

## Lines, Laughs and Lockdowns

In 2020 we had a series of collaborative publications, which were shared with the Branch membership. Contributions were asked for, and we had a real mixed bag of submissions. In edition 4, we began a new serial.

In loving memory of Bill Wright, we reprint his amazing adventure, in his own words composed from notes of his adventure he made for his Mum. We present his story, unedited and exactly as he recounted the tale for his mother, though we have added in some graphics, which we like to think Bill would approve of.

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### A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 1: New York

In 1991 I was living in London, and I decided that I needed to inject some excitement/challenge into my life. So early in the year I booked three week's holiday in late June/early July. I then booked a flight to New York and a return flight from Los Angeles three weeks later without booking any means to get from one to the other! The only other thing I pre-booked were three nights B&B in NY to give me time to deal with the jet lag.

I'd been to America several times in the past, I've driven up and down the east coast from Washington to Florida and back, similarly I'd done the west coast from LA to Yosemite taking in Death Valley and Las Vegas, but I'd never ventured into the 'interior'.

So what was the plan? Well if truth be told there wasn't one.

My intention was to use trains/buses or perhaps driveaway cars, my preferred option, I'd read a newspaper article on this a year or so earlier.

Planning over, let's go!



#### DAY 1 (Friday 21st June)

Left home about 1030. Tube & train to Gatwick arrive about 1200 and had lunch. Flight left one and a half hours late, good flight, watched The Awakening, enjoyable.



It was during the flight that I decided that I'd keep a log of my trip and send it back to my mother every few days so that she could join in my adventure. She was over 80 and not doing too good at the time. So I got out my Filofax (everyone had one in those days) and started taking notes: so keep in mind that this journal was written to her.

Landed in New York about 7.30 in the evening, jumped on a bus to Pen (\$7) then got the tube to 96th street and found my B&B at 160 West 95th Street without any problems. The daughter of the house was in, she showed me my room then took me through the door locks (three of them) and the alarm system.

After a quick wash I went looking for something to eat; I found a diner on Broadway called Key West and had a Bud and a ham sandwich. Got to bed about 11.00 NY time.

### LONG DAY

## DAY 2 (Saturday 22nd June)

Awake far too early, it's two in the morning and I try to tell myself to go back to sleep till seven or so: no good I'm AWAKE, so I start writing this and planning my day. I wait till I hear the family stir about seven and get up. They are all rushing about as they're going away for the weekend; very trusting leaving me in their house alone. Since they were in what seemed like a panic there was no offer of breakfast, but I didn't mind as I was going out and I'd get something on the way.

I set off down Broadway, found a coffee shop and had a leisurely breakfast watching the world go by. I carried on down Broadway alternating between it and 5th Avenue, came across Macy's on 34th but it didn't open till 10 so I had another leisurely coffee then went and had a quick look.

Too crowded, I'm afraid it didn't do anything for me.

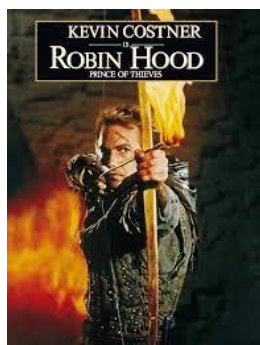


Next, I wanted to go up the Empire State Building; I didn't realise it was so close. I walked several blocks past it before I caught a glimpse of it through a gap. How could you miss something as big as the Empire State Building you wally? I hear you ask. Actually, it's quite easy when you're walking down these 'canyons' of skyscrapers it's difficult to distinguish one from another. So I walked back and paid my \$3 to go to the top, a bargain, amazing views.

Back down to earth, started back downtown and found somewhere for lunch, ordered a chicken salad from the menu and got a chicken sandwich?? I hadn't been specific enough in my ordering; however it was very good. Continued down Broadway then 5th Avenue to Washington Square. This was NOT in the plan, by now I'd walked miles.

Anyway, I carried on through the Village to Soho, stopped to have a beer and listen to some jazz for a while, then on down to the World Trade Centre. I was going to go up but it had started raining by this time, so I sat in the Winter Garden for about an hour and watched the world go by hoping that the rain would stop as I had no jacket.

As the rain seemed to be on for the duration, I bit the bullet and walked back up to Soho and got the tube back to my B&B, soaked to the skin.



It's now 6.40, Just had a hot bath, which was lovely, and I'm sitting writing up these notes for the day. When I finish this I fancy going to the pictures, or should that be movies? I passed one quite nearby on Broadway showing Robin Hood – I quite fancy that.

It's now 11.40 and I'm just in. I booked a seat for the movie then found a Thai restaurant and had a lovely meal. The film was just what I needed light entertainment, a chance to chill out.

## ANOTHER LONG DAY

### DAY 3 (Sunday 23rd June)

Woke up at 6am: things are getting better. Got up about 7.00, had a shower and washed through a couple of things. I've got the house to myself, so had a leisurely breakfast and planned out the day. I had thought I might go for a jog in Central Park – it's only two streets away - but it's raining again and I had enough of that yesterday, so I've decided to go to the Metropolitan Museum in Central Park. Let's see what today brings.



Well it's now 10.30, just in and I'm totally shattered. The first half of the day went to plan, I walked through Central Park, round the jogging track which goes round a lake, tell you what, you don't half see some sights jogging!

I then went on to the museum - my god it's BIG - so I spent till 1 o'clock looking round, what a great place.



Then I walked down Madison Avenue, cut over to 3rd to get a bite of lunch, continued down 3rd and Madison to Madison Square where I found a street market going on in Lenox Avenue so I walked up through it for 4 or 5 blocks. Then about turn and headed south and east till I hit the river about 21st street. Although it was pretty derelict, I walked down it for a while, stopped to watch a softball tournament, then on to Pier 17 an old pier which has been renovated and 'touristified' with a couple of sailing ships, shops, bars & restaurants. I decided then to head for The Village but got a wee bit lost on the way, didn't have a map with me.

I ended up in a district like the City on a Sunday, very quiet and eerie and for the first time felt a bit concerned as there were a few 'down-and-outs'. So I went into a bar which looked OK (any excuse), and it turned out I was only two streets off course.



Time to go home and get something to eat. Jumped on the subway and managed to get back without any problems, I found a place that had been recommended called the Yellow Rose Cafe, I should have taken a hint from the name.

I had southern fried chicken which wasn't all that, I'm convinced these yanks don't know how to cook properly!

Interesting: the first two days I talked about the tube, now I'm calling it the subway – I'm getting to be a real New Yorker; but I'm going to have to get out of this town before I wear my legs down to my knees!!!

