

# 2015 Fall Road Trip 7983 miles

Tuesday Sept. 8 to Salmon la Sac

Leave Kirkland at 9:30 under grey skies and about 60°. I-90 east to Cle Elum. We usually avoid interstates but they are often the best bet in metropolitan areas.

Stopped at Owen's Meats in Cle Elum to buy Grant some jerky for the road.

Drove to South Cle Elum and walked on the John Wayne Pioneer Trail, the old Milwaukee rail line that ran from Seattle to Idaho. We had hoped it went near the river but it didn't. Still it was nice to walk on a gravel trail past pine trees. It's partly cloudy & pleasantly warm.

Grant had read that Smokey's BBQ was good so we had lunch there. The pulled pork sandwiches & collard greens were delicious & not too huge. \$10. We liked the atmosphere. A small interpretive exhibit tells the history of the railroad.

From Cle Elum it's a short 17-mile drive on a paved road to the Salmon la Sac campground. You drive through Roslyn, a quaint

old mining town where the TV show "Northern Exposure" was filmed. Cle Elum Lake is empty...

The CG is mostly empty on this day after Labor Day weekend. We have site #37, a prime location right on the river. The pine maple are already turning bright orange & red. A very brazen chipmunk came right up to us fearlessly. Unfortunately he's probably used to being fed. We shooed him away until he finally gave up.

We arrived early - 1pm - and are planning to practice the fine art of relaxation as best we can. I'm not very good at sitting and reading for long stretches without getting sleepy, so a nap or two may be in order.

This Forest Service CG is \$21 a night, but with our Park Service Senior Pass it's only \$10.50.

Got sleepy reading so went for a long walk, but it didn't help... The air has a lovely hint of pine.

Due to the drought & devastating fires over here there is a burn ban, so no campfire tonight.

Salmon La Sac CG: Best site 37 (not reservable).  
Best reservable site 36, then 39

3

Nice nap, chili for dinner. 43° at 7pm.  
Stroll around CG after dinner. The bats are  
out & zipping around like the spots on an  
eye test - a flash of motion and they're  
swallowed up in the dark.

Our only neighbors are a group of  
about 6 young people. There is a mountain  
of alcohol on their table and we expected  
them to be whooping it up until late, but  
it is eerily quiet, and when we walked  
past, the only sign of them was someone's  
feet sticking out a car door, as if they  
had passed out in there... The mom in me  
wonders if they're OK.

Dark at 8, climb in van to read.  
Grant heard the kids howling in the  
middle of the night, so they are alive.

Wednesday Sept. 9 to Palouse Falls  
Up about 6:30. 41°. Blue sky, no clouds.  
Coffee and hit the road 7:30. Our usually  
accurate road atlas showed a paved connection  
to the West Fork Teanaway River Road, which  
we had hoped to take. We couldn't find it and  
finally concluded it must be unpaved.

We decided to try it anyway, but after a short, rough distance it was gated. Instead we drove back through Cle Elum and east on beautiful hiway 10 to Thorp, then south on 821, the Yakima Canyon Rd. We love this road, with the blue river, green trees & shrubs, & brown hills with outcroppings of black columnar basalt. Railroad tracks follow the river. A mother turkey crossed the road with one very cute baby!

There are several pretty nice BLM campgrounds along here, getting nicer as you go south (Lmuma or Big Pines). At the Umtanum site to the north, there is a nice pedestrian bridge over the river. The air smells like sage.

From Yakima we headed a short ways west on hiway 12, and then to Cowiche Canyon, a hike that has long been on our wish list. Unfortunately Grant was feeling really crummy & his blood sugar was high, despite having taken a lot of insulin & eaten nothing all day. He decided to walk anyway,

hoping it would bring his blood sugar down. He went ahead while I made sandwiches & then followed him. It's a beautiful walk that follows a stream. There are wooden bridges & the sumac was blazing red. I saw several kestrels. (On the drive in I saw a frolicking coyote.) It was quite hot (we started about 11:15). Grant walked to the bridge just past the winery cutoff trail. I caught up with him as he was returning. He wasn't looking too good. I had brought his water bottle, which he had forgotten to take, and he was looking a little heatstroked. We stopped at a shaded bench & he lay down for a bit with a wet paper towel on his face. He was feeling a little bit nauseous & dizzy. It was a long walk back to the car. I drove after that, and with some AC he slowly started feeling better.

On the way out of the parking lot I hit a small pothole at slow speed & the lurching was apparently the last straw for our beloved shoe rack. It pulled the garment hook right out of the

ceiling, taking our clothesline with it.  
I felt very discouraged.

(1pm) We drove back to Yakima, south  
on hiway 82, and then east on 24,  
which quickly became a very empty  
road through stubby wheat fields.  
Then hiway 260 + 261 to Palouse  
Falls St. Pk, reached by a 2-mile  
washboard dirt road. We arrived  
about 4 pm.

The falls are beautiful, spilling  
over a basalt shelf and into a big  
blue pool. While Grant napped I  
watched crazy hikers climb around  
on steep ledges to reach the falls...

The bare bones campground is \$12  
a night. There are outhouses. There  
are a lot of day visitors and only  
a few campers. There's no privacy  
between sites. The couple next to us  
(he Indian, she blond) are arguing a lot.  
Then they broke out guitars, and she plays  
well. Many photographers here for the sunset.  
It was low-key today but one guy showed me  
some spectacular ones he has taken. Grant  
can't eat so I had half a tuna sandwich, corn salad,

+ plums for dinner. Our camp neighbor on the other side is an old hippie lady from California. 7

Thursday Sept. 10 41° 6:00 am  
Idaho

Slept great, awake about 6 am. Our neighbor slept out on a cot. I admire the courage of women who travel alone on the road. My biggest challenge would be getting sleepy while driving.

On the road about 7. Thankfully Grant is feeling much better. 26 East to Colfax. Stop for ice, window washing, + a bathroom. I was pleased to see that the block of ice we'd started with was only half thawed, despite the hot days. I think putting the wool blanket on top of the cooler helps.

The drive through the Palouse is beautiful. Rolling hills Grant calls "land dunes," now covered with wheat stubble or freshly plowed to show the brown-black earth. Sometimes the road feels like a roller coaster as it swoops between the "dunes." A tractor pulling a plough looks like a ship sailing the sea, the plume of dust like spray behind it.

From the town of Palouse we headed south to Pullman, where we had never been. After a wifi stop (thank you McDonalds) we drove through the WSU campus. It's much different than the isolated, dreary outpost I'd expected. The campus is large + beautiful & the town itself is good-sized +

appears to have plenty of amenities. The University of Idaho & Moscow are only 8 miles away, and there is a paved bike path & a free shuttle!

We arrived in Moscow about 10:45 & met up with Rebeca Marquez, an AirBnB guest we have kept in touch with. She moved here because the cost of living is very low and she could afford to ~~not~~ not work while she studied for her CPA exams. Her small apartment is \$300 a month. This morning at 8:00 she had received notice that she passed her final CPA exam and she is now a CPA!

We walked around downtown Moscow (restaurants, coffee shops, & other college town shops) and then to the U of Idaho campus about 1/4 mile away. I like the youthful energy on college campuses. With 11,000 students it's about the size of Western.

We had a forgettable lunch at the Coop, then walked back to Rebeca's and said goodbye about 1:45. The thermometer in town said 82° and it

was quite warm walking in the sun. Rebeca said it had been down in the 50s for the past week or so.

We took 95 south & then 12 east towards Missoula. 12 follows the Clearwater River and is one of the prettiest drives we've been on. It's just a bit hazy from the fires that are still burning.

Stopped at the USDA info station in Orofino & learned that some of the campgrounds were still closed due to the fires, but that the ban on campfires had been lifted! She gave us a nice map of all the campgrounds. We continued on for another hour or so, past many fire scars, past the confluence of the Selway and Lochsa Rivers, and up the Lochsa to the Apgar CG.

Our site is right on the river. \$7 a night (with our 50% discount). Only 7 sites & they are private. There is some traffic on nearby Highway 12, but not much. I went down by the river in the sun & heard animal huffing noises. I feared a bear but Grant said it must have been an otter! This is our own "private Idaho."

Potatoes, eggs, & sausage for dinner (yum!) and a nice fire, using mostly found wood.

We hear the river & lots of frogs.  
About 60° at 6 pm.

Friday Sept. 11 Idaho

Up at 6:30, 46°. I had coffee by the river, wrapped in my blanket, while Grant slept a bit longer. Saw a small fish jump and watched a merganser sail past, wings whistling. Watched a grouse's frustrated attempts to pluck elderberries from the thin and bendy branches that wouldn't support its weight.

We both had nice sponge baths before hitting the road at 8.

Hiway 12 continued gorgeous, skirting the very edge of the beautiful Lochsa River (sometimes a bit close for my comfort - there are no shoulders). The historic ranger station I had hoped to visit closed on Labor Day. Some trails & roads are still closed due to fire activity. We very much enjoyed the short walk through the DeVoto Memorial Cedar Grove.

The Lolo Pass Vistor Center (5225') is a nice stop and there are short interpretive trails.

We got groceries in the town of Lolo,

then headed south on hiway 93 along the Bitterroot River and Valley. Picnic lunch at a fishing area along a barely-moving stream.

93 south became dotted (dots denote a scenic road on maps) and very beautiful.

Stopped at the ranger station in North Fork for campground information. Saw bits of the fabled Salmon River. Saw fishermen and a few bow hunters.

At the town of Salmon we gassed up and headed east on hiway 28. Beautiful high desert. Hundreds of magpies. Arrive McFarland BLM CG, 4 miles east of Lemhi, at 5:20 mountain time. 80°, cost is \$2.50. The CG is an open field with about eight spots, some of which have shaded picnic tables. The ~~three~~ four other campers are sportsmen in RV's, and several very large women.

After dinner of eggs, potatoes, & sausage we walked laps around the small campground for exercise. We're next to the river but can't see or hear it because of a tall hedge. The coyotes serenaded us & the sky was packed with stars.

Saturday Sept. 12 Cody Wyoming

36° this morning with a chilly breeze!

On the road by 7 -oops, make that 8, we're on Mountain time again. Lots of birds flying.

