. They do a good job of hiding larger peaks like Mount Logan (over 19,000 feet), the highest mountain in Canada and the second highest in North America. We don't think it will be visible tomorrow when we turn almost due south toward Haines. It is really hard to believe that this will be our last day of driving in Alaska (and Canada).

Day 34 -- Sunday, June 21 -- Haines, Alaska -- Mile 7925

Today was the last day of driving before we get on the ferry. The weather was absolutely beautiful so we had one last amazing drive down the Haines Highway. It was a great last look at first the Yukon, then a bit of British Columbia, and finally Alaska. Our first views were mainly of the foothills of the Kluane Range, but many were covered with snow. At the Chilkoot pass there were many glaciers as well. Again most peaks and glacier names are never mentioned in the guidebooks or on the information signs. The Chilkoot Pass was

an interesting comparison since it is only across the mountains from the White Pass which we went through at the end of May to get to and from Skagway from the Yukon. In May everything near the pass was covered in snow and most lakes were frozen nearly solid. What little tundra was visible was brown. Now the snow is only visible near the road in spots (still larger spots than one would expect for the Summer Solstice) and the tundra was green except for the very highest elevations well above Chilkoot Pass itself (3510 feet). In addition, flowers are everywhere. Obviously the season is short, so things grow fast. The long days of sunshine certainly help as well. The flowers in yards and hanging baskets are also extra beautiful everywhere. Oh yes, we added yet another animal to our list today. This time it was a porcupine, something neither of us has ever seen outside of a zoo.

A highlight of the day was Million Dollar Falls. It was relatively warm and we could view the falls right above the brink, much like some of the falls in Yellowstone, though smaller. It was also nice to see Haines and the Lynn Canal again, but this time from a car. On the boat from Skagway to Juneau (end of May), we stopped here for passengers. In fact, the mountains beside the fjord look familiar. Once again, we took a lot of pictures since there were so very few clouds. Though our hotel is less than spectacular, the view from the room --- the Lynn Canal, small boat dock, and mountains beyond --- couldn't be much better.

Our room wasn't ready when we got here, so we drove to the ferry terminal and we are already checked in for our evening departure tomorrow. We will be on the ferry for four nights and three days, but there will be no Internet, so this is the last update to the log for the next few days.

Day 35 -- Monday, June 22 -- Haines, Alaska -- Mile 7945

Bob watched the end of the US Open Golf Tournament this morning. It was over well before check out time of 11 A.M. so that worked out well. We have certainly been spoiled by B&B as the hotel (Captain's Choice) was anything but a "taste of luxury" as they stated in their ad. It wins the "worst" of the trip prize, and was not saved by even the awesome view. We tried one last time to do the laundry before we boarded the ferry. Patty made several trips to the hotel laundry on Sunday, but it was constantly busy -- full of old motorcycle guys, who showed up on the ferry this evening. We found a real laundry last night, so we went there today only to find there was no parking and the place looked like a carnival. The machines did too -- filthy! So we repacked our suitcases in the parking lot since we had enough to make it to the lower 48. Then we bought a few snacks for the ferry trip and saw a bunch more people who have also shown up on this ferry. We suspect the rest of the people wandering around town today came from the small and relatively infrequent cruise ships in the bay. The big clue was the fact that they were wearing gloves like it was cold. It was certainly not tank top weather, but this was nothing compared to a month ago when we were in Skagway, just up the fjord. We had a very nice fish and chips (halibut) at the Bamboo Room -- much better than it looked.

Next we washed our very dirty car which literally had a couple of inches of mud at the edge of the wheel wells. It's not the best job in the world, but it we don't need that much Alaska/Yukon dirt as a souvenir. It was a do-it-yourself operation, so it kept us entertained and we finished the job cheap for only one round at \$1.75 because we were able to rinse from the low pressure in the wand. Obviously, we were pretty bored if I am taking time to write this stuff in the log!

We finished the day by reading in the car while parked in the small boat harbor, a few long phone conversations with Beth while we had excellent cell phone reception, and

finally lined up at the ferry. It sprinkled a bit most of the afternoon. We made our way gingerly to the ferry since the last 3 miles of the road was under construction, i.e., dirt, so we wouldn't destroy our car washing efforts.