**GOOD NIGHT!**

## A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 2: On the Road

### DAY 4 (Monday 24th June)

06.30 and I'm wide awake. Plan for the day is to contact one or two driveaway companies and see if I can get a car to somewhere west of NY. My only concern is that I am going to have to go downtown in the rush hour with my bag and I believe it's worse than London!



Left digs about 0830 after breakfast, rush hour not too bad, no worse than London, eventually found the driveaway company I was looking for. They had nothing going west today but had a car needing delivered to San Francisco tomorrow, GREAT. They said they would do the paperwork this morning so that I can go to Newark this afternoon ready for an early start in the morning, they said to come back after lunch, so I left my bag there.

I was feeling really good when I left the office, things were going better than I could have expected, so I decided to splash out and really treat myself. So – guess what – I jumped in a cab and went to the West River Heliport, yes I took a helicopter ride over Manhattan, it was FAB, and I don't like flying!!!



We went down the river and flew over and round the Statue of Liberty, twice, then back up the east river, over Brooklyn Bridge, up to Central Park, across the top of the park, then back down the west river again - FANTASTIC.

The first time I've been in a helicopter, I was sitting up front beside the 'driver' with an English couple in the back, would you believe it was FAN DABY DOZY.

When we came off the English girl went back into the office and appeared with tickets to get a free Rachel from Macy's. She had been told by a courier to be sure to get this perk as it would not be offered freely. So off the three of us went, sharing a cab, to get our freebie, it turned out to be a wee shopping bag, just what I always wanted! I've not opened mine, I'll bring it back for you (save me buying a prezzie - only joking). We then split up as they were on a weekend break would you believe and wanted to see as much as they could before they fly back this afternoon, far too hectic for an oldie like me!

I went walkabout again, my legs are now worn half way up to my knees! I needed some writing paper for the journal, and would you believe the only place I could find it was in Woolworths, hence the cheap nasty paper..



So I continued on my way and spoiled myself again. This is the same guy who a few weeks ago had difficulty spending money on himself without having a bad conscience! Anyway I found a wee shop on 7th Avenue and bought myself a pair of 501 jeans for \$28 (eat your heart out Juliet *my niece*). Lunch was a NY sandwich about a foot thick.

Got back to the driveaway office about 3.00 only for the receptionist to tell me that they had made a mistake with the dates and the car would not be ready until the 24th of NEXT month. Before I could strangle her, she said she had fixed up a better deal for me. While I was away a woman had phoned wanting a Toyota Celica (sports car) taken to LA. Someone 'up there' likes me: I tell you at that moment, if I fell in the Clyde I'd come up with a salmon!

I've to report back at 8.30 in the morning to meet the lady and pick up her car. One small problem, where do I sleep tonight? I hung around till 5.00 and phoned the B&B I had been staying at. They had nobody booked in, so I got my room back, and the landlady said she would only charge me the \$35 she gets rather than the \$60 I paid to the agency - could this day get any better?

I'm lying on my bed writing this, I'm going to see what my money situation is (I'm OK, just need to take stock as NY is expensive) then I'll get something to eat and plan my route.

### DAY 5 (Tuesday 25th June)

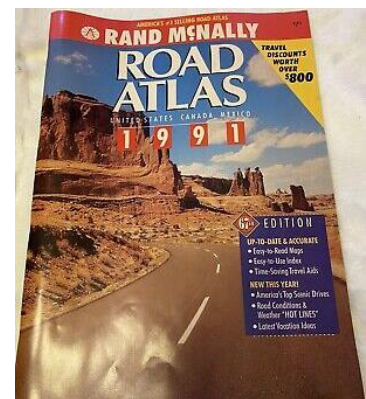
It's 6.30 am and I have not slept well, I think it's adrenaline at the thought of my big adventure.

I went out last night and found an Indian restaurant, the food was very bland. It did say on the menu that everything was cooked mild so I asked them to spice it up for me, even then it came out no hotter than a korma. The waiter said that they have to serve it like that as the natives won't eat anything hot or spicy. Now I know!



When I got back I spent some time looking at possible routes, I was lucky enough to pick up a Rand McNally road atlas from a street vendor on my way home.

I decided to take a northern route through Toledo; Chicago; Minneapolis, then across South Dakota; Montana; Wyoming; Utah and down into LA. The reasons I chose this route is that when I opened the atlas for the first time my eye fell on Glasgow in Montana, I was born in Glasgow. I'd already ruled out taking the customary Route 66 as being too commercialised and tourist-y, which I didn't feel would give me a true taste of America.



I'd also just discovered that I have eleven days to get there rather than the nine I mentioned yesterday: seems they don't count weekends.

**Oh well suppose I better make a move, talk to you later from SOMEWHERE.**



Hello again, it's now about 10pm and I'm ensconced in a motel on the border of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Actually it's a truck driver's stop, only I didn't realise this when I pulled up as there is a separate parking round the back for the trucks. Not only are the trucks big and shiny, so are the drivers, some of them are BIG and boy can they eat!





I went to the restaurant for dinner, the main offering was a buffet, but you need a very big appetite to justify it. So I ordered roast beef and potatoes from the menu, what could go wrong? What I actually got was a large roast beef sandwich covered in gravy, or was it engine oil, with a ring of mashed potatoes making a well for more gravy. Never mind, I was hungry.

Today has been a bit boring, as will the next couple probably. I picked up the car this morning. The lady delivering it was half an hour late as she had got stuck in traffic. If you see NY traffic you'd understand. Anyway she was rather nice, about 30, Spanish looking; it was her car, and she was moving to LA for a new job. I'd drive the car to LA and she was going to fly out at the beginning of July. I had a chat with her and she was OK with me taking the route I intended and wasn't fussy if I was a day or so late.

I've not told you about the car yet. It's a Toyota Celica, a small 2x2 sports car, I don't know what size the engine is but as they say, it's adequate. It comes with air conditioning and cruise control. I've used air con before but never cruise control. It's weird, you get the car up to the speed you want then press a button and it maintains that speed up hill and down dale, without having to touch the accelerator pedal, if I put my foot lightly on the accelerator pedal I can feel it adjusting automatically to keep the speed constant. All I have to do is sit back and steer.



I'm going try to get some sleep now: I hope I can. I'm in a standard American motel room with an air conditioner humming away in the corner, so I've got the classic catch 22 situation: if I leave the air con on the noise may keep me awake, if I turn it off it will get too hot.

