

## Hell With The Fires Put Out

After a month on the prairie, the fence barring my way posed no serious problem. I lowered my pack to the ground on the opposite side, fell to the grass, and squeezed under the bottom wire into Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. In an anxious mood, I shouldered the pack and set out over the grassy plain. For a moment I was puzzled. Surely I should be sighting the Badlands by now. But there I was, falling into the trap most westbound tourists fall into when approaching this unusual area. It's a common mistake to expect the painted hills and spires to stand above the land, to be visible from miles away, but in fact it's just the opposite. The Badlands are sunk into the earth, having been carved out like sculpture from the very plateau I was walking over. I wouldn't see a thing until I was right on the rim of the first canyon.

I soon came upon a blatant reminder of just how harsh this country can be. The bleached bones of a mustang were like a ghastly sign shouting, "Entering Wild Country!" With a shiver, I gave it a wide berth and had second thoughts concerning my route through the region. The Park, divided into two units, covers about 110 square miles of badlands beauty. Looking at my topographical map of this southern unit, I thought I would get a better look at things if I made my own trail through the area, going from one spring to the next. Though there were a few trails and a loop drive through the park, I was to go the entire time in the park without seeing another human.

Soon after passing the skeleton, I crested a gentle rise and there before me spread a wilderness of enormous proportion. It was a land of canyons, gullies, and sharp cuts and draws, topped with domed mounds which sprouted spires and pillars. It was so big. The incredible vastness of the scene frightened me. It was almost beyond the mind; the contorted terrain stretched as far west and north as the eye could see. In there, a man could lose himself for years, exploring the winding

ravines and climbing the painted ridges. I crumpled to my knees and sat down.

Time. Grass. Water. Space. That's what I decided the Badlands were all about. Space, as in vast horizons and boundless reaches, was what had first struck me. But after a period of studying the naked land I began to understand the showcase of Time before me. Millions of years ago water began eroding the Rocky Mountains, depositing the material in what was later to be the Great Plains. It built up and built up, and was composed mostly of sand and clay. The grass covered it, sinking its roots and anchoring the earth together. Then came the water. The streams that flowed through the area began to cut into the soft malleable earth. It carved out gorges and valleys, leaving buttes and convoluted hills. The water exposed the layers of rock and sediment which, to a man with the time to kill, would read like the history of the planet itself.

I could see traces of red in the layers of the hills before me. Large pockets of coal have been ignited by lightning over the centuries and have baked the sand and clay to this hard, brick-red substance called scoria. It looks like the area has been burned over. Perhaps that's why General Alfred Sully, leading an army against the Sioux in the 1860's, referred to the region as "Hell with the fires put out." It's not hard to see why men have called this "the Badlands". The rough, dry country is a bad place to pass through. That is, if you're not a man with a pack on his back and an itching to emerge himself in the lonely land.

I left my pack and walked along the rim of the canyon. It looked so rugged. The Badlands were a series of terraces, different levels and stages of erosion. At the bottom of the canyon was another flatland of grass cut with sharp gullies that during heavy rains would fill with rushing water and eat away the grassy tables.

Examining the harsh beauty before me, I scouted a way down. Then I noticed something move down there. My attention focused on a dozen horses walking up the

creek bed. I was looking at part of the herd of wild horses which roam the isolated park, eluding all who come near, and running free as the Dakota wind. There was a young one amidst the horses below, and it galloped wildly back and forth among the draws, disappearing for moments in the maze of gullies and trying its best to get the old folks to join in. They weren't interested and trudged along at their ho-hum speed.

Returning to my pack, I began a winding descent into the heart of this new territory. As I got down onto the hills and actually climbed over them, new wonders unfolded around me. The sides of the canyon and each rounded dome, were covered with miniature gullies. With the wrinkled contours looking like the roots from an old tree, the land showed its age. I scrambled down and around the steppes, finding shelves of clay to walk on sometimes and finding large mushroom-shaped formations scattered here and there about the landscape.

As I went deeper into the canyon, crossing through more layers in the naked hills, I went deeper into Time, passing through millions of years. Millions! Each layer, line, and color in the rocky face of the ridge had its own story to tell. Though I'm no geologist by any means, the chronicle was easy to read and so obvious, I couldn't help but get a sense of antiquity about the place. What ant's lives we humans lead! What mere specks of seconds we hold in the minute of All.

It was a blustery, cold day, and as I reached the bottom strata of the canyon a few sprinkles of rain fell. But the dark clouds did nothing to mar the day. If anything, they only succeeded in bringing their own extra touch to my first taste of the Badlands. I was down to where I had seen the horses roaming, but found nothing but tracks. It only seemed to fit their elusive character that I should look up to where I had spied on them and see the herd running across that upper plateau!

I made camp amid the scrubby grass of the canyon's floor, and taking my camera, compass, and map, set out to further explore the area. Doing about a three mile loop, I climbed back out to the rim, through another ravine, and looked down into Cedar Canyon. The sheer-sided ravine was dotted with the dark green of cedar trees. I walked the rim, and then descended back into the destroyed land. I came upon several petrified stumps as I scrambled around and over the barren mounds, and also saw several mule deer which took off like bounding rabbits through the rugged terrain.

Darkness came early due to the cloudy sky, and the coyotes were yipping at the stars by the time I found my way back to the tent. It rained lightly off and on throughout the night, and when morning broke, the puffy, dark moisture-laden clouds still hung in the heavens. Three deer were grazing just outside the tent, and after watching them for a time I fell back asleep. When I awoke again, the sun was shining through a patch of blue, and I got myself going.

I followed the course of the dry creek bed, and sometimes walked in the ravine itself. There were many animal trails (horse and buffalo) and they were easy to follow. I came to a spot where the creek turned north, and the land opened into a wide prairie, hemmed in by the streaked and scoured hills. The herd of horses, some twenty strong, grazed peacefully in the cool morning.

Leaving my pack, I cautiously approached the herd, using the creek's deep bed to conceal my presence. I had heard of the wild stallions chasing off or attacking people that got too close, so I was using what I thought to be great care. As I climbed out of the draw once more, I found I was within fifty yards of the nearest horse. They noticed me right away and with a snort from the leader, they broke into a mad dash over the dusty plain. I snapped a shot, running after them for another, but the stallion turned back once the others were moving. He was a grey and black

horse, from a distance looking strong and swift. From the snorts he gave with his threatening looks, I knew he wasn't afraid of me! He stared me down, and with a few snorts thrown in for boot, he succeeded in making me more than a bit wary. I headed back, keeping an eye on the king of that part of the badlands.

Retrieving my pack, I continued on, finding numerous bones and the carcass of a buffalo calf. It was a rugged country with barren, bleached sections of hills. Sometimes the sand took on the shapes of castles or spired cities. Other places looked like ancient ruins.

I scrambled to the top of a hill. The top was grassy, and I was reminded once again how important the grass is. With the small amount of rainfall this area receives, the grass can thrive. In turn it nurtures the wide range of animal life throughout the region. In the 1880's Theodore Roosevelt had owned and run a ranch in the badlands. In those days, the cattle were driven up from Texas, bought and branded by the respective ranchers, and then let go to run loose on public domain land. The cattle thrived on this grass. Everything went all right until the severe winter of 1886-87. The West lost two-thirds of its livestock that year, and many a rancher lost his shirt.

Roosevelt still had a share in his ranch then, but had spent most of his time on the ranch in the years prior to that fateful winter. It was in the vast reaches of the North Dakota Badlands that he developed his great conservation policy and later fostered the Forest Service. The park wasn't only a memorial to the man and the land, but to an idea.

Sagebrush is also quite abundant in the badlands country, able to survive because of its deep root system. I walked over a vast section of the canyon floor carpeted with the hardy plants. I spent some time climbing the rugged land south of Buck Hill. I was surprised by the sharpness of some of the drops, and scrambled

my way from one shelf to another, one rocky pinnacle to another smooth sandy pillar. Like a mountain goat, I roamed ever upwards and about, and finally found myself at the highest point in the park, Buck Hill.

The North Dakota Badlands cover an area along the Little Missouri River for nearly 200 miles, south to north, and span the river's valley for a distance of 5 to 35 miles. From Buck Hill, I got the feeling I could see the entire distance. Of course, this isn't true, but the panorama was exciting.

From the hill, I headed straight north, crossing the park road, and going over a series of wrinkled hills. From a distance the terrain looked impassable, but as I got up into it, I usually found some narrow shelf to follow or a deer trail to lead me through the labyrinth. I crossed the road again and camped near the edge of another wide plain locked in by the contorted ridges. Several deer visited me at dusk and I was lulled to sleep by the lonesome cries of the coyotes.

The morning brought clear skies with it, and I headed north across the plain. Five mustangs spooked into a run as I neared my first prairie dog town. The little fellows began "barking" at me in earnest, their tiny tails bobbing like a conductor's baton with each screechy chatter. The prairie dogs are amazing creatures of very strong social behavior. They're known to kiss and hug each other as a means of identification, and they live in a series of burrows dug into the dry earth. A town can be spotted from the distance by its bare ground, dotted with the mounds built around the holes to the dens. The dogs are herbivores, gaining most of their moisture from the fluid in the grass.

As I sat down in the very middle of the town, the barking kept up, and one of the creatures poked his head out of a nearby hole. Trying to get a picture, I planted myself in front of the now-empty hole, but the little guy sprung out of a hole behind me. There is always more than one entrance to the burrow. I tried

for some time to get close enough for a good closeup with my camera but never succeeded and ended up settling for a view of the entire town.

Passing Boicourt Spring, I climbed a hundred feet to another grassy tableland. What looked like an old man's boney knee stuck out of the ground. A stump about three feet high, was worn smooth. Around the base of the luckless tree, I found bits of buffalo wool, and I realized what had happened. Buffalo like to rub themselves against any and all kinds of things. This was one of their rubbing posts, and over the years they had rubbed the tree down to this polished state. Now, if I could only sight one of the massive creatures.

I slid down the steep slope and came to a mammoth-sized stump that had turned to stone. Eons ago this had been a living tree. The green had faded to brown, and eventually it fell. Later it was enveloped by the rushing waters and buried under a plain of mud. The minerals in the water soaked into the pores of the pulp and hardened. Today we call it petrified wood.

Crossing the road, I followed the Jones Creek Trail for a few miles before turning south through the canyon's bottom, weaving my way through a maze of sagebrush. I came to the edge of the creek bed and found a sheer-sided ravine ten feet deep and twenty feet wide. Finding a spot I could slide down into the ravine was no problem, but I soon found that getting out would be. Nothing to do but walk the creek bed until I found a way out. I started out, winding my way through the tunnel-like ravine. Puddles of water lay silent and tepid in the late morning sun, and the bones of many animals set me to wondering if maybe I should have stuck to the trail. As much as I wanted to see a buffalo, I was hoping at every bend that I wouldn't bump noses with any of the creatures just yet.

At last I found the strong, exposed root system of some sagebrush. I pulled myself out on the south side of the creek and followed a couple startled deer into the hills. Once atop the main ridge dividing Jones and Paddock Creeks, another spectacular sight greeted me. The Little Missouri River flowed to the west of me, winding like a yellow serpent through the tawny hills. Beyond it, two vast steps of tableland rose out of the earth and faded into the distance.

Again, I scrambled and slid down the loose side of the ridge heading toward Halliday Spring and a huge prairie dog town. Approaching the town, I came over a slight rise. Before me, a coyote dug frantically at one of the holes, not twenty yards away. I had heard coyotes all the way across the country, but this was my first sighting. I backed up and over the rise. In record time my pack was off, and my camera was out. I started over again with camera on the ready, walking stick cradled in my arm just in case.

