

## The Last of Montana

Do you ever have those days when you wake up and you feel like you can do just about anything? Like superman himself, you bound about with all the energy of a child, and nothing seems to dampen it? The morning after leaving Glacier Park, I awoke next to Red Meadow Creek and was amazed at how energetic I felt. Perhaps there was something in that tomatoe-soup bread Evelyn and George Arneson fed me for lunch the day before. They'd stopped their camper along side the road north of Polebridge, and we'd had a nice visit.

Or perhaps it was just the clear morning air that mixed in my blood and made me want to bounce along. Whatever, I was in high spirits and I set out through the Flathead National Forest on some of the deserted logging roads.

The names of the region intrigued me. Indian words like Akinkoka Peak, Ninko Creek, Kootah Creek, and Yokinikak and Tuchuck Creeks were much more romantic sounding than Center Mountain and Moose Creek. I passed through many logged over areas, and in the distance the peaks of Glacier rose like a steel blue barrier behind me. I turned up Ninko Creek and literally fought my way through a very dense stretch of overgrown trail. It eventually thinned out, and I took to deer trails up to the top of an open ridge. The ridge was covered with many large, twisted dead trees. Like a graveyard, it was silent and eerie. I walked through the dead forest, following the ridge, and then lowered myself carefully down the slope into the Kootah Creek valley. The trail I picked up here was easy to follow, and I hiked down to a silent campground on Yakinikak Creek. As I bent down over the creek to get a drink, I noticed a foreign color in the clear water. It was a bottle of beer! Someone had put it in and forgotten it. I didn't let it go to waste. I mean, there is a lot of protein in beer, isn't there?

Summer always comes late to the high country, but it took until August 1st before the fact hit me over the head. Actually it was strawberries again. (Remember back in New Hampshire the year before?) I was walking up the faded trail along Tuchuck Creek and came upon an extensive patch of the berries. I couldn't resist lowering my pack and then myself to gorge myself on their sweet taste.

It's funny how sights, smells, and tastes will trigger memories and thoughts. Upon eating my first handful I was immediately transported back in time to summers in the city, gathering the strawberries in the local vacant lot. I could feel the heat and sweat, hear the shouts of the other kids, smell the not-so-pleasant odor of a city summer, and could finally acknowledge summer.

Now I know it was a little late. Most folks would think the season was half over by then, and it is. But being outside day after day, the seasons seem to blend into each other much more. Spring lingers in the high mountains, and even summer days seem like spring days up in the ice fields. Though I had an occasional hot one, I didn't recognize them as summer days, just odd-ball ones that would be gone tomorrow.

All these profound thoughts on a belly of strawberries! I ran into many huckleberries that day too, but nothing quite so mind provoking.

After bushwhacking my way over the main ridge of the Whitefish Range, I made my way to the Weasel Cabin, appropriately on Weasel Creek. Here I found a cozy two story cabin open for anyone's use, and decided to spend the night. I wasn't there too long when two young guys from Eureka, Montana (my next stop) drove up. We spent some time talking and whenever there was a lull in the conversation one of them would say, "All the way from Maine!" and shake his head in amazement. This went on several times, so when they left, I found myself saying, "All the way from Maine!" all night. Only, I could believe it.

Another interesting thing about the cabin was the presence of many couges and scratches in the wood on the exterior, about eight or nine feet up the wall. These were the claw marks of grizzly bears. A grizzly will set out boundaries to keep other bears out. The markers will be a tree, or in this case the cabin, which the bear scratches as high up as he can reach. When a strange bear comes along and sees how high these marks are, he can determine whether or not to stick around; challenge, or move on!

Several miles of road walking brought me to a nice trail leading up into the Galton Range, and I was soon looking out over Wolverine Lakes, three sapphire beauties lying at the foot of Poorman Mountain. Between the bubbling waters of two merging mountain streams stood the Wolverine Lakes Cabin. It was an old cabin of logs and was once used by the fire warden when the lookout on the mountain was used. Now only hikers and hunters use it, and as I read the log, I soon learned that just about everyone carries too much food. Many had left their extra food here in the cupboards, and I was soon fixing myself up some fancy meals with tuna, canned peaches, bread, and fruit cake, not to mention pancakes for breakfast! It gave me a chance to unload several packs of chicken noodle soup which I had learned to loath. (I'm finally getting to where I can eat it again!)

The cabin was a very rustic place, with bunks, woodstove, and the mood only log cabins can give. I noticed more grizzly work on this cabin, and reading through the log, found several references to the bears, one of which had tried to get in the cabin while people were in it! (I wonder what they were having for dinner?) Needless to say, I was a bit over observant each time I went outside.

I went for a dip in one of the icy lakes and spent some time just walking around the base of the mountain. Later that night it began to rain, and I read by candle light with the stoked woodstove radiating a coziness with its warmth, and the rain beating a wild, but soothing melody on the roof.

I was moving early the next day and crossed the ridge into Bluebird Basin. The area was exceedingly quiet, and was a match for anywhere with its pristine beauty. Turning up a faded trail, it led me up to the ridge near Ksanka Peak where I looked down upon the clouds hanging over Tobacco Valley. As I watched, the clouds burned off and the farmlands came into focus dotting the plain before huge Lake Kooconusa.

It was very rocky in the col, and the mountain was strewn with large boulders. As I sat there in the open, bathing in the sights and the sun, a movement caught my eye, and I spotted a weasel among the crevasses. He popped up one minute, only to disappear the next like some genie puffing up in smoke. No wonder the song, "pop goes the weasel!"

Later, I made the steep descent to Indian Creek, and late in the afternoon, walked into Eureka. For the next two days I walked the roads. It was while hiking along Lake Kooconusa that I experienced my only hostile reaction of the entire trip. I was walking facing the traffic, which was mostly logging trucks, and was in the habit of sometimes waving to the bigger trucks. They'd often answer with a blast on their horns. One of the big ones came rolling down the road. It was a dirty cab, rather wide and ugly. The two men inside looked to be the truck's prototype. But I waved anyway and for my friendly effort I was welcomed with a sneer, their upthrust fingers in the international salute of obscenity.

Now, to many folks that wouldn't mean much. They'd shrug it off, and forget about it. But I was so used to people being nice, that the actions shook me. I couldn't understand it. Why did they do that? I shook my head and walked on, and still wonder about it.

A couple days later I was walking the dusty logging roads up Boulder Creek. It was a hot day, and I stopped at each of the feeder streams to drink from their crystal-clear waters. Every once in awhile a big logging truck would zip by, leaving me choking in a cloud of dust. The speed which these guys ran their trucks up the

narrow winding mountain roads amazed me, and I learned to get out of their way as soon as I heard the distant sound of motor.

I eventually turned onto a trail but soon lost it, and bushwhacked my way up Boulder Mountain. There had once been a fire lookout many years ago, but now only the falling walls of a log cabin remained. The views were fine, and still the Glacier Park mountains were visible. Far to the north were the Canadian Rockies, while at my feet were the two Boulder lakes.

