

THE SUMMER OF 2005
OUR TRIP TO THE GREAT NORTHWEST

Our vacation in the summer of 2005 was a deliberate attempt at a grand tour and great journey into territory visited by Thomas but not by Mary, on our way to and from a visit with our son, Allen, and his wife, Mary Rush, in Portland, Oregon. One of our goals was to stay in as many of the great lodges in our national parks as possible, which was a great disappointment, but a noble adventure. The following entries are from the journal that I kept throughout our journey. –Thomas L. Mowbray

26 June

We started our journey to Oregon on a hot 26th of June at about noon, but we got to Mitchell, South Dakota by dinnertime. The Holiday Inn was quite nice, but I do not think that I want to stay in another motel where children stay and eat free. One family with twelve children was traveling with an extended family of eighteen people in two huge SUVs. The father of the twelve was doing an admirable job of managing the group. When someone asked him where they were headed, he said, “To see the heads,” i.e. Mount Rushmore. The drinking water in Mitchell was deliciously fresh and clear and we both thought it was quite remarkable.

27 June

From Mitchell to the Missouri River is an incredibly boring ride, and west of the river was very ugly until we got to the Badlands, which of course is extremely bad and ugly, making it very attractive. We entered the Badlands Park from the west on Route 240 and proceeded to Route 377 and then to Route 44 that took us to Rapid City, which is an incredibly beautiful ride. The large herd of bison in an expansive grassland area in the middle of the park was the most impressive sight of all.

We stayed at the old privately owned Alex Johnson Hotel in downtown Rapid City because the Marriott we planned to stay in was full with bus groups. The Alex Johnson was very disappointing and expensive. The room was small, and like the rest of the hotel decorated in Indian this and that from the 1970s but with new carpet and beds. Our handicap bathroom was very nice. The hotel restaurant was expensive and fussy, but the food was ho-hum. I ordered Trout Almandine, which came with glazed carrots and a wild rice mix and one half a lemon wrapped in buckram. The fish was OK until about 4:00 AM when my sleep was interrupted suddenly by a violent attack of diarrhea.

28 June

We spent a beautiful day at Mount Rushmore and then drove through the Back Hills to Route I-90 and on to Sundance for the evening. The ride through the Back Hills was the most beautiful thus far. The visit to Mount Rushmore was ghastly. Parking was in a private concession only and our National Parks pass was useless. The crowds of tourists

were unbelievable and the architecture of the shrine-like tourist promenade looks like the Communistic architecture of the Soviet Union or the fascist architecture of Mussolini. It is ghastly, complete with a large bronze bust of the sculptor, Borglum, that looks like Lenin. The museum is a modern interactive thing. No one was reading anything, just looking at the lame videos.

We met the family with twelve children from two days before and the father (camp director) seemed to be doing quite well. They got to see “the heads.”

Coming out of the Black Hills, back on Route 90, heading to Wyoming, introduced us to an entirely different geography. From mountains with trees we were again in grasslands with Bad Lands-type eroded areas. We stayed in Sundance in a very nice Best Western motel. Sundance is a small town, but it has a hospital, medical center, and several restaurants. Our restaurant choice was Aro. I had a delicious fillet of walleye, broiled to perfection. The food was very simple but a refreshing change from the disappointing meal the night before, and half the price of the meals we had the past two nights.

29 June

Wednesday was cold and rainy but we headed to Devil’s Tower after breakfast. The skies cleared enough for us to enjoy this unusual basalt formation. Wednesday night we stayed in a very nice Holiday Inn in Billings. This was the largest motel room we have had thus far and it was very comfortable. The restaurant was very good with well-prepared, simple fare. I had prime rib, which was excellent. But the tiny tortured cocktails were a joke. Mary really enjoyed the pool and the exercise room was the best so far – very nice.

30 June

We made it only as far as Butte today. The driving through the hills and mountain passes was very time consuming. We stayed at a Red Lion motel, certainly for the last time, but the rate was the lowest yet, and we had a large king-size bed. The room was large with a nice handicap bathroom and a whirlpool bath. The restaurant was the worst so far, although the breakfast buffet was complimentary.

Beginning in Sundance, cocktails cost only about \$3, but they were very small – about two ounces. I ordered a Manhattan and it came in a tiny glass. It had whiskey in it and a Maraschino cherry and cherry juice but not a trace of sweet vermouth. In Billings we ordered Manhattans straight up and they came in two ounce shot glasses and were not stirred or chilled at all. I commented that they should be in a cocktail glass, so the waitress took them to the bar and returned with the same warm ingredients in the smallest cocktail glasses I have ever seen. In Butte we found the same thing. We had drinks in the bar before supper, hoping for a change of bartending techniques, but with no luck – just the same two-ounce whiskey glasses with no sign of sweet vermouth. My Scotch on the rocks was OK, just very small, but less than \$3.