**Let you know tomorrow how I get on.**

### **DAY 6 (Wednesday 26th June)**

It's now about 8.15, there was no problem with the A/C last night, I went out like a light. I'm off to breakfast now, I'm interested to see what the truckers have, probably a dozen eggs and a half side of pig, washed down with a gallon of diesel.

Today will be another day of just driving and making distance so that I have more time to spend when I come across something interesting. Like yesterday I'm going to take the state highway, a bit like a motorway, across Ohio, boring but it's got to be done. Let you know later.



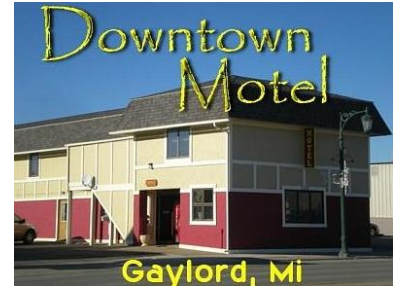
Hello, it's about 10.30, I'm not sure because I've left my watch in the car, what the hell. I'm not where I expected to be either. I drove across Toledo, then instead of going straight on to Chicago and Minnesota I turned right! The thought of more motorways and cities did not appeal, so I threw away all the plans I'd made and I'm now driving up through Michigan which is a strip of land, well it's 150 miles wide, which points up towards Canada. I've got Lake Michigan on one side and Lake Huron on the other, not that I've seen much of them as I'm driving up the middle.



It's very hot at the moment, it got up to 94 today, so I stopped and bought a pair of shorts, my jeans were becoming unbearable, I must look a lovely sight, shorts, T shirt and trainers with no socks, but what the hell. I've actually been driving for most of the day stripped to the waist and no shoes, it's great what with the cruise control I can just sit back and relax.

So where am I now? I'm in a motel in a place called Gaylord. What a name, it's about two thirds of the way up Michigan. I tried something different tonight, I stopped about 7.00pm and had something to eat, then went on for an hour or so, it worked quite well.

That's about all for today, a bit boring in some respects, however I'm still enjoying it. The trip is becoming a voyage of discovery, a kind of Easy Rider for Bill Wright.



**Good night, see you tomorrow.**

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## **A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 3: Hard Driving and Big Skies**

### **DAY 7 (Thursday 27th June)**

Well it's now 8.30 and I slept like a baby. Guess what?? I went for a jog earlier! I'm spending so long in the car I felt I needed some exercise, so off I went. Unfortunately, I could only stand it for about 15 minutes, even at 7.30 in the morning the humidity is so high it's exhausting. Just spent ages in the shower but still can't stop leaking! Have the telly on in the background and the weather forecast is predicting heavy thunderstorms so that probably accounts for the humidity. OK let's see what today brings.

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### **I'M ENJOYING THIS.**

I'm now in a hotel, not a motel, in Wakefield, Michigan heading for Duluth in Wisconsin. I've been talking to the owner and it would appear that I'm making up too much time. Still, I'm enjoying the driving experience and I'll have time to spend when I want to, when I come across something/somewhere that takes my interest.

So back to today. To start with I doubled back to see a wood, yes a wood! Michigan is a large logging state, so this was a wood – no, a forest - where they had set up a logging camp as it would have been in the nineteenth century: interesting.

I then went on over the bridge to the North shore of Lake Michigan, and you'll never guess what your daft son did next. I was driving past a beach so I decided to stop and have a swim. I got changed in the car and walked down to the beach and had a swim.



Well I didn't actually manage to swim as the waves were too high. It was windy and there were big breakers, so the best I could do was to wade out and get beaten up by the waves.



It was great! I'm afraid the rest of the day was an anticlimax after that, except for lunch. I stopped at a bar for a beer and sandwich where the landlady looked like Dolly Paton, which was quite a distraction! I taught her how to make a shandy - something they had never heard of, which amused them greatly.

I've found a nice wee motel for the night. The owners have just taken over and are rebuilding it, so I've got a brand-new room for \$20 for the night. However, I spent \$10 trying to phone John Drummond back in London. He said he would like to come out and join me for a few days at some point. I was hoping to get him at his office, but I realised that I've got mixed up with the time difference. TWIT.

### **DAY 8 ( Friday 28th June)**

Hi it's 8.00 in the morning and already I'm having a busy day. I woke up about six o'clock but it being a new bed and bedding it was extremely comfortable so I turned over thinking I would have a nice lie in. It felt like I'd just got into a very nice deep sleep when there was a knock at the door,

I had to go to the office and take a call from London. The call was from John, he realised what I'd done mixing up the time and thought he would catch me early before I could move on. He is too busy to join me, which is a pity as I think he was looking forward to the break, oh well. John tells me that the weather is absolutely dreadful over there, it wasn't too good here last night either. The thunderstorms I mentioned yesterday came with a vengeance last night, it chucked it down! This morning everything is bright and fresh, absolutely beautiful.

I've been out for my jog and can't stop leaking again. Oh the landlady here is wonderful, she is from Thailand and makes you feel very welcome. She even gave me a wee prezzy for you!

### **OK let's see what today brings: up and at 'em!**



It's now about 9.30pm and I've just crossed the border into North Dakota, which means that I drove across Minnesota today: that's 1600 miles since NY. Today for the first time I got tired, and about midday I felt very tired so I stopped the car and had a sleep for about 45 minutes. Thinking about it I now realise why - I'd gone through a time zone and lost an hour last night, so with John getting me up for a call at 7.00am it was actually 6.00am. Never mind, I felt a lot better for my sleep. There are four time zones across America and when I crossed the state line from Michigan into Ohio I crossed from Eastern time into Central time, losing an hour.





So apart from driving and sleeping, what have I been up to today? Well, I've driven across the South west corner of Lake Superior, stopped a couple of times to have a look but it's like looking out to sea. I believe it's the biggest fresh water lake in the world. I did stop for breakfast about ten thirty near a place called Ironwood, which is near the lake with lots of smaller lakes round about.

Almost every car I saw was a 4x4 or pickup with big canoes on the back or on top; and it's noticeable that most of the men are wearing thick lumberjack type shirts. There are also a lot of Native Americans in this part of the world; the ones I see here seem very downtrodden and looking sorry for themselves, I don't know if this is the norm?

On the drive over to Duluth, which is on the border of Minnesota, deer crossed the road several times, or I came across them at the side of the road. They are lovely looking things, and with the country round there all wooded with thick undergrowth, I imagine it is ideal for them.



When I got to a place called Grand Rapids (no I didn't see any rapids) they were having a celebration to mark the town's 100th birthday, so I stopped to have a look. There were a lot of people dressed in period costume having an open-air concert with a barber shop quartet - it was all quite jolly.