The coyote still dug at his elusive lunch, and I stalked slowly toward him. I hadn't gone too far when he looked up. In a flash he was off and running for the cover of the brush. From somewhere another coyote joined in the retreat. I did manage to get a couple pictures but the coyotes blend in so good with the surroundings it's hard to tell just where the animal is in the shot!

I returned to my pack and walked through the prairie dog town, a hero, the "dogs" barking by the hundreds. The town itself must have covered a good 30 or 40 acres. I had lunch at the well on the south side of the town, and headed south again on animal trails over the ridges and through several gulches coming out on a high spot of land about a mile west of Scoria Point.



I was sitting there, thoroughly enjoying the view, when I noticed a brown spot on a distant ridge. I watched it closely. Yes, it did move! My only thought was buffalo!

Descending into the canyon below, I hurriedly pitched my tent. With camera in hand, I set out on my own buffalo hunt, crossing one ridge, then another. Finally the distant ridge was reached, and I puffed excitedly to the top. What? Not a buffalo in sight. Shoot! Came all the way over for nothing! I went on a short way and looking down the slope, spotted a big brown rock. I looked at it a long time.

"A rock, Jim. You were faked out by a rock!" I thought how silly I'd been, and moved higher up the ridge. I turned back once more to look at the rock, and was just in time to see it move! It was a buffalo after all. I quickly climbed over the ridge and walked down the opposite side, out of the big bull's sight. Every vein in my body pumped with excitement.

The buffalo. If any creature more symbolizes the old West, I don't know of it. These massive animals once roamed the continent from coast to coast, numbering over 60 million strong at the time of Columbus's arrival in the New World. Nearly driven to extinction in the 1870's, they are now enjoying a comeback in protected areas, parks, and private farms throughout the country.

When I crested the ridge again, I was right above the dusty wallow he was lying in. On his knees, he was rubbing his mighty head in the dust. Then he was down on his side and rubbing his shaggy fur. He must have smelled me. He rose to his feet, as if alarmed. His eyes stared up at me. Just the thought that he might be thinking about coming up for a closer look, got me moving. I had my close look. I wasn't going to become one of the yearly statistics of buffalo casualties. I headed back to camp, my hunt a success.

Medora, North Dakota lies in the heart of the badlands and, thanks to restoration, still wears some of the old west atmosphere. I got a good view of the town as I walked out of the park. Tucked in the painted hills next to the Little Missouri, the little town seemed to blend into the land itself, like it belonged there. The town is full of history, and I spent a day there and explored the area. The most interesting character in Medora is ol' Ralph (Doc) Hubbard, a spry 92 year old who runs the local museum. I stopped in to talk to him a bit, and as soon as he learned that I had walked out from the East, well, he just beamed all over. It pleased him so much to see a man walking instead of driving those dang fool cars! Americans are getting too fat and lazy, and as he put it, "they're comin' in here with two spare tires on each side!"

It was May 1st when I walked into town, exactly one year since I began my trek. I treated myself to a fancy steak dinner with all the trimmings and spent a night in comfort at the local motel.

In the morning I headed back into the badlands anxious to get back to their quiet, desolate beauty. After reentering the park, I left the road and hiked across a plateau for a couple miles. Deer were out in force, as were the spring flowers. The grass on the tableland was dotted with false lupine, bluebells, crocuses, false parsley, and a few others I didn't know by name. I was sitting down to get a picture of some of the flowers when I was introduced to another member of the badlands plantlife, the cactus. I sat right on it, a direct hit, and shot into the air. All day long I wore a sore spot, but it taught me to be more careful about where I set myself down.

The Little Missouri is a shallow, winding ribbon of brown, meandering through its own artwork, the molded hills themselves. I waded across at a narrow spot with no trouble, but found the water extremely cold. Ten minutes after I put my boots back on, my toes were still numb!

Climbing out of the river valley, I ascended to the Big Plateau, the first of the two big steppes I had seen from the other side of the river a few days before. I walked the edge of the plateau with constant views of the endless badlands, and made camp near the Big Plateau Spring. Most of the day was still before me so I set out with the bare essentials, map, compass, camera, and walking stick, and did another big loop around one arm of the plateau.

The Audubon bighorn sheep which used to roam these dry regions was hunted to extinction by the 1920's, but the park service had attempted to replace it with the closely related, Rocky Mountain bighorn. As I headed out along the edge of their territory in the park my eyes were scanning the hills for a sight of these rather shy animals. So intent was I on the distant views, I wasn't really watching where my feet were treading. I was more than surprised when I looked down for the first time in ten minutes to spot a prairie rattler sunning itself where my next step was to have been. These are small snakes, and I poked it gently with my staff. With a bit of buzzing it slithered into its den.

I guess it's time to say a word about snakes, especially those poisonous ones. First off, I don't believe in killing rattlers, at least not when they're out in their own territory. If one was to bite me, or was around my home, well that's another story. But out here they fit into the broad web of life just as much as the deer or coyotes. They have just as much right to live, and a more rightful claim to be there than I, myself.

I did carry a snake bite kit, but it was more of a security blanket than anything else. Only a very small percentage of the five or six thousand bites a year result in death. Most of those are the very young or old whose resistance to the venom is weak. I knew that if I was ever bit, even if I didn't get treated

and just laid down for a few days, my chances of living through it would be high. But I'm an average person, and I couldn't help but shiver with loathing at the thought of coming so close to stepping on the thing. As you'll come to see, I wasn't through with the rattlers.

I never did see the bighorns, but had a nice hunt trying to. The next day, in the cool morning, I was moving my camp up to the next plateau. It was only a few miles to the next spring, and I took my time across the flats and into another prairie dog town. The dogs were barking away, but I soon realized they weren't only complaining about my presence. There, through the silver sage, a graceful figure made its getaway. At first I thought it was another coyote, but then it turned its head to look back at me. It was a lynx! As I watched it, the grass seemed to envelop the galloping shape, and in a moment it was gone. Another first.

Making my way up to the higher tableland, I could see a herd of buffalo on the top. Sure enough, when I came over the rim, a herd of fifty animals ran off toward the west. I soon came to Sheep Pasture Spring and made camp, setting off again in search for the elusive bighorns among the gouged hills on the east side of the plateau. Again, I had no luck, but I got close to a few lone buffalo, saw two gold eagles, and like one of the bighorns myself, I scrambled and climbed through the wonderland of sand castles and minarets.

When I returned to camp I found the buffalo herd a mere hundred yards above on the grassy plain. I spent the rest of the day lounging in the sun and catching up on correspondence. A few hours later, the quiet was shattered with the thrashing of bushes in the ravine, not twenty feet from my tent. I watched as five buffalo grazed their way closer and closer. A calf stepped out next to the tent, and it's then I realized the danger my prize tent was in. What if they all got out here and spooked? Would they trample the tent? I decided not to chance

it, and crept slowly up to a spot between the tent and the huge animals. With a loud "HieeeeYaauhhh!", I clapped my hands and jumped up and down. It worked. They all took off like they had the devil himself on their tail, and were soon grazing more peacefully with the rest of the herd above.

The morning brought another clear Dakota day, and I hiked across the open Petrified Forest Plateau. Upon seeing me again, the buffalo herd began moving. They weren't alarmed though, and marched in their characteristic single file. When the large herds roamed the prairies in the 1800's, the white troops were faked out more than once by the approaching column of buffalo. From a distance I could see where they would look like a procession of mounted men crossing the plain.

I wasn't alone in enjoying the plateau's beauty. A pair of horses ran a big arc about me, coming closer and closer. I took off my pack, and backed off a bit. They came in pretty close and sniffed the unusual addition to the scenery.

I was watching them closely when another creature's curiosity was aroused and it too came over for a closer look. The pronghorn, or antelope, is a very curious animal. Once, an estimated 40 million pronghorns roamed the land west of the Mississippi. Second only to the cheetah, the adults reach speeds of 60 miles per hour. But because of its curious nature, they were easily killed. All a hunter had to do, was wave his feet in the air and wait for the antelope to come.

This was the first of many that I would see and it came quite close as I sat there in the open. Even when I rose to my feet it stuck around. Only when I moved toward it did it retreat like a smooth running river into the ravines.

I headed the opposite way, descending the wave-like ripples of eroded earth and coming to the park boundary. I'd be leaving the badlands in a few miles.

There would be more in Montana, but this first taste would be the sweetest. Like most of North Dakota, the Badlands were full of surprises. I would never have thought to see so much wildlife in such a desolate looking area. I would never have thought that I could have come to love such a place so much. Though I still had a good day's hike left in North Dakota, I felt I was leaving the state as I climbed under the fence protecting the park. I looked back up to the plateau in time to see another horse walking calmly along the rim. I hoped that it would always be that way in the badlands that are so good.

## At Home On The Range

Remember all those old cowboy songs Gene Autry used to sing? The lyrics were usually shot full of horses and sagebrush, cattle and corrals, and inevitably "the range." The range was always described as a lonesome kind of place where a cowboy sat around singing sad songs, to a sad land, with a sad cow listening in! It was a place where ol' Gene could ride forever into the sunset and not worry about crowds of people and all the noise and nonsense they bring. In other words, it was a kind of paradise in its own right.

It still is, but there have been a few changes over the years. There are still cowboys and horses, and cattle and corrals, and the range itself is still there, unspoiled in some spots. But there are also things like tractors and fences and farmers. And wheat fields now cover the vast plains where cattle once grazed. Time hasn't left the range untouched.

Since I'd crossed the Missouri in Bismarck, I had an increased feeling of being in the West I had always pictured, the land of cowboys and the whole bit. By the time I reached the Badlands, I was in the heart of that mood, and when days later, I crossed a section line into Montana, I was in for the duration. The land that used to run nothing but cattle, still had its herds, but I found large sections being put under the plow. Wheat and corn was where the money was, and most of the men I met on the Montana plains were cowboy, farmer, and mechanic, all rolled into one.

I found the people of eastern Montana to be every bit as friendly as the Dakotans. A few miles after I entered the state, Sheriff Meeks stopped to ask what I was doing and found me a place to camp on the land of Dean Helm. I ended up having supper with the Helms, and in the morning a wonderful breakfast with Ken, Betty, and Sandy Brockmeyer. How is that for a welcome to a state?

A few miles of hiking brought me into the town of Wibaux, my first Montana mail stop. Postmaster, Dick Schneider, took me for coffee, and later left me in the care of Irene Jones, who was working on a book of Wibaux history. Irene gave me the royal tour and filled me in on much of the town's story.

Pierre Wibaux was a Frenchman who became one of the most successful cattle barons in the history of the west. At his peak, he owned 65,000 cattle, ranging over miles of Montana and North Dakota grassland. From the stories I heard, he was quite a character, petitioning the town to be named after him. It turned out the petition bore more signatures than there were people in town. It seems Pierre was meeting each wagon that came through to get signatures. He succeeded though, and today his name can be seen on any Montana map.

One of the most interesting finds in the area in recent years has been the discovery of five headstones with the dates 1790-91. Some of the names were women; all were English names. The amazing thing is that this was years before Lewis and Clark and the only men thought to be in the area were a few French trappers. Were they the first American settlers in the area? Irene thinks so. She has traced the family names to a location in Vermont, and believes they may have been missionaries.

I had a busy day in Wibaux, talking to a few school classes, lunching with Irene and her husband Ellis, and chatting with the sheriff. I was learning that I could expect any small town on the prairie to be a very warm, homey place, and when I left, it was with thoughts of coming back.

