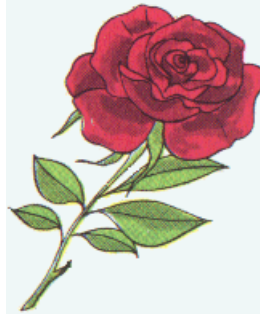


Travels with Nancy and Bill



On long road trips across the country, quality campgrounds are sometimes few and far between. For us, having a pest-free, level spot with a good view tops the list. Access to a dump station follows close behind. Though the full hook-up sites make life easier, our batteries and water supply adequately serve us for 4 or 5 days.

At Forsyth, Montana, we finally found an attractive looking spot at a rustic park on the banks of the Yellowstone River. Since the river was Lewis and Clark's "highway home" in 1806, and we were learning more about their expedition, we decided to stay, explore the hiking trails and photograph the fall colors. Less than one minute after exiting the truck to set up, a swarm of helicopter-sized mosquitoes attacked from all directions. Safely back inside the truck, we continued 45 miles to a KOA in Miles City where full hook-ups, internet, laundry and hot showers were the norm.

We registered, and visited with the couple traveling in a hotel-sized RV, towed by a 1.5 ton dually -- full-timers on their way to New Orleans. We had met them earlier at Pinehurst, Idaho, where the voice on our GPS had said, "Pin Hurst." After sharing tales of the road, parks, and restaurants, we bought a bottle of California Merlot and settled in for the night. With access to the world, we checked our email, sent out notes, and balanced the books. We cleaned, de-bugged, emptied, filled, washed, and dried.



Next day, we aimed mostly for North Dakota. The big, blue Montana sky seemed to encapsulate us. It stretched around, and down, and marked the edge the wide open spaces. All of the Red and Black Angus cattle, hay bales, prairie dogs and rolling hills in the world could never fill the vastness. Highway 94 turned from smooth to rolling, and Bad Route Road forked to the right. Near Whoop-up Creek, the first of many of the oil rigs, which Nancy called "grasshoppers," popped into view. A long, slow train pulling a half-mile line of cars of coal for industry's power plants lumbered up the hill. Nearing the city of Beach, close to the border, more round bales dotted the prairie. Dozens of antelope languished between them. Just across the line, "Home on the Range" ranch occupied thousands of acres. Their sign read, "No services available." Two cowboys on horses slowly followed the fence line that stretched around the spread. Hay fields changed to sunflower fields -- the seeds to be pressed, the oil bottled,

and the fast food barons left smiling. The land changed from plains and hay fields to hills and humps. A dam surely had been named correctly - Camel Hump. As we passed, I should have thought about geological intrusions, and natural weathering, but all that came to mind was Dolly Parton's chest. In early afternoon, we checked in at the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, South Unit, and prepped for the evening shoot - bison, wild horses, prairie dogs, badlands, fall colors, the

sunset and star trails. The park is surely one of the more special places in our nation. Theodore Roosevelt came here to heal and regenerate after the death of his wife and mother. He lost both on Valentine's Day, 1884. In mourning, he lived in a tiny cabin, hunted, worked and rode the land until able to return to New York. Becoming whole again, he left the badlands, was elected governor of New York, and after President McKinley's Vice President died, Roosevelt became a sought-after leader. The McKinley / Roosevelt ticket won the next election handily, and the new 2nd-in-command of our nation worked tirelessly at a job he did not love. When President McKinley was shot by a "crazed anarchist," Theodore Roosevelt became president. On his own, and wildly popular, he won a second term. His time in North Dakota had changed him from user and taker to preserver. He said had it not been for the badlands, he would not have become president. Once re-elected, he was able to use the power of his office, "The Bully Pulpit," to set aside and preserve 230 million acres of land for future generations to enjoy - Yellowstone, Yosemite, Crater Lake, and Mesa Verde, are but a few.



I've often thought had it not been for this president, the scrapers, excavators, blasters and



“developers” of the earth's surface would have had license, and could have taken over the land. Today's national treasures might well have become industrial sites. At Yellowstone, a raucous game of ring around the bison in a snowmobile might attract tourists, as would a natural healing spa and hotel at every major geyser. A zip line and bungee jump from El Capitan at Yosemite would certainly have been a money maker, as would sky diving from a cliff at Grand Canyon, or a day's worth of "Go Native" at Mesa Verde.

\$299.95 a pop?

One mile from our campground, a 36-mile paved road loops from the lowlands, through the badlands. The first time around, we photographed hundreds of bison, scores of unique landscapes, and a breathtaking sunset of red-orange glow as it seemed to sink behind the craggy hills. The next morning, we got lucky and turned left where the wild horses were feeding, and took hundreds more exceptional shots.



Waiting patiently for the bison to clear the road, and wondering whether they might try to become amorous with the truck, or attack, we rolled down the windows and got more shots -- bulls comically scratching their massive heads on the campground

entrance sign, and confused suitors seeking favors, but accidentally approaching the wrong gender.

That afternoon, we ordered bison burgers at the Cowboy Cafe in Medora, photographed the cabin where Theodore Roosevelt stayed, watched a short movie of park history, and headed out for another shoot on the loop. Better than ever, we watched as a herd of bison splashed in the Little Missouri River, shot awesomely colored landscapes, a coyote, prairie dogs, and another group of wild horses. At dark-thirty, we set up for star trail shots, pointing



our cameras on tripods above a jagged silhouette.

At 8-ish the next morning, packed up, and hooked up, we headed out. At the Painted Canyon visitor's center a few miles past the campground, a ranger advised us to stay away from an unruly bison that had taken over the lawn and sidewalk. "He charges at people," said the ranger. As I crept close to get a unique shot of a bison using a sidewalk. Nancy said, "Better listen to the ranger. Those critters weigh a ton, and can do 35 mph." She always has the best ideas.

Bill Hunt