When I left the festivities I ran into some BAD weather. It started chucking it down, with thunder and lightning thrown in for good measure. In one way it was quite funny because the radio was warning of severe weather coming my way and I could actually see it several miles ahead. DARKNESS! To the north and south the skies looked clear, the radio was saying that in about 150 miles to the South the temperatures were in the 90s.

As I neared the rain the sky was beautiful: the clouds were low and seemed to hang in the sky like a curtain, all light and shade. It's difficult to explain, but have you ever seen an artist doing a watercolour of a sky? When they first apply the paint it sort of runs down the paper in light and dark strips- it was just like that, amazing.

When I was in the storm there was spectacular forked lightning which seemed to hang in the air for ages so that you could see it clearly, a very surreal experience. So that was my day, another of hard driving.



I'm now in a Best Western in Grand Forks North Dakota. Had a shower and managed to get pasta for dinner; I was getting to the stage I don't think I can eat much more fried food. I also had a drink earlier and I'm just having a discussion with myself whether to go and have another or be a good boy and have an early night, I'll let you know tomorrow what I decide.

**Good night.**

## DAY 9 (Saturday 29th June)

Good morning, it's just after nine and I've had a nice lie in, watching a Gene Wilder film (or should that be movie?) on telly, very relaxing. Last night I compromised and went back to the bar for a drink to find a singalong with a honkytonk piano going on; no, don't worry, I didn't try singing!



Just realised that I forgot to tell you that I passed the source of the Mississippi River yesterday. Amazingly it starts up here and flows two and a half thousand miles down to the Gulf of Mexico.



Hello, it's now about 9.30pm and I'm a wee bit pissed. It's been a disappointing day in a lot of ways, not that I'm downhearted, tired or fed up, but I think I had expectations which weren't met, or perhaps they were too high?

Today I've driven most of the way across North Dakota, and I'm about thirty miles from the Montana border. My fantasy or expectations of North Dakota were of the 'badlands' you see in cowboy films, but the North Dakota I drove through was farming and ranching country. Don't get me wrong, it was very nice, but not what I expected or imagined.

I've now found out that the 'badlands' are in ND but in the south of the state, rather than the North which I'm traveling through.

I stopped at a place called Rugby, which is the geographical centre of North America: they have a monument to prove it. They've also got a museum which said it depicted the history of the last 120 years of the area with indoor and outdoor exhibits.



Outdoors was meant to represent the town at the turn of the century, but both it and the indoor exhibits seemed to be put together without any thought or explanation, nothing that 'told me a story'.

For example, they had a room with all sorts of guns, pistols, rifles, shotguns and other firearms stuck on boards with holes all over them like someone had taken a shotgun and blasted all the walls. The place could have been fascinating and told a story but actually it was like a big junk yard!

I've now found a motel in Williston, and when I booked in, dressed in my T shirt and shorts I asked the owner where I could eat. He muttered something about a couple of fast food places in town.

After I'd had a shower and freshened up, put on a shirt and trousers, I decided that since I was in cowboy country I fancied treating myself to a steak.

This time the owner directed me to the Elk Lodge, a baronial pile in the middle of town. The dining room was a massive beamed hall, and I asked for the best small steak they had (I didn't want to end up with an American portion half cow) cooked rare. The waitress who was in 'formal dress' was very helpful and attentive, but when the steak arrived it came overcooked and very well done, I'm sure this was because the meat had been frozen.



I suppose I was a bit intimidated by the surroundings because I didn't send it back, or the wine which was a disappointment. So much for treating myself!

Having got all that off my chest you may think I'm fed up with this whole adventure. Far from it!!! I'm still enjoying myself, sure there's little glitches on the way, but overall I'm amazed by what I'm seeing and experiencing. Today it was the sky, it's so big! This morning started out cloudy and overcast, but by lunchtime the sun was out and the sky was blue with little cottonwool clouds dotted about. When I'm out on the plains the sky is enormous, awe- inspiring; it just goes on forever. You probably think I've gone mad, after all the sky is the sky isn't it? This is something different it's hard to explain.

**I've gone on long enough, see you tomorrow. Good Night**

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## A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 4: Into the Wilderness

### DAY 10 (Sunday 30th June)

Good morning, it's about 09.30 and I've had a good lie in. I'm now off to Glasgow; should get there about lunch time. I have no expectations of this one, never had, it was just an objective for me to go for. Judging by the places I've been through recently they'll all be in church - there's a lot of churches up here, mainly Lutheran.



Evening: It's 8.30pm and I've lost another hour! Today started off dull and dreich, crossing into Montana it was just like being in the Borders!

I've moved motels. The first one was quite small and I had a small room with dark wood on three walls and carpet on the other. When I sat down to write the walls started coming in on me, and I realised I just couldn't spend the night there, I felt so uncomfortable. I booked out and I'm now in a modern Super 8 Motel and I feel fine again.

Where was I? Oh yes, driving through the Borders.

I reached Glasgow at lunchtime and IT WAS CLOSED. The place was totally deserted, not a single person on the streets.

It's a railway town, with people either working for them or farming and ranching. Being me I found a wee bar open and chatted to some of the natives.



The barman offered me a drink and asked where I was from. Glasgow I replied, whereupon he asked which Glasgow and rolled off half a dozen states.

It turns out there are about twenty Glasgows in the States. Once we established I was from Scotland the natives were intrigued. One old chap of 76 who claimed to be Scottish latched on to me; it turned out his grandfather was from Scotland. He said he had a set of pipes and could still play, and the local high school has a pipe band. I had lunch in a restaurant in town, and since it was Sunday I decided to have their roast beef (OK) mashed potatoes (hmmm) and the dreaded horrible brown gravy (YUK).

## THAT WAS GLASGOW



Leaving Glasgow I headed south across the Forth Peck Dam, the biggest earth filled dam in the world, built during the depression. It is massive, and when I drove across it I found it difficult to imagine that all that earth had been 'dumped' there and was holding back a lake over 100 miles long.

Fifty miles south of the dam I headed west, it was very quiet with long stretches of straight undulating road, so I had a play! For the first time I drove the car the way a sports car is meant to be driven, at 90mph rather than the boring 55mph limit, GREAT FUN!

The downside of my fun was that I nearly ran out of petrol, or gas as they call it, and I've found in this part of the world I can drive for 100 miles without seeing a gas station. I usually fill up in the morning which more than does me all day but with me 'enjoying myself' I used a lot more gas. The warning light was on for the last 20 miles into Lewistown where I'm staying tonight, and my bum was twitching I can tell you.