The ferry was late (apparently this is the way it always is), but when it arrived things happened quickly. The ship is huge. Once we drove our car into the bay, we had to drive onto a vehicle elevator that took us up a floor. We hauled in a bunch of our stuff and eventually got assigned a room. It has bunk beds and is just right with space for everything. We are on the same level as our car, so it's not a problem to go get things during "car deck" calls when we are allowed out there. A quick inspection of the rest of the boat revealed several nice places to sit and look out the front, a snack bar, a nice restaurant that's less expensive than the rest of Alaska, and a solarium on the top that is glass covered on three sides with lounge chairs where people are camping out. Indeed, just outside this area people are allowed to put up tents if they tape them down with duck tape. AND we found a couple of nice clean washers and driers in the public shower rooms (we have our own bathroom) so we can do that laundry here for the same price as in Haines.

Day 36 -- Tuesday, June 23 -- On the Alaska Marine Highway

We slept well on the ferry though the bunk bed mattresses have a distinct slump in the middle. It's a great little room and it's nice not having to meet a deadline for breakfast because we had that in the room with food we brought on board.

We made the first car deck call and picked out enough laundry to get us home. The car deck calls are mostly so people with pets can tend to them. There is a pretty kitty in the car next to us. Patty met someone taking her dog for a walk and we wonder if they provide fire hydrants and grass for the dogs.

The weather was gray, but as we approached Sitka the scenery improved as we went through a narrow passage. We only learned that there was time to get off to take a bus into Sitka right when the boat was docking. It sounded interesting, but it was more of what we have seen, although maybe better, especially the Russian influence. The appeal to simply stay on board and read was greater so that's what we did. After the boat resumed its course, we did just enough laundry to get us home and then had dinner at the ferry restaurant where prices were less than almost anywhere in Alaska and there was no tipping because that is not allowed on the ferry.

We enjoyed an evening of reading and we can now pack away some completed books. The Milepost was buried in the car in Haines. Although it was immensely helpful, we are tired of carefully reading it, mile by mile.

Day 37 -- Wednesday, June 24 -- On the Alaska Marine Highway

This really is our last day in Alaska because late in the afternoon, the ferry moved into the waters of British Columbia. We spent the morning in high activity --- reading, playing Sudoku, and doing crosswords. Such a tough life that is going to end with a bang in about a week (along with adapting to triple digit temperatures)! At about 12:30 PM, we stopped in Ketchikan, the last stop until we arrive in Bellingham on Friday. This time we did get off the ferry to have lunch near the ferry terminal. We could see at least four huge cruise ships in the port in front of the downtown area, so there was no way Bob would consider taking a bus 2 miles to go see the jewelry and souvenir shops and fight the crowds, even at

the museums. We enjoyed an ordinary lunch where it seemed we heard names or accents from Texas multiple times. It was also nice to have a high ceiling after the low ones in the boat.

We ate a simple hamburger at the snack bar and then relaxed for the evening.

Day 38 -- Thursday, June 25 -- On the Alaska Marine Highway

This was the long day on the ferry since there were no stops in British Columbia. We awoke to a relatively rough ride for a few minutes which we later figured out was crossing open water into another bay. At about noon, the captain announced that it was time to take the Dramamine since we would have about 2 hours of rough stuff as we crossed more open water. We picked up barf bags just in case, but skipped the medication to see how we'd do. Patty read in bed and felt like being rocked in a cradle. Neither of us felt the least bit ill. After this, the water became calm and we even had a good deal of sunshine by 7 PM. We are operating on Pacific Coast time so we'll be ready to arrive in Bellingham tomorrow, but the ferry stays on Alaska time. We spent a lot of time reading and doing Sudoku and crosswords today. The work will come soon.

We had a nice dinner on board at the restaurant and took a lot of our stuff to the car to simplify things when we get to Bellingham.

Day 39 -- Friday, June 26 -- Eugene, OR -- Mile 8330

For once we were up early to be ready to leave the boat at 7 AM (Alaska time). Getting our car off the ferry turned out to be much as we had feared. Since we were one of the first on, we were one of the last off and it was complicated by the fact that everyone had to back onto the car elevators. After almost an hour we finally made it off and we met Karen Morse and Arlan and Diane Norman at Starlight Café in a very nice part of Bellingham. Despite the large number of years since we have seen these great people, it seemed like yesterday. It has always been delightful to be with these people, so this was a terrific visit. Since everyone had noon obligations, we only took a few minutes to see Joe and Karen's beautiful house overlooking the bay. Then we drove along the bay on Chuckanut mountain to I-5. We called Uncle Bob and Aunt Dorothy and they were ready for us, so we decided to drive the 360 miles to Eugene since it was not yet noon. Unfortunately, Seattle and Tacoma were a virtual parking lot and we had an additional slow up about 20 miles south of Portland as well. The trip took us 8.75 hours with only two stops -- a short one for gas on one for fast food. We concluded that Seattle traffic is worse than Atlanta's! The really neat part of the drive was the amazing, but brief, view we got of Mount St. Helens just as we crossed the Columbia River from WA into OR. Given the completely cloudless sky, we probably could have seen Mt. Rainer just as well if there hadn't been so many trees on the freeway nearer Seattle.