Across the beautiful high plains, about 6000' elevation. Saw our first herd of antelope, mingling with a herd of cows.

Hwy 28 south to 33 E to Rexburg.

Hay country. WiFi & windows stop. 20 N to Yellowstone west entrance, climbing through pine forests to the Continental Divide at 7000'. Beginnings of fall color, including yellow aspen. Picnic on the river near the park entrance. All campgrounds are full.

This is kind of a quick Yellowstone trip, just passing through. Stop at Beryl Spring, with its blue almost-boiling-temperature pool & roaring fumarole. Walked the 1-mile Artist's Paintpot loop to see boiling mud & blood-red trickles of steaming water. Saw elk & of course Bison.

In Canyon Village we had hot showers for \$3.90. Then drove about an hour to the east entrance of the park, over an 8500' pass & down a steep road. Yellowstone Lake, which we drove past, is large & pretty. There are some nice picnic areas on the lakeshore.

75° at 6 pm

Saw an enormous mushroom cloud of fire smoke in the blue sky. It was a controlled burn south of the park. It was quite spectacular, although the sky soon grew overcast & hazy. The east side of the park has many burned areas.

We left the park about 5:30 and began looking for campgrounds in Shoshone Ntl. Forest. The first one was closed for the season - uh oh. The second one was open - but full. We got a bit nervous. The third one, Newton Creek, was open but there were two large RVs in line to get in. You're supposed to drive in, find a site, & then come back & pay, but they were parked by the pay station, blocking the road. So I jumped out & walk down to snag a spot, feeling a little bit guilty. We did get a lovely spot on the river, but it turns out there were plenty of spots, and this one isn't big enough for a big RV.

Dinner of quesajuevos (corn tortillas, refries, cheese, fried egg, sour cream, salsa). Nice fire\*. Just as it was getting dark a Forest Service guy came by and told us a grizzly had been spotted in camp. If we saw it we should \* from all scrounged wood, Grant says to mention :

climb in the car. This freaked us out a little. We closed up the bear box just in case. A Forest Service woman came by as well. She said the bear was being "pushed" down the road by cars and that there had been a "bear jam" when the bear was spotted. She & the guy made sure the bear was gone before they left, so we were never in any danger. Grizzlies are scary. No tents are allowed in this area because of them, only "hard-sided" camping vehicles.

Sunday Sept. 13 Bighorn mts.

Up at 7, 45°. Sit watching the river for a while, watching the sun light up the sandstone cliffs. Bald eagle flies by. On the road at 8:15. There were many nice-looking campgrounds on the way to Cody, so we needn't have worried last night.

The scenery to Cody was majestic, with sculpted sandstone cliffs & monuments. It's hazy though.

In Cody we went to the Buffalo Bill Center, which houses five museums under

one roof. \$19 non-senior admission. We arrived at 8:30 & to our amazement didn't leave until 1:30. This is unheard of for us. First we went to the Buffalo Bill museum, which had a lot of interesting displays about the life of Bill Cody, whose many claims to fame include the Wild West show he created & toured the world with. Its purpose was to showcase the real lives of cowboys & Indians to educate people & inspire them to preserve the legacy. He was (according to the museum) the world's first international superstar. He performed for ~~the~~ Queen Victoria & for King Edward. He also included horsemen from Morocco, the Caucasus, & other parts of the world. Can you imagine how thrilling that must have been?

Then we visited the Natural History Museum with its displays of Wyoming plants & animals & ecosystems.

Out to the car for sandwiches. Oh, first we attended a raptor lecture with a peregrine falcon, a red-tailed hawk, & a great-horned owl, all too injured to release. Always a treat to see these magnificent birds up close, the presenter was very good, & we learned some interesting things.

After lunch we finished the Natural History

museum & visited the Plains Indian museum. Lots of beautiful clothing & artefacts.

All in all the museums are good but not as good as the reviews. Cases of artefacts get boring after a while. I'd rather see more dioramas, films, & "~~more~~ holistic" displays.

After groceries & gas we left Cody at 2 pm. A few clouds had moved in & it was quite windy & hot.

We drove for 50 miles or so across high, arid plains. The distant hills were hazy - we think it may have been dust kicked up by the wind.

We entered Bighorn National Forest & climbed steeply up to an 8000' pass, past some red & gray cliffs & through sparse pine & juniper groves. We're in the Bighorn Mountains.

Shell campground is two miles down a dirt road. It's almost full with hunters. The two empty sites are "tent only," which means you carry your gear in a short distance. It's a really nice site in a grove of pine & aspen, next to a rushing stream. It's very private & we're sheltered from the wind.

There is a big pile of pine logs. \$7.50.

Arrived about 4. It's nice to have time to

relax in camp while it's light. Elevation over 7000'.

Spaghetti with ground bison & whole wheat noodles → delish. Sit by the fire for a long while until it began to rain about 9:00. We quickly stirred down the fire, put the chairs in the van, & climbed in to read. Doesn't seem that it will last long. (It didn't.) Saw a baby snake.

Monday Sept. 14 Devil's Tower WY

37° didn't feel too cold this morning. On the road by 7. Back to 14 East and then 14A west to Medicine Wheel, through gorgeous Wyoming high country. We're up around 9000 feet. It's a beautiful morning. There are bird houses on many of the fence posts. Saw a mountain bluebird. Quite a few patches of bright fall color. Numerous geology road signs list the formation, the geologic era, and the age in millions of years - cool!

Medicine Wheel is a little-known National Historic Site. We'd never heard of it until yesterday, when we overheard a woman talking about it at the Buffalo Bill museum. When we realized how close it was, we decided that we were meant to go there. It's a 1.5-mile drive up a gravel road to a parking area. When we arrived, there were two at 8:30 am

\*We had the place to ourselves. There was a ranger and more people when we returned to the lot.

other cars. You walk 1.5 miles on a dirt road to the site. It's at almost 10,000 feet, so the gentle ups and downs left us a smidge breathless. We saw several marmots & pikas - adorable. The site itself ~~is~~ feels very sacred. It's a large wheel of stones built many thousands of years ago by Indians, many of whose descendants still come here for sacred rituals. The fence around the site is festooned with cloths & medicine pouches.

We watched a golden eagle soar above us!\* It felt great to get a good walk in.

We've seen lots of hunters, and none of them are wearing orange. We're told this must mean it's bow hunting season.

We were sad to leave the Bighorn Mts - they were spectacular, even with a hazy sky. 14 east to Dayton, where a sign for drilling permits said "We quill so you can drill." 70° at 11:30 am.

Sheridan has a nice rest area with wifi & a visitor's center. We picnicked here and caught up on email. Said rest area was on I-90, which we had to drive on for about 30 miles. It left us feeling a bit crabby...

Back on 14 east in farm country

with lovely green fields of new-mown hay.

We saw hundreds of pronghorn (which are not actually antelope). They make themselves right at home in the fields. Them and the deer.

We also saw small natural gas installations.

At 4pm we arrived at Devil's Tower National Monument. We had called ahead and been told that the campground might fill up, so even though I tried to be Buddhist & trust that all would be well, I was a bit nervous. We were relieved to find a spot, but within an hour of our arrival the campground was full. I felt bad for the people circling hopefully. \$6 per night with senior pass. 82°.

We drove to the Visitor's Center for great view of the tower. It's a volcanic plug of curvy columnar basalt, 1267' above the surrounding area. We saw no climbers on it today. It's an understandably sacred site to local Indians.

Back at camp we realized that we had a fantastic view of the Tower! We are also right next to a prairie dog town, and we got some great sightings of the little furballs.

Dinner was leftover spaghetti. We decided not to have a fire. Our neighbor ran a noisy

generator for two hours. I decided it's my karma for being a selfish camper who impatiently grabs a campsite to make sure I get one.

Tuesday Sept. 15 SD

Grant says it rained in the night, but I never heard a thing. By morning everything was dry. Up at 6.  $58^{\circ}$ . Start hiking at 6:30: south side trail (steep) almost to Visitor's Center, then cut over to paved Tower Trail\*, which runs 1.3 miles around the base of the tower, through peaceful pine forest, with great views out over the valley below. We walked a total of about 3.5 miles and returned to camp about 8:30. Made coffee & breakfast, packed up, and on the road by 9.  $71^{\circ}$ , with a mix of grey & white clouds.

24 north to Hulett, then 34 & 90 southeast to Sturgis, site of the famous annual Harley gathering. We were curious about it, but

\* Indians leave colored prayer cloths & bundles tied to trees along the trail.

it just looked like a big party town to us. Bars & saloons everywhere. Kind of a raunchy edge to it. ("Dick & Jane's Naughty Shop," for example.)

14 west through Deadwood & road construction, then 385 & 87 to Custer St. Park. There are many tacky tourist towns along this otherwise beautiful stretch of road. It's very windy today & at one point the sky was half full of grey clouds with curved rain tendrils hanging down. The clouds did affect my mood a little. But eventually the sky turned blue with some puffy white clouds. Quick picnic lunch at a roadside pullout & then into Custer State Park (\$15 for one-week permit).

We drove the breathtaking Needles Hiway, which we had done three years ago. The stunning granite spires for which the road is named are at the north end of the drive.

We then headed east to the 18-mile Wildlife loop road, where we saw a cluster of half a dozen bighorn sheep, pronghorn, bison, & prairie dogs.

From there we drove 16A west to Comanche Park Forest Service campground. It closes after Labor Day and only the five sites at the entrance remain open. They are free. There

are pit toilets & no water. It's next to the road, but is otherwise pretty nice. It's very windy however, so we are holed up in the car. We arrived at camp around 4 pm. There are (non-biting) flies here, though the wind helps. (We have had no mosquitoes on the trip thus far.)

We have neighbors - a 40-something couple on bicycles. There is also a big RV at the other end. Quesajuevos for dinner, and a small fire after. Planned tomorrow's route. Light sprinkle of rain after we climbed in the van, just for a minute.

Wednesday, Sept. 16 Iowa

Up at 6:30, on the road at 7. Brief, heavy rain in the night. Blue sky, sunshine, & no wind. 49°.

Back to Custer & then south on 385.

Hot Springs features spas, thermal baths, sandstone block architecture, & a mossy waterfall.

The Black hills really are beautiful.

