

### Leaving Alaska – Arriving California (April 1985)

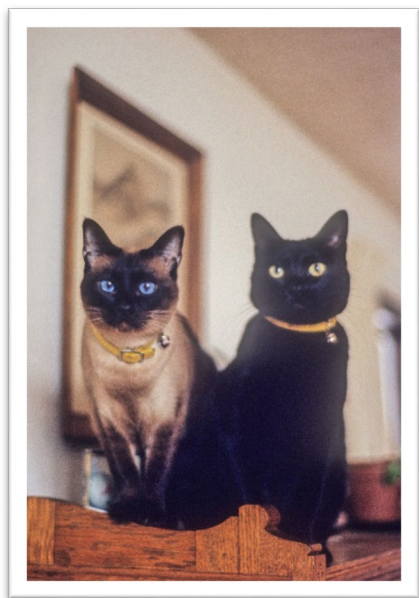
At the beginning of April in 1985, I left my job at the US Fish & Wildlife Service in Anchorage, Alaska to accept a position with ESRI in Redlands, California. I was fortunate that the US Fish & Wildlife Service was obligated to move all my household goods and furniture back to the “Lower 48”, saving me thousands of dollars in moving expenses. Early one morning, a large Allied Van Lines truck arrived, and a crew of movers began packing things up and hauling them downstairs to the van. About an hour later, one of the movers came rushing in and grabbed the fire extinguisher from the kitchen wall – I told him “no, that stays here”. Immediately he shouted, “there’s a fire”! Seconds later, another guy raced in and said, “call the fire department – quick!” Right away I called 911 and reported a fire outside my condo. Then I ran downstairs and saw the front of the moving van engulfed in heavy smoke!



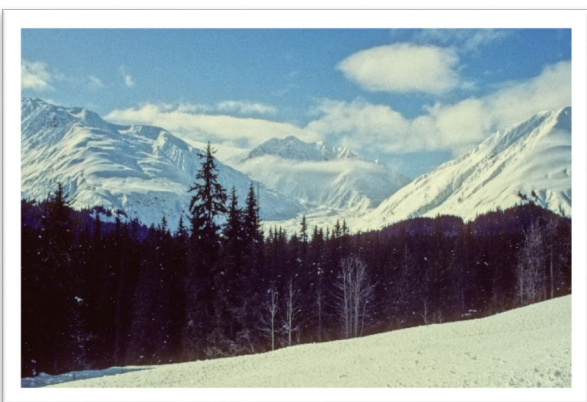
Luckily, none of my stuff had been loaded yet, but someone else’s stuff that was already in the front of the van wasn’t so lucky. The driver pulled the van into the street just as the fire department arrived. As the firemen aimed their hoses inside the van, thick smoke poured out. They had to use long poles to pull burning boxes, a smoldering mattress, and charred furniture out of the van and onto the street. After 30 minutes, the street was filled with charred and water-soaked things belonging to someone I did not know! Meanwhile, a second van showed up and proceeded to load my stuff – what a way to start a move!!

The next day, my last day of work for US Fish and Wildlife Service was very hectic, despite all of my prior planning. (too little time to convey so much important information to my colleagues) As I rushed to the personnel office to complete the “checkout” process, I was confronted with the fact that I “owed” Uncle Sam \$26.04 from an old travel advance – I literally had to “buy” my way out of government service! (what a way to leave) I spent my last night in Anchorage staying with Bob and Leslie, just as I had done seven years earlier when I first moved to Alaska. (amazing how things come back around in one’s life again)

The next morning, after breakfast with Bob and Leslie at the “Downtown Deli”, I packed my things, including my two cats Jasmine and Chloe, in the Landcruiser for the trip down to southern California!



I took one last look at my condo and then headed north out of Anchorage, with wonderful memories of seven years in Alaska flooding my mind. I felt overwhelmed by the sadness of leaving and began to realize how much Alaska had made its mark on me. I knew I would return at some point in the future, to visit, but not to stay. I was now bound for another stage of my life in California – two weeks and 4,000 miles away! As I drove north on the Glenn Highway to Palmer and the Matanuska Valley, the landscape was very familiar from earlier journeys to Vancouver, British Columbia to attend graduate school. But as I drove past the Matanuska Glacier and over Sheep Mountain Summit, the realization hit me that I wouldn't be back for who knew how long. (as a side note, nearly every year since I moved to California, I have travelled back to visit friends and family – Alaska surely remains a part of my heart and soul!) The further north and east I drove, the snow alongside the road became deeper. Where there had been a foot of snow on the ground in Anchorage, there was now 2 – 4 feet covering the land. The rugged Chugach Mountains, covered in a blanket of new snow, shined brilliantly under the clear blue skies. And the Matanuska Glacier appeared like an enormous “ruffle” on a massive snow-white satin gown – a spectacular sight!



After a few hours, as I approached Glennallen, a small band of Caribou crossed the highway in front of me. They were magnificent, regal animals with large racks of antlers and silvery manes. They casually trotted off into the deep snow on the edge of the forest, seeming almost to “float” across the snowy landscape!

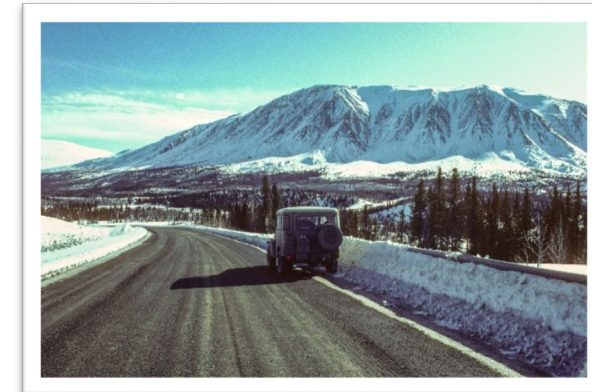
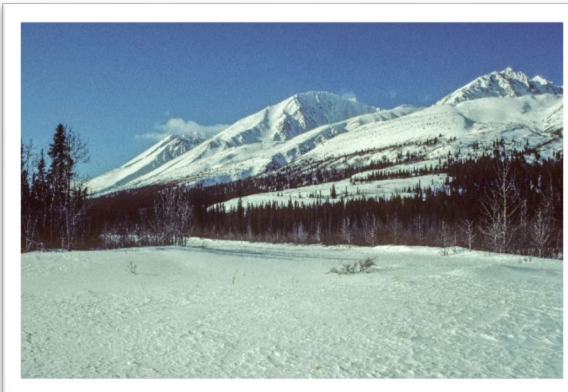