The scenery has become much nicer the further south I come, I'm now into rolling hills and range country. They do have real live cowboys here, en route I saw two rounding up cattle, and it seems that most of the men in this town wear cowboy boots and Stetsons, and talk funny too!

Things are getting interesting: apart from cowboys I've seen deer, bison and an eagle. Tomorrow I'll head south to Yellowstone Park, about 200 miles away. With all the hard driving I've been doing I reckon I've got a couple of days in hand for resting and going off-track. As always I'm looking forward to the next couple of days, should be nice if I get the weather.

Oh that reminds me, on my way down from Glasgow I seemed to be in a little oasis of sunlight while to the south and the west there were very dark skies and thunderstorms. It was magnificent, I could see the lightning forking and hear the thunder rumble all round and I was getting it in stereo! This place never ceases to amaze me.

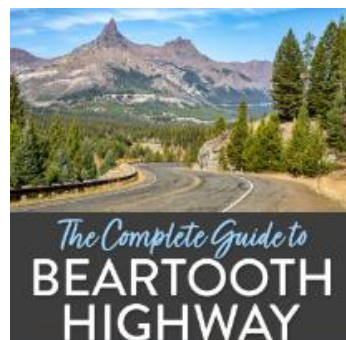
**Bye!**



## DAY 11 (Monday 1st July)

I'm sitting on a rock, on top of a mountain, in the Rockies, driving over the Beartooth Highway. I've had to backtrack 30 or 40 miles from last night's stopover, but it's worth it: let me quote you a passage from one of the guides:-

*Beartooth Highway US212 from Red Lodge to Yellowstone National Park, recently designated a National Forest Scenic Byway, has been described by CBS correspondent Charles Kuralt as "the most beautiful drive in America!" Reaching heights of nearly 11,000 feet, this 69 mile drive offers sky-top views of snow capped peaks, glaciers, alpine lakes and plateaus. Pristine air, unique alpine vegetation and breathtaking scenery.*



It's certainly all that, and more. They reckon it's a three hour drive, but I've already taken two and I think I'm only about half way, I have to keep stopping, like now, to sit and admire the views, I get peace to do it because the natives tend to stop at the viewing points in their cars, take a picture and move on; do they actually ever SEE anything? I'm now just below the snow line, sitting in my T-shirt on a rock with a fair breeze blowing and the sun beaming down, looking over a valley which is very green with lots of pine woods. The smell of the pines from where I'm sitting is lovely. On the other side there are towering snow-capped mountains, part of the Rockies I believe. I just had to write this bit now as this view is so spectacular and inspiring, it almost makes me believe there's a god!



Back again. What a great day! It's now 10.45pm Mountain Time and I'm in Cook City, god knows why it's called that, about two hundred yards of wooden buildings: motels, restaurants, a gift shop, a general store, a garage and a bar, which I have to confess I've been in for the past hour or so. It took me about five hours of stopping to take pictures and drink in the views to do the three hour drive. I don't think the photos will do justice to the spectacular scenery, but they'll be a reminder.

When I got to Yellowstone Park it was just after 5pm and I had a dilemma, the nearest accommodation going south was 25 miles away and there was no way of telling if they were full [NB: these were the days before mobile phones], which would have meant a fifty mile round trip for nothing. So after talking to one of the Park Rangers the best plan was to come back to Cook City for the night.



Earlier in the day I really wanted to sleep in the car tonight under a starry sky, must have been all that scenery made me starry eyed, I realised in the evening that it gets pretty cold, at seven and a half thousand feet up and close to the snow line!



It's amazing you know, this morning when I was having breakfast I felt really tired and worn out, you know that deep down fatigue? Tonight as I write this I'm feeling great again: it's amazing what a stimulating day will do to lift your spirits. I'm going to sleep now under a starry sky. By the way, you know I've had this fascination with how 'big' the sky is here, well I found out today that the Montana slogan is 'The Big Sky State', so someone else has noticed! After a great day it's time to turn in.

## GOOD NIGHT

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### A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 5: Into the Wilderness

#### DAY 12 (Tuesday 2nd July)

Its 6.00am, I'm up and dressed ready to go, slept fitfully, probably because I wanted to get up early to get into the park. Well I've succeeded, so let's go!

6.30 Now in Yellowstone Park. It's like being in an alpine pass, the sunshine is hitting the snow covered peaks but it's still quite dull down here in the valley.

8.30 I've now driven into an even more scenic and really wild part of the valley. I've seen a herd of bison, deer and what I think was a wolf.



I'm now at Tower Falls, a waterfall that drops 130ft into the canyon. There's a wee path going down to the foot of the falls so yours truly had to have a look, and even though there was the roar of the water I found it peaceful down there, that was until the place was invaded by hoards of students of all nationalities who decided to join me.

When I got back to the car park I counted eight busloads of them, I hope we're not going to shadow each other on our way round the park.

8.40 I just had to stop again, I've come up and over a hill and I'm standing by the car looking over miles of rolling hills and pines, surrounded in the distance by snowcapped mountains, It's so peaceful, the birds are singing, the sun is shining in front of me and the moon is still visible in the blue sky behind me. I'm just drinking it in.

9.05 Stopped again, sorry can't help it. There was a big forest fire here last year and I've just come across a large patch where the trees are all standing, their trunks burnt black while the branches that remain are bleached white by the sun. Between the trees are patches of bright yellow flowers. I wonder if it will translate onto film.

10.40 Now in Canyon Village, topped up the car and myself. Breakfast was interesting, I went for Texas French Toast which was French Toast as you would know it, however they then applied a liberal dressing of icing sugar, as if that wasn't enough they served it with a large helping of butter and maple syrup on the side.



After the toast, without the sides, I still felt hungry so I had a bowl of raisin bran, which I enjoyed. I had a look round their gift shop and bought myself a T shirt. Oh I forgot to say earlier that when I started out this morning I had to scrape ice off the car, so much for my idea of sleeping out!

11.10 Inspiration Point, overlooking the canyon and the best waterfall off in the distance, which is where I'm heading. Its lovely and warm now and I've changed into my shorts and a T shirt, I'm getting good at quick changes in the car.

11.55 Just been to see the lower falls, they're spectacular, again there were upper and lower viewing platforms, I went down to the lower one where there is a tremendous view (just realised that I'm running out of superlatives!) Now sitting here sweating like a pig, been running up and down all these stairs I forgot that I'm still 7-8000 feet up and the air is a bit thinner, need to slow down a bit.