Before ~~springs~~<sup>not</sup> we drove through a corner of Wind Cave National Park. Open meadows, bison grazing - wow. The meadows are a ~~mix~~ palette of green, red, & tawny brown grasses.

Grant coins the term "touristocrats," for tourists who are (or fancy themselves) classier than your average tourist.

We also drove through a bit of Buffalo Gap National Grassland. Lots & lots of round hay bales dot the landscape, like grass polka dots. I found them very cheery & picturesque.

We continued south into Nebraska, as one of the goals of this trip is to see this state, which we've never been to. Our initial impressions were of rangeland, cows, & a big sky. There were scatters of rain.

In Chadron we stopped at a Safeway for groceries. No one spoke with an accent. The people we saw all seemed very mellow. I don't know if that's a Nebraska characteristic.

We got on hiway 20 & headed east. Fields of ripe sunflowers, corn, more cows, & lots of hay. A few soybeans.

Super unleaded gas (lots of ethanol) is cheap, like \$2.23.

Cherry County, "God's own cow country - 8.3 million acres."

The Sand Hills of northern Nebraska are beautiful. Rolling grass-covered dunes. Saw white swans in a large pond.

Stopped by a historic bridge over the Niobrara River for lunch. Near Valentine we crossed into Central time. 90° today.

A nice gravel trail runs for miles along hiway 20. It's called the Cowboy Trail and is the longest rails to trails conversion in the US (I think).

About 6:30 we crossed into Iowa over the Missouri River, skirted Sioux Falls, and headed a few miles north on hiway 29 to Stone State Park. \$11 a night includes showers, and firewood. There's no one else here. It's warm & humid & there are mosquitoes. We made delicious chicken tacos for dinner, took showers, put screens on the van, & climbed in. Cicadas are making a racket & it reminds me of the Amazon.

Thursday Sept. 17

Up at 7, on the road at 8. 75° already. We heard train whistles in the night and also thunder & bright flashes of lightning, but it never rained. The van stayed pleasantly cool for sleeping. This morning the sky was blue.

The park is in Iowa's "Loess Hills," a mix of endangered prairie & forested uplands. There are nice viewpoints. It's a big park with trails & seems quite nice.

We drove 75 north past huge farms & enormous expanses of corn & soy. The sky turned heavy & grey.

On 18 east we stopped for gas & brief wifi. Lots of anti-abortion billboards in evidence.

Arrived at the Clay County Fair in Spencer about 10:30. Warm & muggy, but the clouds held down the heat. Parked in a spacious free lot near an entrance. \$9 admission. First we saw the cows and pigs & sheep (no baby pigs - Grant was very disappointed).

There was a troop of "African" acrobats, very exotic in long hair braids. We had gyros for lunch. We walked & walked until we

were exhausted & a bit crabby. We couldn't take any more obese people, kettle Korn smells, or schlocky merchandise. It was fun at first, but by the end we couldn't wait to get out of there. As we left we walked by the tractor pull, where souped-up giant tractors with roll cages were roaring & disgorging clouds of black smoke, like green dragons.

Back in the car at 2, we wearily slogged about 15 miles north to the lakes around the town of Okoboji. My parents spent one night of their honeymoon here when they drove across the US in 1958.

It turns out that only a couple of the many state parks here have camping. After driving around the lakeshore for a while, past many mansions, we came to Gull Point S.P. We were disappointed that the campground is not on the water. We drove down by the water for a couple hours. Grant napped while I sat on a bench by the lake & read.

About 5:30 we got a campsite -

the campground is mostly empty. Chicken tacos for dinner. No fire because of the mosquitoes. The cicadas are serenading.

I'm happy we're seeing new parts of the country, but the midwest, as beautiful as it is, just doesn't hold a candle to the great American west, and I find myself feeling a bit homesick.

On the way to camp we bought two gorgeous cantaloupes from a roadside vendor. We'll give them as gifts to the people we're visiting tomorrow. We were sad to learn that sweet corn season is already over here.

At the fair we learned more about the gas they sell here. E-85 is 85% ethanol and flex fuel cars can use it. It's quite a bit cheaper than other gas. We're told that our car can run up to 15% ethanol. "Super unleaded" varies in its percent of ethanol, so you just have to check at the pump.

Friday Sept. 18 Early, Iowa

Up at 7. 50°. On the road 7:30.  
Sat by the lake & drank our coffee.

Drove south until we found a place to walk, near Peterson, in Wanata State Preserve. The dirt road went through forest & then out of the park & past fields. We saw an ammonia pipeline.

We walked for about an hour, then drove on farm roads to Storm Lake for a wifi stop. The rolling hills & mix of fields & clusters of trees is quite lovely. The sky alternated blue & grey, with occasional spatters of rain.

We had lunch by the lake and then drove through the town of Schaller ("shaler") where good family friend Clare King was raised. From there it was 10 minutes to Clare's nephew's farm.

Dean Drey & his wife Deb took over the family farm in 1994. It's been in the family since his greatgrandpa homesteaded it in 1876. They grow corn & soybeans & raise hogs. They have 700 acres. They were so nice to us, answering our myriad

questions about how they plant & harvest, decide what kind of seed to plant, when to harvest, & on & on. He showed us his combine & let us sit in the cab, way up high. It was fascinating. They'll start harvesting in about a week & will work 12 & 16 hour days until it's done. They were very nice people. Dean is practically the spitting image of Clare's son Russ.

We arrived there at 1 and left at 4. We then drove about a mile into the town of Early to Clare's sister Lorraine's (Dean's mom). We had a nice chat and then she fed us chicken, "cheesy potatoes," <sup>"lettuce"</sup> salad, and apple cobbler. She showed me old pictures of Clare and we chatted some more. She invited us to park out front for the night. She's really nice and very easy to talk to.

Dean also does "for hire" harvesting & builds grain bins. He says the money's good but it's hard to find workers to help.

Schaller was once the popcorn capital of the world, but not much is grown there now.

Saturday Sept. 19

Up at 7, 40°, <sup>bluesky</sup> Toast & chat with Lorraine, and then she took us on a nice walk around town. She is really spry for being almost 80. \*

At 9:45 we said goodbye.

\* She told us about the town and how it is shrinking as people leave farming & move to bigger towns. Early no longer has a grocery store, & the kids have to go farther & farther to school.

We drove back to Storm Lake for wifi, <sup>groceries</sup> thinking we'd take hiway 18 across the state, but then realized that 20 made more sense. So back to 20 we went, and across to Waterloo. Storm Lake is a town on a very pretty lake, with parks & trails.

In Moorland we parked in a church parking lot to make sandwiches. An East Indian woman was staring at our van, so we explained what we were doing. She was wearing Indian traditional clothing & spoke with an accent, so she was clearly an

immigrant, and I wondered what she was doing in this small town in the middle of Iowa. She was very friendly & marveled at how far we had driven. As we drove out of the town we were surprised to see a little BBQ restaurant.

20 east was a beautiful road. The fields of soy & corn were a palette of greens, golds, & umbers. Some fields were just corn stubble, others were plowed, & a rich dark brown. We saw harvesters running, & a plow. The sky was robin's egg blue & dotted with puffball clouds, suspended as if by invisible threads. Gently rolling hills, clusters of trees, farm buildings (stately houses, barns, silos), small brilliant blue lakes, clouds of purple aster in bloom. We drove much of it in silence, listening to music that somehow accentuated the beauty.

These scenic drives, without billboards or semis, are like a form of meditation. They are food for the spirit.

In Waterloo we visited the John Deere Tractor & Engine Museum, which we really enjoyed. The exhibits are fairly interactive,

and pretty interesting. It's not too big, so you don't get exhausted. I think we probably spent about an hour there.

After gassing up in Waterloo we drove about an hour east to Backbone State Park. It's Saturday so there are quite a few campers, including a lot of families with little kids. The kids were having a blast playing & riding bikes.

Our neighbor, a young, single woman, couldn't get her stove to work, so we offered to share ours, and chatted while she boiled her brown rice pasta. She's from Iowa City & said she lived around the country before deciding to go back to Iowa City, and with a new appreciation for it. A familiar story I think; it certainly is mine.

Potatoes, eggs, sausage for dinner. No mosquitoes. Sat by a small fire for a while. We're staying at the "primitive" campground by the west gate. The south gate "modern" campground is the same but has electric hookups & showers.

~~Sat~~ Sunday Sept. 20 Fairport, Iowa

Up about 7, 50°. Pack up & drive to the Backbone Trail. It's a fairly easy 1 mile or so loop on a dolomite ridge\* and through a beautiful forest, mostly deciduous, mostly maple. With the weathered old rocks, winding river, & type of forest, it felt like a cross between the east & the south. (\*called the Devil's Backbone)

It's another perfect fall day - blue sky, sunshine, warm but not too.

Showered at <sup>south</sup>campground and hit the road about 9:30. North to hiway 3 east.

NE Iowa is gorgeous. Rolling hills, prosperous farms. It's called the "Iowa Hill Country."

We have seen more racial diversity in rural Iowa than I expected: East Indian, black, Asian, Hispanic, Eastern European.

In Dubuque we got on 52 south, the "Great River Road" that follows the Mississippi River.

In Bellevue we stopped to watch a barge go through lock #12. They are numbered north to south.

---

Midwest trivia: Dinner = lunch, & supper is the evening meal.

Travel term we coined: reburg. It's a second town that appears right after you drive through one.

A nice walkway goes along the river. The barge was pushed into the lock by its "pushboat" (like a tug). The pushboat came through separately, so the whole process took a while. We ate our lunch sitting on a bench in the sun.

The drive from Bellevue to Clinton was really beautiful. In Clinton we stopped for groceries & wifi. Clinton to Montpelier (61 south, ~~22 west~~) was unappaling urban industrial.

The "Quad Cities" include two in Iowa & two in Illinois. Davenport, Iowa has a really nice riverfront trail & park & hip, happenin' feel.

22 west is industrial. In Fairport we stopped at the Recreation Area to verify that it looked OK for camping. Then we drove 6 miles farther south to the nearest town, Muscatine, to look for a place for Grant to watch the Seahawks game tonight.