Soon, I was entering Glennallen where I filled up with gas and a cheeseburger from the “Tastee Freeze”, the only place open in the town. Later, I ran into some pretty rough road conditions on the way to Tok Junction, but the road surface was generally clear of ice. However, as I arrived in the small town, it was packed with people and their dogsleds – clearly there were dogsled races going on. As a result, all of the motels in town were totally booked, even the bad ones! So, I headed out of town into the blackness of a brilliant star-studded night. Nearing midnight, I came to the tiny town of Northway Junction, where I found the one and only motel overbooked, forcing some people to sleep in their cars in the parking lot! I decided to drive a couple miles out of town and pull off the road to spend the night in the Landcruiser. (trying to sleep in the front seat with two cats competing for the same space in my sleeping bag was no fun!) Although it was hard, I did manage to catch a few winks. As the sun was rising, I woke up to find it clear and very cold outside – there was a heavy layer of frost, even inside the Landcruiser! The cats had to be “fried” out of the sleeping bag. It had been so cold that their bowl of water in the front seat had frozen solid! Having now started the day, I drove back into the town and found the “Northway Airport Lodge and Café” open for business. Breakfast was the first thing on my mind and the eggs, bacon, potatoes, toast and coffee made it a great beginning to the day. The lady running the café said she had just purchased a new computerized microwave oven, and she was so excited about it that she kept reading the instruction booklet over and over. As two men came in wearing heavy fur parkas, looking as if they had just been on the trail, she informed them it had been 10 degrees below zero last night! (no wonder the cats and I had been so cold) After enjoying the great Alaskan breakfast, I resumed driving east toward the Yukon Territory, where I found the new Canadian Customs post was not only new but also more formal. But the “formalities” were still hardly noticeable.





When I arrived in Beaver Creek, the westernmost town in Canada, I stopped at “Ida’s Café” for coffee, before heading into the heart of the Yukon. A few hours later, as I drove along the shore of Kluane Lake, still frozen over from the winter, I had gorgeous views of the mighty St Elias Mountains, Canada’s highest at over 18,000 feet elevation.



Around midday, I stopped for lunch at the only café in the village of Destruction Bay on the lakeshore. As I enjoyed my Caribou burger, I overheard a conversation at a nearby table about an “exotic dancer” in Whitehorse. The consensus among the group was that they didn’t know if “it” was male or female. One woman claimed she couldn’t see the outline of anything that looked familiar in its “G-string”! (so, I’ll never know the answer)

Later, on the drive to Haines Junction, I passed only two vehicles during the three-hour trip. Much of the route was along the shore of Kluane Lake, still frozen and with deep snow covering it. I noticed a lot of animal tracks (otter, moose, caribou) alongside the Dezadeash River as I approached Haines Junction. The small town was surrounded by incredible mountains, with clouds swirling around jagged peaks covered in new snow. As the sun was setting behind the St Elias Range, the cats and I checked into a nice room at the Kluane Park Inn – a beautiful log structure with a gorgeous view of the mountains and the river. (Haines Junction is the place where the Alaska Highway continues northeast to Whitehorse, Yukon, while the Haines Cutoff Highway heads southeast to meet up with the Alaska Ferry) I spent a very restful and peaceful night, and so did the cats!



The next morning, I drove down the highway following the Dezadeash River to Dezadeash Lake, where I enjoyed a delicious breakfast of eggs, potatoes, toast and Caribou sausage at the Dezadeash Lake Lodge. Looking out the café window, there were lovely views of the rugged snow-covered mountains called the “Icefield Range”. The landscape of the entire Kluane Valley was still covered in its winter coat of deep snow, and as I gazed upon it, I began to wish I had brought my cross-country skis with me – the conditions looked perfect! Later, I came to “Three Guardsmen Pass”, on the border with British Columbia. The snow alongside the highway was incredibly deep, making the steep mountains look like massive heaps of ice cream! Soon I came upon a British Columbia road crew clearing six foot-high banks of snow on the side of the road using huge snow blowers that threw large fans of snow 50 feet into the air – very dramatic! As I looked around, there was no question the dominant color was “white” – pure and simple.



After crossing the summit, I passed almost no other vehicles on the road, which only added to the feeling of being alone in a very wild and remote corner of the world. At one point, I came upon an old abandoned petroleum pumping station that had been managed by the US Army – part of the Haines to Fairbanks pipeline that was built during WWII. It was a bit strange to see US Army property in Canada.





As I descended the 3200 foot-high pass, the landscape quickly transformed from treeless tundra and windswept mountain slopes into a thick forest of large Sitka Spruce and Western Hemlock, forming a tall green “wall” on both sides of the highway. And at the same time, the berms of snow on the edge of the road were 8 – 10 feet high. Two more huge snow blowers continued to chew away at the deep snow in an attempt to widen the road. It was clear that winter still dominated the region. Then, at last, I came to the US border customs station at “Pleasant Camp”, where the young customs agent asked me only a couple of questions before bidding me a safe journey. (I think she was “charmed” by the cats!) The highway soon descended to the shore of the Chilkat River and followed it all the way to Haines. As I drove south along the river, I began to see several Bald Eagles perched in the upper branches of the trees, ready to feast on the first salmon run of the season. (the Chilkat River is a well-known habitat for a large population of Bald Eagles during winter and spring)



When I finally arrived in Haines, I had some time to drive out to Chilkat Lake before checking in for the ferry to Seattle. As I approached the lake, I could see some old homes built entirely from Western Red Cedar and overlooking the lake and Lynn Canal beyond. Behind them, jagged peaks covered in a coat of new snow jutted straight up to precipitous heights – a spectacular setting, especially in the late afternoon sun.