01 July

We left Butte early and reached West Glacier by 1700. Luckily, we were able to stay at the Lake McDonald Lodge. The room was simple but very nice, in a separate building, but we had dinner and breakfast in the elegant old lodge. What a joy. This place is spectacular. Unfortunately, we could stay only one night here, but the front desk people got us a room for the next two nights at East Glacier.

02 July

We took the Going-To-The-Sun Road to East Glacier. It was OK except for the section before Logan Pass, which was so dangerous that the road should have been closed. We noticed that all the park's old tour buses drove only from east to west on the road, i.e. on the mountain-inside lane. It was extremely dangerous driving, with whole sections of the road missing and numerous one-lane sections. From Logan Pass east was OK.

There was quite a bit of snow in the snow/ice fields of Logan Pass and the falls from the high snow-covered mountains were beautiful.

Route 49 to East Glacier was another high road that was very dangerous with no guard rails. East Glacier Grand Lodge is very nice, and the cavernous, Brobdingnagian lobby is spectacular with its huge Douglas Fir columns, but the dining room was very disappointing – not nearly as nice as Lake McDonald for looks or food or service.

03 July

On July 3rd we drove to Canada, to the magnificent Waterton Lakes National Park, and had high tea at the elegant Prince Of Wales Hotel. It was a perfectly beautiful day. The service by the tartan-clad staff was impeccable and the food perfectly prepared. Tea is served at tables that are set along the wall of windows in the grand lobby that overlook the lake. Nothing in any of our national parks - no inn, no service, no food - comes anywhere close to what we experienced in Waterton, although it was just as expensive.

04 July

We drove to Coeur d'Alene, but there was no room in the grand resort hotel on the lake, so we stayed in a very nice Best Western owned and operated by the resort. The dining room was lovely and had very good food.

05 July

After breakfast we made our way to Kennewick, Washington and stayed in a very nice Best Western with a very nice complimentary breakfast buffet, a nice pool and very nice exercise room.

06 July

We arrived at the Rush's (Mary's parents) home in the afternoon after a beautiful drive through the Columbia River Gorge. The traffic through Portland was as bad as the metropolitan area around New York City. Allen came over after work and had supper with us, and Mary came later, as she worked late. We were so happy to see everyone.

07 July

The Rushes took us on a day trip to Astoria and to a state park at the confluence of the Ocean and the Columbia River where we had a picnic lunch. We stopped at another park where there was a reproduction of Lewis and Clark's camp. We returned on a different route along the shore and then inland through the forests, and had supper at a very nice log restaurant in the timbering area.

08 July

Friday was a quiet catch-up day, and Mary did laundry. In the afternoon we went with Allen to the Portland Zoo when he was done with work at the Nature Center. It was rather cold and rained continually. I was in my wheelchair, holding our large umbrella and trying to keep dry, but my hand went numb from the cold and I was eventually soaked to the bone. The rose garden in the park next to the Zoo is magnificent and, fortunately, the rain stopped so we could enjoy it.

09 July

We took Mary and Allen to Mount Hood for the weekend. We could not stay at Timberline Lodge as I had hoped, so we stayed at a ski camp lodge in Government Camp. The room was a cute loft arrangement with a circular stairway and Mary and Al slept in the loft bedroom. We had dinner at Timberline Lodge. It was quite expensive, but rather mediocre. I recalled how lovely the Lodge was in 1969 when I visited, and its shabby appearance today is very disappointing, even more so than the other great lodges, all of which are a national disgrace. A wide ugly road to accommodate busses and RVs has replaced the original, lovely winding two-lane road that used to wind through the forest to the Lodge. An incredibly ugly visitors/convention center sits in front of the Lodge; its only function seems to be as an eyesore. The furnishings in the Lodge's lobby are horrible; there weren't any cushions on the chairs. The place was crammed with , drunken wedding crowds and there was only one row of tables in the huge dining room with diners. No wonder, the food was the highest priced ho-hum stuff imaginable, and the dining room was terribly understaffed with poorly trained waiters.

After dinner we looked out the back porch windows of the upstairs lobby and saw the top of the mountain for about thirty seconds, and that was all we saw of it. It rained all day. We enjoyed a drink together at a sports/ski bar in Government Camp before returning to our lodge. The breakfast at the lodge was very good.

10 July

We returned to Beaverton on highway 84, but first we drove the rest of the way around Mount Hood, never seeing it. The scenic old highway, Route 30, was beautiful with numerous waterfalls and scenic overlooks along the Columbia River. It is a shame that more of the old Route 30 – Lincoln Highway -- has not been preserved. I-84 certainly destroyed much of the natural beauty along the river and should have been built on top of the bluffs, out of sight, and not along the river.

Barbara Rush prepared a delicious Lasagna for supper and Allen and Mary joined us.

11 July

Barbara babysat her grandson, Timmy, and we had a nice, slow catch-up day. Mary and I had dinner with my second cousin and her husband, Lois and Bob Burns, at their lovely home in Beaverton. I hadn't seen Lois since she lived in New Jersey. We had a good time catching up on family events.