All he could find was a dive sports bar. Luckily when we got back to the campground he was able to find a radio station playing the game. I so dislike football & wish he hadn't started

liking it again, years after we met. I will sit by the fire so I don't have to hear it.

The campground is OK. \$16 a night, has showers, right on the river. There are no dikes here to block the river view. Arrived 5 pm.

Potatoes, eggs, sausage for dinner. The campground is kind of litter-strewn, and our neighbors are noisy. We can hear the cars on the hiway, & the rat-a-tat of guns across the river. But there are also geese honking, cicadas chirping, and an occasional train passing, so there are good noises too.

The moon is almost half full, shining on the river.

I got kind of crabby toward the end of our drive this afternoon. If we drive too much past 4:00 we both seem to get a bit crabby.

The urban industrial driving takes a toll too.

I keep thinking back to things we learned at Dean's farm. Metal farm buildings have wood frames. The metal panels are siding. The buildings can be insulated.

A combine is the machine that holds the harvested item in a tank. Interchangeable heads are crop-specific. A corn head

cuts the stalk, strips off the cob, and "shells" the cob, removing the kernels. It spits out the stalk + cob, all ground up. These are later tilled under. (The exception is corn for silage, when the whole plant is ground up, fermented, and fed to animals. Also, seed corn is not shelled during harvest.)

Seed corn is grown by individual farmers who are invited by the seed companies (ditto for other kinds of seed.) It's a privilege to be asked. You make more but the requirements are stricter.

When a combine is working it can either fill its tank or offload the grain via an auger, into a wagon being pulled by a tractor. The grain is loaded with a longer auger into a bin, or taken to an elevator. The corn must be dry enough otherwise the farmer is charged a drying fee. Dean's bins have heat dryers.

Monday Sept. 21 near St. Louis MO

Up at 7, 50°, no dew, blue sky. There were dozens of flies sleeping on the van ceiling. Luckily they didn't bother us last night.

Drank my coffee sitting in a bench swing by the river. Saw a Kingfisher and a barge go by.

Hiway 22 west. Lots of "barn quilts" (big panels painted with a quilt square pattern). Sign for Muscatine restaurant: "A guy & a grill."

I-69 south to 261 south to 61 south.

As in Dylan's 'Hiway 61 Revisited.'

Been seeing many freestanding solar panels on farms. We're not seeing big corporate farms, only private family farms.

In Fort Madison we went to Riverview Park and walked along the river. The old fort has been preserved. There's also an old riverboat. We stopped for groceries & gas.

Yesterday we bought a flyswatter. Today we killed dozens of last night's flies. There are still more.

Play on words: Heron There (i.e., here & there). Good name for a nature center.

Abortion is the issue in the middle of this

country. So many signs & billboards.

Lunch at a roadside park. Cloudless blue sky, 80°, lite breeze.

Cross into Missouri. Gas is \$1.99 a gallon. (The lowest we saw was \$1.94.)

Hannibal Mo is Mark Twain's hometown.

We saw his boyhood home & other buildings he wrote about in his book. We strolled the small nearby riverfront. It is worth stopping here, although we did not actually go inside any of the buildings.

After a brief wifi stop we happened upon a great visitor's center (just south of town on route 61) where we got information about St. Louis for tomorrow. Then we backtracked a bit to hiway 79, the dotted road along the river. It was gorgeous! We stopped at Lover's Leap, a 200 ft. high promontory, for a view of Hannibal & the river.

At Clarksville the road was closed for bridge construction so we detoured back to I-64 south. We arrived at Cuivre (~~rhymes with~~ <sup>pronounced</sup> quiver) river state park about 5 pm. \$13 for a basic site.

The sites are nice and fairly private.  
There are showers and laundry.

Stroganoff for dinner (ground beef, mushroom gravy, sour cream over whole wheat farfalle noodles). Good but would have been better with onions, more gravy, and more seasonings.

74° and a few skeeters. Cicadas singing.  
Did a big load of laundry.

Tuesday Sept. 22 Missouri

Up at 6:30 at first light. 52°. Large, bright planet in the sky.

On the road at 7, heading for St. Louis. 47 east, 79 s, then 1-70.\* Found cheap parking near the stadium, a few blocks from the arch. The sign said \$3 but she charged us \$5. She was crabby - we didn't argue. Walked to the Old Courthouse (an NPS site) to buy our arch tickets. We had thought of doing the one-hour boat trip but they only had one cruise at noon,

\* Hit rush hours all the way, but still only took us about 1:40, instead of 1:15 with no traffic.

which didn't jibe with our lunch plans.

The arch area is undergoing a massive civic renovation. It's going to be very nice, with a big park along the river, but it won't be done until 2017. Meanwhile you walk a few blocks to get there. You go down under the arch, and climb into small 5-person capsules. The cars lurch & rock their way about 1 minute to the top. You can't see the view. At the top there are small slit-like windows that let you see out over the river on one side and over downtown on the other. We were underwhelmed, but it was worth doing. \$7 each with our NPS pass (usually \$10). Long line when we came down - glad we went early.

We decided to walk the two miles west to Pappy's BBQ restaurant. Unfortunately we picked the wrong street (Olive) which was shabby & depressing, populated by all manner of street people. I wouldn't have felt comfortable walking there alone.

We arrived at Pappy's at 11 and there was already a short line. It has a great atmosphere and they play rockin'

blues music. But we didn't think the food was that good. Tough brisket, fatty pork, greasy & overcooked sweet potato fries. Grant regretted eating so much.

We walked back on Market, which was much nicer. Many beautiful parks, fountains, & buildings, including Union Station & City Hall. It was hot, & by the time we got back to our car we were dragging. We walked for about two hours. We saw lots of good street food & wished we'd eaten that instead.

We drove out of St. Louis on hiway 30, headed for scenic hiway 21. It was a long slog through lights & traffic & we did not like it. We were delighted to finally get out in the country again. It made us question our plan to go to Kansas City...

Our GPS sent us on a 14-mile wild goose chase, and we finally pulled into Sam A. Baker State Park about 5:15. We're in the Ozarks & the roads are narrow, windy, & hilly. There are Bible Verse signs at frequent intervals.

The park is nice, & the same as the

other Missouri S.P. last night: \$13, showers, laundry, & a fair amount of space between the sites. The C.G. is mostly empty. The host is a super nice man, retired CA executive, also is a volunteer naturalist.

A light dinner of tomato soup & half a grilled swiss sandwich each. A couple of skeeters. Dark at 7:30. 72°. Took real showers (no button to constantly push!). Deer, woodpeckers, cicadas serenading.

This campground has wifi & clean bathrooms.

Wednesday Sept. 23 Kansas

Up at 7, 56°. On the road at 7:45. Stop to fill water jugs & faucet won't turn off. Try fixing but no luck so stopped to tell host.

143 north back to Des Arc, then 49s to the 60. Lots of signs for Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

Stopped at a gas station for ice and there were many displays of Christian merchandise...

Driving through pine & hardwood

forests & it's kind of monotonous. The intense Christian signage is freaky. Four-foot tall bloody Jesus on the cross painted on plywood, propped on a porch, with the words "This blood's for you."

Saw a few dead armadillos by the roadside.

It's hard to avoid cliché judgments down here. People seem ignorant & backward, but is that just what I've been conditioned to believe? People here spout "religion" but not spirituality. Religion is intolerant, close-minded, vengeful. Spirituality is accepting, compassionate, tolerant.

In Mansfield we stopped at Rocky Ridge, the home where Laura Ingalls Wilder lived for 60 years. The house has been preserved but you can only go on a guided tour. We decided to pass. We had lunch at the rundown picnic tables across the street, then got on hiway 5 north. Another country road with narrow lanes & no shoulders. A little freaky to drive at 55, so we often go slower. It was a "rollercoaster" ride, with big ups & downs & curves. It was green but not especially scenic. Some early fall color just

beginning.

Grant said he wanted to skip BBQ in Kansas City and that he would never have us go out of our way again for BBQ. It just hasn't been worth it. There doesn't seem to be any other compelling reason to go to KC, and given that it's even bigger than St. Louis, and that St. Louis knocked the stuffing out of us yesterday, we decided not to go there.

We got on 7 west. No Catholic churches here in MO, just lots of Baptist & Pentecostal.

mid-70s, light clouds, ancient-looking, heavily-weathered rock outcroppings along the road.

In Clinton we stopped for gas & splurged on ice cream, which we've been craving. The air is very warm & muggy & there are more clouds.

Crossed into Kansas & arrived at Hillsdale State Park at 5:30. It was a long day but we made it without getting crabby. The campground is on a big reservoir. #16. Showers included.

Turns out a tornado hit here 5 days ago & destroyed 5 RVs! The host said his enormous rig tipped up on 2 wheels. The whole thing lasted about 90 seconds, which must have seemed an eternity. No one saw it coming. 2 people were injured.

Stroganoff for dinner (sautéed strips of beef, onion, mushroom, sour cream over farfalle - tasty but the meat was tough).

75°, beautiful sunset. I remember a beautiful sunset the last time we were in Kansas. Walked over to the lake and saw a three-foot-long snake skin. Also saw rabbits, bluebirds, nuthatch. A few skitters at dusk, cicadas singing. No fire due to heat & bugs. Also the firepits are too tall.

The campground is litter-strewn. The port-a-potties are clean.

Sitting in the van to escape bugs. Front windows open with bug screens, but it's a bit warm in here.

Today is brother Mark's 50th birthday. I sent him a text.

Thursday Sept. 24 Nebraska

Up 6:45, 63°. Lovely red sunrise.

Stop to see the tornado damage at the adjacent camp area. Trees twisted off six or eight feet above ground. An RV turned upside down, reduced to rubble, pieces of insulation and metal sheeting wedged in trees nearby. Wow.

On the road at 7:30. 68 west to 35 north then 59 north, to Topeka, the capital of Kansas. At the Brown v Board of Education historic site we saw the Monroe elementary school that was forced to integrate. We drove by the capital building, and then to Ward-Meade historic park. Old Pioneer Town is a collection of real & replica 1800s buildings that is quite charming though small. The stately Ward-Meade mansion is also part of the park, and a very nice, small botanical garden. We continued our walk into the adjacent neighborhood. Once-grand houses are in various states of disrepair, which is sad to see.