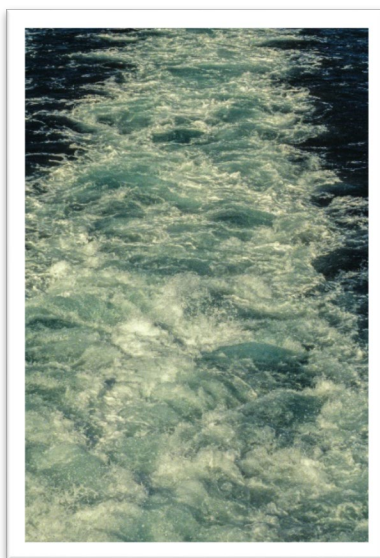
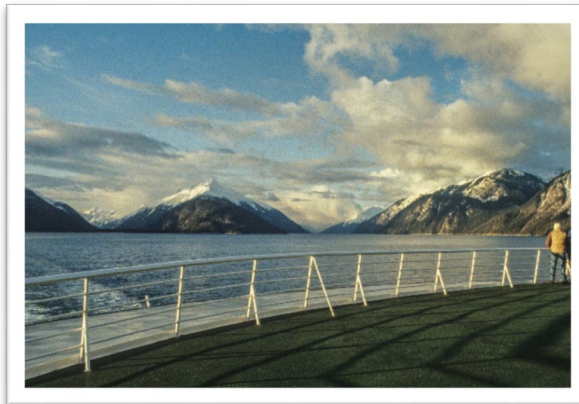
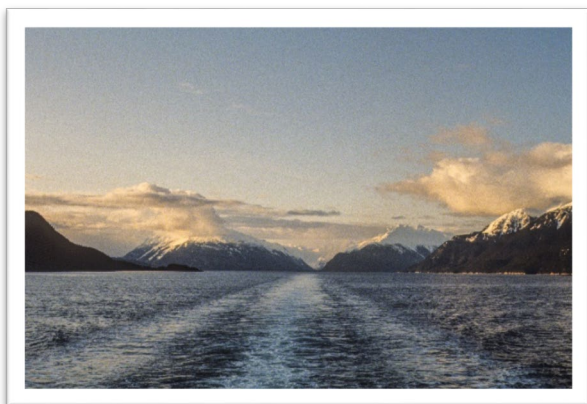


I hiked along a trail around the lake and discovered an old graveyard that had been disturbed recently. On one of the broken tombstones was the inscription, “Harry Sullivan – Died 1923”. (but who knows the story of his life) As time approached the hour to board the ferry, I stopped at “Sally’s Inlet View Café” for a huge “Alaskan Cheeseburger”. While I tried my best to finish the monstrous burger, I couldn’t help noticing Sally’s large collection of old Winchester rifles mounted on the wall above the kitchen. She also had a “special” on the menu, the “Bigfoot Burger” – a full pound of beef topped with cheese, bacon, ham, sausage, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, pickles, etc, and all for just \$7.00! It looked like a real “bargain”, but it was so huge it would have been able to feed a family of four, or an Alaskan logger!



By now it was time to check in for the ferry, and shortly afterwards, I boarded the “MV Columbia”, the largest ship in the fleet that would be my home for the next 4 ½ days. The cats were all eyes and ears as I drove onto the ferry. (they would have to remain inside the Landcruiser on the vehicle deck for the entire journey, while I had booked a stateroom on the upper deck) Slowly, the ferry departed Haines and began the journey south down the Inside Passage to Juneau, the state capitol of Alaska. The route down Lynn Canal gave us incredible views of the steep, rugged landscape of the fjord as the sun slowly set.





It was now time for dinner, and I enjoyed fresh roasted Alaskan Ling Cod in the cafeteria as the ship sailed among the rocky islands. Meanwhile, three women at the table next to me were getting suitably “soused” on wine with their dinner. And as the Purser announced the movie for the evening would be starring Tom Selleck, one of the women said, “I get so horny watching him”! So ended my dinner in the cafeteria, after which I chose to spend some time outside on the deck, taking in the beautiful scenery as the ferry slowly navigated its way through the islands of the Inside Passage. (MV Columbia is a very large ship with two cabin/stateroom decks, cafeteria/snack bar, dining room, cocktail lounge/bar, movie theater, rooftop solarium, and two observation lounges. It has a capacity of over 1000 passengers, but on this trip, there were less than 200 of us on board.)

Precisely on schedule at 9:30pm, we arrived at Auke Bay Terminal in Juneau. During the off load, I had time to call my sister Lynn to let her know when I would be arriving in Seattle. About two hours later, the ferry departed Juneau, bound for the next stop in Sitka early the following morning. Meanwhile, I went to the bar for a cold beer before retiring to my stateroom. As I sat at the bar, three elderly ladies came in, looking and acting more like loggers than ladies. When I finished my beer, I headed to my room and retired for a very relaxing night as the gentle sound of the ship’s engines lulled me to sleep. Early the next morning, I took a shower and headed up to the cafeteria for delicious breakfast of eggs and corned beef hash. While I enjoyed breakfast in the dining room, magnificent views of the northern Alaskan Panhandle slowly passed by as the ship sailed among countless small islands. About an hour later, the Purser made an announcement that passengers were permitted to access the vehicle deck for

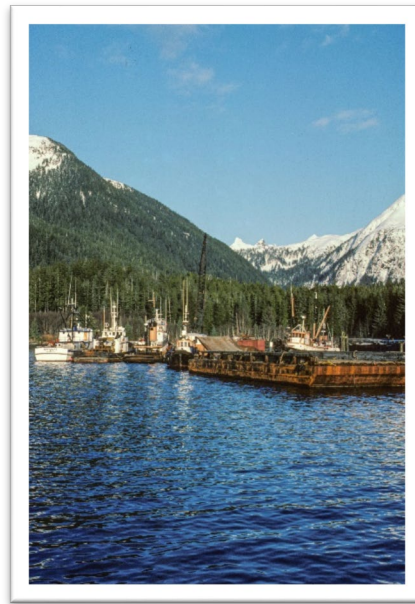


15 minutes. So, I visited the cats in my Landcruiser, and found them to be in fine shape. Perhaps the constant “hum” of the ship’s engines had a calming effect on them. They were excited and happy to see me! Meanwhile, the huge ship navigated through some very narrow channels on its way to Sitka, sometimes within just 50 feet of the shore.



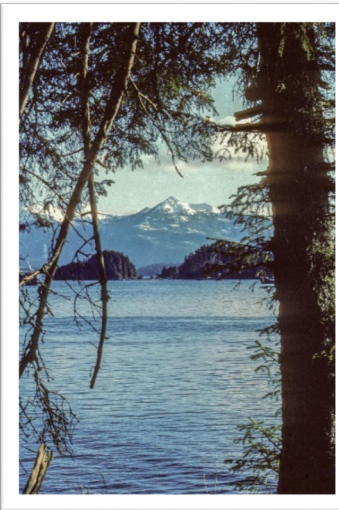
It was a strange feeling to look out the window and see tall trees and huge rocks passing by, almost within an arm’s reach! (the passage to Sitka has to be negotiated during daylight hours, for obvious reasons!) From the deck, I spotted some deer and a black bear along the shore, while a group of Porpoises followed the ship. At the same time, a flock of seagulls flew around the ship, hoping for a handout from passengers standing outside on the deck.