Bobby, Ruth, Steven, and Kirk were at Uncle Bob and Aunt Dorothy's when we arrived, so we had a nice visit that evening.

Day 40 -- Saturday, June 27 -- Eugene, OR -- Mile 8350

Aunt Dorothy fixed us a great breakfast and we visited most of the morning on the patio which included the two cats who have adopted them. Shortly after noon, Bobby and Ruth came over. We had lunch at Applebee's and then went to the Owen Rose Garden. Although the roses were just a bit past their prime, the smell was still heavenly, the temperature was perfect, there was no wind, and the sky was clear blue. We spent the rest of the day visiting and eventually went to Mac's in the veterans building for a very nice dinner. Kirk and Tess joined us. It was difficult saying goodbye to Bobby and Ruth.

Day 41 -- Sunday, June 28 -- Twin Falls, ID -- Mile 8910

It was tough to leave Uncle Bob and Aunt Dorothy's, but we finally made it out at about 8 in the morning. The drive along the Mackenzie River was as beautiful as Patty remembered. It was Bob's first trip down this road through mostly rain forest. We had to detour since the Mackenzie Pass was closed, but this took us by Sahalie Falls (120 feet). It was right beside the road and only took a few minutes of time. With the extra mist from the falls, this really felt like deep rain forest with green moss, etc. everywhere. It was well worth the stop, despite a full day of driving ahead. As soon as we went over the mountain pass (ca 4800 feet -- high compared to Alaska passes), the area was arid and within miles it was quite desert-like. We got a beautiful view of Mt. Washington and the three sisters against perfectly blue sky. Eventually the terrain became quite canyon-like as opposed to the flat land that we had envisioned. That came in eastern Idaho. We did see lots of farmland (irrigated) including large fields of onions and potatoes. We are at a Holiday Inn Express and had dinner at Chili's. Everything in this part of Twin Falls is completely new. If time permitted, we'd find the actually "twin falls". We were quite impressed with the deep canyon formed by the Snake River on the short drive into town.

Day 42 -- Monday, June 29 -- Kearney, NE -- Mile 9840

This was by far our longest driving day of the entire trip --- 930 miles. We covered the distance in about 14 hours, mostly at the posted 75 mph speed limits on I-84 through the rest of Idaho and a corner of Utah and then on I-80 all the way across Wyoming and about half of Nebraska. Other than a brief view of the Great Salt Lake in Utah and some antelope and wind farms in Wyoming there wasn't a whole lot to see. Since our objective was only to make miles these last three days, we only made 5 quick stops for fuel and/or food, the latter being consumed in the car. To occupy time, we finally made use of the books on CD that we had brought along, managing to get through all of a very good one and most of another crappy one. We rolled into Kearney about 10 PM and stayed at the same Holiday Inn Express as that first night six weeks ago.

Day 43 -- Tuesday, June 30 -- HOME! -- Mile 10521

The home stretch!!! In many ways, this was the "longest day" --- certainly nothing that we haven't seen many times before. We were beginning to get re-acclimated to the hotter and drier conditions as we headed south (in contrast to Texas, states like Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, and even Oklahoma were quite green) as well as the increased traffic. We certainly could have done without the long delay in Oklahoma City for a minor accident right

where I-35 splits off (in just one lane!) from I-40. For entertainment, we finished that crappy CD book from yesterday and then listened to book number three that, fortunately, turned out to be quite good. After that, Bob figured out the overall gas mileage (using his Gen Chem factor-label skills to convert the Canadian dollars per liter to US dollars per gallon). Over the whole trip, the Fit averaged nearly 37.5 mpg over 10,000+ miles! Considering that it is rated at only 33 mpg on the highway, we were quite pleased to say the least. For the record, the highest price we paid for gas equated to about \$3.85 per gallon in the Yukon. Gas in Alaska ranged from a low of \$2.71 in Anchorage to a high of \$3.22 in small towns in the more deserted eastern part of the state.

At about 7 PM, we arrived at home having covered 10,521 miles in the car (and another 1800 or so on the ferry) --- a safe and happy ending to our trip of a lifetime!