24 north to 99 north. A brooding

sky finally gave way to rain, and a clean windshield.

Stopped at a Kansas meat store for ground bison & sausage, both hard to find at a regular grocery store.

It was nice to be back in farm country. Corn, soy, sorghum.

Lunch at a park in Frankfort. Huge playground, swimming pool with elaborate slides. How can a tiny town afford these things, but not Kirkland?

9 west to 15 north and into Nebraska. We love these back roads. 65 mph, scenic, and no semis or billboards or Walmarts.

Wifi break in Fairbury then 136 west, 14 north, 74 west, & 281 north to Mormon Island State Recreation Area. Arrive at 5 pm. 74°.

#18. Sandwiched between interstate 80 & hiway 281, it feels more like a glorified rest area.

Stroganoff for dinner & hang out in the van to avoid mosquitoes & light rain.

Saw glossy ibis today!

Friday Sept. 25 Estes Park CO

Up at 6:30. Light rain. On the road at 7:30. Drive to Crane Trust Nature Center hoping to walk on their trails, but it was closed.

11 north to 2 west. Gloomy weather, gloomy moods. Rain as far as the eye can see.

Hiway 2 is nice: wide lanes, shoulders, rural, 65 mph, little traffic, no billboards.

Weather report says there is sun to the west.

This weekend is the annual "Junk Jaunt," a 300-mile garage sale loop!

~~Neon~~ Neon green signs point to locations.

Dozens of coal trains going by. None of the loads are covered.

Farm sign succinctly summarizes life here: "Faith Family Farming."

Hiway 2 is "Sandhills Scenic By way." We're back in the grass-covered dunes - beautiful.

Stop at the Nebraska National Forest for a stroll. It was handplanted in the late 1800s. Misting lightly.

Soon after, the rain stopped and the

sky brightened! So did our moods.

Lunch in Whitman, a very small town.  
Practically a ghost town. Peaceful & quiet.

Lakes & marshes appeared along the highway. Glittering blue and a few ducks.  
385 south past cattle feedlots & sugar beet fields to Scottsbluff National Monument.

Sandstone bluffs soar above the prairie.  
A short drive to the top and you can see for miles. The Oregon Trail went right past here. Prickly pear & agave here.

71 south to Colorado. The Gering Valley is lush & lovely. It's nice to be back in "the west," with rock formations.

It's about 70 degrees & breezy. We're back on Mountain time.

NE Colorado is blah. Scrubby & featureless. oil rigs. Pronghorn galore. Prairie dogs.

20 minute construction delay on I-70 east felt interminable. I-25 south was 75 mph in rush hour traffic. It felt insane! We were getting very tired, hungry, & crabby. The campground we had hoped to stay in was full... We slogged on. 34 east became a winding mountain road with no place to

pull out. We finally decided to continue to Estes Park, eat in a restaurant, & find a parking lot to sleep in. We arrived at The Grumpy Gringo about 7pm (8pm by our tummies) and had pretty good mexican food. The owner was really nice & offered to let us park out back for the night!

We got groceries at Safeway, did a quick wifi stop, and came back to the restaurant to sleep about 9pm. We're exhausted. This town is crazy busy. Turns out that tomorrow is free day in the National Parks. Also it's elk rut and fall color.

To cap off the day, my hand lotion exploded all over my stuff ...

I did not pass the severity test very well today. We should know better than to try to camp so late, especially on a Friday night.

Saturday Sept. 26 Estes Park CO

Awake at 5:30. Cold here at 7500' High 30s?  
Lots of stars. Drive to McDonalds for bathroom.  
At first light drive to Park entrance. Visitor  
Center doesn't open until 9. Mobs of cars  
were driving into the park. The park camp  
grounds were listed as all full. We made  
coffee in the parking lot and decided to  
wait until tomorrow to do the park. <sup>Just too crowded</sup> on "free day."

Lots of elk along the road. Drive hiway 7  
south. Brilliant yellow & gold aspen. The mix of  
aspen & <sup>green</sup> conifers is stunning. Brisk, chilly walk  
around Lily Lake. Only a few people there so early.  
72 south was crowded with leaf peepers.  
All of the Forest Service campgrounds were either  
closed or full. Continued on hiway 119 to Boulder.  
At 5300' elevation, it was much warmer. <sup>thru gorgeous</sup> canyon.  
A gorgeous fall day, the sky brilliant blue.  
It seemed like half the people from nearby Boulder  
& Denver were driving the fall color loop today.  
The roads were packed.

We were surprised & delighted to find  
free parking next to the Boulder library. A  
network of bike & pedestrian trails laces the town.  
We walked along Boulder Creek, shallow &

people-friendly, to the Saturday farmer's market. Four times the size of Kirkland's, it had 10 times the selection & quality. Incredible organic produce from truly local growers. A whole booth of just kombucha. Meat, cheese, honey, and much more.

We bought corn, a cantaloupe, and cherry tomatoes. The people watching was wonderful. Boulder is like Eugene squared. Dreadlocks, flowing clothes, piercings, tattoos. Lots of old & young hippies. Lots of scruffy young people with backpacks.

Quite a few drunks & street folks as well.

We had lunch on a shady bench near the library and then walked on the "multi-use" trail to the University campus.

The trail is a bit nerve-wracking because bikes are zooming by in both directions.

The UC campus is really nice. We walked past the stadium where a football game was in progress. The crowd was roaring & the band was playing. The buildings are sandstone block, in keeping with the local scenery. They have a nice outdoor pool. There are lots of

trees, shade, & trails. Looks like a great place to go to college. In keeping with Boulder's eco-progressiveness, the student apartments have clotheslines.

We spent about 2 1/2 hours in Boulder. We also went to the library, which was really nice, & ~~also~~ had great maps available.

We left about 1:30 and drove back to Estes Park on 36. Nice but not nearly as nice as 7. Huge traffic jams getting into town.

We're on the east side of the Continental Divide here, so it's dry & almost desert-like. Actually, it's more like Cle Elum or Ellensburg, with open pine forests, but it's much higher elevation.

We grabbed some paper towels at Safeway & then drove to the park visitor center. Turns out there are in fact campsites available on the west side of the park, an hour & a half away. We decided to go for it, but about 10 minutes into the park the car began to decelerate, and we realized we were almost out of gas! Yikes, how did that happen? We reluctantly headed back to Estes Park, a place we had hoped to be done with.

It was an absolute mob scene of wall-to-wall traffic. Turns out that in addition to everything else that's going on this weekend, they were having a big Autumn fest, with live music & the works.

We gassed up and slogged our way out of town & back to Lily Lake, hoping for a moment of peace & a place to cook dinner. It had been so peaceful there this morning. But it was mobbed as well. We did find a parking spot by the lake where we read for a while. The crowd thinned a bit & we made dinner: corn on the cob & bison spaghetti. A very rowdy wedding party arrived & hooted drunkenly for about an hour. It's now 7:15 & dusk. People are still drifting in and out but it's mostly quiet now.

About 8:00 we drove to McDonalds and did wifi until 9:30. Then back to Grumpy Gringo. Since we hadn't explicitly asked permission to stay a second night, we wanted to wait until the owner

had left. He was in fact gone, and we settled in for the night.

Sunday Sept. 27 Rocky Mt. N.P.

Up at 6:15 and off to McDonald's to brush teeth. It's light at 6:30. Chilly but not as cold as yesterday. 50° in the van, 46° outside. Grab a few quick things at Safeway and into the park at 7. More people than expected are already in the park. Many were parked at the big meadow, spotting scopes and chairs set up, watching for elk.

We drove to End o' the Road picnic area and made coffee & then headed west through the park. The windy road climbs through subalpine forest up to an alpine high point of 12,183 feet. No trees grow up here, only low tundra plants, and you can see for miles. It's another beautiful fall day, and not that cold even at 12,000 feet. The traffic finally thinned a bit. The fall color is stunning, and seems to be about at its peak. We saw a magnificent bull elk next to the road, guarding his harem. Some of the aspen are pumpkin orange.

We pulled into Timber Creek camp, on the

west side of the park, about 9:30. Many sites were empty, and many people were leaving. No idea why the sign at the campground entrance said it was full. Lesson learned: don't always believe the full signs. We found a great spot with a view west over a big meadow.

After registering we drove south to the Bower Gulch trailhead and walked through meadow and pine forest for just over an hour. It felt so good to finally get away from people after two days of intense traffic & congestion.

By the time we got back to the campground it was pretty empty & quiet. We had lunch and sponge baths. There's a strong, cooling breeze, but the sun is pretty intense, so we're parked in the shade of the van. Puffy white clouds have appeared, covering the sun off & on. It's a sleepy afternoon, but it feels great to have some down time to just hang out & relax.

We're at 9000' elevation. I have just a tiny headache and we're a bit short of breath. Grant feels a little dizzy.

Leftover spaghetti for dinner. Sat by the fire & watched the total eclipse of a supermoon! Reddish with a fringe of gold. It lasted a long time. Got very chilled, even by the fire, so we climbed in the van to keep an eye on the moon. When we fell asleep, about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the moon had reappeared, brilliant, almost blinding, gold. In the middle of the night, the moon shone full & bright in the van window - beautiful. We heard elk bugling all night, and in the middle of the night we saw them in the meadow 50 yards away! Silhouettes in the moonlight. Hearing elk bugle is a wild & primal sound. We're so glad there are still places left ~~where~~ you can experience big animals in the wild.

Monday Sept. 28 Leadville CO

Up at 7. 38°, light breeze, overcast. Elk still bugling unseen in the near distance. Leave camp at 7:50 and drive to the Onahu trailhead. We walked on a fairly smooth and gently climbing trail north toward the Bowen Gulch trail. The trail crossed the park road and continued to a bridge over the river

(the Colorado), where we turned around and walked back. 80 minutes of brisk walking in the woods & cold air felt great.

We stopped at the west entrance visitor center where we discovered that all Arches campsites are completely booked for weeks. Grant found a hostel that will let us park in their lot, no reservations required.

In the pleasant town of Granby we ate lunch. The sun was peeking through. We took 40 west through glorious swaths of golden cottonwood trees. It's warmer but still cloudy. 9 south to Silverthorne, with a brief construction delay. At the ranger station in Silverthorne we learned that many Forest Service campgrounds closed today, and that the weather looks good - dry and not too cold - for the next few days.