After a few more hours, we arrived in Sitka under clear, sunny skies. The small town of Sitka has a long and interesting history as the old capitol of Russian Alaska, and well before that, as the center of Tlinget native culture. It wasn’t long before we found out that the Pacific Herring Fleet of more than 50 boats was anchored in the harbor awaiting the opening of the season. (the fleet is only given a short two hour notice of the season opening, and once it opens, it’s a “Monte Carlo” start for a race to the fishing grounds) A crewman on a good boat can make up to \$4,000 in just a matter of hours!





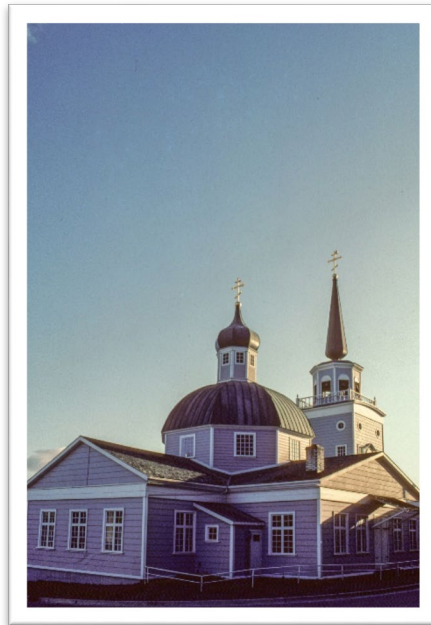
Meanwhile, several large Japanese fish processing vessels were anchored in the bay awaiting the season opening as well. Once the ferry was docked, the Sitka Tourist Bureau had arranged for a school bus to take passengers on a short tour of the old town. The first stop on the tour was an old Tlinget Indian village – a collection of many old ramshackle houses, all that was left of the Native American heritage. Nearby were several modern fish processing plants which were very surprising, having beautiful native carvings and paintings on the buildings, the sight of which gave me the feeling that the Tlinget spirit was still alive! Our next stop was at the Sitka National Historic Park, next to Sheldon Jackson College. (the college was founded in 1878 by Reverend Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian minister, and it remains the oldest institution of higher education in Alaska) And although it was a short visit, the exhibits and displays of Tlinget history and culture were fascinating, informative, and beautifully presented. After the tour, I took a walk along a trail through a grove of ancient Sitka Spruce, where large totems were erected on either side of the trail – standing like “great spirits” in the forest! As I walked along the path through the woods, there were gorgeous views of Sitka Bay and magnificent Mount Edgecombe, an ancient volcano. The massive, rugged mountains surrounding Sitka provided a beautiful and perfect background.



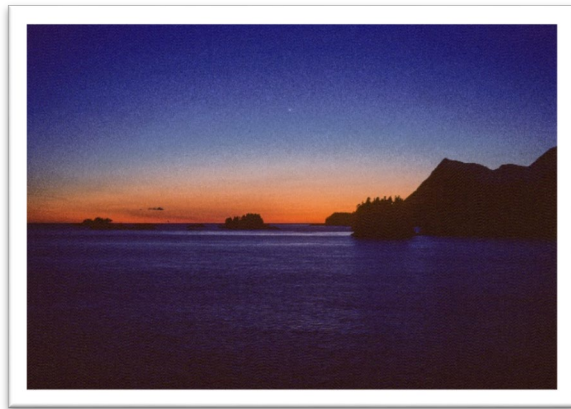
At the end of the path was a large open field where a famous battle took place in the late 1700's between Prince Baranof's Russian fleet and the local Tlinget tribe. The outcome of the battle firmly established Russian domination in Alaska. I walked back into the old town to the site of the historic Baranof Castle and Saint Michael's Cathedral, originally built in 1844 as the first Russian Orthodox church in Alaska. To my surprise, I happened to arrive as a wedding reception was taking place. I



watched for a few moments as the guests enjoyed their glasses of Champagne under the brilliant blue skies and warm rays of the late afternoon sun. Beautiful views of the rugged snow-covered mountains and deep blue sea were in abundance – a lovely and memorable site for sure!



As the sun began to set behind Mount Edgecombe, I made my way back to the ship. Within a few minutes, the huge vessel departed Sitka for Petersburg and Wrangell, and to do so, it had to “thread” its way through very narrow passages. With the golden hue of the sunset, the jagged peaks and rocky islands slowly became sharp, black silhouettes, framed against an orange and red evening sky. Then suddenly, while I stood outside on the deck, the rising star of Venus appeared on the horizon as the ship turned east and continued its southbound voyage, on course for the small fishing towns of Petersburg and Wrangell – 12 hours away.



By now it was time for dinner in the cafeteria, where I enjoyed a sumptuous Alaskan seafood feast of baked salmon, halibut, cod, oysters, shrimp and scallops! The cold pint of Alaskan pale Ale went very well with dinner. At one point during the evening, I looked out the window and saw a large ocean-going tugboat towing a huge barge northbound up the Inside Passage. There was no other sign of civilization as we slowly sailed into the night. After dinner, I sat in the observation lounge listening to lovely Celtic music on my cassette tape player, watching the ship silently moving among the forested islands – the moment felt like a “religious experience”. Eventually, my eyes could no longer resist the urge to close, so



I retired to my stateroom for another peaceful night's rest as the ship's engines hummed on through the night.

The arrival in Petersburg at 2:00am quietly passed by me. Then I awoke at 6:00am as the ship docked in Wrangell, where there was time to get off the ferry and explore the old fishing village. It was a clear, cold morning as I walked off the ferry – unusual this time of year in Southeast Alaska. Walking along the harbor, smoke from many wood burning stoves drifted gently above the town, clinging steadfastly to the edge of the steep mountains that rose directly above the harbor. I strolled down the narrow street toward what I thought should be “downtown”.