Finding the trail I was expecting, I followed its overgrown course into the wooded pass between Boulder and Purcell Summit. I camped by a gentle flowing creek and fixed dinner, and later, because the bugs were so bad, I crawled into the tent. I was looking over my maps when I noticed a strange glow from outside. Stepping out, I was greeted with the entire horizon turned a bright, burning yellow. If it had been on one side of the sky I might have been able to scratch it off as a wierd sunset, but this was all around me. The intenseness of the color was eerie and chills crept o'er my spine. My first thought was a forest fire, but why didn't I smell smoke or hear the crackling of flames?

As I watched, the silent sky suddenly turned color again. In a matter of minutes it was a blood red. My twinge of fear was growing with the deepness of the color. What on earth was going on? And then I heard it. Far in the distance, like some banshee out of Hell, it came screaming up the valley. It was a wind, but from its voice, I knew it carried something more. I raced to secure all the lines on my tent, doublechecking each stake. The red in the sky was rapidly being replaced by black. I don't mean dark, but black, as in death. I shivered and jumped in the tent as some unseen spicket was turned and buckets of water were suddenly dumped.

I've always been a lover of thunder and lightning storms. To be out in my tent during one of the light shows was always an added treat. But as that ominous storm descended upon me, I felt more afraid of it than any one thing in my life. The rain

beat upon my tent like a charging bull, while the lightning seemed to be an electric sheet constantly jumping just outside my door. The thunder crashed like tumbling mountains, and mortal man that I am, I prayed to God to see me through.

After what seemed like hours, I was blessed with sleep, and awoke to the ripple of the creek, the dripping of water off the trees, and the silence of everything else in my world. As light slowly tip-toed into the day, I noticed downed trees, and gave a word of thanks to the One upstairs. I was to learn later, that this one storm was responsible for the loss of more than 11 million board feet of lumber in Montana and Idaho. That's a lot of trees blown down!

The stillness of the morning was surprising after the rather lively night. Every move and sound I made shattered the quiet like a gun. All was wet. Drops clung to each twig and leaf. The pines glittered like tinsel Christmas trees as the sun caught each drop and twinkled a million times over. A mist, clouds slouching through the valley, came and went like some observer recording the aftermath. It was good to be alive.

I was in the Kootenai National Forest, and as I hiked the old pack trails that day, I was constantly coming into areas that had been cut over by big logging operations. It made the trails near impossible to find, so I ended up hiking the ridge to Lost Horse Mountain. The abandoned fire lookout proved to be a cozy shelter, and I decided to spend the night.

Any sunset has an amazing quality to it. The sinking of the sun marks the end of another day, another breath of time, and like a sky of stars, no two are alike. Sometimes you'll get the kind that sink into the distance and there will be a definite moment when the last touch of light vanishes from sight, a definite here-and-gone feeling. But then there are the sunsets like on Lost Horse, when the clouds, massive and fluffy, think themselves masters, and make a game of the evening light. Golden yellow turns to pink and red, and later deeper hues of violet are added. There is a definite lingering here, as if the day had no thought of giving over to night.

The colors hang for hours, and no exact moment can be given to say when the sun actually set.

I spent two nights in the cozy building as rain moved in, and then dropped down into the Yaak Valley on trails which obviously no man had used in years. I spotted several deer and two coyotes in a span of two miles and noticed lots of bear sign. Everywhere the evidence of logging was clear. Old skid trails laced the mountain, and huge piles of decaying slash dotted the clearings.

I don't know why, but for some reason I was really looking forward to reaching the little town of Yaak. The name, an Indian word for "arrow", had a mystic appeal to me, and it was a minor goal to reach it and see what it looked like. I always had a preconceived idea of what a town was going to look like, and it was sometimes fun to see how far off my images were. I had pictured Yaak as a neat little town with log cabins and a few trussed up tourist shops. I was far off course.

Crossing the bridge over the Yaak river, I was greeted with the sight of dilapidated buildings, many still lived in, with dirty children running about in profuse numbers. Rusted trailers dotted the hill. One wreck of a building had a sign which read, "The Dirty Shame." And it was. It was the local saloon, and I could see a fat lady sitting on a groaning bar stool. She looked like she ate nails for breakfast, real tough. As much as I would have enjoyed a cold rootbeer, I passed by. Yaak was the pits.

I passed the 4,000 mile mark on my walk that day, and the next day, near Canuck Peak, I took a step and found myself out of Montana. It was quite a moment. It was August 10th, and I'd been in the state more than three months and walked over a thousand miles within its spectacular bounds. I had grown especially fond of its many faces, but now it was time for another side of the West. Idaho waited.

Patching Holes in My Soles  
(Idaho and Washington)

The word "Idaho" has always held a certain appeal to me. The syllables roll easily out of the mouth and fall on the ears with a sound of music. I found two meanings for the Indian word, Idaho: "gem of the mountains" and "sunrise". Both could mean the same thing when you think about it, and it's fitting that such a musical word should represent something so beautiful.

On a map Idaho looks like a big rectangle with the right hand corner ripped off. The edge that is left is like a pan handle reaching north to nudge against the Canadian border, snuggled in between Washington and Montana. The state is only 45 miles wide at this northern tip, though in hiking it, I was to travel nearly double that distance, taking about nine days. The Idaho I wanted to see was there but through problems of my own, I kept mostly to the Forest Service roads and didn't see much of the higher, wilder country I'd planned.

It was my boots! My Red Wing Irish Setters, which I dearly cherished for their comfort, had been through too many rivers and sun baked days without being oiled or greased. (Just like a car, it's important to keep the foot gear well oiled, especially when you're getting them wet a lot.) They had become constantly worse over the past couple weeks, with the uppers leaving the soles and developing large splits in the leather, threatening to spill my feet. Not only were they getting quite uncomfortable, but I was afraid I'd get up somewhere and have them fall away completely.

Through the efforts of Cary Zook, the postmistress of Cohagen who had written a few letters to the Red Wing Company on my behalf, I learned the Red Wing company was going to give me another pair. But through a series of mis-directed moves, I

never did get them, until after the hike was complete. In the meantime I was expecting them at each town along the way. It wasn't until half way across Washington that I sent for an old pair of boots I had at home to wear the last couple hundred miles of the walk.

It was a frustrating time, especially when I walked into Bonner's Ferry, Idaho and found no boots waiting for me at the P.O. A call to the Red Wing company assured me they were on the way to one of my stops (which one they couldn't recall) so I spent two nights waiting, but to no avail. I left town, heading up Myrtle Creek and camping on Mack Creek for a couple days as it rained and rained. It did nothing to improve my spirits, and over the next two weeks it rained nearly every day. There was no sense taking the high route now (over the Selkirk Crest) even if my boots had been up for it.

But though the weather and the boots both put a damper on things, there were still moments of magic each day that made things worthwhile. If the day ever came when there were no such moments, that is the day I would have given up. My strength, like most living things, came mostly from the sun, but through the cloudy times I took solace in the many other kinds of beauty in the world about me.