A brief stretch on interstate 70 was fairly scenic & mellow. Then 91 south to

---

Another term we coined: Fake Lake, or Flake, is a reservoir.

\* We crossed the Continental Divide at 11,300' Fremont pass just north of Leadville.

Leadville, at over 10,000 feet elevation.\*

At the ranger station we learned that all of the campgrounds in the district closed at noon today - she said that usually there is snow by now. Luckily she said one of the campgrounds was un gated, but there would be no water, garbage, or outhouse. It's only 9 miles from town on a paved road. Sounded perfect to us.

We went back to town, parked, and walked past the very quaint old downtown buildings to an ice cream shop. 71° degrees but breezy. The ice cream was delicious.

Coming into town we had seen a laundromat with "hot showers." We did a load of laundry and had nice showers (\$5 each). The place had wifi and I had a chat with a nice woman who had moved there a year ago. She said the people are very nice and down-to-earth and rents are reasonable, but the school isn't very good. She also said it's warmer now than it had been all summer.

(Forgot to say that Grant realized, after we were several blocks away, that he had left his camera in the coffee shop. I ran back to get it, forgetting that we were at 10,000 feet. My

lungs were burning!)

It sprinkled briefly and then the sun came out. We drove nine miles up county road 4 to the May Queen Campground on Turquoise Lake, arriving about 5:30. There was one other camper here (one more arrived later). It was 59° and very windy, with menacing clouds approaching. We made sloppy jack (potatoes, eggs, onion, sausage, cheese) and it took a long time for the potatoes to cook because water boils at a lower temp. up here. The wind tried to blow the stove out. Clark's Gray Jays ~~Ant~~crackers (birds) hovered, looking for a chance to steal food. A few drops of rain fell. But we got dinner cooked without mishap. Soon the wind died and the clouds disbursed. It's nice to be in a quiet, empty place. No fire tonight.

Tuesday Sept. 29 Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Up at 7. 38°, cloudy, no wind. After coffee (the cream had gone sour so we drank it black & it wasn't bad) we walked for just over an hour on the Turquoise Lake trail. It takes off right from the campground and runs along the lakeshore with a few small ups and downs. It goes through pine forest and a patch of aspen, over a couple of creeks with nice bridges, and past an old mine (Leadville was silver mines). The sun was breaking through.

On the way out of camp a snowshoe hare ran across the road! He had fluffy feet, like dancer's leggings, Grant said.

We stopped at the ranger station briefly, then got gas and groceries, and headed out of Leadville. We liked this little town.

24 east goes along the Arkansas River, dripping with brilliant fall color. Lots of river rafting companies here.

In the very appealing town of Buena Vista we bought sweet corn at a roadside market.

We once again crossed the Continental Divide at 11,300' Monarch Pass. Ate lunch looking west down the pass. Warm, sunny, could see for miles.

We were surprised that there were still trees so high up.

In Gunnison we did a wifi stop and I learned the very sad news that my old MEI friend Jim Hewing had died in a hiking accident when he fell 90 feet. He was a great guy and it's hard to believe he's dead.

We made a quick stop at the ranger station for campground info (in case the national park is full). 50 west to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. It was a spectacular drive through fall color and rock formations.

We arrived about 3:30 and the campground was almost empty. After a brief stop at the visitors center we settled in to site c25. #3, very private, with a view of distant peaks. We're at 8400'. It was 71° at 5:30.

Sloppy jack for dinner. A surprising number of people are pulling into the campground at dark. We have a nice fire going. It's about 60° now and no breeze. The sunset was lovely, all pink & blue & gold.

The corn we had for dinner was from Olathe, ~~Kansas~~. It was delicious. Maybe Olathe is known for sweet corn?

There are several blue grouse in the campground. They are quite fearless and if you hold still they come right up to you. They are a lovely blue-grey color. The males have a small orange patch above their eye.

Wednesday, Sept. 30      Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Up at 7. 45°, partly cloudy, no breeze. Walk the 2-mile round trip on the rim trail that goes from the campground to the visitor's center. It's a moderate trail with great views into the canyon. With the altitude, the heat, and the hills, we were tired when we got back. It took a good hour. Grant's blood sugar was low when we returned so we hung out at camp for a bit before embarking on the south rim drive, about 10:00. We stopped at the half dozen or so viewpoints, most of which have quarter or half mile trails. The views of the canyon walls and

river 2000' below were spectacular. The black igneous rock is laced with pink stripes. Where the Grand Canyon is all about horizontal layers, this canyon is more vertical, with towers and columns. The effect is often like a Chinese woodblock print.

This is a pine, juniper, oak forest, and the effect from a distance is textured earthtones, like a fuzzy crocheted afghan made from that multi-colored earthtone yarn.

It was quite warm today and by noon, with all the little walks on top of this morning's bigger one, we were pooped. Picnicked at a table with a cooling breeze. Grant watched a chipmunk eat a spider.

We stopped at the visitor's center to take a closer look at some of the displays. We also watched the 20-minute video, which we found a bit disappointing.

We drove the 15 miles down to the town of Montrose for wifi and groceries. Back to camp about 4 pm, where it is 76°, overcast, and very peaceful.

In this high, dry air our noses are

all ~~scabbing~~<sup>crusty</sup> inside. We saw a golden eagle today.

Thursday Oct. 1 Moab UT

Up at 6:30. <sup>overcast</sup> About 50° with a light breeze. Rabbits & deer in the campground, the former darting for cover, the latter strolling fearlessly right past us.

Hiked the Uplands Trail for an hour, through oak forest & meadow. These are short, scrub oak, like a Lilliputian forest - you feel like a giant walking through them.

We love this landscape - tawny grasses, dusky grey-green sage, a palette of earthtones, oak leaves in shades of gold & brown. A pale quarter moon hanging in the sky, a mountain bluebird singing its heart out, white-throated swifts wheeling & darting like kites.

On the road at 8:30. The sun is breaking through. Stop in Montrose for gas. 550 south and 62 west. Spectacular fall color. 145 south to Telluride, a ski town in a breathtaking setting, up against a big bowl at the head of a valley. Lots of

cute shops & expensive, quaint houses. They have a free gondola up to the ridge. Perhaps another day. The fall color illuminated the Valley in a golden glow. Mostly appear to be birch & aspen.

145 north to Placerville, where we had lunch in a lovely town park.

Soon we were into red rock country. Vultures teetering on V-shaped wings. 145 is a high and lonesome road with little traffic. We love these roads, and slip into a peaceful trance.

90 west to Utah, and the red rock beauty keeps increasing. Wide river valleys like movie sets from a Western. Juniper-dotted hills. The rocks so red they're almost purple. The Dolores River Valley - stunning.

191 north to Moab and we are jolted out of our reverie by this strip mall town of traffic & lights.

Went to Arches to get info and there was a line (actually two) to get in at 3 pm! It was very hot - 92°. We drove back to the south end of

turn to the Lazy Lizard Hostel. For \$8.82 we can park in their lot and use their facilities - hot showers, wifi, kitchen, picnic tables. There are people of all ages here, from all over the world.

Taco salad for dinner. Sit at the picnic table in the warm evening. Chatted with <sup>young British</sup> a couple who are spending two and a half years (14 months so far) riding dirt bikes from Alaska to Argentina!

A group was partying in one corner of the lot, complete with coolers of beer, pipes of something, rope lights, and increasing hilarity, so we moved to a quieter spot.

Friday Oct. 2 Moab, Utah

Up at 6:30 and in the park by 7, at first light. Many cars already there; many photographers with tripods waiting for sunrise on the rocks.

First stop Balancing Rock, and there was a tour bus filled with seniors! Walked the .3 miles around the rock.

It's cool & breezy, with light clouds - very pleasant hiking weather. Arches is a place of stunning beauty. We're trying to focus on that, and not on the hordes of cars and people.

Next we hiked the 1-mile trail to the Windows, before driving to the end of the road and hiking to Landscape Arch, 1.6 miles round trip. The parking lot was already almost full, but luckily we were between groups and almost alone on the way in. A lovely walk up a canyon to views of the long, slender arch soaring above us. Red sand reminded us <sup>of the</sup> Sahara.

Lots of dead bunnies on the road, ~~casualties~~ byproducts of tourism...

The wind picked up until we had to shield our faces to breathe. Red dust everywhere.

We checked out the campground. It's very nice and amazingly there was one spot left. But we decided to stay at the hostel instead, since it has shade, wifi, and is a fun place

to hang out.

Last but not least, we hiked the half mile to the upper Delicate Arch viewpoint. This is the iconic arch that is Utah's symbol. Partial clouds kept it a comfortable temperature, and it was still very windy.

Stopped for lunch at the picnic tables across from Balanced Rock, but ate in the van because of the wind. Could see rain in the mountains to the east.

Left the park about 12:30 and drove back to the hostel, where we spent a couple of hours relaxing in the common room and getting caught up on email. Then we went grocery shopping before coming back to cook hobo stew in the hostel kitchen.

The partyers were actually pretty mellow & quiet and we slept great in the main parking lot.

Saturday Oct. 3 Moab UT

Up at 6:30, leave at 7:30. Chilly, blue sky, no wind. Arrive at Canyonlands Park, 34 miles NW of Arches, about 8 am. After a quick stop at the Visitors Center we drove to Grand View and walked the two mile round trip trail along the canyon rim. Absolutely gorgeous & we were pretty much alone. You're up on a mesa with carved canyons below you as far as the eye can see. Deep rich reds, some almost purple, hoodoos, needles, serpentine carvings with the river deep out of sight. On the way back we started to see groups of hikers. I've noticed that two people hiking together are quiet, but more than that are noisy.

We so enjoyed the solitude of the hike. We saw several small lizards. When we got back to the parking lot there was a big tour bus. Sigh. I guess we all wish we could have these places to ourselves.

At mesa Arch we hiked the half

mile loop trail to a long, low arch with a view of buttes below.

Lunch at a shady covered picnic table at the Upheaval Dome parking area. Grant had gone low before lunch so we didn't walk the 0.8 mile trail.

Our last stop of the day was the Green River overlook, with a sweeping view of the river far below in its carved serpentine channel. The green on its banks like emerald ribbons.