I was walking the tracks in the morning when a train came roaring by. The conductor blew his horn good morning as I waved and watched the hundred or so cars clatter by. The cars that once carried cattle east, now hauled the most recent Montana treasure: coal. The range that once supported the millions of



buffalo, antelope, and horses is now being stripped away in places to reveal one of the largest loads of coal in the country.

There is a great deal of controversy among the people of Eastern Montana over the issue of the coal. Actually, the question is how to go about getting it. Strip mining lays the land to waste; its like a lobotomy on the land; and will never be the same afterwards. What becomes of the ranches, the farms? That is what a lot of Montanans are asking themselves right now.

The farther up the tracks I hiked, the further into the Montana Badlands I got. I didn't have any maps for the section except a copy Sheriff Meeks had made for me of a very general map showing the tracks and a road to the west in Makoshika State Park. I had no idea where the water holes were, but I knew if I headed west, I would eventually hit the park road.

I stepped off the tracks and headed across the sage flats to the wall of streaked hills, characteristic of the badlands. Once over the ridge, I was swallowed by the striated beauty for the next three days. I found water in two places; Glendive Creek and a windmill well surrounded by cattle. The badlands here were more rugged than those in Dakota, but had much less wildlife. New kinds of flowers dotted the sharp hills, and the silence, deep in some of the canyons, was absolute.

I eventually hit the park road and followed it into Glendive where I spent a few days. It was generally a lonely time, but the weather had turned bad, holding me there. I dug into the town's history, and Louise Cross opened the town museum to give me a look. When I headed out one windy morning I was never so glad to get walking again. Over the rolling plain I walked a quiet dirt road past occasional ranches. Antelope roamed the fields with cattle, and I even saw a few buffalo in one corral.

For three days I walked northwest toward the little town of Brockway, meeting the folks on nearly every one of the scattered ranches I passed. Again, I found the folks to be very hospitable, and enjoyed more home-cooked meals, and learned more everyday about this wide, open country.

Once beyond Brockway, I followed the Old Green Trail for a ways. This was the trail used in the old days to drive cattle from Glendive to Jordan. The next day, on the divide between Timber Creek and Little Dry Creek, I walked a faded trail through untouched grasslands. This was the old range country I was looking for. Not a tree, not a fence, not a soul in sight. Nothing but the grass-covered hills and an occasional antelope.

The day was a hot one, my first real scorcher of the season, and I was delighted when I finally passed a ranch and the owner came out to offer me some ice tea. Sid Bollinger was his name, and he couldn't figure out why anyone would be walking down the old trail. We had a nice talk and I continued on.

There were more farms now, and though I longed for more of the open range I had glimpsed, the prairie here was dotted with plowed fields. Not to say it wasn't beautiful country; it was indeed. I walked a dirt road and saw a huge bull snake that put my mind to wondering where I was stepping. Later, just before the sun set, I spotted my first badger.

A car came driving up, and it was Sid and his wife and mother. They brought cookies and water. I had spoken to Sid about my plans to get more fuel for my stove when I reached Cohagen. He had thought on it, and had called Cohagen to see if they had any unleaded gas. It turned out they didn't, so he was going to try and have some waiting for me when I got there. How is that for going out of your way?

In the morning I met the Leonard Pluhar family, and Nick Clauson stopped his school bus to take a picture of all the kids standing with me. I never felt like such a celebrity as I did in the plains country. The people identified with

me much more than anywhere else for some reason. Perhaps it was their closeness with the land.

I had lunch with Morris and May Petitt, and their son Mike. Morris was full of tales from the old days and bent my ear for awhile. One was about another walker, a guy from down around Miles City who the people called Galloping Jesus. This guy raised horses, some of the best in the land, but he never rode. When out to round up a few head, he'd just walk them down, keeping after them until they tired. Once some outlaws stole part of his herd and headed up into the Missouri breaks. He set out after them (on foot) and tracked them to their hideout. Returning to town, he got the sheriff. When offered a horse and asked if he'd join them, he declined, saying he'd meet them there. He met them; in fact, he was there before the posse. They retrieved the horses and hung the thieves.

I left the Petitts and headed west across the sage-covered flats. Rabbits dodged through the gullies and the air was fresh and still. Far to the west the little town of Cohagen came into view. It looked like a big ranch from the distance and I remembered on the Montana roadmap it was listed as having a population of 12. The name itself comes from the Indian word for "cow pasture", and years ago all that was here was a cow camp.

As I got closer I noticed the store and saloon, a schoolhouse and hall, and the post office. Cary Zook welcomed me at the P.O. and wondered what had taken me so long! She had been getting reports of my progress over the past couple of days.

That night at the town hall many of the local folks got together for a potluck supper. It was a very happy time for me. The people were new friends, but I felt very relaxed and at home among them. Bill and Phyllis Clauson invited me to stay at their place that night, and I ended up spending two nights with the friendly folks. Their son, Tim, showed me around, and took me for my first horse-back ride, an exciting but bumpy experience. I liked the mood of the life the Clausons lived. It was wholesome, like the good meals Phyllis cooked up. A man

thrives on it. I would have liked to stay on, but the trail called.

I headed west out of Cohagen, following a dirt road through beautiful grassland and buttes, and very few ranches or people. The thing I liked about the road was that it wasn't fenced off from the land like many county roads are. It went through fences occasionally, crossing a cattle guard, but then it left them behind so the sight of a fence wasn't always marring the view. I walked through many herds of cattle and sheep, the lambs scurrying after their mothers jostling tits. They were perhaps the most delicate looking creatures, also the most vulnerable.

As much as I love the cry of a coyote, and the idea of them still roaming free, there is an inevitable conflict between him and the rancher. I suppose it's most likely to happen out here where the wild and the domesticated exist side by side, but just because it is inevitable does not make it easier for a man losing livestock to accept. Coyotes are predators and that can't be denied. A sassy lamb looks like a four course meal to a coyote, and that's where the trouble starts. To the rancher, every lamb is money in the bank. When he starts losing them to predators it hurts. Out here, there is an all out war being waged against the crafty and elusive coyotes. Poisons were once used against him, but the federal government banned it. Since then the coyote population has greatly increased. Some areas are patrolled by air, others use traps and ground hunts. I felt sorry for both sides. A rancher losing money, and an animal losing its life. Which way do you go? Unfortunately I don't have any answers.

The next day I got an early start, entering more horse country. Many young colts romped around on their rubber-band legs, wobbly and unsure. I passed through another herd of cattle and crossing a cattle guard, sat down for a break. Looking back the way I'd come I was a bit startled to see the entire herd piled up at the guard! They had been following me like I was a piper!

Where the road turned south, I kept west, through the grassy hills with scattered outcroppings of rock. The views from the tops of the hills were inspiring, and I fantasized about being a plainsman on the hunt for buffalo. I didn't see any of the creatures, but did see loads of pronghorns (one herd of 15) and endless groups of horses. I was walking up a ridge when over one side a herd of at least fifty horses came pounding toward me. As soon as they saw me they turned down the opposite side of the hill flowing like a river of pulsing power. It was a sight I'll never forget. The dust from their flying hooves, the sound of the rumble in the earth like rain.

But horses weren't the only animals. The grass was fairly short for the most part, and as I hiked over the prairie, something to my left about twenty feet away, jumped into the air. The corner of my eye caught the movement, and as I turned to look, I heard the tell-tale buzzing of a rattler. It was a big one, and had sensed my passing from a good ways off. Coiled perfectly in striking position, it made for a good picture, and I managed a closeup with no difficulty. The thing was a good four feet long, and as big around as my upper arm at its thickest point. I had heard how tasty snake meat is, and this one would have made a grand feast. But I had all the food I needed, and I left it there rattling away.

It was a magic land for me. I loved the open, the boundless vistas. Once I had bumped into a coyote trapper and stopped for water at a rare ranch, I didn't see a soul for three days. Going for so long without the sight of people seemed to affirm the fact that there still was some of that "range" that the songs sing about.

It was cold the next morning, and I scattered sheep to right and left as I walked through a big flock into a valley, then headed up the other side. I was

beating my way through a dense patch of sagebrush when that blood-chilling buzz sounded right behind me! I froze in my tracks. Looking around and down, I spied a small rattler coiled where I had just recently rested my foot. My stomach jumped like it had a bullfrog in it! I had stepped on the thing!

When I think of how cold it was that morning, and the fact that this little snake was probably just getting warmed up to high gear, and when I think that he was coiled up so nicely, and my foot had probably pushed down directly on his deadly head making him unable to strike even if he wanted to, well then I take the episode as just a matter of course. No wonder he didn't strike! But many a time I think of it, and all that's there in my mind's eye is that rattler with its venomous fangs. And you know, that ol' bullfrog still jumps!

The next day I saw another rattler, along with a couple prairie dog towns, and many antelope. It seemed like I was walking ever so gently up-hill all morning. When at last I finally reached the little pass between two buttes, the distant Musselshell River Valley lay below me. A green belt of trees marked the watercourse's path through the dry land, and ranches dotted the sides of the coulees.

Two days later I stepped out onto a highway and walked a few miles to the Musselshell and my next mailstop, Mosby, Montana. The "town" consisted of a gas-station, post office, and a house. I was soon talking with all three residents of Mosby, Allen and Ken Boulden and Faye Killian. The two brothers and their sister invited me to stay for lunch and told me about their rather isolated life. The post office was started in 1904 to service the many homesteaders in the area. During the first 15 or 20 years of this century there was a dry-dirt farm boom taking place. The railroads were promoting farming, and folks were coming west by the thousands to get their half section of land. It was soon

apparent that a life could not be made in the west on a half section of land. The population melted to the stalwart ranchers of today.

The Boulden family has run the post office since 1921, and Allen remembered coming west in a Model-T with his uncle. They bounced along the cow trails to where his father was homesteading about 15 miles north of Mosby. That was back in 1913 or thereabouts.

It was mid-afternoon by the time I bid the friendly trio good-bye and headed up across the Musselshell. I was just turning onto a dirt road when Doug Brown pulled over to talk a spell. Doug was working for the State, scouting out state-owned land for possible recreational use. After a long talk we agreed to meet two days later on a state-owned parcel to the southwest.

The road I followed for several miles south, paralleled the winding Musselshell. It was a beautiful area, with picture-perfect farms in the bottoms along the river, and stands of pine dotting the wall of cottonwoods. Crossing Flatwillow Creek, I climbed to a broad ridge; the countryside opened up before me. A storm was blowing in to the south, its lightning clearly visible, but where I stood the sky was still blue.

Turning west, I soon came to one of the frequent reservoirs I had been passing, and made camp with the company of a few ducks. The next day I kept to the ridge between Flatwillow Creek and North Willow Creek, through some rolling open range. The views of the Flatwillow Valley were endless, and all morning big thunderheads rolled over the plains, dropping deluges of rain for several minutes before moving on. It was a simple matter for me to stop, pull my tent's fly over me, and wait for the shower to pass on.

By noon the skies had cleared, and I found myself high among sheep by the thousands. Flowers blanketed the steep hills in virtual carpets, the aroma filling my head. Antelope were becoming commonplace, people a rarity. I chugged

up a rocky pinnacle and looking west, caught the outline of my first Montana mountains! Topped with white, the Big Snowy Mountains were like a giant welcome sign to a new phase of the hike.

With the sight of the mountains, I realized the prairie would soon be but a memory for me, and I seemed to appreciate it all the more in the next few days. I camped with Doug Brown the following night at a bluff overlooking the creek. He was an avid backpacker and filled me in on some of the places I would be going through when I got up into the mountains to the west. I especially enjoyed Doug's advice on how to identify bears. "Upon first sight you should climb a tree. If the thing climbs up after you, it's a black bear. If it shakes down the tree, it's a grizzly!"