The wet day I crossed the Selkirk Crest and dropped to Two Mouth Lakes, I was walking in clouds most of the day. But I tried to forget the wet boots and the slippery ground, and focus on the bright greens, the chilling forests peeking through the mist, and later, along Two Mouth Creek, the large cedars and the cascading creek.

Priest Lake, both Upper and Lower, blocked my path the next day, and I spent two days skirting their eastern shore going north. Upper Priest Lake was wilder and the trail around it was a beauty, even in the occasional showers. During one such blast of rain, I took shelter in the roots of a huge cedar tree. I stayed dry while the rain fell, but afterwards, walking through the dripping forest, got soaked. You just can't win!

Crossing Huges Fork, and walking the forest service road along Gold Creek the next misty morning, I came upon a weathered sign, "Entering Wash.". I stopped and looked at it a long time, and then stepped over the invisible line into the new state. It was hard to believe that I had finally reached my last state. From Maine to this distant sign was so very far. It seemed unreal that they should be linked by the common bond of statehood. I took a picture of myself by the sign, and gradually accepted the idea that I had indeed arrived. Now it was time to celebrate.

I'm a great one for celebrating. If I can find a reason to indulge in a feast or a festive mood, I won't let it pass. Reaching the far-off land of Washington was certainly cause for celebration, but my food was short and I lacked the proper feast materials. However, when I reached the Stagger Inn Campground, I made myself a cheese sandwich, a batch of instant pudding, and topped it all off with an ice cold lemon-lime soda found in the brook. Such was my celebration.

The campground was the site of the Theodore Roosevelt Grove of Ancient Cedars, huge trees some 800 to a thousand years old. It was unique camping in the shadows of these giants, like sleeping in a living museum. The silence was that of an ancient hall, and it even had the carpet of soft humus to muffle my noisy footfalls. I slept good that night, feeling comfortable in the hands of these friendly giants.

Three days later I was approaching another mail stop, Metaline Falls, Washington, and as the town came into sight I had another illusion shattered. I'd pictured the sweet sounding place as a quiet river town, tucked in the mountainous forest. What greeted me was a clanking, whining cement factory that loomed over the entire town. The setting was nice enough, but marred somehow by the noise and dust of the factory's conglomeration.

My first stop was the P.O. where I suffered the disappointment of no boots. It seemed to set the whole mood of my stay in the town. I ended up staying four days waiting for the lost boots as rain swept the area in endless waves. It was a lonely time; the landlady, Mrs. Simpson, was the only person I got to know. She was a gruff, independent old woman, but possessed a heart of gold. But I wanted desperately to talk with someone.

When I first got to town I hadn't spoken to anyone in several days. After a short stop in the post office, I dropped in at the drug store to get a pen. (I used those Bic medium-points, and it had to be that or nothing.) I walked up to the counter and asked, "Do you have any Bic pens?"

"What?", she replied.

"Bic pens?", I answered.

She leaned forward with a puzzled look on her face. "What?"

"Do you have any Bic ink pens?" I thought that's what I was saying.

"I'm sorry, I can't understand." She leaned closer.

I realized then, that what I said and what came out were two different things.

A bit embarrassed, I slowly and carefully pronounced each word. Just as I finished the troubled sentence, I noticed the things on the counter before me. Mr. Cool strikes again!

My stars had stopped shining for a time, and when I called home during my stay in town, I learned I wasn't the only one taking a setback. A member of the family, my great aunt had died, while both Mom and Dad had been in the hospital at the same time for various ailments. To top it all off, they had returned home to find their home burglarized. And I thought I had troubles! My depression persisted though, and I walked around the lonely streets of the little town more dejected than ever.

One evening, just before dark, I walked over to the bridge sweeping over the Pend Oreille River. Downstream, the water was churned by rapids, but south of the

bridge the river was like a mirror. I gazed up the glassy ribbon, watching the clouds drop over the forested hills, and after a time I noticed movement along the east side. A beaver swam gracefully upstream. It stopped by some driftwood near the bank, but unsatisfied with such dinner fare, quickly moved on. From as high as I was, the river's water was clear and deep blue. The bottom extended out from the shore for a dozen feet before dropping into the darkness of the channel. I noticed a distinct path or furrow in the bottom of the shallows which the beaver had made on its nightly forages. I'd seen deer trails, horse and cattle trails, and now I was looking down on a beaver trail!

My beaver eventually left the east side and swam lazily across the river, letting the current drift him downstream and closer to me. I followed him across atop the bridge. Here I noticed another beaver. A curious thing took place. My beaver (the kid from the East Side) began browsing along the west side above the other. Beaver II was seemingly unaware of him until about 25 yards away, he suddenly veered sharply off into the channel, and doing a wide loop, came silently up behind my beaver, Beaver I. Beaver I found something that interested him on the bank and climbed clumsily out of the water. Like an old man, bent and slow, he waddled a couple feet inland and back, before slipping once more into the water.

By this time Beaver II had caught up. The result was a big splash. Both disappeared in the resulting flurry of water. I scanned the smooth river for a minute or more before noticing them both back on their own sides of the river again.

Now I don't know for sure if they had switched places. All those beavers look alike! But later, the one from the west side came over to "our" side and followed quietly behind the other up the river and out of sight. That's how I left them, and I always think of Metaine Falls as Beaver Town. They were the bright spot in an otherwise trying time.

The weather took a turn for the better a day after I set out again. I walked the service roads of the Colville National Forest and welcomed the sun back to the world. Three days later I found myself walking along the mainstream of the Pacific Northwest, The Columbia River. It was a wide, powerful river, with white flurries of rapids breaking the deep blue in places. I hiked the road along its east bank, singing a Woody Guthrie song:

"Roll on Columbia, roll on.

Roll on Columbia, roll on.

Your power is turning the darkness to dawn,

So roll on Columbia, roll on."

I camped that night in a wooded spot where Scriver Creek joins the Father river, and found the water amazingly quiet in that spot. The smooth, gentleness was only a ruse, though. Under the placid surface was the force that could have (and undoubtably had) moved mountains.

I passed through Newport the next day and hiked the dirt track up Sheep Creek to Elbow Lake. From there it was down to the Kettle River and up Little Boulder Creek. The ranchers in the west often graze their cattle on the National Forest lands, letting them roam and forage all summer, and then rounding them up in the Fall. Consequently I would often be up in the hills, miles from the nearest ranch and be startled by the deep lowing of a cow, or scared half to death by walking into one in the brush!

One morning as I cleaned my cookpot, I looked down the little hill I was camped on, to find a dozen cows chewing lazily not thirty feet away. Standing on the edge of the slope, I beat my spoon around in the pot. "May I have your attention please?" They all looked toward the stranger on the hill with what I termed to be a bored, here-we-go-again look.

"Now, I suppose you're all wondering why I gathered you here for this meeting." They shifted to a more curious, attentive position. "Well," I said, "It has come to my attention that you gals just aren't getting enough exercise. I want to see some action around here! You hear me?" They looked at me with baleful eyes. "And another thing, while I'm at it. No more gossiping during the morning chew! We'll have no more of that. Carry on!"