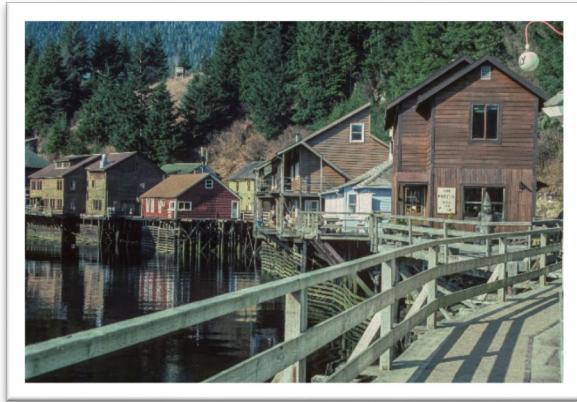


And as I was taking a photo of the deserted main street, an old, grizzled fisherman with a scraggly red beard, and dressed in hip boots, came up alongside me. He tried to carefully avoid stepping in front of my camera, until I said, “please go ahead, you’re part of the local color”! After the photo, he waited for me and even made a remark about cameras and “reality”. Then he invited me to walk with him down to his fishing boat in the harbor. As we walked along through the sleepy village, he told me of his days as a logger in Oregon, before moving to Southeast Alaska to take up fishing – and in the process, he “found himself”! (a wonderful story) He lived with his two granddaughters near the tiny native village of Salmon Bay on Prince of Wales Island. As we arrived at the harbor, he pointed to three tall totems next to an old Haida “longhouse” called “The Shakes”, being almost entirely constructed of Western Red Cedar shakes. Then he showed me his fishing boat, an old wooden vessel sitting alone. It was named the “Annie J”, in honor of his deceased wife. At last, he told me his own name, “Xtry” – he was a wonderful old character who I had the great fortune to meet during my short time in Wrangell. Before returning to the ship, I took a few photos of the harbor, the old docks, and some of the old, decaying wooden buildings precariously “perched” on the old pilings. As I re-boarded the ferry, the early morning sunlight and mist on the water would become a beautiful memory of my visit to Wrangell.

Back on the ship, I took a shower as it left the dock in Wrangell, and then headed up to the cafeteria for breakfast. While I enjoyed a delicious plate of smoked salmon hash and eggs, beautiful vistas of Southeast Alaska passed by in front of me. The rest of the morning I spent in the solarium on the top deck, taking photos of the awesome scenery. Around noon, we arrived in Ketchikan under lovely sunny blue skies – something rare to see in this part of the world. (on a previous trip by ferry I had experienced some of Ketchikan's annual rainfall of 156 inches!)



Once again, we had time to visit the town, and as I walked along the waterfront, I came to the historic district known as “Creek Street”. As I was picking up some brochures at the Visitor’s Bureau, I overheard the receptionist making a telephone recording of tourist information. It went like this: “... and plan to visit Ketchikan’s hysterical Creek Street area”! She was so nervous that she didn’t even hear herself say it! As I walked along Creek Street I found out about its history as the old “red light” district, where small, clapboard houses were built on old wooden pilings over Ketchikan Creek, next to the steep mountain side. The “street” is actually a long wooden walkway that connects all of the houses along the street – pedestrians only. It dates back to the late 1800’s and has been faithfully restored to much of its “original” charm. Several of the original old houses have been furnished with period antiques and now function as small museums. Creek Street is definitely the premier historic site in Ketchikan. At the same time, it remains a rustic logging and fishing town, which only recently became the gateway to the awesome Misty Fjords National Park.



After my tour of Creek Street, I still had time to visit the Deer Creek Mountain Salmon Hatchery above the town. There I found a lovely park with a mountain stream running through, and above it rose rugged snow-covered mountains – a beautiful scene! On my way back to board the ship, I passed many long, steep stairways that led to houses often 100 feet above the street. In many places, the sewer and water pipes were above the ground as they descended the steep mountain slope to the bay. Just before I reached the ferry dock, I encountered some folks desperately trying to “push start” an old pickup truck. They had apparently flooded the engine, and although it was a fruitless effort, they were glad to accept my assistance. Before I reached the ferry terminal, I passed by a small sporting goods store that had a large display window full of young ducklings, perhaps only a few weeks old – all of them were cute and fuzzy! They were madly dashing around, pecking at anything that remotely looked like food – even each other’s tail feathers!







Back on the ship, as it prepared to depart for the final destination in Seattle, a much smaller ferry continued to skip back and forth across the narrow channel to Gravina Island, the location of Ketchikan's airport. As we departed Ketchikan, I sat in the observation lounge and watched several fishing boats make their way out to the North Pacific fishing grounds. At one point, we had some beautiful glimpses of Misty Fjords National Park, and as the sun slowly faded, it highlighted the immense snow-capped peaks of coastal British Columbia. Later, while I enjoyed another delicious Alaskan seafood dinner in the cafeteria, I overheard a conversation among the crew regarding an impending strike vote this weekend. But one of the servers said she didn't think the staff would reject the offer of a 5% raise when other unions were taking pay cuts! After dinner, I went to the movie theater to watch "Star Trek III – The Search for Spock". The room was full of kids, of course, but it was their parents who looked like they really wanted to watch it. At one point during the film, the irony of the moment suddenly hit me – here I was watching a film about a time far into the future with a starship travelling at five times the speed of light (Warp 5) through endless reaches of the universe, while at the same time, I was travelling aboard a ship at 20 knots per hour through the endless reaches of the ocean! (it was a memorable moment of cosmic reality) After the movie, I took a stroll on the upper deck beneath the light of a brilliant full moon and billions of stars. Gradually, the cool ocean air began to gently tug at my heavy eyelids – soon I fell asleep to the gentle rocking motion of the ship as she followed her course through the Inside Passage. The next morning, I awoke early to find another sunny day – such rare weather for early spring. When the Purser announced that we would be approaching Dixon Strait and the open ocean crossing of Queen Charlotte Sound where we should expect some rolling and pitching motion aboard the ship, I quickly decided to catch breakfast before the ocean crossing. (I finished my eggs, bacon, and toast just before the ship started to encounter some large ocean swells)