12 July

We went to the Nature Center where Al works for the afternoon, and met him there when he was done for the day. The paved walkways through the park, which is pretty much a wetland, were very nice. Mary and I treated everyone to a goodbye dinner at a very nice restaurant and had a delightful evening.

Wednesday, 13 July

We set off for Mount Rainier. There was one room available at the National Park Inn, with a sink in the room, but with shared bathrooms and shower rooms. The Inn is quaint and quite lovely, but the overpriced food was rather poor. The day was cold and cloudy and there was no sign of the mountain, but the hotel staff said the mountain was supposed "to be out" tomorrow. The road from the park entrance to the Inn was magnificent, and the paths across from the Inn were beautiful, wandering through a cathedral of awesome firs and cedars and a meadow filled with birches.

14 July

We awoke to a beautiful, clear, picture-postcard day with Mount Rainier shining magnificently in the morning sun. It loomed over us and over everything around it, even though it was fifteen miles away from the Inn. After a nice breakfast we drove to Paradise and Mirror Lake and beyond, and then back to the Inn. The scenery was breath taking. We were happy to be staying where we were, because the Paradise Inn was painfully crowded with tourists clambering around aimlessly as if someone had stepped on an ants' nest.

After another mediocre dinner, we sipped the rest of our bottle of wine on the front porch and watched the sun set on the mountain. A female deer entertained us for some time, grazing in the planted areas between the lodge and the road until a drunken jackass

stopped his red truck next to the deer, got out of the truck to take pictures, and scared the beautiful animal away.

That same day there was another female deer close to the main entrance of the Inn near the walk when we returned from our drive. It was calmly lying there and panting rather heavily. One park person commented that the deer was probably quite warm because of the unusually warm and sunny day.

15 July

We drove to Bellingham in the rain, which was sometimes heavy, and stayed at the Best Western Lakeway Inn, which was hosting a huge convention of old fart VFW jackasses. The Oboe Cafe – the restaurant -- was pretty good. Mary's fish was good, but my sirloin steak left much to be desired and made me sick during the night. Before leaving for Canada, we bought a new supply of Mylanta, Imodium AD, and Kaopectate.

16 July

We drove to Kamloops and stayed in the worst Ramada Inn in the world, run by a sloppy family of Asian Indians. The food was terrible, but the dining room was a beautiful round room with a magnificent view.

17 July

We arrived in Jasper on a picture postcard Sunday evening and stayed in a very nice motel – Malign Motel – owned by the Decor Hotels who also own the Chateau Jasper and another motel where we had a delicious dinner. Mary had lamb chops and I had prime rib, the finest dinner so far. Our room included a very nice buffet breakfast.

18 July

We drove to Lake Louise in the rain and stayed at the Lake Louise Inn – a ho-hum ski resort lodge thing. The room was lovely but we had no view. We had an elegant dinner in the Victoria Dining Room at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge on Lake Louise. The view of the lake was stunning, and as we enjoyed our superb meal a storm sent a curtain of rain across the lake and the Victoria great hall rumbled with thunder.

19 July

Tuesday was another picture postcard day and we drove to beautiful Banff, stopping frequently to take photographs. We stopped at the inn across from the Columbia Ice Fields and I was shocked to see how far the glacier had receded from where it was in 1969. We spent the afternoon in Banff, took the gondola to the mountaintop, and had a splendid day. The hotdogs at the sky top cafe were \$4.75 each and they tasted great. Mary climbed further up to the weather station.

We spent the night in Calgary at the Best Western Village Park Inn, which is a large, five story hotel with a parking garage underneath. It was obviously built for the Winter Olympics. As with most of the Best Westerns thus far, the restaurant was terrible, but the room was large and very comfortable.

It was so sad to have the mountains vanish so quickly behind us as we raced into the plains.

20 July

We drove from Calgary to Swift Current on a beautiful day through the treeless grasslands. The rather costly motels in dumpy Swift Current were all full, but a kind clerk at the Travelodge motel referred us to a very nice but simple Mom and Pop motel called the West Wind Motel, which cost half the price of what we had been paying. Likewise, we had a very nice dinner in a favorite local Chinese restaurant with modest prices.

21 July

We drove to Brandon and stayed at the Victoria Inn, which was very nice but plain, with large rooms. They had a very nice dining room and we had delicious Angus Beef steaks that were perfectly cooked. There was a very nice garden room cafe area adjoining the restaurant and set into the indoor pool area, with real vegetation and large trees, and we had breakfast there the next morning.

22 July

We made it to Fargo and stayed in a Ramada Inn with a very nice indoor pool. The food in the dining room was very ordinary with fuddy-duddy service, but the room was nice.

23 July

We arrived home by suppertime. After driving for days through boring plains and grasslands, and the still flooded flatlands of North Dakota, the ride from Fargo to Minneapolis was scenic and very pleasant, and we had a beautiful clear day.

What a fantastic trip this was, and worth every penny and every mile, but it was still nice to get back to our lovely home -- one of the world's most desirable destinations.