As I walked away, I thought I heard a murmur of protest. I swung around to see them playing innocent. They watched in amazement as I marched away.

During the next few days I made my way west on the roads, sometimes jeep trails, and sometimes paved, but nearly always beautiful. There were many farms and ranches scattered about the little mountains, and though I didn't meet any of the local folks, I did see people every day. I went over Marble Mountain, down Deer Creek to Curlew, and then up through Lundimo Meadows to Empire Lakes.

One morning west of Ward Lake, I rounded a hill and saw a machine that I'd heard about, but never seen. It looked like a bulldozer, but instead of the plow it had what looked like a huge pair of scizzors. I watched as the fellow running it, drove up to a tree. Like wire-cutters through wire, the tree was off, the trunk snapped in two! It was amazing, and it must have shown on my face. The operator stopped his machine and yelled, "A fellow walkin' 'round the woods is liable to see most anything!" I hastily agreed.

From the high pass between Bodie and Hardscrabble Mountains, I got my first look at the distant Cascade Range. With the bottoms of my boots secured to the uppers with fishing line, I wondered how it would be crossing the snow-covered mountains. Hopefully my boots would be at Tonasket, my next stop before entering the high country.

Closer to where I stood was eastern Washington's highest mountain, Mount Bonaparte. It rose 7,258 feet, looming out of the forested hills twenty miles away. Three days later, I found myself climbing the trail up to its summit. It

was good to be back on a foot trail again, and I zipped off the miles to the top with no trouble at all.

Finding the trail well maintained, I figured the lookout on top was still being used. Sure enough, as I neared the open summit I saw a flag waving in the breeze and saw a figure moving around the big windowed lookout. I climbed up the steps and was surprised to meet a young lady, Molly Bolin, serving as the year's fire-watcher. I stayed and talked a long time, enjoying the company of a female, and asking as many questions about her life on the isolated mountain as she did about my long walk. I envied the life of the firewatcher. For me it would be the ideal job, sitting on the top of a mountain and watching the countryside. And getting paid for it, too!

Eventually, I moved down the mountain and camped, and the next day hiked a fine trail along the wooded Fourth of July Ridge. I walked a road for a couple miles, and then turned down Siwash Creek. I was on private lands, but it was still quite wild and I spent Labor Day camped in a stand of Ponderosa pine next to the babbling stream. Fall had been inching its way into the mornings, leaving frost-covered fields and frozen water jugs, but the afternoons were still summery and clear, and I rested from my labors that day, secure in my solitude, and happy with my life.

I followed Siwash Creek westward the following day, and entered an area of dry, brown fields. Sage and cactus dotted the parched grass for a couple miles until I dropped into the Okanogan River Valley. It was like descending into paradise. The green of miles and miles of apple orchards was splashed up the sides of the yellow hills. The winding river, the source of it all, cut through the very heart of the picture.

It was in Tonasket, down on the river, that I gave up hope of getting my new boots in the mail. Even calls to various post offices I'd passed showed no hint of where they had been sent. I called home and arranged for my old pair to be sent

to my next town, and kicked myself for not having done so earlier. After a night in the town, I headed up the road with fully loaded pack to tackle the Cascades and the Pasayten Wilderness.

For the first two days I walked along the roads up into the mountains. The first night, outside of Loomis, I camped with some migrant apple pickers. James Suneagle and his gal, Rose, were wanderers of another kind. They traveled from one part of the country to another getting work where they could, and living a poor, but happy, full life. James fixed up a meal for me to cook when I got in the high country. In a plastic bag he put brown rice, miso, onion, clove and a pepper, and told me how to cook it just so. I was anxious to try it, but held off for a couple days.

I was hiking the road up Toats Coulee Creek when I met Jim Lofthus of Seattle, walking down after three weeks in the wilderness. He was the first other backpacker I'd seen since leaving Glacier National Park. We sat down and talked a spell, and Jim told me about his rather unique diet while up in the mountains. He didn't carry anything that needed to be cooked, and his staple was good ol' peanut butter -- 30 pounds worth! He also had margarine, dried milk, and crackers for a time, but he got all his nutritional requirements from what he carried and seemed to thrive on it. Of course, I could just picture him when he hit the grocery store in town. I could be sure he wasn't going to buy any peanut butter!

The Pasayten Wilderness lies sprawled along the border, extending for 40 miles east to west, and 20, north to south. Its miles of unbroken wilderness exemplified the North Cascades and was to bring the relief I needed to my sagging spirits. The boots were worse, but I would patch my sole (soul, too) with the views and the highcountry experience. I'd make due.

The morning I hiked up the Deer Creek trail and came to the little wooden sign proclaiming Pasayten Wilderness, was a fine one. I hadn't felt so good and so full of energy in a long time. It's a good thing, too. I was soon burning up and over two ridges, and made the gradual ascent of Windy Peak.

Windy Peak didn't live up to its name that day. Not that I'm complaining. I scrambled up to the very peak of the craggy summit and sat for a long time looking out over the territory. Bonaparte was visible to the east, but my eyes kept gazing westward to the jagged Cascades. Cathedral and Rimmel Peaks invited me to come for a closer look, but when I moved on, it was northeast to camp on the headwaters of the Middle Fork.

I had a fine campsite that night, a clearing surrounded by lofty pines with a murmuring brook rolling through the middle. I soon had a fire going and pulled out the meal James had fixed for me. I followed his instructions, and as I came to the little pepper, I cut off a bit and tossed it in the pot. I looked at it, and I looked at it a second time, then took a big bite. The stream was thirty feet away, and I raced to it! My mouth burned, my eyes watered. Talking about hot stuff! Those things are dangerous!

Horseshoe Basin is a vast, open area with grassy fields dotted with occasional stands of trees. I walked across it one morning, soaking in the clean air and the wide vistas. It was a place where a man could stretch himself and find some elbow room, where he could feel his own smallness, but also the life that pumped through his every vein. The mountains and forests surrounded it, but they didn't loom over it. I was conscious of only the basin itself, and the intense freedom that only unfenced, untrampled areas can give.

From the basin, I picked up the Boundary Trail, the major east-west trail through the area, a mile or two below the border. It was a perfect trail, easy, and for the most part above treeline. The Pasayten is very open country. The

mountains are mostly clear of trees, and many park-like areas dot the valleys. It makes for excellent hiking, and I strolled along the wide path past Teapot Dome, over Scheelite Pass, and camped west of the old Tungsten Mine.

It showered briefly during the cold night, but the morning was clear as could be. I passed through Apex Pass, then Cathedral Pass. I could see for miles. Many small alpine lakes dotted this area, and as the day progressed, several deer hunters too! It was mid-September now, and they allow a hunting season within the wilderness bounds. The hunters ride in on horseback, and bring in many of the conveniences a man wouldn't expect to find way out there.

I stopped to talk to two guys at Spanish Camp who were having a great time just staying in camp boozing it up. They had everything with them but the kitchen sink, and insisted on giving me some of their goods. With my appetite, it was a hard deal to refuse. When I moved on I had beans, hot-dogs, raisins, lunch meat, cheese, and an onion! You can bet that I ate well that night!