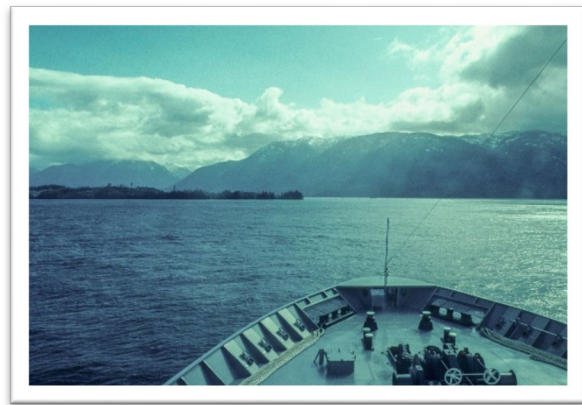
Suddenly, as I was leaving the dining room, there was the sound of broken china and glassware! It wasn't long before I heard the announcement, "would a room steward, please report to the Chief Purser's office", which meant some passengers were experiencing seasickness. Thankfully, the passage across the open ocean lasted less than two hours, during which time, I sat outside on the Sun Deck as the ship rolled with the ocean swells – the heavy white metal railing moving up to meet the horizon at very regular intervals. Meanwhile, the rugged mountains and rocky coast of British Columbia slowly passed by, highlighted in beautiful shades of blue and green. While I was sitting in the warm sun, enjoying the gorgeous scenery, an elderly woman from Poland approached me and began a short conversation. She told me that she and her friend had taken the ferry up to Skagway the week before and they were having a marvelous adventure! At one point during our conversation, she talked about her capture by the Germans during WWII, and how she had escaped to Canada. She was sad about the current situation in Poland, now dominated by Russia. (remember – this was in 1985) Then precisely at 11:00am it was time for the crew to practice their emergency drills. The first was the fire drill with hoses spraying water over the side, followed by the abandon ship drill with life vests and lifeboats at the ready. Meanwhile, a passive ship's audience watched the drills as if they were not part of reality. (it reminded me of the way so many people disregard the safety demonstrations aboard airplanes) Following the safety drills, I sat in the observation lounge and watched as the ship steered its way among the myriad of emerald green islands between the British Columbia mainland and Vancouver Island.



Meanwhile, a young mother was breast feeding her baby, an elderly couple played cards at a small table in the corner, and another young woman sat quietly stuffing a large number of pre-addressed envelopes with a mimeographed page of information about her family's "reassignment" from Fort Richardson in Alaska to Fort Huachuca in Arizona! (in bold lettering, it read "The Jernigan's Reassigned", and even

included a map of their route from Alaska to Arizona) Another middle-aged couple sat at a corner table with glasses of wine. It wasn't hard to notice the woman carefully and patiently giving her husband a manicure, and at the same time, he appeared to have no interest in her loving attention. (was he embarrassed by her display of affection, or just insensitive – we'll never know) Earlier in the day during breakfast, a young woman with three kids had sat down at a table near me. Her children were giving her a particularly hard time, and I felt very sorry for her as she showed the strain of the ordeal. (especially so since she was pregnant and there was no "father" in sight) I could only hope someone would be there to help her when we arrived in Seattle – she most surely needed it!

This day was the first full day of sailing with no stops, and it seemed different from the first part of the voyage – more like an open ocean voyage, except that we were always within sight of land - very near at times. (perhaps it could best be compared to a very long river trip) As the ship passed the logging town of Campbell River, the outgoing tides met in a narrow passage, creating very turbulent, boiling water, with many large whirlpools. Strangely, the ship seemed almost to be drawn to them, and as I listened to some haunting electronic music on my cassette tape player, the sense of peril seemed to be heightened, although there was no real danger as the vessel slipped easily through the swirling water. Passing close to the rocky shore of northern Vancouver Island, the steep, heavily forested mountains seemed to rise straight up from the depths of the narrow channel. The rugged peaks were still covered in a thick blanket of snow, sparkling brilliantly under clear blue skies.



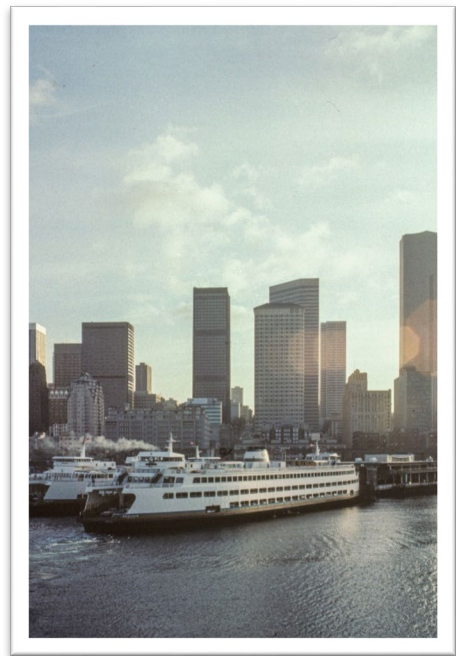
My awareness of the awesome scenery was heightened by the beautiful Celtic music I was listening to. (meanwhile, people around me appeared to be totally unaware of the profound experience) I soon realized that my time on the ferry had forced me to relax and experience a deeper level of life! Later, I returned to the observation lounge, where two ladies seated in front of me were looking out the window with binoculars at two things opposite each other – the ladies were obviously unaware that their field of vision crossed somewhere over the water in front of the ship. Then I spotted a lone seagull silently winging its way in the gathering darkness, just above the surface of the water – somehow instinctively knowing its course through the night. As it flew in unison with the passage of the ship, I became mesmerized by it – alone, yet such an integral part of the environment, though dwarfed by the immensity of the world around it. I don't think anything symbolized the nature of a journey through the Inside Passage as well as a seagull flying alone among the mountains and the sea. (the image of the gull that evening remains my most memorable moment – even as I write this travel blog today, over 35 years later!) As the sun finally set behind the mountains of Vancouver Island, I saw a small fishing boat slowly making its way south in the dusk, and I was immediately struck by the connection with the seagull – both alone, but knowing their way in the world.





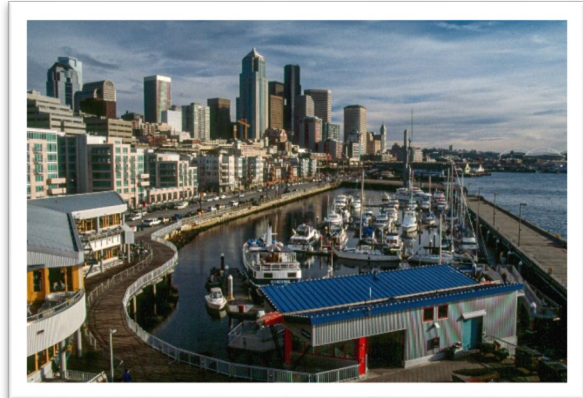
It wasn't long before my heavy eyelids bade me to retire to my stateroom for another restful sleep as the ship continued the journey to Seattle.