We celebrated Doug's 25th birthday with a steak dinner cooked on a stove he carried in the truck, and spent the evening swapping hiking stories.

At dawn, I left Doug and headed straight across the plain, crossing highways 244 and 87, and following the county line through the whispering, waving grass. The Little Snowy Mountains were just ahead now, the land rising into the dark green of piney forests. Beyond, the Big Snowys rose like a solid mass, the rocky slopes shining below the cap of snow on the summits.

Out where I was, the farthest thing from my mind was other people, but as I stopped at a well for water, an old pick-up rolled up. The middle-aged man at the wheel had a beat up old cowboy hat on; his face was weathered and burnt brown like the very land he worked. This was Joe Kombol, a man I saw as the modern day cowboy, the typical rancher of today's Montana. He was rugged, straight forward, friendly, quick to laugh, distrustful of government, and above all, a family man. We struck up a quick friendship and I was invited home for supper, a few miles south. I ended up staying the night with the Kombols, Joe and his wife, Dolores, brother, Bill, and daughters Chris and Tammy.



After the evening's meal, we got to talking about the old days, and they pulled out a box full of arrowheads they had collected on their land. In awhile Joe, Dolores, and I were bumping our way along the trail to their summer pasture. We eventually came out on a flat ridge and climbed out of the truck. We were standing on the sight of an old Indian village. Joe pointed out various teepee rings, the circle of stones used to weight down the hides on the lodges. At first they were hard to see, but I soon developed an eye for it and noticed hundreds of the rings. The shadows were getting longer, and we could imagine the bustle of the village a hundred or more years ago.

Nearby, a far older sign of man's existence in the area was found. The Kombols showed me a steep bluff where early hunters had driven the buffalo off the edge in great numbers. I had read of these "buffalo jumps," and understood that sometimes the tribe would take weeks planning and preparing for the final drive that would often net enough meat to get them through the entire winter.

We made our way back to the house as night was falling, and talked into the evening. Our lives were so different. I admired them, as I did all the prairie dwellers I met. They possess a certain spark. Maybe it's just because they're very content, happy people. When Joe drove me back to where we had met the day before, I knew I was saying goodbye to the prairie. A few miles and I'd be up into the mountains. I was leaving the plains that I had at first feared, and the people that were always surprising me with their kindness and hospitality. I wouldn't forget them or their land. As I turned west once again, something Dolores had said echoed in my mind: "You see things three times. Once before you get there, once while you're there, and once when you look back."

## The High West

Whoop-up Creek gurgled through the pine-covered hills, clear and cold, racing down to the plains. I followed its winding course upward, first on a jeep trail, then in the tracks of a deer, hiking ever higher. The day was perfect, May 28th, and at last the creek faded to a trickle. Then, it too disappeared. I left the trees behind and entered a high pasture. At last I came to the top of the mountain. I was standing at 5,725 feet above sea level atop Bald Butte, my first western mountain.

As far as originality in its name goes, the place was severely lacking. I mean, there must be a thousand Old Baldys, Bald Mountains, or Bald Buttes in this country of ours. You'd think that the folks bestowing names on places would have been more thoughtful. It was a unique, beautiful place, and indeed was quite bald, but after staring west at the Big Snowy Mountains (I was in the Little Snowys) and north at the Judith Mountains, and in every direction at the stunning patterns in the prairie below, I got to thinking what I would have called such a place.

Of course the vanity in me came out first, suggesting names like Big Jim Mountain, or Stoltz's Slope. But then I got to thinking about famous people I thought deserved to have something named after them. Let's see. How about Woody Guthrie, the folk-singer? Or James Michner, the writer? Or better yet, how about Kombol Mountain, after my recent new made friends? How about any of the wonderful folks I'd met this past year on the trail? Yeah, that's a good idea! But how do you choose one over all the rest? I mean you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Well, I guess we could compromise and call it something like Bald Butte after all!

Of course, this being my first mountain in such a long time, I felt it was very special. It was another goal reached. I was in the mountains of the West, those distant peaks which throughout my life had been but pictures in travel magazines and dreams. I was actually there. The sense of fulfillment was intense, the views, breathtaking. All together, I was in one heck of a good mood.

I eventually descended back into the forest, entering the Lewis and Clark National Forest and hiking jeep trails through the park-like woods. Occasional clearings full of flowers added to the mood. The hiking couldn't have been any better. My next view of the Big Snowy's gave me a start. Black clouds were pouring over the summits, as if the mountains themselves were exhaling the menacing clouds, and thunder echoed through the hills. Lightning soon began bombarding the snowy peaks. With such fast changes in weather, I knew I was back in the high country, and made camp by a branch of Willow Creek.

The storm rolled over me, and in the morning sprinkles fell. I slept in, and didn't get going until noon. When I finally did get myself up and going, the sky was full of those big, guess-what-we-are clouds that take on the shape of whatever your imagination desires. The fresh scent of pine permeated the air, and I followed Willow Creek on a faded trail.

I was just noting the lack of any wildlife, when rounding a bend, I stopped dead in my tracks. Thirty yards ahead of me was a bear. It wasn't black! My first thought was grizzly. It was bigger than any black bears I'd seen, but from it's actions, and my lack of observation, I hesitate in saying so for sure. Black bears are not always black. In fact, many are actually brown. But again, this was a big bear! She was partly behind a dead tree, her forearms digging away at the decaying wood. I surely didn't want to get any closer. A nearby tree looked like security so I moved toward it keeping an eye on the bear.

It's then I saw the cub, the little tattle-tale! She'd been watching me all along, and as soon as I moved for the tree, started squealing to her mother. Mom gave an anxious look around the tree as I clapped my hands, hoping to scare her off. At the same time I was moving for the tree. Whether it was the clapping, sounding like gun shots, or the sight of my travel-worn self, I don't know. But she turned and lumbered off with the cub scurrying before her. I stood there watching them, breathing a sigh of relief.

I'd been gaining elevation very gradually as I ascended the creek, and at last I came out on the top of the divide between Willow and Flatwillow Creeks. The trail pointed directly into the heart of the Big Snowy Mountains, now blocking my path like an impassable barrier. I knew better, but the sight was enough to dwarf the grandest schemes of any man. The mountains looked cold and blue, the clouds laced with refracted light looking like the images of the peaks themselves. The forest at my feet took on almost glowing qualities. The greens were vibrant and alive, and the very air I soaked into my lungs seemed to possess the lively color.

I descended into the valley and started up into the Big Snowys. I had hoped to camp in one of the canyons, and started up Horse Thief Canyon only to find the creek dry. But the area was so beautiful. I left my pack and hiked about a mile up the dry stream bed. It was difficult walking on the boulder-strewn bed, but the canyon itself was fascinating. The walls were cliffs rising upwards of 200 feet on either side, sometimes leaning inward over me. The rock was streaked with some blueish element, or perhaps it was only the fading light. It began getting dark, so I headed back, retrieving my pack, and bushwhacking northeast to the road. It was a peaceful night, but I found it difficult to sleep. I was ready for the Big Snowy Mountains.

The morning brought clear skies, and I took the trail up Maynard Ridge, ascending gradually with near constant views. Bald Butte looked like a grassy hill to the east, while to the north, the city of Lewistown could be seen at the foot of the Judith Mountains. Patches of deep snow blocked the trail periodically, but it posed no problem. I soon left the trees behind, finding myself on an open ridge high above the plains below. Half Moon Canyon dropped steeply to my right, and as I climbed higher, Horse Thief Canyon yawned on the other side.

The mountain I was climbing, Big Snowy, is a merging of three main ridges and several minor ones. They meet, forming a vast plateau a couple miles square, high above treeline. The plateau is covered with a layer of small rocks, almost gravel-like, so walking is quite easy. I made my way over this alpine plain and gradually ascended to the highest point, 8600 feet.

Before me, the mountain dropped into Swimming Woman Creek Canyon. Across Half Moon Pass to the northwest, Greathouse Peak loomed a hundred feet higher than where I stood. Far to the west, the next range, the Little Belts, were capped with snowy fringes, and to the southwest the Crazy Woman and the Castle Mountains showed themselves like icebergs against the blue sky. The prairie stretched everywhere to the south, with the paths of the creeks standing out as dark green in their sea of dusty tan.

I had lunch on the summit, soaking the view into my memory and taking a few pictures. It was silly of me, but I didn't think about getting down until I was ready to move on. Then, it was with alarm that I realized I was on the edge of two converging cliffs. Half Moon Pass was my destination, and after a bit of reconnoitering I decided my best bet would be straight down the talus face of the mountain. With a few prayers, I headed down.

It proved to be a very nerve-wracking experience. The rock was very loose, falling in mini-avalanches, and sometimes I'd find myself riding a wave of flowing rock like a surfer on the sea. A few spots were tricky with sharp drops, but I

was able to lower myself down or go around. Eventually I found myself a thousand feet lower, in the pass. Looking up, I didn't see how I made it down such a steep face other than falling, but it was good to learn I could negotiate such slopes.

I found the pass to be locked in snow, but at the base of Greathouse Peak were many little terraces just right for a backpacker's tent. I made camp overlooking the canyon with mountains looming up on three sides. The snow melt was causing the clear, ice-water to cascade down the mountain in hundreds of thin streams. Their bubbling lulled me to sleep.

I found a forest service trail the next day which led me back up to the heights. Knife Blade Ridge was just as its name implies. The narrow strip of rock was bordered on each side by steep drops, hundreds of feet. I crossed the spectacular bit of geological horseplay with caution. A strong wind was blowing. Halfway across I paused and sat down. The feeling was one I wanted to explore. It was a bit of fear, rolled with the solitude of the land, and topped with the awe in which I held the mountain range.

When I did reach the other side, the ridge opened into a wide, tundra-covered plateau. Snow abounded but I was able to skirt it most of the time; otherwise it was hard enough to walk on. Careless Creek Canyon gaped to the south of me, getting its name in 1865 when a member of a surveying party fell off his horse and shot himself while buffalo hunting. The views were spectacular and constant.

Several miles later I descended into Blake Creek Canyon and made camp by a gushing spring. My tent was set up under a spreading oak tree on the edge of a flower-studded meadow. I was lying in the tent as darkness fell, when I heard the plop of a big drop on my trusty shelter. It couldn't be rain; the skies were clear. I scrambled out, scaring a bird out of the tree overhead, and right away, knew that I'd just been baptized!

Now this might not seem like a big deal, but to me, out there for so long, that moment was quite an event. I'd come over 3,300 miles at that point, and my tent had never been hit. Isn't that incredible? Wouldn't you think a guy would be bound to get marked sooner than that? What? You don't really care? Don't you even want to know what kind of bird it was? No? Well, I thought it was kind of interesting myself. (For you folks that are interested, it was too dark to see!)

Morning found me crossing the prairie again across what is known as Judith Gap, the area between the Big Snowy range and the Little Belts to the west. Far to the south I could make out the Absaroka Range, while at my feet, the fields were littered with lupine dancing in the breeze.

I passed through the town of Judith Gap, spending a few hours talking to Mark and Mabel Haynes who ran the General Store. They were also the local historians and went all out to tell me about their area. Charlie Volf, a rancher I'd met on the way into town, had steered me their way, and it was a fortunate meeting. The "Gap" was once the great runway for the buffalo herds. Later when Montana had its gold rush, the Carrol Trail led right through. Calamity Jane was a part-time resident, and Charlie Russel, the great western painter, passed through often, using some of the scenes in his paintings. I felt I was learning more about the history of this country than any book could tell me, just by talking with the folks along the way.