12.20 That's me up and down another 1,000 feet or so, this time it was to a platform just above the edge of the lower falls, just where the water goes over the edge, quite awesome watching the power of the water tumble over the edge and come half way back as spray. I noticed when I was up there that there is another platform quite low down on the other side, got to be done!

1.05 Now crossed the river and found the path down to the platform, it's called Uncle Tom's Trail. It zig-zagged about half way down the falls then a flight of 328 stairs took me the rest of the way to the platform near the bottom of the falls where its noisy and exhilarating, the only problem was the 328 steps back up! Think I've had enough of waterfalls for one day.



3.00 Stopped for lunch earlier, the place was too crowded so I just bought a sandwich, an apple and some milk and had a picnic. I've now stopped at a place where all the trees were blown down by a tornado in 1984, they were then burnt in the big fire which was in 1988, not last year as I said earlier.

4.30 I've decided to give up waterfalls for the day and I'm now into geysers. I'm at Norris Geyser Basin which is a large area of hot springs and geysers like a moonscape in places as the water which comes up is sulphurous so the ground is brightly coloured. The geysers themselves are funny, some just sit there and bubble all the time, others like the one I've just spent 20-30 minutes beside before it erupted, consist of a hole in the ground almost full of hot water which occasionally bubbles up then 'erupts' into a fountain of boiling water. The best known one is Old Faithful which I'm off to now, about 30 miles away.

7.15 I've now seen Old Faithful 'erupt'. It's called that because it does its thing on average every 57 minutes or so, and there are benches half way round it in a semicircle and hundreds of people there.



On the way down I came across an elk and a couple of deer, too far away to get a photo with my wee camera, although someone was kind enough to lend me their binoculars to see the elk, it was a lovely big beast, in contrast to the heard of bison who looked a real moth-eaten crew.

Anyway, can't spend all night sitting here writing got to find somewhere to stay tonight, I'm going to have to drive 50 to 60 miles so better get on my way.

I am b\*\*\*\*\*ed! I had more like 80 miles to get to a place called Jackson or Jackson Hole, and what I overlooked was that Grand Teton National Park is a continuation of Yellowstone going south. This meant that the whole way was restricted to the park's 35 & 45 mph speed restrictions, so I didn't get here till about 10.00pm, then came the problem of finding a bed for the night. The first two rooms I was offered were \$110 & \$120 just for me! I've been used to paying \$25 tops \$35 this trip, but I've now found one for \$65 which is very comfortable. I was starving as I hadn't eaten much all day, so I had a shower and went to try and find some food. This late at night the best I could do was a burger.

Mind you even at 11.00 at night the town is still buzzing, it must be a holiday place.

**Goodnight!**

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## A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 6: More Adventures

**DAY 14 ( Thursday 4th July)**

### **INDEPENDENCE DAY**

*No, I'm not getting superstitious missing out on day 13, I just didn't have time to write, I WAS HAVING TOO MUCH FUN!!!!!!*

Yesterday started slowly, I had a lie-in till just after 9.00 which was nice, then I had a continental breakfast in the motel, part of the B&B deal, and after breakfast I went for a walk round town.

Jackson has a small compact centre with cowboy bars, clothes and souvenir shops on the Main Street, all with a boardwalk running in front of the shops, like you see in cowboy films.

I bought myself another T shirt, black with a big wolf's head on the front; then a poster for white water rafting caught my eye. WHY NOT! So I went in to enquire.



The only vacancy they had for the day was for a trip leaving almost immediately, so what the hell I took it, I just had time to rush back to the hotel and change into something I felt was more appropriate, shorts and a T shirt, jumped in the car and rushed across town to meet the bus. In 40 minutes we got to the Snake River where the rafts were, and were given a waterproof suit, a lifejacket and a paddle.



We had a short safety briefing before we got loaded into big rubber dinghies which each held ten people, and off we went down the river. Initially the water was calm, giving Bill our guide time to give us instructions on how and when to paddle and allowing us to get to know each other.

Oh, at this point I'd better explain who Tana is, because her name is going to crop up quite often. When I got to the bus it was sitting with everyone loaded, engine revving waiting for me, so I sat in the first available seat, which just happened to be beside this lovely girl called Tana. We got chatting and it turned out she'd been to Scotland, her father was a golf pro and she had visited Turnberry with him.

Back to my story, I think because we got off the bus chatting, Bill assumed that Tana and I were an item, so he put us together in the back of the boat, where he said it was driest, however there was more chance of falling out! Sitting on the side of the boat with one foot anchored in a 'stirrup' to help keep you onboard, off we went with Bill steering and chatting away. Initially there wasn't much paddling required we just let the river take us along nice and peacefully. Oh, I didn't mention there was a boy of about 10 called John on board, Bill had put him in the very front of the boat holding onto a rope which ran all the way round the sides.

The first rapids were quite tame, just a learning experience, for the next 8 miles or so we alternated between calm water and ever more fearsome rapids. When we reached the more 'interesting' rapids Bill had us paddling like mad into the biggest holes and waves, which was exiting. Wee Jonny at the front was having a great time, every time we went into a big one he would all but disappear under the waves; it's a wonder he wasn't washed overboard, but he seemed to be having the time of his life.

About half way down Bill asked if I wanted some more excitement, probably because as he had said earlier it was quite dry in the back where I was, and I had remarked on this: BIG MISTAKE. So we all changed round and I ended up at the front just to the side of Jonny. Off we went again, and now it was more exiting and VERY WET- every rapid we went into, the waves washed over the top of me, a bit scary and at the same time totally exhilarating.



By the time we got out I was like a drowned rat, totally soaked, ringing wet, so much for the waterproof suit we were issued with. Some people had obviously done this before, or knew the score, as they had a change of clothes with them. I just had to sit on the bus dripping, as did the majority.



By the time we got back to Jackson about five o'clock I had more or less dried off. When we got off the bus there was a big sign for something called the Alpine Slide, it had to be done! So Tana and I took the chairlift up the hill where we were given a sled, like a tea-tray, which you sit on with a lever between your knees to control the speed, you push it forward to allow you to go faster and pull back to brake. We were then launched down the 2,500 foot bobsled type run: I really am a big kid, it was great!

Tana said she would like to go to the rodeo, which was on in town that night, so we went back to our respective motels to change, agreeing to meet later in one of the bars for something to eat. I arrived first and got chatting to a guy called Gerry, who it turned out was a barman at another place in town; he joked he liked to watch other barmen work on his days off. He turned out to be a very nice guy who opted out of corporate life about five years ago and 'retired' here. He had been an executive vice president with General Motors, realised that his kids had left home, his marriage wasn't going too well and he was working all the hours god sends: why? So he threw away the three piece suits, bought himself a wee house on the outskirts of town with a paddock and horse, and now works part time as a barman and he's as happy as the proverbial pig in shit. I'm jealous.