I slept in a trail shelter next to the Ashnola River that night, and in the morning, climbed out of the valley into a high, grassy basin on the shoulder of Sheep Mountain. A couple miles later I skirted the side of Quartz Mountain and came out on the western side. The view drew me to a halt. Before me, the Pacific Crest of the Cascades stood jagged and sharp against the horizon. Some were topped with snow, others wore just a collar of white. My mind was a total blank, at least I don't remember thinking any particular thoughts. I sat on the turf of the mountain and just looked. Like a stone warmed in the sun, I warmed to the sight before me.

I stayed too long, playing the part of a rock on the side of Quartz Mountain. By the time I got to the Pasayten River it was getting dark, and I had to make a fire before I could put up the tent. This was very unusual for me. My normal routine was to make camp in mid-afternoon. Those days when I did stay out on the trail longer were usually exceptional ones, and I have to count every day in the Pasayten in that category.

I only hiked eight miles the next day, with a side trip up to the Pasayten Cabin, an old log palace now in ruin. I hiked southwest along the river and ended up at another such cabin at the point where Rock Creek, West Fork and Middle Fork all converged. The cabin wasn't in total ruin, but left a lot to be desired as far as holes in the roof. The mood of the building is what made me stay. There was a sense of history here, a warmth that comes with aging wood. There was a log for hikers, and in it someone mentioned that this was built by one, Henry Tuttle years and years ago. Henry was a trapper, and he'd hauled in the now busted woodstove, and carved himself a home out of the wild land.

It rained that night, and I ended up putting my tent fly over my bunk to keep dry, but I was content. Moby Rat, the resident varmint, kept me company as he scampered about all night, and by morning I was ready to leave. I continued up the West Fork and then up Holman Creek to Holman Pass where I crossed the Pacific Crest Trail. Running from Canada to Mexico along the crest of the Cascades and Sierras, this trail seemed to pull me to it. The urge to get on its gentle path and follow it winding through the mountains was hard to resist. Maybe next time, I thought, and descended into the valley.

Places like Sky Pilot Pass, Deception Pass, and Devils Pass were with me the next day as I hiked deeper into the heart of the Cascades. The terrain was growing sharper and I drew closer to the glaciers of the North Cascades National Park. For two days I went without seeing anyone, until one afternoon in Devils Park, three tired backpackers walked up to the shelter where I was having lunch. They had just hiked up the long trail from Ruby Creek, and the mathematician of the trio informed me the trail had 86 switchbacks! I didn't count them on the long way down, but it seemed more than that. The descent was hard on the old feet, but when I made camp as darkness fell, and stuck my toes in the icy water of the creek, it was an instant cure!

I entered the Ross Lake National Recreation Area the next morning, hiking a short ways on the road before picking up an old unused trail around the southern end of the lake. Coming to the Ross Lake Dam at the south end of the lake, I found the ranger station on two barges floating on the water. Here I met rangers, Lynn and Rick Peterson, and picked up a food package I had sent there from home. Later, I walked over the dam, and hiked the trail to the Greenpoint Campsite.

Early the next morning I was on the trail, and passed nearly a dozen hikers on their way out after a weekend in the park. One of the groups was a young mother with her five or six year old daughter, Tosh. She was a tiny thing with big dark eyes and on her back she carried a little bite-size pack. Her mother proudly informed me that on one day she'd hiked 14 miles! A real, natural born hiker!

As I hiked up the Big Beaver Creek trail into the North Cascades National Park, I found myself in the Washington I'd always pictured. It was a very lush forest, with moss and fungi coating every log. Huge cedars, hundreds of years old, blocked out the sun, and the trail wound through their knobby root systems. I camped at the 39-Mile campsite and was cooking dinner when a helicopter flew over. It came back and landed somewhere nearby and then took off. The forest was so dense I couldn't tell what was going on, but a few hours later, after my fire burned to smoldering coals and darkness crept in, I thought I heard a yell. I listened but heard nothing more until I saw flashlights bobbing up the trail toward me.

"Kind of late for hiking, isn't it?" I offered.

The two lights jerked with a start and immediately flashed in my face. The voices explained that they were trail crew (the parks employ crews of men to maintain the hiking trails. It's hard, but satisfying work.) They asked about a campsite and turned to go, but as an afterthought I asked if they knew anything about the helicopter. The retreating light answered, "That was us. The damn pilot dropped us in the wrong spot and we've been fighting through the brush for the past three hours!" I rolled over and went to sleep, the mystery solved.

Two days later I ran into another crew, and spent some time talking to Bill Turner, one of the park employees whose job was to inspect the work of the contracted crews. I learned that it cost nearly \$5.00 a foot for new trail construction, and that groups that have volunteered time and money to construct the trails themselves were not being encouraged because the government can't afford one person to oversee the work. Now, with all those fat paper-pushers in D.C. it seems like a few more folks in the Park Service wouldn't make that much of a difference. But then, you know government!

Walking through the forests I found the biggest hazard to be from an occasional bombardment of pinecones let loose by some high-flying squirrel. I'm not sure what kind of cones they were, but they had an uncanny resemblance to a hand-grenade, both in size and color (and probably weight). It seemed that the squirrels waited for the unwary hiker to pass under their perch before letting loose with the cones. I had several near misses and could just picture myself lying unconscious on the floor of the forest with a pine cone at my head -- a squirrel marking an X on his stoop high above!

I passed over Whatcom Pass that afternoon, and for two days camped on Indian Creek. On the third day my restlessness moved me up Copper Ridge in a thick fog. Though I would have preferred the views, there was a certain mystic mood in fog walking, and I enjoyed the day. On one rock slide I saw five marmots, and heard many others "whistling" through the mist.

I camped on the shore of Copper Lake, a tiny speck of a pond, half-covered with ice. When I awoke in the morning I found the clouds all in the valley below me. How nice to look down on clouds again, instead of up! It was to be my finest day in the park, as I walked above treeline all along Copper Ridge. I ascended to Copper Mountain where I sat on a big snowfield next to the deserted lookout and looked out at Mount Baker, the extinct volcano. Just as inspiring was Mount Shuksan

right next door. Glacier Peak was visible far to the southeast, while northward, the Canadian peaks offered their snowy summits for view.

I had the ridge to myself that day, and strolled along the easy trail, stopping often, until descending to Hannegan Pass. I met several people heading up, and I wished them good weather and all the glory I'd witnessed.

I hit the road in the morning, walking up the highway to Austin Pass between Baker and Shuksan. Here I met Nancy and Peter, a couple from Vancouver who were on their way to climb Mount Shuksan. I hiked a couple miles with them through some exceedingly beautiful country at the head of Swift Creek, and parted company when my trail kept heading down the stream. My camp that evening came with a view of Mount Baker and the ice-cold running water of Swift Creek.