With my pack full of food, and my mind full of new knowledge, I left the little town as clouds poured over the ridges in spectacular formations, eventually entering the National Forest again near Hopely Creek. Unfortunately the creek was dry. My supply of water was dangerously low. I went to sleep without dinner, and in the morning drank my last two swallows. After all, I was only three miles from a ranger station, and they wouldn't have a station where there wasn't water. I was soon proved wrong. That is, partly wrong. I was right about the Forest Service not having a station where there wasn't water. Yes, the creek was dry,

and the station shown on my map was long gone.

It was quickly becoming apparent how water means life itself. For several miles, as I climbed the ridge to the snow I knew would be there, I labored on. Each step seemed a chore, and I stopped every half mile. My energy was totally lacking. My tongue felt like one of those badlands cacti, and all I thought of was water. When I finally did reach the first snowbank, I set my stove to melting the stuff and was soon drinking all I could hold. Never again.

The miles went faster after that, I was back to my old self, walking along the top of the ridge to Mount High before descending toward Russel Point. I was walking through an open park (high meadow) when I heard the distinctive barklike snort of an elk. Hunters refer to it as bugling. Whatever, it's very unique coming from an animal, and I watched eight elk prance across the field.

The next day I gained the ridge again, this time above High Spring Creek. The mountain was partially open and grassy, making for excellent views of the region to the south. Eventually I descended into the Lost Fork of Judith River, where I camped for two nights by the pretty mountain stream. Rain came in waves and I explored the area and did a little fishing between showers. My journal tells it best.

"Rain. It patters and pounds on the tent like a soothing song that lulls and puts a body to sleep. Thunder crashes through the valley announcing a wet morning. I curl in my sleeping bag, warm. Half asleep, I listen to the weather and fall deeper into my coziness."

"The rain lets up gradually until there is no patter, just the sound of birds and the rush of the river. The silence arouses me. I look out to see a black sky with the sun shining through in places. A distant ridge is lit up against the clouds, its snowbanks a brilliant white."



"I pull on my clammy clothes, and stepping through the wet grass from the edge of trees into the valley's field, I feel the sun warm and dry upon my back. I stretch and smile, and look long at the morning."

When I moved on, I hiked up the Burris Creek Trail until I gained the ridge above the West Fork and followed it a couple miles over balds and through scattered forests to Sand Point (8,211 ft.). The views had been great all morning, but there on the Point I had excellent views in every direction, especially north and east. The big white clouds in the sky were making giant shadows on the mountains, turning the green of the forests to alternating patches of darker hues.

The wind had been with me like a faithful companion the last couple miles, and I sat on the leeward side of the summit, warmed by a peek-a-boo sun. The wind still seemed a constant sound, as regular as the hiss of the ocean. When for a moment it stopped, it struck me right away. All was suddenly calm, not a sound, not even a bird. Across the valley I could see clouds moving over King's Hill, rushing over Woodchopper Ridge, but here where I sat, all was still. It was as if Time itself had closed its eyes for a moment, and I was suspended above the world. I felt totally whole, and in that split second more alive than I'll ever be. Then, it was gone. The wind came whispering.

The ridge bent southwest, and I hiked the snowy trail along the top. Reaching Spur Park, I turned north through high open fields. These "parks" as they are called are ideal places to spot wildlife, and as the skies threatened, I spotted a big bull elk who seemed just as curious about me as I did about him. The temperature was dropping rapidly, and I soon stopped for the day, pitching the tent, making a fire, and fixing up a much needed cup of tea.

A thick fog hung over the mountains in the morning. I delayed my departure by staying in my cozy sack and reading for a couple hours. But all books come to an end, and I was soon hiking along the jeep trail through the dense clouds

dragging bottom. The damp air chilled me thoroughly, and I hoped for the sun to make its late arrival. I couldn't see very far ahead, and once I froze in mid-stride. Ahead, was what I thought surely was a bear. He was standing still. For a couple minutes I waited anxiously for him to make his move. I had a tree picked out, and was ready to drop my pack, but the more I looked at it, the braver I got. I clapped my hands. He did nothing. I walked up to him. He sat there. Stumps don't move too fast, and this one, disguised as a bear in the misty morning, wasn't going anywhere.

I continued on, and was nearly run over by a lost mule deer! She looked embarrassed about the whole thing, and walked off slowly, trying to look as calm as she could.

Eventually, I came out on a bald ridge, and the sun peeked through the mist for a moment. A hiker I'd met in Georgia, Bill Moore, had always referred to the sun as "Big Eye". On mornings like this he'd yell out across the valleys, "Come on, Big Eye!" Usually it'd work, the sun would burn its way through. I thought I'd give it a try, and the screaming did me good, but did little to help brighten the day.

I descended to Kings Hill Pass, climbed over Porphyry Peak, and then descended northward through O'Brien Park. The next day I followed O'Brien Creek into Neihart. The town was once a mining metropolis of 5,000 folks. Migrating buffalo used to run through the valley for days on end driving the people up the sides of the mountain until they passed. But now the town is lucky to have 200 people in the summer. Postmistress, Peggy Schwantes was very friendly, and I spent a couple hours reading mail, and sending off letters. Barb and Archie Gunderson gave me some Coleman fuel and a few paperbacks. I was going through a lot of books. The town didn't have a grocery store. I had enough food to see me to Helena, but would have to cut out my intended jaunt through the Gates of the Mountain Wilderness. I left town and turned up Harley Creek, climbing higher and higher.

The skies were still foggy, but cleared somewhat as I hiked through Harley Park, and then Onion Park, where I came to the head of Tenderfoot Creek. The creek flowed west for 25 miles and I had the choice of taking the ridge or the canyon. The clouds hanging over the mountains made up my mind for me, and I descended into the canyon. It turned out to be a good choice.

The next day was June 8th, and my birthday had come around again. (You don't have to sing this time 'round, unless you really want to.) The day was clear and warm, and I walked a beautiful trail through the sheer-sided canyon. The trail was non-existent in many places, but finding a way to go was no problem. The water was though. I found that I had to cross and recross the winding creek, taking the time to take off and put on my boots. I finally put the question to myself. "Would those mountain men of old, spend all this dilly-dallying around to get across? No! They'd just plow right through!" So that's what I started doing. Oddly enough I didn't seem to mind the wet feet. After awhile I got used to it.

I went through stands of lodgepole pine, along sharp cliff faces, and once came upon an otter with a big trout in its mouth. At one point I was crossing the base of a slope strewn with a jumble of big boulders. It was hard going, hopping from one rock to another, and I stopped for a break, taking off my pack and setting my walking stick down. The staff slipped, and before I could do a thing, it had fallen into a crevice in the rock and was bouncing lower and lower into the pile. I stood horrified as I watched my faithful stick disappear, and thanked my stars when it came to rest, a few inches poking out of the hole.

The gear I carried with me became very important, very close to me over the months. I've talked to other long-distance walkers, and they've mentioned the same attachment toward their equipment. The things become a part of you, and with each new experience they become richer, like aging wine. Just the thought of losing my walking stick was enough to make me sick. It would've been like a death in the family, some bit of magic gone for good.

But I didn't lose it, and it aided in my stream crossings that day as I followed the stream west. Smaller creeks joined in, with names like Stringer, Lonesome, Iron Mines, Lost Stove, Bolsinger, and Packsaddle. With each addition Tenderfoot Creek became more powerful and the canyon opened up. Sometimes I'd be high above the creek in open fields and I saw several deer, and another black bear with her two cubs.

Toward the end of the day I found myself in high pastures with cows grazing peacefully in their summer pasture. A storm blew over the mountains and the wind whipped through the canyon so fast, it took the pollen right off the trees. The air was a green mist sweeping the skies. I stretched out on the high meadow and watched the storm approach, and when it seemed like it was almost upon me, I raced it down to the creek and set up my tent.

The next day was another good one, and I took my time through the beautiful world along and above the creek. After about ten miles, I came to the Smith River flowing purposefully north. Tenderfoot Creek joined the larger river in an area of rolling, open fields. That is, on the east bank. On the opposite side of the river the land took an upward twist, and cliffs sprung upwards for several hundred feet. I faced two barriers: the river and the mountain.

At first glance, the escarpment before me looked unbreachable, but after a little study I located a spot that looked like it could be scaled without a rope. That's where I would cross the river. There was a thin strip of shore at the base of this likely route, and as it began to cloud up again, I thought it best to get across and camp.

The river here was broad and dark. I couldn't tell if it was deep or not. Stepping into the water, I noticed right off how mucky and slippery the rocks on the bottom were, even with boots on. The river was very smooth looking, but it was a

deceptive appearance. There was power there, and as I got into it up to my knees I found it hard to stand. I knew the river was getting deeper; how deep I couldn't tell. I would have to turn back. My feet were slipping! I tried to turn, but it was too late. My legs were swept out from under me and down I went.

For a man of 23 years, Death is a far-off, abstract state when it comes to his own reality. I was able to accept the death I saw as part of the food chain in the wilds. It surprised me not at all to come across the bloody remains of a rabbit, or to spot a hawk dropping on some unseen prey. But when it came to my own life I hadn't given it too much thought. When I was suddenly face to face with it, I wanted no part of it.

All I remember is bouncing along the rocky bottom, fighting for air. With one hand I clawed the bottom, trying to draw myself into the calmer shallows. With the other, I still clung to my staff, flaying the river in an attempt to keep my head above water. I suppose it all happened in an instant, but it seemed longer. I was washed down at least 30 or 40 yards before I managed to free myself from the river's powerful grip. I crawled onto the bank totally drenched, and falling exhausted to the earth, wept into the grass.

At that moment the clouds let loose and hail fell from the skies for fifteen minutes as I huddled under a fallen tree. For a time, when the sun came out once again, <sup>the</sup> cards seemed stacked against me. I had control over myself, but still wasn't across the river. I hiked north about a quarter mile and finding the river the same, decided I'd have to raft across. I spent nearly an hour gathering dead trees along the bank, and then lashed them into a fan shaped vessel. By all appearances she seemed quite sea-worthy.

My pack went on first, then straddling the pack, I grabbed a long pole and pushed myself into the current. She began to float slowly along, and as the current caught her, she bumped over the shoals, threatening to capsize. With the pole, I shoved hard and steered her into deeper waters. Like a fish, she zoomed downstream.

It was a precarious situation for me. The raft was top-heavy and rocked dangerously as she dashed me along the river. I was scared silly, but kept trying to pole her to the far shore. The bottom disappeared and I used the pole as an oar and got closer and closer to safety. At last I was sailing within four feet of the shore. If I could only get over a bit closer. But the current was too swift there, and kept whisking me along. My heart threatened to pound out of my chest as I made a desperate dive for the bank, with rope in hand. I made it, and quickly pulled the fighting raft to me, grabbing my pack and setting it free. It careened out of sight.

I found myself on a point of land cut off by soaring cliffs. But I knew I'd find a way up them tomorrow. It was time to make camp and dry out my gear, and to give thanks for my life. My hands shook for several hours, and only in sleep did I find peace from the trial of the day.

The next days were back to normal as I walked across private lands for a day, up Rock Creek, then up Calamity Gulch and down into the Sunshine Basin. I hit the roads along Trout Creek through York and across the Missouri River again, and then across the flats to Helena, the Capitol of Montana. Four days after nearly ending the hike in disaster, I was staying with new friends in town.