We had dinner then headed off to the rodeo. Gerry told us that if we went to a specific entrance and pretended to be locals we would get in for half price, I kept very quiet and let Tana do the talking, not only did we save on entrance fees we were able to walk anywhere round the 'arena'.



We weren't confined to the bleachers like the rest of the visitors, we could lean on the rail at the side of the ring and be really up close and personal with the proceedings. It was exciting, but went on a bit too long, there's only so many times you can watch someone being thrown from a horse or lassoing something.

When we'd had enough of the rodeo we went back into town and ended up 'shooting some pool'. It's quite popular here, and we came across a bar with about a dozen tables and met a group of young actors who were performing in town. I got a bit carried away and ended up drinking and playing till 2am.

Woke up this morning with a wee bit of a hangover, probably not as bad as I deserved! Over breakfast I resolved to have a quiet day. I went to see Gerry, he told us yesterday to come and have one of his special Bloody Marys, which he makes for the 4th of July. I was sceptical due to my 'condition' but he assured me it would do me good. I don't know what he puts into it but surprisingly I felt much better for it!



At 10.30 they started down Main Street. There were lots of cowboys, Indians, frontiersmen, and bands, it was all good fun and everyone seemed to enjoy it.



I went back to Gerry's for a very weak shandy and Tana appeared a wee while later. She asked Gerry if he knew where she could go horse riding, he picked up the phone dialed a number and gave her the phone saying it was a friend of his. As she talked there was this wee voice from somewhere saying "Can I come"? It was me! They both looked at me in disbelief and asked if I could ride, when I said no she had another conversation with the guy on the phone and eventually said OK let's go.



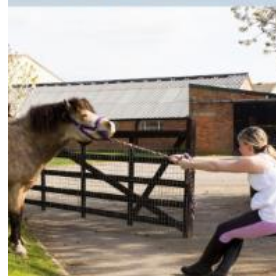
I'm back. Very early. What a farce. The bloody horse knew I had never ridden before and set out to humiliate or kill me. OK, I'll tell you if I must.

We drove into the hills about seven miles out of town to a ranch which rented out horses by the hour. Tana had already explained to them on the phone that she was an experienced rider and I wasn't, so they had a very fit looking horse ready for her, and an older kind of clapped out one for me. They got me up on this thing, they're high! and gave me some basic instructions on how to steer. Tana assured them that she'd look after me, so off we went, down a wee slope, over a burn and into the woods along a recognisable trail.

From the first ten to fifteen minutes things seemed to be going well and I was enjoying myself just plodding along in the sun, then the horse started to slow down till it eventually came to a complete stop. Would it move? Would it, hell, no matter how much I tried to 'persuade' it, so I had to resort on calling out to Tana who was quite a way in front by this time. So she came back and said to give her the rope which was hooked on to its halter and she led the horse along and for a while. I began to feel guilty as this was her thing and I was handicapping her, stopping her enjoying herself, so I said things seemed OK now, as they were, and she gave me back the rope, at this point my horse seemed to be jogging along nicely beside Tana so I encouraged her to go off and enjoy herself, **SECOND BIG MISTAKE** in two days.

As soon as she disappeared round a bend the bloody thing stopped again and no amount of 'persuasion' from me would make it shift. THEN a group of riders appeared on another trail about fifty yards away heading back in the direction of the stables. To my astonishment my beast decided to follow; he just turned round and took off after them. I've never been so scared, here I was on the back of this horse galloping (that's what it felt like) along and I had no control whatsoever, terrifying. When we got to the burn it slowed down, sauntered up to the rail where I'd picked it up, it then turned its head and looked at me with one big eye as if to say you can get off now! I gladly did, wrote a note to leave on Tana's car and got a lift back to town.

## HOW TO GET A STUBBORN HORSE TO MOVE



Tonight, there is a fireworks display to mark Independence Day, so I think we're going to have some dinner and go to that, tell you about it later.

## A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 7: Catching up and moving on

### DAY 15 ( Friday 5th July)

Hello, today has been a bit boring, I've just got my head down and driven a long way, I reckon I've done about 550 miles and ended up in a place called Mesquite just over the border in Nevada. It's very hot; even at eight o'clock at night it was still 105 degrees, and driving down through Utah the temperature was up to 110. Thank God for air conditioning!

Tonight I had something to eat in a cafe and then retired to the local bar. You'll be thinking I'm turning into an alcoholic but it's more about meeting people than drinking, and for the first time on my trip the barman knew what a shandy was. I met a couple up from Vegas for a weekend break, and together with a local couple the five of us danced, played pool and generally enjoyed ourselves. They insisted on contributing to my education by introducing me to 'sippin'' bourbon as opposed to plain old bourbon. Luckily I spotted a bottle of malt whisky behind the bar and could return the favour, introducing them to 'sippin'' whisky, it was great fun.

That reminds me: I didn't finish my tale of Independence Day in Jackson. In the evening I met up with Tana and we went to a Mexican restaurant for dinner, then at 10.00 we went to a big fireworks display to celebrate the 4th, it was quite spectacular. After the fireworks we found a bar with live music and danced the night away.



So compared to the last couple of days I guess a quiet day was called for. One thing before I go: as I mentioned I'm now in Nevada which is famous for gambling, but you can't believe the lengths they take it to. Everywhere you go there's a gambling machine of some kind – even if you sit down at the bar for a quiet drink there's a personal poker machine built into the bar in front of you!

**Good Night.**

## DAY 16 (Saturday 6th July)

I'm in the cafe having breakfast, too early! I made myself get out of bed, although I still felt a bit tired, because I thought it was after 10 o'clock. In fact I've gone through another time zone and it's only 9 o'clock. I could have had at least another hour in bed.

It's taken me a long time but I've now sussed out this breakfast lark. Instead of the fry-ups everyone has (I'm just thinking as I write that, that as a Scotsman is that the pot calling the kettle?) I am now able to order something that suits me better. Most places have cereal if you ask for it, so now I have cereal, orange juice, a pot of tea and toast. Boring I know, but I can't handle the fry-ups any more.