The trail down Swift Creek was terrible, that is as far as pathway goes. The country itself was pretty, but overgrown and difficult going. As I passed Fourth of July Creek, I couldn't help but think of Joe Morovits, the mountain man who lived in this area back between 1891-1918. He was a hermit, but a very industrious one. Not only did he climb most of the peaks in the area, but he also hauled in mining equipment, piece by piece on his back, and dug a thousand feet of tunnel! Eventually he lost his claim and small ranch through a legal technicality and he disappeared up into the mountains; no one knows where.

I eventually found myself back on the road again, and by the end of the next day I found myself in Concrete, Washington. It sounds like a very cold, hard place, doesn't it? Perhaps it was years ago when the cement companies had their factories there, but today it's a peaceful, neat little town, and I took a quick liking to it. Perhaps the fondest fact about my stay in the town, was the arrival of my old boots in the mail. How good it felt to have soles and support on my feet again!

I took to the roads for nearly a week, and crossed the Skagit River, following it west on the south side. It was a pretty, quiet road, but litter added a touch of grossness to it all. Most of it was beer bottles and cans, but there was also a high percentage of potatoe chip bags, waxpaper, and tinfoil. Matchboxes were plentiful too. At one point I even found a valuable camera lens.

It was the tail end of September by now, but so close to the ocean that things were still warm. The days were rather hazy, and scattered trees showed changes in color. Late in the afternoon, just west of Dry Creek, I was passing an old farmhouse. It was a trim little building and nearly buried under a forest of well tended shrubs and trees. Near the fence by the road, was a big bed of brightly colored flowers. An old woman stood waist deep in their splash of color, looking like Mother Nature herself, and I stopped and looked at her.

"Mighty pretty flowers," I said as she looked up.

"Thankyou," she replied, "Where you been, camping?"

I ended up talking with her for nearly an hour. She and her husband had lived there for more than 25 years, but were moving into town in a few weeks. It was getting to be too much for them to keep up. The flowers were her pride and joy, her very life. She seemed saddened by the thought of leaving, and I wouldn't have doubted that she eventually dried up and shriveled away at not being able to water and care for those beautiful plants.

At last I bid her goodbye. I'd gone but a dozen steps when she added, "It's nice to run into a friend once in awhile. Somebody to talk to." If there hadn't been a fence there I think I would have raced back and given the old woman a hug! Her words haunted me, a universal plea from all old folks.

I kept to the roads, and two days later passed through the big city of Mount Vernon early in the morning. Crossing the Skagit River once again, I entered a sweeping flatland covered with farms. It looked as though every inch of land that didn't have a building on it was plowed up. It was an area of quiet roads, and

I hiked southeast, ending up in LaConner at the end of day.

I had heard of the fine museum in LaConner from Ed Pulice, the Concrete postmaster, so I had to stop and spend a few hours going through the exhibits. I think the thing I enjoyed most was their fine collection of pictures from the 1800's. The ladies running the place were very interested in what I was doing and arranged an interview with Dick Fallis of the Puget Sound Mail. I spent the night with a few guys from New Jersey who had moved out here within the past couple years. Doc, Mike, Frank, and Arty, were backpackers themselves when they weren't up in the woods working on the logging crews. They offered a spot on their floor which I readily accepted.

The next morning I headed out of town across the Rainbow Bridge and spent four days crossing Whidbey Island on some of the back roads. It was pretty country, but quite heavily populated, and when I came to the ferry at Keystone Harbor I was ready for a change of atmosphere. The boat ride across Puget Sound to Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula was a fine one. The sky was clear, the water smooth, and the smell of the sea mingled with each breath. I was close now. The Olympic Mountains were poking out of their own clouds and stood as my last challenge before reaching the ocean itself. The last leg of my long journey had begun.

## The End of the Trail

"I have looked on wonders, and while I live  
I hope I never lose the hunger to behold more."

John Jakes

In The Furies

In Greek Mythology, Mount Olympus was the home of the Gods. Today, its namesake and American counterpart in the heart of the Olympic Mountains gives the same impression. It's a place of greatness, where men have seldom ventured until only recently. This majestic, wild quality radiates outward from the glacier-covered mountain and lends the mood to the entire Olympic Range.

It's a land of great contrasts, and stunning beauty. The peaks jutt out of the ocean to heights of 7,000 feet or more, acting like a giant net catching the moisture laden air off the sea. On one side of the peninsula (for that is what this range is) a lush rain forest gets 140 inches of rainfall a year. Just 40 miles west, on the opposite side of the mountains, lies the driest coastal region north of southern California. The little town of Sequim gets only 12 inches of annual rainfall.

Like the mountains of Montana, the Olympics were a dream calling me to be fulfilled. They had always been a far-off place to day-dream of going to someday. My someday had come around on my calendar. One clear October day I found myself hiking the path up Copper Creek, getting higher and higher above its rambling course. The hillside became more open as I ascended, and with it, the views.

At last I reached Buckhorn Pass. It was like a balloon had burst. The total picture of the eastern Olympics exploded into view. Mount Deception and Mount Mystery looked like prehistoric monoliths across the valley, while Buckhorn Mountain loomed nearby. The peaks surrounding me were very sharp, and often consisted of a series of needles or pinacles. The slopes themselves were very bare and talus-covered, some resembling huge dunes or piles of slag.

For a long time, I sat in the sun on a rocky stub of earth. When I did move on, I hadn't gone far before looking back down the valley, I let out a gasp. Miles away, yet very clear and imposing, stood Mount Baker. As I looked closer, I could make out the Sound and its islands, all looking quite flat under the figure of Baker's lofty rise. Later, I could make out the Coastal Range of British Columbia, its snow-covered peaks marching across the northern horizon.

I continued with excellent vistas of the area until dropping down into the trees again near the Boulder Shelter. Still feeling energetic, I hiked on, crossing into the Olympic National Park and camping at Home Lake. I hadn't seen anyone in the past couple days, and felt that most joyous feeling of being in a treasured palace and having it all to myself.

The morning came cool, but clear, and I fought the wind up to Constance Pass. The mountains stood rocky and pointed, sharp against the morning air. Down below, the Dosewallips River cut deftly through the rugged peaks. I stayed on the pass until I got cold, then started moving up Twin Mountain. Again, a look back brought a most rewarding sight. Miles to the east, Washington's most famous mountain, Mount Rainier, stood like a blue ghost in the distance. It must have been a hundred miles away, but still it threw its beauty to the winds.

When I reached the windswept summit of Twin, I found the remains of a rock wall offering a respite from the gusty blasts. I sat myself down, and enjoyed a longer look at the distant Rainier. Also from this vantage point (if I wasn't sitting behind the wall) I got my first glimpse of Mount Olympus sticking its trio

of peaks through a bank of clouds to the west.

Descending to the Dosewallips River, I suffered a minor setback when I found my pack frame suddenly broke in two! The frame had developed a crack a few days before, and with the rocky motion of the descent, had snapped both main vertical bars. I pulled it off and looked at it a long while. The pack had seen me through 2,000 miles of the Appalachians, and now, nearly 5,000 miles of this cross-country trek. I had taken many spills, always falling on the sturdy frame or my head, the two hardest things I carried, and it had seen me through. Now it had carried its last load. Or had it?