I liked Helena from the start, even though I walked into town in a cold rain. It seemed like a small town but was actually a city of 25,000. It was a pretty town with neat, trim houses, and the people were friendly sorts. On the way in I met

Gregg Hoffer and Gail Weatherson, two young folks that invited me to stay at their place while I was in town. I agreed, and enjoyed their company and conversation for four days.

When I moved on I followed a road out of town which was once the main road to Missoula, the Mullan Road. It soon turned to dirt and got more desolate the farther I went. A light drizzle fell, making the green hills that much brighter. Bluebirds and magpies kept me company, and I made camp near Austin Creek about 16 miles out of town.

In the clear morning I ascended an eroded track and came out on a gentle, smooth sloped ridge. I was standing on the Continental Divide. Here, if I spilled water, it would theoretically go in two directions. Some of it would flow down into Austin Creek, and then into Sevenmile Creek to Tenmile Creek, through Lake Helena to the Missouri, then down to the Mississippi and to the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. The rest of it could flow west into Uncle George Creek to Dog Creek, and then to the Blackfoot River and Clarks Fork. It would mingle with the waters of the Pend Oreille and join the mighty Columbia River to be washed out to the Pacific.

It was quite a mind-boggling journey in its own right, the route this water took. But up on the Great Divide I was standing at the very source! Here was where it all starts. The waters began their many travels to be used over and over by farmers and ranchers along the way. I stood at the spine of the Continent; another landmark had been reached. I'd be turning north here and following the Divide for a few hundred miles to the Canadian Border before turning west again. I would come to know the divide, but there was 25,000 miles of it, winding through two continents that I'd never walk. It was like taking a day hike on a trail that never ends. But I was ready for the taste I was to get, and before the day was half through, I was hiking along the ridge of land known as The Great Divide.

## Along The Great Divide

There's something about the high country that makes every minute seem fuller, more rewarding. The body not only responds to the freshness of the mountain air, but to the distant panoramas and the nameless emotions that come with them. There is strength in the sights, and the body drinks it up like some elixir. Energy flows like the clear mountain streams, and those who experience it are likely to cherish those moments as if they were gold-plated hours.

I always find I have more energy when I'm in the high country, especially on a sunny day with non-stop views. The day I reached the Great Divide, I hiked its rather gentle, rolling contour for a few miles before turning west, then north along Hope Creek, cutting off a corner of the meandering divide. Along the creek, Montana's past leapt at me on every turn.

In the early 1800's Montana was almost solely the domain of the Great Plains Indians and fur trappers. But in the 1860's a few prospectors found gold in Last Chance Gulch in Helena. The Montana Gold Rush was begun. In Helena, over 35 million dollars of the precious metal was mined from the earth. During the next ten or twenty years, nearly every far-flying region of the Montana mountains was exploited first by placer miners, then the hard rock miners. The territory was fast becoming a populated area.

Every once in awhile someone will still find a big gold nugget in one of the crystal streams tumbling down from the divide. I looked each time I crossed a creek, but never saw anything that looked like gold. But there was much evidence of the old gold rush days. The remains of the flumes used in washing out the gold were found in many places, and old cabins, now in ruin, dotted the



river valleys in what seemed like an ideal location for a home in the mountains.

I climbed back to the top of the divide near Meyers Hill and was welcomed with views of the snow-capped mountains in the Anaconda-Pintler Range seventy miles away. With water from Dana Spring, I hiked part way up Black Mountain before camping, continuing up to the partly wooded summit in the clear morning. Snow covered the mountain but the trail was partly readable due to blazes on the trees.

The divide took a downward turn, and I slid down the snowy slope using my walking stick as a rudder. I found snow to be at least ten to twelve feet deep in some places, but was easily walked on as it was frozen and packed. I continued over Nevada Mountain, and for the next four miles found one of the most inspiring stretches of hiking in many a day.

For the most part I was out in the open along the narrow ridge. On one side a fire had burned off the timber in years past, and on the other, the slope was grassy. Pockets of snow clung to the mountain in some spots, and water was plentiful from the run-off. With views of the mountains for miles around me, I walked along under clear skies.

I camped right on the ridge that night with my own ice box and running water in the form of a big snow drift. Moving on the next day, I found the divide more wooded as I approached Granite Butte, and turned down the South Fork of Poorman Creek. Near the headwaters were the ruins of many hardrock mines that had run from 1866 until World War II. All along the creek were collapsed log cabins and I learned later that the name Poorman Creek was derived from poor placer mining along the lower creek. Only in the hardrock mines was it found to be profitable.

The forest was mostly pine and as I spotted another fallen down cabin, I noticed daylight starting to fade. Still, I was curious, and stepped over for

a closer look. I approached the tumbled logs, and not until I was upon it did I notice the little deer fawn curled at my feet. I've seen many fawns in my time, but never have I been so close. Each spot seemed to stand out against the fuzzy tan of the thing's frail body. At first I thought she was dead, so still was she. But then I saw her steady breathing and noticed one eye peeking out of the little head tucked under her body watching me closely. Her mother was nowhere to be seen, and I slipped off my pack and snapped a picture before sitting down next to her. I couldn't resist touching her. She looked like she was made for cuddling, like some stuffed animal, but blessed with the beauty of life. I quickly regretted petting the feathery fur. So frightened was she that her thin frame shook with fear. I stepped back, and looked into her sorrowful eyes. My heart melted. She jumped up, and not too sure of herself, but quite fast just the same, she ran off into the woods.

I walked into Lincoln the next day, spending a long time talking to Bud Cook, the postmaster. He had run across a still one time when he was hunting up on Poorman Creek. Those ol' miners must have done something besides look for gold. Or maybe that was to ease the failures. Lincoln itself dates from the gold boom, and Bud told me a lot of his own hunting adventures in the region.

I stayed that night with Karen Harris and Paul Olson, two new friends living in Lincoln. I'd met Karen in a music store in Helena and run into her quite by accident in the Lincoln post office. She was a school teacher while Paul worked for the forestry service. He filled me in about many of the areas I'd be hiking through in the next stretch and even showed me some of his slides that he'd taken. My expectations grew the more he told me and showed me.

The next leg of my trip was one that I was especially looking forward to. I'd be traveling through the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas for the next few weeks, areas untouched by roads or the scars of man. For the next 180 miles

as I walked north, I would see, or cross, no roads or powerlines. There was nothing but what belonged there. I was ready for it.

I stopped at the P.O. before leaving the next day. Martha Youderian was filling in for Bud, and she offered to weigh my pack out of curiosity's sake. It was at its peak weight with twenty days worth of food, four thick books, and my various other gear. It rocked the scale at 82 pounds! I found it hard to believe, but there it was before me. I shouldered the pack (with some difficulty) and headed out of Lincoln, into the wilds of Montana.

It was raining as I left town, and I hiked in sporadic showers for several miles as I went up an arm of Stonewall Mountain and then down to Snowbank Creek. The snow was wet and sloshy above the creek and the further down I went the more the trail became a rushing torrent itself. Needless to say, I was soon hiking in soaked feet. I did fourteen miles that day and only took one break, just getting into the wilderness area.

The next day I only did three miles, hiking up a faded trail that disappeared on me as I came out on a ridge directly east of Red Mountain. I camped as it started to snow, an added treat for a day in June. Red Mountain, I had seen from south of Lincoln and up to then I'd planned on climbing its snowy slopes. But all that day and the next, dark menacing clouds boiled over its summit and I decided to try it again some other year.

My third day in the Scapegoat Wilderness began with two miles of bushwhacking down the mountain to Webb Lake. There was an empty ranger station here, and since Paul had shown me pictures of the cabin door clawed apart by a grizzly, I had no urge to stay long in the area. Heading up Lander Creek I spotted many deer, and at Middle Fork I beat my own way up to the high ridge leading to Crow Mountain.

It was a good feeling making my way without a trail. The sun was shining and at the same time it was snowing big fluffy flakes. Blue sky rubbed shoulders with bursting dark clouds, and as I reached the tree line and crested on the open ridge, I could see Red Mountain still bombarded by the storms. It looked like the mountain was making the storms itself. In every direction there was nothing but snow-capped mountains surrounded in the dark green of the piney forests.

I had found my place in this world. Somewhere high above the treeline, where the sky is held up by the peaks of land, I had come home. The wilderness is a mother nursing us all as we come to feed on its beauty. I couldn't get enough though, never in one short human life.

I camped above 8,000 feet that night, very high for that part of the country, and the next day stayed where I was in my room with a view. It was a wonderful day of alternating snowfall and sunshine, and I spent most the day looking out across the wilderness at the everchanging clouds. From my perch on the ridge, I could often see several storms raging at once, while simultaneously the sun shone through blue sky over other parts of the mountains.

The next day I packed up and set out to climb Crow Mountain. It was a gradual walk up the ridge, but the wind was a power to be dealt with. I was wearing every stitch of clothing I had, and still the wind sent its icy fingers into my bones. I pushed on, and as I reached the summit, I set my pack up as a windbreak and huddled behind it. Any temporarily frozen extremities were worth it, as I looked out over the clear day, the land standing in sharpened clarity. Red Mountain had finally broken free of its tempests, and far to the east I could make out the dull brown of the prairie. I finished one roll of film, and in the chilling wind, tried to change rolls in my camera. Never had it been such a chore. I stayed on the summit as long as I could bear the cold, about twenty minutes, and then began a long descent into the Cooney Creek Valley.

The Cooney Creek area was a virtual paradise. The forest, lining the clear mountain stream, was dotted with many park-like meadows full of flowers and deer. I walked through this Eden for a few miles before turning up Tobacco Valley, and then Dobrota Creek. The forested valley here was much more closed in than Cooney, and on one side the cliffs of Scapegoat Mountain loomed upward hundreds of feet.

Deer and elk were plentiful through the area, and I noticed my first grizzly bear tracks in the damp earth of the trail. There is no doubt about grizzly tracks when you first see them. Their size shouts their claim to fame, and the long claw marks, sometimes three inches long, add the identifying logo to the print. The grizzly is King in this country, and I was careful about hanging up food at night, and also took to my moth-ball bear repellent again. I had no wish to be visited by one of the bears at night, but I did long to sight one during the day. For the next several weeks I was to see the tracks often, sometimes quite fresh, but never did I make a definite sighting.

The next morning I left the trail and climbed the talus slope of Scapegoat Mountain. Finding a break in the cliffs, I scrambled up to a gently sloped basin. I was well above treeline now, and found the going easy across the open bench. When I climbed over another stiff rise in the rock, I found myself in a wide pass between Scapegoat and the other jagged peaks of the Great Divide. Another vast basin stretched out before me, covered with boulders and snow, looking like a scene from Siberia's tundra. I was but a mere speck in this grand scale about me, and leaving my pack, made an easy ascent of Scapegoat Mountain.

Though it was only 9,204 feet high, in that region it made it one of the highest peaks for miles. The views! How can I describe them without repeating other descriptions already uttered? Let me just say that I was filled once again with the exhilaration of the high places and spent a couple hours on the big boulders of the summit. A pika, a small rodent of the alpine areas, kept me company, and we both sunned ourselves on the most perfect of days.

I spent the rest of the day crossing the wide, snow-locked tundra to Flint Mountain, walking up its grassy shoulder late in the day. The hike was one of constant panoramas. Unknown to me, Flint is shaped like the Rock of Gibraltar, slanted on one side, dropping off steeply on the other. When I reached the summit and found the mountain dropping away before me, I was surprised, but not worried. A little scouting, and I soon found a perilous, but possible route down the cliff.