The next morning, I awoke early as the ship sailed through northern Puget Sound and among the beautiful San Juan Islands – scenes that were familiar to me. As I stood on the deck at the bow of the ship, the skyline of downtown Seattle eventually came into view – it was very familiar to me, having lived in Seattle for more than seven years. The ship docked at the waterfront exactly on schedule at 7:00am, after a voyage of 4 ½ days and over 1,000 miles! (pretty impressive)



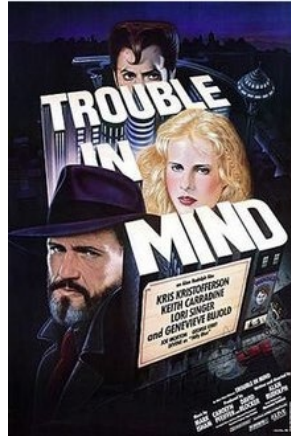


For a few minutes, as I drove off the ferry, I felt like someone arriving from another planet. But suddenly, the traffic in the city brought me back to reality. After leaving the ferry, I drove to Lynn's apartment in Ballard, where the cats appreciated a well deserved "breather" from the confines of the Landcruiser. After moving a few essentials into Lynn's apartment, she invited me for lunch at "Periwinkles", a local café in the "Ballard Marketplace". The ham and cheese croissant was delicious, and the "double chocolate cake" would satisfy any chocolate fiend for life! Later that afternoon, I washed at least seven months of Alaskan mud off the Landcruiser at a small car wash in Ballard, while an old man talked my ear off about Alaska. He was a retired Alaska Railroad engineer, and although his continued conversation didn't do much to help me wash the vehicle, I enjoyed listening to his story. Over the next couple of days, the cats were thankful to be out of the cramped quarters of the Landcruiser, and I visited several places in the city that recalled fond memories of the days I spent at the University of Washington, as well as the Capitol Hill neighborhood where Marion and I lived for three years after we returned from Africa. There was also a visit to the old Pike Place Farmer's Market and the Seattle waterfront.



One afternoon, Greg, a former colleague from Alaska, invited me to join him for some sailing in Puget Sound aboard his new 23-foot San Juan sailboat. The weather was cloudy with a few showers, as well as some gusty winds out of the northwest. Greg did a fine job as skipper and the boat sailed along at a good 20 – 25 knots. Several times we were "close hauled" and "heeled over", to the point the gunwale was in the water – very exciting! We spent three hours sailing the waters of Puget Sound before returning to Greg's house in Edmonds for dinner of fresh cracked Dungeness crab! On my last day in Seattle, I went downtown to meet my Alaskan friend Tracey at the Sheraton Hotel where she was working. As we caught up on the time we had been apart, she informed me she would be

moving to Long Beach, California to live with a man she had met in Seattle two months earlier. (she had to admit it was a “fast romance”, and she was a bit scared by it all as well) Then she told me how she had met Andy and established an instant connection. He was a “key grip” working for a Hollywood company shooting a movie in Seattle titled “Trouble in Mind”, starring Kris Kristofferson, Keith Carradine, and Lori Singer.



Later in the evening, Tracey insisted that we head to “La Bistro” in Pike Place Farmer’s Market for drinks, since the movie would be filmed just outside the bar. Andy made it possible for us to enter the restricted area, and while Tracey and I enjoyed our wine in the bar, we were able to meet some of Andy’s crew and watch as they filmed some of the scenes – especially the scene where Kris Kristofferson drove an old car down the dark, narrow alley outside the bar. But the highlight of the evening was sitting at a table in the bar next to Kris Kristofferson and Keith Carradine as they relaxed between takes! (it was a night to remember, and one that I still share with Tracey and Andy, who are now living in “Hendersonville”, North Carolina, of all the places in the world!)

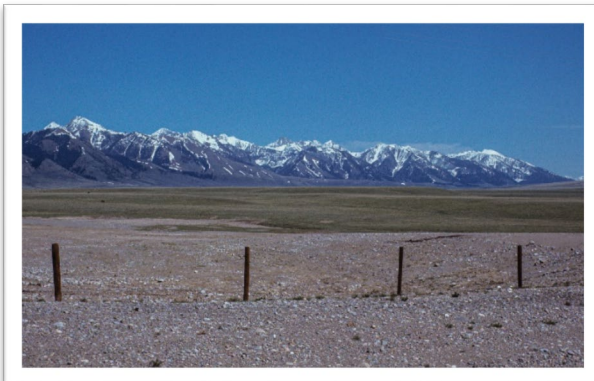
Early the next morning, I bid farewell to Seattle, and under dark threatening clouds, I headed east on Interstate 90 over Snoqualmie Pass, where lots of winter’s snow remained piled high along the edge of the 8-lane highway. Just as I reached the summit, I suddenly looked down, for no apparent reason, and saw the odometer turn over 100,000 miles! It was a special moment that I could not have planned, but ever since that time, I almost felt like I was driving a new car. As I descended down the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains, the dense forest of Douglas Fir and Western Hemlock gradually gave way to open stands of Ponderosa Pine – eventually becoming a very different landscape of broad expanses of grassland and sagebrush, so typical of eastern Washington. (a result of a “rain shadow” created by the Cascade Mountain Range) It wasn’t long before I came to the Columbia River and the massive Grand Coulee Dam – a huge Bureau of Reclamation project from the days of the Great Depression.