With a little Yankee ingenuity, I hunted out two strong cedar sticks, each about two feet long. After a little lashing and a few knots here and there, I had myself a pack again. It worked fine for the remaining two weeks of the hike.

Once down to the river (it was a long descent), I hiked northwest up its winding course through nice forested country. At the Bear Camp Shelter I decided to spend the night. As darkness came on I sat in the glow of a crackling fire and watched the moon come up over the mountain, full and bright as could be. The only sounds were the pop of the fire, a distant owl, the brook nearby, and occasionally the sound of my flute echoing through the valley.

I don't think I've mentioned it before, but I started my hike with a bamboo flute which a friend in Vermont had given me to carry on the Appalachian Trail. I learned to play it, and toted it along that first long walk, and then again on this longer trip. It was a soothing companion, as all music is, and fit in especially fine in the mountain setting where its notes could drift over the hills and through the canyons.

I remember playing it one day in Vermont during a break along the trail. For several minutes I blew away before resuming the walk. About a mile later I met a

backpacker and we started talking. He finally noticed the flute tucked in the roof of my pack and exclaimed, "So that's what I heard a while ago!"

But instruments are hard to play in the winter, and I eventually gave it to some of my new friends, sending it to the Tompkins in Maine. Richard had shown a liking for it. I missed it, but knew it was getting used. In Concrete my sister, Lisa, had sent me a gift: a new bamboo flute! It was a good friend.

That night at Bear Camp was a very special night. I stayed up and watched the moon. It too, was an old friend. I'd watched it come and go, wax and wane, over the miles and months. Its fullness reflected my being. A certain, new awareness had overtaken me that day. I seemed to see everything, as if I were trying to blaze all the glory of the wilds on my mind before I ended this long trail. A fly buzzing over the path, a mushroom with bites out of it, a leaf with a tint of red, they were all as important as the view of Rainier.

First thing in the morning I went through Dose Meadows. Tumbling cascades caught my attention for a long time before I began the hike through a basin of glowing red and gold heath. The colors caught my attention. This was Fall! Oh, I know these western mountains weren't covered with everywhere-you-turn, what-a-sight color like New England or Ontario, but here was a definite beauty of its own. From Hayden Pass the gray and sandy colored ridges were stroked with greens, the dark evergreens, and the lighter shades of grasses, and here and there were splashes of deep red, the heath and huckleberries. The greens molded to yellows, while the reds faded to bronze. The sky shown blue, capped with white charging clouds. Color, color, color!

At Hayden Pass, Mount Olympus looked much more formidable, and I noticed with much more clarity the contrast between the eastern and western parts of the Peninsula. I could see both, from the pass. Green was the dominant color to the west. Eastward, the browns and tans took over. Again, color was the key to the day.

From the pass, I dropped down into the Elwha River Valley. It was an easy descent through fine evergreens that carpeted the trail with a soft layer of needles. I was zipping right along, and almost to the river, when I saw another black bear. He was about twenty yards away browsing on berries and had no inkling of my presence. I stopped, and looking at the big animal, the sweat started to roll. How would he react to me?

Hitching the pack up higher on my back, and acting like I was unaware of him (but still watching out of the corner of one eye,) I strolled down the trail, breaking into a loud whistle of a nameless tune. As if struck, he immediately looked up from his meal. For a moment he seemed unsure of what was making that foreign noise. As soon as it registered, he charged! Luckily for me, in the opposite direction! So fast was he, that had he wanted to, he could have run up to me, planted a bear kiss on me and taken off before I had a chance to move. And that's pretty fast!

I have mentioned earlier that I didn't carry any rain gear. Upon approaching the Olympic Peninsula, and knowing its reputation for month-long rains, I had purchased a rain suit. However, as it turned out, I never used it. The region, indeed the entire West, was suffering from a very dry season which turned to drought as months rolled on. I say "suffering," but for me it was a gift of God. Not only did I experience exceptionally fine weather, but the projected rains that had worried me, only fell for half a day during the entire two weeks on the Peninsula.

I was camped on the Elwha when the rain came, but by mid-day it had ceased. I packed up and hiked down river. The stands of timber were truly magnificent, and in one area I found extensive blowdowns. The giant douglas firs, six feet in diameter were toppled like matchsticks, lying like some giant had thrown them there. I was amazed at the amount of timber just going to waste. There was enough lumber blown down

to make a whole subdivision of log cabins! But then again, woodpeckers, squirrels and other creatures must have their housing projects too.

At the Elkhorn Guard Station I met a few people, the first in several days, and then continued on to the Marys Falls Shelter for the night. The next day was a long one, a 22-miler down to Lake Mills and up to the Boulder Creek Campground. I did several miles of road walking that day, but only saw a few cars, and had the campground all to myself.

I didn't see a soul all day as I hiked past Boulder Creek Falls up to Appleton Pass and then down to the Soleduck River. But as I reached Heart Lake, at the base of a high, open ridge, I saw two backpackers camped on its shore. I waved and continued up to the crest of the ridge, which was wooded on one side, and set up the tent in a sheltered niche of the mountain. If I took a few steps one way, I could look down on the lake. It did indeed resemble a heart. A few steps the other way brought a perfect view of Mount Olympus, just across the wide Hoh River Valley.

That evening, as I was just finishing supper, one of the hikers from the lake walked up. His name was Jim Reeves, and after a bit of talk I learned that he had just completed a coast to coast trip on a bicycle! Later, we hiked farther up the ridge. As we came out in a high clearing, a large herd of Roosevelt elk stampeded down the slope and out of sight. The sun was setting, shooting rockets of pink light through the high country. Mount Olympus and even the whole range, was bathed in this tinted light. But of much more consequence was the view far to the west, the sight I'd walked a continent for: the ocean! It lay like a pool of whipped color, seen through a break in the mountain's wall. I was coming into the home stretch.

In the morning, Jim and his partner, Ron Knight, hiked up and agreed to meet me at last night's viewpoint. I packed up and rushed to join them. The sight of the

ocean 40 miles away in the light of day was enough to tingle my spine with its glorious presence. We hiked together for a few miles along the open ridge, looking down into the Seven Lakes Basin to the north, and across to Mount Olympus to the south. The glaciers on Olympus took on a surreal look in the sharp morning air. Like melted foam or plastic, they clung tenaciously to the jagged slopes of the God of a mountain. Near Bogachiel Peak we stopped for a long time on the ridge and just enjoyed the sunny day. It must have been 60 or 70 degrees, and hardly a breeze to be felt. The air was so clear we could drink it, and so we sat, soaking in the views. Later we parted, the guys heading down to the Hoh River, and me continuing along the ridge to Deer Lake. I saw another bear that day, and two more hikers, and even a couple marmots.

After a peaceful night at Deer Lake, I hiked along another ridge for awhile before dropping to the Bogachiel River. I was in the rain forest now, and everything was green and coated with moss. Running into four members of a trail crew, I learned I was only the second hiker they'd seen on the trail in two weeks.