I camped high that night, and the next day descended Bar Creek into the peaceful, Danaher Valley. It was a beautiful place, with wide meadows and the snowy peaks surrounding the fringe. I saw lots of beaver sign and couldn't help thinking of the old mountain men that once roamed these reaches, searching for their gold in the form of furs. The free trappers were an independent bunch, wandering through the mountains with the barest of essentials and living off the land. Through snowstorms and bear attacks they stayed and found the freedom of the high country was to their liking. Through their constant hunt for beaver the west was first explored by the whites.

Most of the day I hiked the Danaher River's east bank. It was a river of many moods, sometimes sluggish like a Louisiana bayou, other times churning itself to a frenzy in frothy rapids. At Basin Creek I saw my first people in five days, a group of scouts from Newport, Washington led by George Smith. They were a good bunch and we rapped awhile and exchanged addresses. As they continued downstream, I turned up the Basin Creek Trail and camped a few miles later.

The trail I was on faded to nothing the next morning, and I made my own way up to the ridge between Trap Mountain and Twin Peaks. The area was densely forested and still locked in deep snow. The steepness of the terrain made the going difficult, and several times I found myself slipping down the snowy slope. I crossed the divide into the drainage of the Lost Fork of Ahorn Creek, and after many falls and scratches, and a few curses thrown in for good measure, I reached another trail

near Pearl Basin. Near the point where the Lost Fork and East Fork joined, I met Don and Char Murray of Missoula with their dog, Pete. Pete was soon snoozing as we chatted, and interrupted us with his loud snoring. They were only out for a few days, and I sent a letter back with them to be mailed.

I spent most of the next day taking a side trip up Prairie Reef, a spectacular mountain that looks like it has been split in half. A fire lookout sits on the summit, and only <sup>a</sup> few feet to the south the mountain drops thousands of feet into Reef Creek. I got my first view of the Chinese Wall. The Wall is a twenty mile section of the Continental Divide, an escarpment a thousand feet high. I'd seen my share of cliffs, but such extensive faces were truly incredible.

It was late the next morning when I approached the base of the Wall. It was a cold, overcast day, and as the cliffs appeared like ghosts out of the fog, I entered extensive snowfields. The landscape, covered with snow and dressed in grey, gave the appearance of January rather than the first day of July. But gradually the clouds lifted, and the distant mountains came into sight, Prairie Reef perhaps the most dominant. But the most outstanding feature was the Chinese Wall. Rising upward with no breaks, it had a million faces, as if the elements had carved a mural of all mankind. I crossed a ridge into the Moose Creek Basin, a wide bowl a couple miles across, blocked at one end by the Wall. There were many little ponds and streams lacing the tundra here, and as I made camp I spotted a coyote as well as many ground squirrels. The sky had cleared to a jewel of a day, and I spent the rest of the remaining hours of light exploring the area.

In the first light of the new day I was on my way along the base of the Wall. Snow carpeted the land, and I found the going easy over the frozen snow. For several miles, I walked over the snow, enjoying the wide open vistas, and once spotting two bull elk. I climbed Larch Hill at the northern end of the Chinese Wall and got a splendid look back at the way I'd come. Far to the north I got my first glimpse of the mountains in Glacier National Park. They appeared as

blue ramparts above the closer peaks, and seemed to say "come on!".

The snow was getting mushier under the blast of the summer sun, and descending to My Lake, I often found myself slipping down the mountain twenty feet at a step. I lost the trail a number of times, but finally reached wooded, Spotted Bear Pass and descended along the Spotted Bear River.

In the first mile of the new day I saw more grizzly tracks, two deer, and a bobcat. The river led me north until I turned up the trail to Switchback Pass. It was an appropriate name. The trail I was on wound back and forth ever higher, and eventually was lost in snow. When I left the trees behind, the pass was easy to find and offered many extensive views of the surrounding country.

I ran into a bit of a problem here. In the snow I couldn't see the trail, and without a topo of the area, I wasn't sure of where the trail went. I descended very steeply into a high basin that was totally cut off from Basin Creek below by high cliffs. Above it, more cliffs blocked escape. I had slid down a snowfield into the basin that for all purposes appeared to have no way out except back up the wall of ice. I decided not to worry about it, leaving it until morning, and wandered along an ice-covered stream that broke through to the light every several yards. The stream rolled off the edge of the cliff in two falls, and I camped by the edge of the escarpment and enjoyed the solitude and untouched beauty the place offered.

When the next day came, I managed to find a slight break in the cliff and with a bit of strenuous climbing found my way over the ridge and into the next valley. For the first few miles I bushwhacked along the east side of Clack Creek and later found the trail on the west side. The closer I got to the Flathead River, the more bear tracks I noticed, but also those of two hikers. It was the Fourth of July, and I pushed on, hoping for some company for the first time in several days.



I had forded the River with no problem and was trying to find the trail again when something at my feet set up a tirade of screeching. It startled me beyond words, but even more surprising was the creature that was making all the racket. I looked down at a baby rabbit, no bigger than my hand. I'm not sure if I stepped on it, or just came close, but the little fellow set up a wail of protest I'll never forget. His mother came hopping up, and in a frenzy, jumped about at my feet as I held the little one. I took the tongue-thrashing bravely and put the baby down, before moving on, leaving them in peace.

A few minutes later I bumped into Mike Agnew, and was soon sitting on the porch of the Gooseberry Park Forest Service Cabin, talking to him and his partner, Mathew Reid. The two of them were working on the Border Grizzly Project, and were up in the area studying the bear's habitat. The cabin is one of several in the wilderness areas, <sup>950,000</sup> acres used by the Forest Service and special study groups of this kind. I spent the night with the guys and enjoyed a Fourth of July feast of chicken and dumplings and cake. I learned a lot from the two, and was impressed by their knowledge and plans. Mat wanted to study the arctic wolf, while Mike thought sailing around the world was more in his line. I didn't doubt that they'd each fulfill their dreams.

I headed down the river the next morning, spotting two white-tails, a coyote, and my first western moose. The cow moose and her calf were below me, lying peacefully in the green grass of the river bottom. They obviously didn't want their picture taken. At first sight of me they took off. I spotted them again later, but never did get close enough for a shot.

I camped at pristine Beaver Lake that night, tucked up against the Great Divide, and the next morning left the Bob Marshall Wilderness. I was still in the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and it was still wild as could be, but the

classification was different. I followed the tumbling waters of Badger Creek for miles, and at one point stopped to wash my clothes. This might not seem like such a big deal until I add the fact that I was in them at the time! During one of the many crossings of the creek, I tried jumping across from one rock to another. The gap was too far and I didn't quite make it. It wasn't a life or death situation, but I did get bruised up a bit. The strange thing is, that a short time later I crossed it again, and fell again! I've often said that if anything ever happens to me during my walks, it won't be from outlaws or animals; it will come from my own clumsiness.

But I was still in one piece, and after I crossed the main branch of the creek I found the country more open, with evidence of grazing. The main chain of the mountains was going northwest while I was hiking due north. The farther I went, the more prairie-like the land became.

The next day I hiked up through Whiterock Pass, and all the land before me to the west spread out in its tawny beauty. The prairie was with me again. I was still in the mountains, but they were bald and grassy. I hiked up a branch of the Little Badger Creek and then down Mettler Coulee to the South Fork of the Two Medicine River where I camped.

I was only eight miles from my next mail stop, East Glacier Park, and when I got ready to leave my camp the next morning, I felt a strong desire not to go. But my sister, Lisa, would be meeting me, and I headed out. As I came upon a coyote getting a drink from a brook, he took off across the meadow. I surprised him with a couple of my own coyote imitations and he stopped and turned around. He started up again, and I gave him a couple more. He didn't stop this time, but merely looked about as if to say, "is he for real?"

About a mile from town I hit Route 2, and just before I got to the first buildings, a black bear ran across the busy road not fifty yards before me! It seemed ironic that I should walk through such wild country without a sighting and

find one digging around the garbage of civilization.

I promptly hit the post office for my mail, and postmistress Betsy Jennings, had received a letter from Bud Cook in Lincoln to keep out an eye for me. It was nice knowing that if I hadn't shown up, someone would have missed me. I got a letter from home with news that Lisa would be coming out in a few days with my father. They were taking a plane, then a bus. Dad would stay in the resort town for a couple weeks while Lisa hiked through the park with me. I anxiously awaited their arrival.

During my stay in East Glacier, I did a lot of hitchhiking. One day I thumbed over to West Glacier and Lake McDonald, and browsed through the park library. Another day I got a ride into the town of Browning, east of the mountains, where I went through the Museum of the Plains Indians and attended some of the events of the 27th annual American Indian Days. The contrast in the two opposite sides of the Divide was great. On the west it was very wet and green, while in the east, the dry prairie lent itself more to brown.

I met several very interesting people. King Kuka, a member of the Blackfoot Tribe and his wife, Marietta, ran an art and gift store featuring some of his own creations. They made me welcome, and one night took me out to Two Medicine Lake for a cookout with King's parents. Later, while my sister and I were hiking, they went out of their way to make my father, whose health made such a trip into the mountains impossible, feel at home. One day they even took him for the Grand Tour all around and through the park on the scenic drive. Add these folks to the list of unforgettable American heroes!

My stay in the town was an interesting one, but to be at the foot of the soaring peaks of Glacier Park and not be able to hike up into them, that was frustration at its most intense. I waited anxiously for Dad and Lisa's arrival, and in the meantime over the next four days, managed to eat (all on my own) four gallons of ice-cream!

At last they got to town, and the next day, Dad walked us to the trail head, and we headed up into Glacier National Park. Lisa was 13 (almost 14) at the time, and it was her first experience with a backpack, but for the most part she did real well. Oh, there were times when she complained and we had our conflicts, but I was glad to have her share the spectacular beauty of the area, and freedom of the trail.

After camping by 41 Mile Creek we made our way up the mountain to Scenic Point. The site covered the best of two worlds. To the east, the prairie stretched like a rumpled tablecloth, and Browning was clearly visible 15 miles away. Turning to the west and north, the sharp, glaciated peaks of the park loomed in all their glory. Rising Wolf Mountain stood across the valley like a sentinel, and everywhere the rocky slopes dropped into sharp cliffs and canyons. It was a magic view, and after what was a hard climb for Lisa, it was the reward for her effort.

For a couple miles we walked above treeline through pockets of bright alpine flowers and constant views. The day was clear, but the wind was fierce. Walking was relatively easy now that we had gained our elevation, and gradually the mountains of the Continental Divide came into view, forming the backdrop for Two Medicine Lake. The Divide is made up of many different mountain ranges and we were now in the Lewis Range. I longed to get up to the summit of the Divide once again, but it was not to be.

We descended past Appistoki Falls and reached the road and ranger station at Two Medicine Lake. Here I tried to obtain a backpacking permit but the rather sour ranger told us quite rudely that we couldn't go, due to avalanches. I had tried to obtain a permit ahead of time, one which would give me the leeway of stopping when and where I wanted, but the Park people at headquarters were of no help. It left me with a rather bad opinion of the park's attitude, which you will see later turned to downright anger.

The ranger was unwilling to give us any advice, or alternatives, but told us we could get a permit at Cut Bank Creek and go from there. But the only way to get to Cut Bank was a four mile walk down the road to the boundary (there is no camping in the park unless it's in a campground or one of the designated sites) and then up the boundary trail to the Cut Bank station. We set out with Lisa already dead tired and me boiling with frustration at having to walk a road while the trails went unused. (I was to meet people in a couple days who came over the trail we had wanted to take soon after we were told it was closed. I guess we caught the ranger at a bad time of the day!) We came to Trick Falls, where many tourists were parked, and ran into Dad on a tour of the area. Here, I managed to get Lisa a ride with a couple of folks from Utah, out to the boundary. She waited for me there, and I zipped off the rest of the miles in short order.