You hear many languages spoken in National Parks.

Some of the rocks are domed, with swirls of color, like soft serve cones. Others are chunky and fractured, like blocks of gourmet baking chocolate.

Back to the hostel for hangout time.

Spoke Spanish for a while with one of the cleaning ladies. Learned that the hangout in the corner of the lot is called "Hobo Corner," and many of the people camp there for months. There are several cats here and a dove who showed up a couple weeks ago. The cat delights in stalking the dove.

Grant grew restless and walked toward town. I did laundry, then drove to the store, picking Grant up en route. Bought stuff for stroganoff. Came back and cooked before the kitchen got busy. Ground bison, onion, mushroom, sour cream, whole wheat flat noodles. Perfect!

Showers, buy ice, reorganize the cooler, and we are ready to hit the road in the morning. It's been a nice interlude here at the hostel. "Luxury" communal living. We'll miss the sink, hot showers, and interesting people, but will be glad to get back to the camping life.

70° at 8 pm. Perfect weather today—not too hot, no wind.

Sunday Oct. 4

Natural Bridges <sup>national</sup> At Mon.

Up at 6:30, chilly & clear. On the road at 7. Goodbye to the Lazy Lizard, with its hobos, vagabonds, and dirty kitchen (the place gets a thorough scrubbing every day, but by the next morning it's trashed, despite the signs begging people to wash their dishes, etc.).

191 south to the Needles section of Canyonlands National Park. Vast views make the spirit soar. Not a cloud in the sky. At the visitor's center the crowd appeared more rugged. This part of the park attracts mainly hikers.

Hiked the Slickrock trail. Started about 9:30. It's supposed to be 2.4 miles, but we apparently missed a sign & veered off onto a side trail. We started climbing up and doing a bit of scrambling, and soon the cairns began thinning out and we were on the edge of the canyon. We started to get worried. Grant wasn't feeling so great. He thought his blood sugar was running low and ate a granola <sup>bcr</sup>. He's been going low on hikes

---

Another term: Vasta = a vast vista

the last couple of days, so he didn't take any short-acting insulin with his breakfast. We decided to turn around and retrace our steps, knowing it was a long way back. At that point we'd been hiking for an hour and a half. Grant was dizzy & his heart was racing. I was really worried that he wouldn't be able to make it back. We hadn't seen another soul on the trail.

We began slowly walking back. I was afraid Grant might lose his balance. I was wishing we'd brought more water.

After perhaps 20 minutes we saw hikers coming toward us in the distance. What a relief. Some clouds had rolled in, and a stiff wind, which helped cool us down. Grant had to sit several times from dizziness. The trail was so beautiful and serene walking in - our favorite yet. But once the worries set in it didn't seem as beautiful, only endless.

Finally we came to a trail sign

that we had somehow missed earlier, and soon we saw hordes of people hiking toward us. We had apparently beat the crowd. When we finally got back to the car it had been 2½ hours. Grant checked his blood sugar and it was 424! No wonder he'd felt so awful. He hadn't been going low at all, and he should have taken some insulin - lesson learned. The other lesson learned is that we should take his tester & insulin with us when we go hiking!

Needless to say I drove after that. After a stop for me to make a sandwich we left the park (the road back to hiway 191 is beautiful) and drove to Natural Bridges National Monument via hiway 95 (more stunning scenery). We arrived at 3 pm and got the last campsite. A young woman drove in right after us, looking forlornly for a site. We offered to share ~~hours~~. She was grateful but said she would first look for a dispersed site on the BLM land right outside the park.

They say it's supposed to rain tonight. It's definitely getting windy, and there are hunks of gray clouds. But mostly it's warm & blue.

We're relaxing & reading. Campsites are \$5 with our senior pass. The sites are tucked in amongst the pines and juniper, and have picnic tables and fire pits. There are pit toilets and no water.

Hobo stew and split a grilled cheese sandwich for dinner. Light sprinkles off and on, so we decided not to have a fire.

Fell asleep to a sky full of stars - thick smears of them. This was the first dark sky park in the U.S. Lots of rain fell during the night, along with thunder and lightning. And wind rocking the van. (go to page 77)

\*<sup>(from page 78)</sup> We were glad to get to tiny Hanksville, where we bought a few staples at the friendly Bull Mountain market, then sat at their cafe tables and used their wifi. After gassing up we decided to take a break from the rain and have lunch at Duke's Slickrock Grill. My BLT with steak fries was yummy. There were a lot of refugees from the rain in there -

(cont'd p.78)

Monday Oct. 5

Capitol Reef ntl. Park

Up at 7. The rain had stopped and it wasn't cold except when the wind gusted a bit. Drove the scenic loop to see the three bridges. (A bridge is carved by water, an arch is not.) We had the world to ourselves. We had decided to take a day off from hiking, and it's a good thing, as trails would be muddy and slippery, and we'd have to be careful of flash flooding.

Hwy 95 north. It started raining again, off & on. Heavy clouds swirled around buttes, like waves crashing over sea stacks. The plants have responded to the rain by opening more leaves and flowers. The colors of the rock are muted by the gray sky, but the heavy clouds create a dramatic scene.

Water poured off the cliffs in heavy red ribbons, feeding red streams, and roiling red rivers. Looked like red velvet milkshake.

We crossed the upper part of Lake Powell. I feel sad that the Colorado River is dammed. I have never liked Lake Powell or Lake Mead.

We crossed through the Henry Mountains on a narrow road between towering red

cliffs. The river was swollen red and roaring alongside the road, looking fully capable of eating away at it. We ~~were~~ both felt a bit vulnerable, with the river on one side and knowing these were perfect conditions for rockfall off the cliffs on the other side. It was a little freaky.

(see \* page 76)

hikers and campers, all looking a bit forlorn. They were playing country music and the place was done up in cowboy decor - it was perfect.

At our gas stop Grant chatted with a guy who had his little dog in a cage strapped to the back of his motorcycle.

The dog was wet and shivering :)

As we continued west on 95 there were rocks on the road...

Soon we entered Capitol Reef National Park and the landscape became surreal. Rock formations like Hershey's kisses, first gray and then white with mineral rings as if they were tie-dyed.

We had an instinct that the

campground would be full and hightailed it there, arriving at 1:00. At first we thought it was full, and were just about to give up when we saw an empty walk-in tent site. This means a place to park your car and carry your stuff across a sodden field to a distant table with no fire ring. \$10 with our discount. We were grateful and relieved. We just can't believe how busy National Parks are, even on a rainy Monday!

While Grant napped I went exploring. Checked out the remains of the little town of Fruita nearby, including the store that sells old-timey trinkets and treats. I listened to a recording of a man who had lived in Fruita for 40 years, growing fruit and nuts. He said it was "paradise." The Park Service maintains many of the old orchards, with their heirloom apples, peaches, pears, and other fruits. They let people pay to pick the fruit. One of the orchards is next to the campground, and I couldn't resist sampling one of the yellow apples — it was delicious.

I also walked the lovely, short trail along the Fremont River. The rain had stopped.

In the afternoon we drove the park's scenic drive - 8 miles each way. The narrow, paved road was strewn with mud from the rain. The dirt roads in the park are closed. The views were magnificent, if muted by the gray day.

About 4:30 we drove to the town of Torrey, 11 miles west. They have a nice information center with wifi, so we hung out there for a while. They also had a picnic shelter so we did dinner there (it had started pouring again). Leftover stroganoff, and half a peach.

Got back to camp at dark.

Tuesday Oct. 6 Wasatch mt. St. Pk. Provo UT

Up at 7:30, 49°, no rain or wind - yay! A glimmer or two of blue sky. Our moods are lifted. Walk for an hour or so along the river. See a lone turkey gobbling on a fence rail.

Stop in Torrey for wifi and call Mary Peters. She says we can stop by at Eve's in Salt Lake City tomorrow for a visit. (Eve is Mary's daughter and Mary is there visiting.)

Leave Torrey about 10:15, on hiway 24 West. Pass through small towns, all of them have a Mormon church, and only a Mormon church. In one town the Sheriff's car was parked by the side of the road. A cowboy hat was perched on the back of the empty driver's seat. Decoy.

Pelicans on the Koosharem Reservoir, and a campground that looked cheap and empty.

24 west was a great road through a wide agricultural valley. We are happy to be on the road again, out in the country.

The sky is growing bluer.

In Sigurd we swooned over the color of the nearby Vermillion Cliffs.

In Salina we stopped for groceries and had lunch at a park between two schools.

We did something new on this trip. We combined all of our music onto one thumb drive, and then each of us deleted any of the other person's songs that we don't like. This way we can listen to the same music and know that we'll like it.

On 89 north we saw a lot of sheep farms, and more small towns with Mormon churches. One of them had a fancy temple too.

We dipped into Provo and happened to drive through Brigham Young University, which was beautiful.

At 3 pm we arrived at Wasatch Mountain State Park, in the hills north of Provo. \$20 a night, hot showers, and quiet, private sites tucked into scrub oak groves. Each site has a water faucet. Ours is dripping. Saw a female Vermillion flycatcher. Most of the sky is blue, although the sun is going behind clouds. 62°. Chicken tacos for dinner, and our first fire in a while.

Wednesday Oct. 7 Salt Lake City

Up at 8.  $31^{\circ}$  and lots of dew but no frost. Sun came into camp at 8:30. Blue sky. We're at 6000 feet.

Leave camp at 9:15. 40 north to 80 west. Wifi stop at McDonald's. Interstate 80 west through Salt Lake City was crazy fast. 70 mph through a big city with curves and merges and semis. It was scary and stressful.

Drove to Salt Lake State Park, and walked out to look for birds. But the lake is very low and after 20 minutes of walking the water looked no nearer so we turned around.

Drove back into the city and did a pass by the Mormon Temple, which looked like a Disneyland castle. Mormonism creeps me out.

Gassed up and drove to Liberty Park to read in the shade for an hour. It's a lovely green space with a pond and one-mile loop walking trail.  $80^{\circ}$  today.