I spent the night in the Hyak Shelter, and the next day continued descending the river, exploring the mood of the forest. The word was green. Everywhere, the color leapt at me. Even after several days of no rain, the forest was a damp, dark place. Its lushness was that of a jungle. I would have found it difficult going without a trail. The earth was very spongy and slippery off the trails, and the trees were huge things that seemed more like towers than trees.

The river itself was a beautiful, dark tinted stream that wound its way through the dense jungle of green. Many creeks joined its flow and often cascaded down the steps of mossy rocks. It was paradise.

So dense were the trees and foliage, that I once found myself in the middle of a herd of elk before I realized it. The trees came suddenly to life with the crashing and thrashing of branches. It seemed the entire forest was moving as the

herd melted into the thick growth. I froze, as twenty feet in front of me, a massive bull elk stood profiled on the trail. It was a perfect pose, head erect in a patch of sun filtered through the trees. Of course, my camera was tucked neatly in my pack!

As I lowered the pack and dug for the camera, he jumped into the brush with the others who were moving unseen throughout the forest, but not really going anywhere. Their dolphin-like screeches and trumpeting, sounded through the unpassable maze of foliage. I had my camera out and stalked slowly up the trail, bent like the lone hunter seeking his prey.

When the next trumpeting challenge came from behind me, and not ten feet away, I was so startled that I missed another shot at the Bull elk hiding behind the tree! He jumped off again. It was almost as if he had waited for me to pass before shocking the life out of me! This sound they make is very unique. Hunters refer to it as trumpeting. It's that and more, like a cross between a cow's low and a yodel!

My sister, Sue, had expressed interest in coming out for the last of the walk and I had told her I'd be reaching my last mail drop, in Forks, Washington, around the 17th of October. I'd also written to her about my intended route. Unknown to me, she never got that letter. Still, I half expected to see her any day now. But she never showed up on the Bogachiel, nor the next day as I crossed the Calawah and then walked the road along the Calawash River.

I was getting a bit worried, but when I walked into the Forks P.O. on the 18th, I found a note signed, "The Jim Stoltz Welcoming Committee." All it said was "they" were camped on the Hoh River, and would be in town everyday around noon to see if I'd arrived. I was excited, but more curious than anything else. It wasn't Sue's handwriting. Who was here to greet me?

I had breakfast and was window shopping around town. Stepping into a hardware store, I was thumbing through some prints of some old-timey photographs. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed some other customers come in, and heard someone say, "Nice pictures, huh?" I agreed, and then it struck me who had spoken! I looked up into the two beaming faces of Susie and my ol' buddie, Duke Dawson!

Our reunion was a joyous one. I hadn't seen Duke for nearly three years, since we'd shared an apartment with my brother, Mark, in Norfolk, Virginia. He'd spent the summer working in Michigan and when Susie said she was heading west to meet me, he said why not? The two of them took my pack and drove out the 11 miles to the Mora Campground, as I walked it without a pack, zipping off the miles in a little over two hours. It was an amazing feeling, hiking without the pack. I felt buoyant and almost floated along.

We camped with "Photo" Bill, a friend of Duke's we'd just happened to bump into in Forks, and enjoyed an evening of story swapping around a warm fire. The ocean, now only a mile away, could be heard pounding like a drum in the distance.

It was Susie's 19th birthday the next day, and we celebrated with birthday cake for breakfast, before breaking camp. Bill left for Seattle, and Sue and Duke drove out with the pack to Rialto Beach. While I was still twenty miles from my destination, Cape Alava, getting to the sea and looking out across its boundless waves was all that possessed me. I zipped down the road, getting closer and closer. The surf became louder and louder, and as I reached the parking lot I began to run. A small dune blocked my view of the Pacific, and I raced up and over, and stopped.

What can I say? There it was, the waves pounding, foaming in the sun, the water stretching to the edge of the world. I was there. At last I was there. I'd made it. Susie walked slowly up and slipped her arm about me. My eyes brimmed

over, and I realized they too, were overcome with the intenseness of the moment. We said not a word, as if in the presence of something holy. The Pacific folded itself endlessly against the sandy beach.

When we finally got moving again, Sue and I bid farewell to Duke to hike up the wild coastline. He would drive the van some sixty miles around to the Ozette Ranger Station, three miles from the beach, and then hike in to meet us the next day.

It was a magic day, and Sue and I felt the freshness of this world that was new to both of us. We hiked along, exploring the tidepools, and going through stretches of beach piled high with giant pieces of driftwood. This was part of the Olympic National Park, and no roads led into the next twenty miles of beach. It was unspoiled wilderness, unchanged for thousands of years. We saw no one the rest of the day.

We crossed rugged, rocky stretches and then vast beaches when the tide went out. It was nice having company and we joked and laughed, and once had a sword fight with a couple carrots! The sun set in a blaze, and we had a box seat to the colorful display from the Cedar Creek Shelter.

I roused her in the darkness of early dawn, and we continued on to the site of the Norwegian Memorial. On this coast in 1903 a Norwegian ship went down with all but two of its crew. We met a few rangers here, among them the Park Supervisor, and later met Duke, hiking down the coast to meet us. We were all in a fine mood, and as I hiked along I suddenly noticed I wore a big smile on my face. Looking back at Susie, she too was drifting along with a big grin. It was just that kind of day. We spotted a couple bald eagles, a few distant seals, and zillions of tiny sea creatures in the many tidal pools.

Getting to Sand Point and the shelter, we made ourselves at home. I was putting my gear on a bunk when I noticed it full of rocks. Duke had slept here the night before.

"Hey, Duke? What are all these rocks in here?"

"Oh, those are bear rocks." he said matter-of-factly.

"Bear rocks? What are bear rocks?", as I looked at them with renewed interest.

He picked one up and threw it out the open-faced lean-to. "You know, bear rocks! When the bears come in, you use the rocks!"

It seemed like any other day as we got up and got the fire going. We took our time; Cape Alava was only three miles away. The day was warm and a bit hazy as we rounded Sand Point and got a fine look at the Cape and Ozette Island just west of it. It didn't seem possible I would soon be there. The tide came in and we walked the thin, shrunken strip of beach. A few deer lazed in the morning sun, and later we came to some ancient Indian petroglyphs, pictures carved into the seaside rocks.

I found myself slowing, I didn't want to reach this place I'd strived to reach for so long. It was the going, not the getting there that was good. But all trails must end, and we soon found ourselves on the broad sandy beaches of Cape Alava that morning, the most western point of land in the contiguous United States. It was October 21, 1976. I'd taken over a year to walk from coast to coast. My estimated total mileage read 4,811 miles.

I really didn't feel all that excited at first. It was anti-climatic after that first touch of the ocean two days before. But after a time, as Duke and Sue sunned themselves on the giant driftwood logs, I stood out by the waters edge, and it slowly came to me what I had done. The power, and the miles of the country came rolling through me, and my blood raced into high gear.

I'd crossed the forests, the mountains, swamps, badlands, prairie,  
and every kind of terrain imaginable. I'd shared the laughter of people from  
all walks of life, and come out with new friends. I had actually done it!  
This was my destination! This was where "the road not taken" had led me.