After a restful night on Lower Two Medicine Lake, just out of the park, we set off up the overgrown and rugged Boundary Trail. It wasn't the best introduction to hiking I could offer my little sister, but it surely was adventurous. It really wasn't much of a trail at all, rather just a cut through the trees and mostly overgrown. It was straight, and went up and down anything in its path, in that country some pretty steep pitches.

Twice, showers overtook us, and we pulled out the tent fly and dropped it over us until it had passed. Then the sun would come out and set the morning steaming. We forded the rushing white water of Lake Creek, and came out on the open slopes of Mad Wolf Mountain. Here the views were endless and we continued on animal trails through the grassy fields until coming out on the Cut Bank Ridge. Bad Marriage Mountain appeared rugged and bronze in the late afternoon sun west of us. Amphitheater Mountain stabbed the skies, while across the valley, Kupunkamint Mountain puzzled our tongues. Six horses roamed the meadow near us and took off at our approach, but later came out above us to question our presence.

Far below us was the North Fork of Cut Bank Creek, and we could make out the ranger station in a small clearing. We bushwhacked down the slope, and the closer we got to the creek, the thicker the mosquitos grew. Never have I experienced such masses of the pests. I found myself spitting them out of my mouth with each breath, and one swipe on my bare leg would net fifty casualties for their side. Lisa was a trooper, but it was too much for her and she nearly went crazy as she tried in vain to drive the cloud of parasites away.

We reached the creek and forded it, almost losing Lisa to the strong flow at that point, and eventually reached the ranger station. It was closed! For the next two nights we stayed in the campground and I tried to get my ever elusive permit. The station was empty all this time, but I sent a note out with a camper to ask a ranger to come over to issue us a permit. Eventually a ranger showed, but he was of no help whatsoever and didn't have any permits. You can imagine my frustration. The weather was excellent, the scenery like a magnet pulling me. But I wanted to do things by the rules. After another day of getting nowhere and growing more perturbed with the system, I thumbed my nose and we headed into the back country,

We hiked the six beautiful miles into Medicine Grizzly Lake, and made camp in the shadow of the Divide. It rose out of the azure waters nearly two thousand feet and was laced with waterfalls which tumbled down the face of the rock and into the lake. It was a magical place, and as we prepared our dinner we were visited by one of the residents, a marmot. Marmots are animals of the high country, and they have the tendency to chew on just about anything. This guy was amazingly bold, and kept trying to get at our packs. We took to throwing stones at him, but still he kept coming. Lisa took up her walking stick and for half an hour marched back and forth around the camp on "marmot patrol" (sounds like a TV series, doesn't it?), keeping the creature away until he gave up and disappeared.

The next day we climbed the trail to Triple Divide Pass, a point of land dividing three water tables. Water could go to the Pacific, the Gulf, or to Hudson's Bay. The views seemed to wipe away any trouble I felt in my mind over the permit thing, and we descended to Red Eagle Lake, passing many waterfalls and fording another creek.

Lisa's longest day was a seventeen miler we pulled from Red Eagle Lake over to Saint Mary Lake, and then up past Virginia Falls and part way up to Piegan Pass. The walking was fairly easy, and the sights inspiring. Glacier Park is a land of waterfalls, and everywhere we turned, the sight of falling water was sure to greet us. We passed many the next day on the north end of Saint Mary Lake, and both of us were shooting film like crazy.

It was while I was changing film that Lisa got ahead of me as we hiked up Piegan Pass one morning. It was a foggy morning, and I had shot my last picture of Mount Jackson through the clouds. We were in prime grizzly country, but I wasn't overly concerned about the fact, and it was far from my mind as Lisa hiked ahead and passed out of sight. I had just started up again, when I heard a quavering yell, "Jim!"

I froze and chills swept through me as I yelled back, "What?" Lisa's voice came again, but the only word I caught was "bears!" I was running up the trail. Was she being attacked? Was it a grizzly? My God, don't let it happen!

I hadn't gone very far when she came into sight, running down the trail. She wore a fearful, yet excited expression, and the story spilled out. I had been kidding her the past few days about not watching where she was going. She had the habit of walking with her eyes on her feet. This is good in some terrain, but not in bear country. She'd walked along the trail, and nearly bumped into two black bears. They had taken off in one direction and she'd gone the other.

Her excitement bubbled over. She'd actually seen wild bears! It was quite an experience for a young teen-age girl, and though I've often kidded her about trying to pet the bears, I'm sure she recalls the thrill of sighting wild creatures in their own environment. I did notice she paid more attention to the trail after that!

We saw one of the bears as we continued up the trail, but were soon in a thick fog as we reached the Pass. We crossed several steep snow fields that day, and with Lisa, I took extra care, but we had no problems. As we descended, the skies gradually cleared, and we found ourselves dwarfed by the jagged peaks of the Divide. More waterfalls, and several miles later, we arrived at Swiftcurrent Campground.

We spent two nights at this developed area of the park, and during our stay took a day hike up to Grinnel Glacier with Gary Sergio of Sydney, N.Y. It proved to be a highlight of the trek for that section, as we hiked without the packs, and nearly flew along. The trail was perfect, easy going, with the path cut right into the side of the mountain. In one spot a waterfall sprayed right over our path, adding a bit of relief to the hot day. As we reached the snowfields at the head of the valley and looked back down, we could see the string of turquoise lakes dotting the green valley. All around us the peaks rose sharply and the Divide's jagged Garden Wall towered above the ice of the basin we were in. It was a day well spent, and one we both recall with a special fondness. But again, I think our entire time in the park was something special. I think we became a lot closer because of it.

Continuing north, this time with a permit, we passed through one of the most amazing bits of trail construction I've ever seen. The Ptarmigan Wall rises like a razor, notched and nicked from repeated knockings, at the head of Ptarmigan Creek. In the 1930's the Civilian Conservation Corps cleared and constructed most of today's trails in the park. When they got to the Ptarmigan Wall they decided to tunnel through. So today a hiker will walk past Ptarmigan Lake, and wind up a couple



switchbacks almost to the top of the wall, and there he will enter a tunnel 40 yards long. Emerging on the opposite side of the ridge, the Belly River Valley sweeps before him surrounded by stunning ranges of mountains.

I reached the tunnel long before Lisa had even passed the lake, and went through the heavy steel doors to the opposite side. The doors are closed during the winter to keep out the snow. It would never melt if the ice were allowed to pack itself into the mountain. I couldn't believe it, and walked back and forth from one side to the other, shaking my head in amazement. One of the wonders of the hiking world! Lisa was a tiny speck on the snowfields around the lake, and several day hikers swarmed over the mountain. I decided to help Lisa out and descended the trail, got her pack, and headed up again. The sights alone provided me with the extra energy, and I zipped by the hikers I'd passed on my way down!

Much later, as we began our long descent to Elizabeth Lake, the wind came roaring like a banshee. I was buffeted about, and poor Lisa was blown right over on more than one occasion. We eventually made it to the lake and camped, continuing on the next day to Glens Lake. These days were perfect blue-sky days, and the day we hiked to Stoney Indian Pass couldn't have been any better. The many waterfalls, the little lakes, the extensive views all made it a very special time. When on the last day of Lisa's hike with me, we awoke to a rainy day, we couldn't complain. We'd had much more than our fair share of clear days, and in the mountains, a man counts those like gems.

We hiked through Waterton Valley in a drizzle and met Richard Lehrer, a dentist from New York City. With Richard, we hiked to the southern end of Waterton Lake and caught a ferry up the lake to Waterton, Alberta. We were required by law to report to the Mounties, so we walked over. My mistake!

Lisa, who I was planning on sending back to East Glacier from here by bus, didn't have any identification. We were detained for some time until, with more than a few tears, she convinced them she wasn't a runaway and only wanted to stay a couple nights in Canada. We spent nearly five hours getting things straightened out and by the time we emerged from the station all the rooms in town were taken. With Richard and another weary traveler, we camped in a picnic pavillion for the night.

Two mornings later, after a nice stay in the tourist town and a night in a fine hotel, I bid farewell to Lisa and Richard as they took the bus back to East Glacier. I was sorry to see her go; I enjoyed the company. I felt that I had given her something she would never forget, the Mountains. What I would have given to have had experienced what she did in those two weeks back when I was thirteen! Lisa had done things many people will never experience. She'd forded rushing mountain streams, crossed treacherous snowfields, dozed in the sun on a bed of alpine flowers, tried to pet a bear (just kidding, Lisa), and felt the wind of freedom blowing through the monoliths of earth we call mountains. What better gift could I have given her?

I took the ferry back across the lake. It was a clear, windy day, and the mountains seemed to stand out sharper against the sky in the cool morning. As we moved slowly south, I noticed the boundary cut between the two countries, a wide swath cut in the trees, and straight as an arrow. It seemed so foolish. I guess I'm an anarchist at heart, but why does a person have to "belong" to a country?

In a way it reminds me of little children playing in the sand. One marks off a line and says "you can't come over here. Pass it, and I'll bash your head in!" How long can we bash heads? Wouldn't it be nice if we could be like the deer and roam where we please on this earth. He goes where he pleases and when he pleases. No governments tell him what to do. He answers to himself and his family. Does anything else really matter? Forgive me if I get carried away. I assure you these

were my only political thoughts.

I hiked west from Goat Haunt, seeing a few deer before rounding a bend and finding two men on their hands and knees in the middle of the trail. They were obviously quite interested in something, and as I watched in growing interest, they began tearing up pieces of earth and grass, and poking inquisitively among the leaves and dirt. My curiosity was at a peak by the time I drew up behind them, and I stood in silence while they scoured the path. At last the older one turned around and explained it all in three words: "lost contact lens!"

I don't think they did find it. I hiked on, passing Lake Janet, and at Francis Lake came upon two does lying on the shore in the sun. They looked like a couple bathing beauties and even stuck up their noses at me when I whistled. The next day I continued over Brown Pass and up to Hole-in-the-Wall, a giant cirque set high underneath the Great Divide. I made camp and then spent the rest of the day hiking up to Boulder Pass.

I hiked part way up to the pass with two fellows from Winnipeg, but the snow turned them back. I reached the snow covered pass and continued up the sloping side of Boulder Peak. Once on top, I had reached the peak of what was to be 18 days in the park. The views were enough to bring tears of joy to my eyes, and a shout of thanks to the master creator of it all.

The wind barely stirred, and the sun felt warm and good. I sat on a rocky pinnacle and looked about. In every direction there was nothing man made to mar the view. It was totally pure, totally clean, and it seemed to be all mine. That feeling of misersness came over me again, and I wanted to stay there with my treasure forever. I knew that it would be many days before I saw the likes of this kind of country again, but after an hour I headed back down, taking a short cut by sliding down a steep snowfield. It got me down in an exciting fashion, but also burned my fanny raw on the ice!

The next morning I left Hole-in-the-Wall and returned to Brown Pass. I was standing on the Great Divide again. During the past five or six weeks I'd walked its ridges, traversed its passes, waded its icy runoff, and soaked in its scenic secrets. It was always with me, even when I was several miles away. Now I was leaving. Another leg of the journey would soon begin. I knew I'd be back. Like all the friends I'd made along the way, I'd gained something from this one, and I'd return someday to test myself with it again. I sat there for some time looking both east and west, and then started my long descent to Bowman Lake and eventually the park boundary.