

Montana Road Trip, OCT10

The Rev. David R. Graham

Snoqualmie, WA to Big Timber, MT and Big Timber, MT to Kalispell, MT:

<http://gallery.me.com/wp650385>



Regrettably, I let the battery of the camera deplete before the Kalispell, MT to Metaline Falls, WA leg of the trip. Northern ID (Panhandle) on US 2 is about the most beautiful country, apart from a national park, I have ever seen. Lots of space and money up there, no doubt the people nourish the image of the area as Aryan Nations in order to discourage in-filling. Lakes, lakes, lakes! Valleys, valleys, valleys. **Bonnors Ferry**, on the big, magnificent **Kootenai River**, was a lovely

location that had people with ordinary financial resources, pride of place and spirit of work.

In the Big Timber to Kalispell gallery are pictures of the cattle drive I and other drivers got to wend through on US 2. Several hundreds of them in four or five groups spread out over two or three miles of road. The only way to get them down from high summer pasture to low winter pasture, where they will be fed just-harvested hay through the winter. Rolled up

windows so wouldn't get squirted on and did not hit or take hits from any cows or calves seeking one another. Highway was covered with poop, glad the car was moving slowly.

The hands, male and female, were riding horses, but usually now on the ranches they ride ATVs, as do the farmers. Every piece of clothing worn by "cowboys" in the real is practical, needed.

In MT wildlife everywhere, including porcupine.

Herds of white-tailed deer leap across the ranchettes near Big Timber dusks and dawns. As the movie title and tag line says of MT, it's a Big Country. It truly is. Deer leap over the fences. Antelope (pronghorns) dive under them.

Learned a bit about oil field refraction ("refrac") liquid, the stuff used to separate the oil from whatever surrounds it, in the case of the two test wells Bill was supervising: rock, sand and shale.

Apparently the refrac liquid now is non-toxic, can be poured on the ground when brought up from the well. The counties still want it disposed as hazardous waste, however, adding unnecessary cost.

The farmers "paint" their fields on the GPS-controlled computers in the cabs of their tractors then sit there in the air-conditioned cab and watch TV or read a book while the computer runs the tractor, which pulls the implement (plow, seeder, cutter, etc.) over the field with the



utmost efficiency. The ATV is everywhere on the ranches, two beverage holders, one on each side of the driver, usually stocked with a beer can. Food and more liquid in the cooler behind the driver on the ATV's rear deck. Along with tools.

Women as much as men operating the farm equipment and working the livestock. But not the oil equipment. Oil rigs still worked by men, although sometimes the wife of the onsite boss will live with him there. That's unusual, though. Bill refers to the crews as "boys," hails them as such when he talks with them. Everyone treats that as ordinary.



Mostly we drove between the sites and his rented home (a beauty) just south of Big Timber, in his GMC. Long distances on dirt and gravel roads to get to our destinations. Rolling prairie, livestock and wildlife everywhere, along with abandoned homesteads. Everyone drives Chevy or GMC trucks. I don't recall seeing a Ford pickup. That's the way it was in the 70s out west, also. Urban cowboys drive Fords, westerners drive Chevys or GMCs. They say the

latter are far more dependable, after years of experience in those harsh conditions. Nationwide I hear Ford trucks outsell Chevys and GMCs. Lots of urban cowboys.

AT&T coverage is minimal, only in larger towns. Verizon coverage is almost everywhere, except as roads bend and dip behind the rolling hills. The west is fully modern in its tech but doesn't waste money on bon-bons. That's why many rich farmers' homes are trailers: because

there's no profit in a house, only in the barn and implements and tech to run them. Very practical.

Livestock everywhere, EVERYWHERE! Mainly cattle. Mainly in pastures whose boundaries stretch out of sight. Some sheep. More deer and antelope than sheep, from what I saw.

Except on the Blackfoot Reservation, the horses were well-bred and sleek and plenty numerous, but nowhere near as numerous as cattle or even deer and antelope, who were everywhere grasses were. On the Blackfoot Reservation the horses were nearly all sway-backed, some severely, although they were not as uniformly starved as I had expected. Their living conditions, however, like those of the Indians themselves, were slatternly. One does not stop on the Blackfoot Reservation, especially for an overnight.

Grizzlies (Brown Bears) still on the endangered list but their numbers are so large that areas of WY and MT are too dangerous for human visits.

Wolves have driven elk herds down from the mountains into the plains and valleys. Wild turkey everywhere, were artificially introduced. Everyone thought that was kool. Now they're hated because they live on hay stacks and foul them.

Winter wheat is being planted now, to root just before the first snows, so roots will allow them to survive the winter and shoot up a wheat plant early spring. The wheat and hay feed



wildlife and stock. Most is dry-farmed but there is some world-class hay that is irrigated, sold for very high prices.

Human food is a mixture of traditional western, common packaged and a smattering of things healthy/vegetarian. I realized that the organic food business is a spin-off from the hippies of the 1960s, mainly in CA, OR and WA, who were building on the naturalist/nudist practitioners (largely Germanic) of the 19th and earlier 20th Centuries, especially those who had long since



built colonies in SoCal. The hippies have been revised to make them out as left-wing political radicals, but they were not that at all, they were primarily health-conscious, anti-control freak, no matter whom, and wanted to be left alone to work out their own destiny. The left wing political radicals came from the rich families, largely Jewish, who had no interest in nutrition or healthy life-styles. Later drugs came in and things spiraled downward socially but still not politically. It was the "soshes" of the 60s, the rich and affluent kids, who sat on the sidelines then and mocked the hippies but

who envied and tried secretly to copy what they thought were their values but got it wrong, went political radical, including violent, while also getting rich or starting rich and became the politicians now driving the country into sorrow -- soshes of the 1960s and scions of the rich and famous.

The hippies, however, produced the organic food business and the great and good health-consciousness at its root. And they were building on the previous generations' naturalists/nudists, expanding their reach to the entire society. In Ocean Beach, San Diego, in the 1970s, we had the OB People's Food Store (**still there**), something entirely new for the time and remarkably successful. It mirrored an old established "health food" store nearer downtown San Diego owned by one of the old naturalist/nudist generation. The OB store's name had an obvious Communist reference, but it was not Communist, it was natural/organic foods, run for profit by a group of hippies who wanted to do a good service without skimming the gravy for themselves. They weren't political. Probably that didn't last into the 80s, I don't know, but the organic/health food consciousness was seminal for the new generation and together with parallel efforts in SoCal, OR and WA made an economy of good food and profits.

This was on my mind whilst seeing the beautiful MT/ID countryside.

The Kootenai River is the second most beautiful river I have ever seen. The Yellowstone is the most beautiful river I have ever seen. Pictures taken on I-90 on the way to US 89 show a treeline off to the right of the camera and highway. That is the line of the Yellowstone River. It is the only free-flowing tributary of the Missouri River, which of course rises in Montana.



The Rockies in Montana are actually numerous ranges, including Bitterroots, Crazyes, Centennials, and several more. The geography is utterly fascinating and tells wonderful stories. In one pass I saw sedimentary layers standing vertically! What violence must have done that! The grasslands or prairies are endlessly fascinating. Bill took me out to see one of the great bowls of North America, comprising several million acres of depression in the earth's crust. A breathing problem I had canceled a trip to Cody, WY to see a sacred place he knows. We worked our hands to the bone, driving and talking and enjoying the Land! :-) What a Nation we live in and belong to, who made us who we are, what we do. Truly we are Hers, and we owe Her loyalty and protection, as of our Mother, our Alma Mater.