Okay, I need to get on my way – it's about six hours to LA, down through Las Vegas. I don't intend to stop there even though the couple I met last night invited me to spend a couple of days with them. I've decided that I would like to get to LA and deliver the car on the weekend rather than trying to find my way about in weekday traffic, I am also getting close to my 'delivery date'. Vegas is no big loss as I've been there before. As they say: been there, done that, got the T shirt, and while it's a fascinating place in many ways and has got to be seen to be believed, I don't feel the need to go back into its madness. The same goes for the Grand Canyon and Death Valley both of which are within striking distance.



Later: It's now 10.00pm and I'm in a hotel in LA, I think in Santa Monica. I managed to find Maria's (the car owner) house remarkably easily considering the size of LA. Luckily she was in – I don't know what I'd have done if she wasn't as I didn't have a phone number for her. Luckily, too, she was coming this way to meet friends and gave me a lift back. It's near the Driveaway office, where I need to go on Monday to get my deposit back. I'm running out of hard cash, but I'm fine as I've got plastic.

Talking of plastic, before I left I got myself an American Express card thinking I was being smart and it would make life easier (the clue is in the name) than using my Bank of Scotland Visa card. In fact the opposite is true: almost nobody wants to take my AE card and would rather have my Visa. It turns out they charge about twice the commission that Visa do so folk are not happy to take it.



Talking about money, I think I'm going to get a fright when I get home, the plastic has taken a hammering! I was managing to keep a rough track of my spending up till Jackson, on about \$65-75 a day; HOWEVER In Jackson I was enjoying myself so much I let the plastic rip. No regrets, I'll just have to live on bread and dripping for a while when I get home.

Today I drove across the desert through Las Vegas, staying on the freeway and just driving straight through. After all the clear mountain air I'd encountered on my trip, coming into LA was a bit of a shock. From about fifty miles out I could see the smog/haze, whatever it is, lying in the valley covering the city. The thing is when you get into it you don't really see it, the only thing I am aware of is that I can't see the sun, there's just a bright haze, I think I'll have to escape from here!



Tonight I feel a little lonely and 'abandoned'. Earlier I went out looking for somewhere to eat but it's a very commercial district; lots of businesses, garages and a few shops. I eventually found a Chinese restaurant and had a nice meal.

I think the funny feeling I had earlier was about not having a car. Being carless in LA is very limiting, and I think after two weeks of total freedom I feel a bit restricted. Mind you, Maria said I should phone her tomorrow morning and she and a friend may be able to take me for brunch, and then down to the beach. If that doesn't happen then I'll have a rest, sit by the pool, read my book and maybe have a swim. Yes, that sounds nice.

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## A Trip to America in 1991 – Part 8: Farewell (and a stand-off at the Driveway Corral)

### DAY 17 (Sunday 7th July)

LA: Had a nice lie-in till the back of 9 o'clock. After I got dressed, I phoned Marie, whose car I had delivered yesterday; but as she was going to a beach nearer her, about 20 miles away, I said I would leave it as she made no indication that she was going to pick me up.

So I took myself off to the local beach, Santa Monica, and walked to Venice Beach and back. It's mad down there, particularly along at Venice, with their outdoor gym with all the 'beautiful bodies'. The skateboarders and cyclists are everywhere, showing off. Had some brunch – at least they're into healthy eating here – then walked about some more just taking in the sights.



Got back to the hotel about 5.30 tired out, so I lay down and watched some of a naff film about motor racing starring Tom Cruise, then went and had dinner. If this is beginning to sound a bit flat it's because that's how I'm feeling at the moment. I think it's a combination of things: now that I have stopped driving and haven't any more 'targets' to reach I feel that the adrenaline has gone; also this is the second time I've been in LA and I don't feel any more comfortable this time than I did the first time. I don't know what it is but there is something about this place which makes me anxious; for some reason I don't feel I can relax.

As I want to get out of LA, I feel I have three options:-

- 1 As I need to go back to the Driveaway office to get my deposit back, I could see if they have a car needing delivered a day or two away, but perhaps I've done enough driving for this lifetime.
- 2 Hire a car and take off up the coast towards Big Sur and Monterey. I know it's a lovely drive as I've done it before, but again: more driving?
- 3 Take an earlier plane home. I've already phoned Virgin to check and they have seats available tomorrow. I'm beginning to warm to this option as I feel that anything else I do now would be an anticlimax.



### **DAY 18 (Monday 8th July)**

Had a lie-in again, and didn't leave the hotel till about 10 to allow the rush hour traffic to die down. Then had a long taxi ride to the Driveaway office. They had all the paperwork, but there was a problem: they needed a phone call from Marie to say the car had been delivered and she hadn't contacted them. The office number they had for her unfortunately was not correct, so they said the best they could do was leave a message on her home phone and hope she picks it up and I should come back later. With only \$2 left in my pocket after paying \$20 for the taxi earlier, I needed my deposit back! I decided I'd camp in their office and have a Mexican standoff to see who would give in first, so I sat in a corner, got my book and a bottle of water out, and 'made camp' – much to their dismay.





I'm getting pissed off with this lot. I'm sitting here writing this and reading my book trying to appear laid-back when actually I'm getting quite anxious. I've now decided that I really want to catch tonight's flight, so I need to be out of here by about 3.00 latest 4.00.



Later: It's now 5.00 and I'm sitting in the airport ready to go home. They blinked first. The office staff at Driveaway eventually got fed up with me dassing down in their office and gave me my deposit back without any contact from Marie. I've changed my ticket which has cost me £75, but had I stayed I'd have spent way more than that per day, so I'm quite happy. I've now realised that I will lose the best part of a day flying in this direction as I take off at 6.30pm Monday from LA and land at Heathrow about 12.45 Tuesday. If I'd flown back on Friday as scheduled I wouldn't have got back till lunch time Saturday, which wouldn't give a lot of time to recover for work on Monday. This way I'll get a good rest as I've found in the past it takes me several days to recover from the jet-lag flying back from the states.



I'm on the plane now and it feels like the adventure is over, so was it worth it?

The first few days in New York were exciting. Exploring the city was great, and although I hadn't expected to walk quite as much as I did, I felt I got a real feel for the place. Of course the thing that stands out was my first flight in a helicopter: seeing the city and the Statue of Liberty from above was really something. Then I got the car and off I went. I suppose if I'm truthful the first few days were quite hard work and not overly exiting.

The real excitement started after Glasgow, when I started south through Dakota and Montana. THOSE SKIES!!!



Then over the Beartooth Highway, which comes second only to Yosemite National Park as the best scenery I've ever experienced, and from there on into Yellowstone Park which was wondrous.

What can I say about Jackson? It was just the most fun I've ever had with my clothes on!!! So would I do it again?

**YOU BET I WOULD**