At 3pm we drove the short distance to Eve's house. We visited with Mary and Eli out in the garden until Eve woke up to get ready for her night shift. We visited with her until she had to leave, and then we had a lovely

dinner of lentil soup, rice, & salad. Grant and Eli hung out on the porch swing while Mary and I cleaned up and chatted. We're sleeping in front of their house tonight, on a fairly quiet, tree-lined street with frogs chirping. Grant says it reminds him of Federal Ave., and he feels safe and ~~comfy~~ comfortable here. Eve's house is a lovely refurbished craftsman with a front covered porch, wood floors, a gazebo out back, and a big vegetable garden.

Thursday Oct. 8 Sawtooths, ID

Up at 7, warm & sunny. Coffee and visit with Eli, Mary, and Eve (just home from the night shift).

Say goodbye at 8:30 and head north on I-15 and I-84 to Idaho (there aren't any real alternatives to the interstate). Wifi stop in Heyburn, then north on 27 to Kimama. We had hoped to continue north thru Craters of the Moon on what our map said was a paved road, but it

turned out to be dirt, so we took 24 west. It was so nice to be off the soulless, boring, nerve-rattling freeway, where two semi's swerved into us because their drivers were texting! It was wonderful to be back in farm country. We saw trucks hauling heavy loads of sugar beets, and watched them being harvested. A tractor "mowed" off the tops and then a harvester dug them up and fed them into a spinning cage that shook off the dirt before dumping them into a hopper, and from there into a truck. We could have watched for an hour but there was no safe place to pull over. Later we saw piles of potatoes and potato trucks (Idaho is, after all, known for potatoes).

Although we didn't get to go through Craters of the Moon, we did get to see some of the black lava beds, looking very sharp and jumbled and forbidding.

We took 75 north to Sun Valley, another cutsey, small ski town. Just north of there we entered the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and stopped at the very nice visitor center for campground information.

We crossed 9000' Galena Summit, with a beautiful view of the valley below. In Stanley we sailed past our turn and drove about 6 miles east on 75 before realizing our mistake and going back (along the beautiful Salmon River) to hiway 21 west. A few miles north of Stanley we turned left on the paved road to Stanley Lake. The Inlet campground, 3.5 miles in, was still open. It's just gorgeous. We are right on the lake, with tall peaks on one side. The lake is full of grebes. We sat in the warm sun and read. We made chicken tacos for dinner and sat by a blazing fire (made with wood left behind by previous campers). 37° at bedtime.

The nearest campers were playing old country music. It sound tinny but somehow it worked. Other than that, and a barking dog at one point, it's very quiet here. And very dark.

Some kind of ducks flew over us, heading for the lake, and they made the most amazing sound, almost like the hum of an airplane.

Friday Oct. 9 Crane OR

Up at 7:15, 27 degrees! Mist rising off the lake and a red sunrise. Too cold to make coffee. On the road at 7:45. The mist over the lake was magical, like Avalon.

21 west is called the Ponderosa Scenic Byway. Sweeping, tawny meadows; rushing, rocky rivers; pine forests (many trees killed by pine beetles). Dead red fox in the road. Tons of campgrounds (pay) and dispersed sites (free).

The road was longer, steeper, and windier than we expected, and we got a bit worried about gas. Luckily Idaho City had gas. Donna's Cafe and Grocery had free wifi. It's a nice little town with all the amenities for outdoorsy folks.

Groceries, gas, lunch in Boise. 76°. Grant got really crabby for some unknown reason. We were on hiway 20, trying to avoid 84. It was a string of traffic and lights and he got really frustrated. Finally we just got on 84. Once in Oregon we took 20 west. By then it was a country road again.

After that I drove the last two hours. 20 west in Oregon is beautiful. Sage-covered hills, basalt canyons, rivers, cattle, hay, green

valleys, sweeping views. In Buchanan we turned south to Crane, and then west 3 miles to Crystal Crane Hot Springs. We stayed here 4 years ago. \$20 includes a campsite with a table, use of the common area, wifi, kitchen, showers, and hot springs! It's like an upscale version of the Lazy Lizard. 85° when we arrived, so we sat in the shade for a while. We arrived at 4:30, but we had crossed into Pacific Time, so really it was 3:30. After an early spaghetti dinner we hung out in the hot springs for a while, took showers, and read. Lots of stars here. We like this place. The campground is about half full, and pretty quiet.

Saturday Oct. 10 John Day OR

Grant heard coyotes singing in the night.  
Unfortunately I did not.

Up at 7, 41°. Wifi and coffee and on the road at 7:45.\* 78 south to 404 and then north on the Malheur Wildlife Refuge "center Patrol Road," a gravel road that runs down the center of the refuge. Washboard rough...

(\* People were in the hot springs with their mugs of coffee - what a nice way to start the day!)

We borrowed one of the auto tour CDs, which was very interesting. We walked for a little while at Buena Vista ponds, but the ponds were dry and we didn't see any birds. Grant's knee has been bothering him so we didn't walk far. Also it was quite windy.

We saw a lot of hawks, often a half dozen at a time. Must be lots of food here.

The refuge was pretty dry. We did see several beautiful pheasants.

We left the refuge and headed north on 395 through gorgeous country: pine forest, high desert, cattle ranches. Lunch at a picnic table in Seneca, where we had to hold onto our plates so they didn't blow away.

Arrived at our old friend Mytch Mead's about 1 pm. He lives in John Day. On the approach we passed through a huge burned area from this past summer. It had come very close to town and 50 homes were lost.

Mytch, his wife Jan, and their kids, Rhea and Cassidy, live in a wonderful timber frame passive solar house up on the hill above town. We had visited them four years ago in a different house. Cassidy is now 4 1/2, and is a little boy who loves to wear dresses. It will be interesting to see how that plays out in this small, conservative town of hunters and pickup trucks.

Mytch and I walked up the steep hill behind their house to see the view. It was so windy we could barely walk into the wind. He showed us his shop where he makes wood and metal art pieces that sell for several thousand. They have two sweet cats that love to be held and purr a lot.

Jan is a physical therapist at the hospital and had invited several of her coworkers and their families over for pumpkin decorating and dinner. Nice people but lots of young kids and it was pretty exhausting. And noisy.

They all left about 8 and we staggered out to the van. It's a lovely warm evening. One of the kitties jumped in the van to investigate.

Sunday Oct. 11 Yakima River Canyon

Up at 7, coffee and conversation with Mytch, on the road at 8. Gas in Mt. Vernon, then 395 north to Ukiah. Blue sky. Mytch's wife Jan says that in spring the hills here look like Ireland - they are emerald green. We'd like to see that sometime. Paved forest road 53 goes through fir-larch forest, and the larch are turning golden! The first larch I've seen in

---

Kid book idea: picture book of farm equipment, crops, birds, animals, geology. Versions for different ages. Accompanying activity books.

a long time. Lots of hunters out here. This road will close Oct. 15, in just a few days.

Lunch is late at a lovely little town park, with picnic tables, clean bathrooms, and a flower garden. Some of the littlest towns have the nicest parks. I wish we had an easy way to thank them.

74 north to 841 west along the Columbia, a drive and view (the bit along the river) that I think is overrated. Wifi break at the 97 junction, then north to Goldendale, Toppenish, and Yakima. My mood was sinking. It's not that I don't want to go home, because I'm actually ready. I guess it's that I sort of dread the transition. The drive from Goldendale to Toppenish is pretty, so that helped.

70° in Yakima at 3:30. 821 north into the Yakima Canyon. Stopped at Big Pines, a BLM campground at the south end of the canyon. Sites are free after Sept. 15. Our site is on the

river, and despite a little road noise and a nearby generator, we can hear the river. Spaghetti for dinner and a big fire with wood we scrounged.

Monday Oct. 12 Kayak Point

Grant slept poorly and started the day in a bad mood. I woke up at 7:30 to a view of pleated, gilt-edged clouds tumbling across the sky. On the road at 8. As we drove north on 821 we saw a quail fly down a slope, land off-kilter, and roll down the hill! Very conical. We saw three big horn sheep grazing in a farm field. Lots of red sumac, larch, and fall color, especially when we got on 97 north across Blewett Pass. Blue sky and sunshine.

We took 97 up the east side of the Columbia River (we usually take Alt 97 on the west side). We liked the east side - more orchards. A pretty drive. Stopped to buy a few honeycrisp apples (\$1.50 a pound) from a nice woman selling them in her front yard. Lots of apple harvesting happening right now.

Drove the three miles up the hill to Chelan. We were curious about this year's fire damage. The hills to the south were definitely blackened, but the town itself appeared fine. I walked 20 minutes on the riverwalk loop, which was lovely. Picnic lunch in the park.

North to Pateros. Lots of burned areas with spots of green orchards that for some reason didn't burn. Stopped at the fruit stand in Pateros and bought scones: a nectarine and a blueberry scone.

20 west. Too early to camp so we decided to drive over the pass. Clouds hovering over the mountains made me feel sad to leave the warm and sunny east side. Stopped at Washington Pass overlook, a short trail with a spectacular view. Grant is still resting his knee.

The new North Cascades National Park visitors center in Newhalem is only open on weekends.

It rained all the way down the west side. Grant said it felt like home but I thought it felt gloomy.

Our plan had been to camp one more night and get home mid-day, fresh and ready to unpack. We couldn't find the French Creek Forest Service campground west of Darrington, plus it was still raining. I was feeling discouraged. I really didn't want to go home, dealing with rush hour, and arriving hungry and exhausted in the dark. Finally we agreed to go to Kayak Point County Park west of Arlington. We arrived at 6:15 and it was almost dark. We were shocked to discover that sites were \$32! We paid the half price senior rate, not knowing if we qualify.

Eggs, cheese, refries, tortillas by headlamp. Peekaboo view of the sound. Warm evening and no rain or wind. Reading in the van. It's been a long day.

Tuesday Oct. 13 Home

Rainy night, but warm. Up at 6 on the road 6:30. Marine Drive to Marysville on ramp to I-5, where we joined rush hour. Barely light at 7 am. Thinking that 405

would be very backed up, we continued on I-5 to the Ballinger<sup>(Kenmore)</sup> Way<sup>^</sup> exit. mistake.  
I-5 is a parking lot.

So depressing to be back in grey drizzle and big city. If it weren't for my kids and parents, I think I'd move to a smaller town.

Groceries and gas at Freddies and home at 8:50.