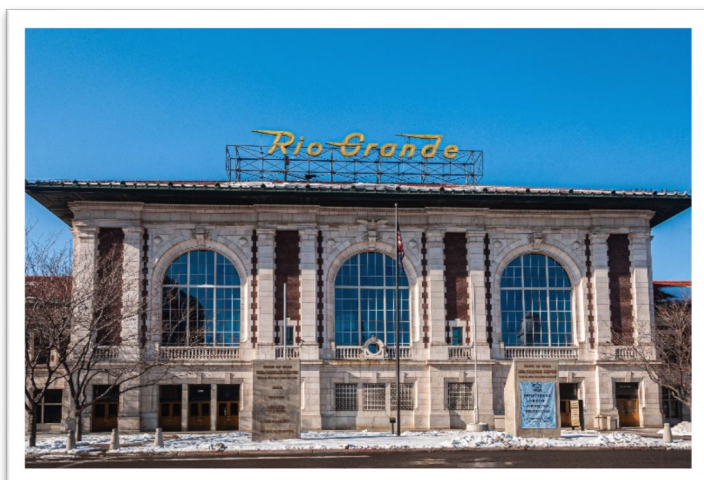


The dam is named for an ancient riverbed known as the Grand Coulee that was formed deep in the earth's crust 40 – 60 million years ago, part of the Columbia River Plateau. South of the dam are remains of the ancient riverbed in a long wide canyon that stretches for nearly 50 miles, divided into the Upper and Lower Grand Coulee. At the head of the Lower Grand Coulee is an enormous geologic formation known as Dry Falls where glacial waters from ancient Lake Missoula plunged 500-feet over the cataract to form the ancient riverbed we see today. The water from Roosevelt Lake behind the dam now generates over 6,800 Mega Watts of power from 4 enormous power plants having a total of 33 massive turbine generators, making the Grand Coulee Dam the largest power system in the country. The water from the lake also irrigates tens of thousands of acres of fertile agricultural fields that were once covered with sagebrush. Beyond Grand Coulee Dam, I came to the small town of George, Washington where "Martha's Inn" has been serving their famous apple pie for generations. From there, the route took me along a very straight road through Soap Lake and Ritzville toward Spokane. (it was a route I knew well from the days I lived in Republic, Washington where I worked for the US Forest Service many years earlier) Arriving in Spokane, the cats and I settled into a nice motel downtown near Riverfront Park, the site of Spokane's "World's Fair – EXPO 74". As I walked along the riverfront in the evening, there were beautiful views of both the Upper and Lower Spokane Falls.

The next day, I headed east through northern Idaho to Missoula, Montana to visit Tammy, a dear friend from Alaska. (not long after I had gone to Vancouver, BC to pursue a PHD program in Satellite Image Analysis, Tammy moved to Missoula to care for her mother) I spent a couple of days in Missoula with Tammy, and we enjoyed our time together, having dinner at the "Clark Fork Inn" in the historic "Milwaukee Road Railroad Station". Later, we danced to some traditional country and western music at a local cowboy bar called the "Duelin Dalton Saloon". Before leaving Missoula, I was fortunate to meet up with two of my old forest service colleagues who were now stationed at the Region One headquarters. It was wonderful to share our memories over a few beers at the "Cowboy Bar". Leaving Missoula, I drove south through the Madison River Valley to the ghost town of Bannock, historical capitol of the Montana Territory in the late 1800's.



As the sun was setting, I walked through the abandoned town - a chilly breeze rustled the sagebrush and stirred up a bit of dust, which really took me back in time. Most of the old buildings were open, and walking into the old schoolhouse, it looked like class had ended just yesterday! I had the same feeling as I walked into the old church and the old hotel as well. I wanted to stay longer, but I had to continue my journey to southern California. (Bannock is a magical and timeless place – definitely “off the beaten path” and accessible only by many miles of one lane dirt road) Not far from Bannock was another place from memories of my life on the Selway Mountain fire lookout tower in the summer of 1966, a very small town called Grant. (I used to stop in the town to buy a few essentials on my way to the US Forest Service station at Bloody Dick creek) As the sun began its path toward the western horizon, I crossed Monida Pass and through Dubois, Idaho to spend the night at a motel in Blackfoot, alongside the mighty Snake River. From the motel I had a gorgeous view of the Teton Mountains shining in the distance. As I continued my journey the next day to Salt Lake City, I stopped at “Temple Square” and the new “Triad Center” next to the historic Denver & Rio Grande Railroad station.

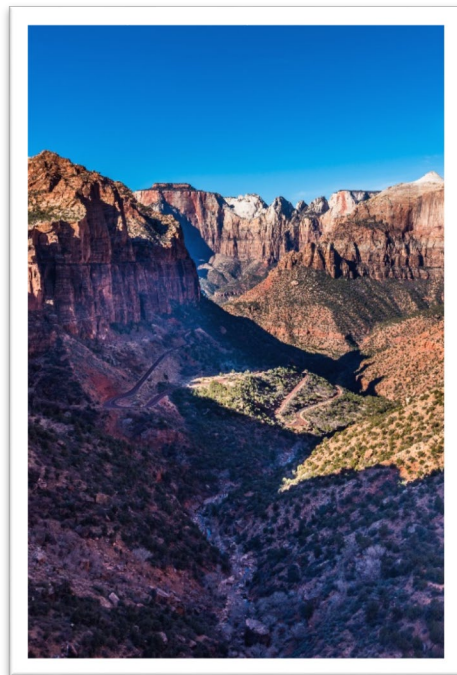


The sleek glass buildings around the old station were beautiful, and incorporated a nice collection of shops, restaurants, and bars. But there was one Utah state law that struck me as being particularly odd –

state liquor stores were prohibited from selling any “non-alcoholic” beverages because they could be used as “cocktail mixers” for alcoholic drinks – weird law, since the state liquor store sold the “liquor” and the grocery store next door sold the “mixer”!

From Salt Lake City, I continued south on Interstate 15 toward Provo, and along the way the views of the rugged, snow-covered Uintah Mountains rising above the American Fork River were spectacular. I noticed signs for “Osmond Studios”, and Robert Redford’s “Sundance Ranch”. Further south, around Cedar City were extensive red rock plateaus and cliffs still covered in winter’s snow. I spent the night at a small, very friendly motel in Cedar City. Next door was a very local café where the delicious home cooked meal of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans cost me less than a pint of beer in Las Vegas!

The next day, I drove to Zion National Park, after crossing the 11,000 foot high summit in Cedar Breaks National Monument near the “Brian Head Ski Area”. The drive through Zion National Park was spectacular, especially as the highway exited a 1.5 mile long tunnel and suddenly revealed a massive canyon almost three thousand feet deep! The views were magnificent!



South of Zion, the highway passed through the steep, narrow canyon of the Virgin River and into the northwest corner of Arizona – very impressive! Later in the afternoon, I drove through Las Vegas



without stopping, not having any desire to lose money gambling. About an hour afterwards, I stopped at a café in Stateline, Nevada for dinner – a nice BLT sandwich, despite the lousy service. As I left the café, I put \$5.00 into a slot machine, as my contribution to the state's economy!



The sun slowly set over the Mojave Desert and I continued to Barstow, California, just a couple of hours from my final destination - Redlands. It had taken me two weeks and over 4,000 miles from Alaska, but the trip had been packed full of adventures and wonderful experiences – memories to last for a lifetime! I hope you enjoy the trip as much as I did.



*My home in Redlands*

As a post note: Since moving to southern California, I've made the trip back to Alaska many times to visit friends and family – sometimes by way of the Alaska Highway and the Alaska Ferry. The experience always awakens the memories of my journey in April of 1985!