

Backpacking Trip — “The Beaten Path”

Beartooth Wilderness Montana



August 2001

Day 1 – Clark's Fork Trailhead to just beyond Fox Lake



Clean, showered, ready to begin our 10-day backpacking adventure in Montana's wonderful Beartooth Mountains.



On our first night, we camped at the far side of a stream bordering the trail in a tufty meadow. A cliff face to the east was dramatic to look at but kept the sun from reaching our tentsite until late the next morning. After dinner that evening, a light rain misted, but we were well protected in our rain gear. Robin was less than thrilled about the dampness, but we both enjoyed the patter of gentle rain on our tent that night—one of our favorite sounds.

Day 2 – Fox Lake to Bald Knob Lake



After some heavy uphill slogging, we got a gift—an unexpected swimming hole by a waterfall along the side of the trail. This turned out to be a highlight of the trip, one of those idyllic moments in time that crystallize into what you recall as “perfection.” All three of us went swimming in the chilly waters. The sun shone bright, we were all alone in the wilderness, and we reveled in the feel of the cold water as we plunged in and swam around. The river water sluiced over the smooth rocks in places, eddied in deep crystal pools in others. It was our perfect swimming hole.



We camped at Bald Knob Lake, about a half-mile above Ouzel Lake. The lake wound about in such a way that it almost seemed like two lakes. We camped in between the “two” lakes, with a view to both, but with our campsite centered on the smaller.

Day 3 – Bald Knob Lake to Fossil Lake



The epitome of the “happy camper.” This was Alan’s first backpacking excursion into the wilderness.



The hike to Fossil Lake was a 2.5-mile jaunt above treeline and through fellfields, over ground about as level as the Beartooths ever get.

Day 3 – Bald Knob Lake to Fossil Lake (*continued*)



Our first campsite at Fossil Lake. Just as we arrived, it started to rain. Alan got his tent set up in time to beat the worst of it, but for the longest time I couldn't find our tent stakes, and in the meantime the rain just started coming down harder and harder. In no time at all we were soaked, our exposed tent was soaked, and I was cursing up a storm. It was awful—funny in retrospect, but awful at the time.



During her explorations late that afternoon, Robin fell in love with a different Fossil Lake campsite and convinced us to move. Rather than disassemble our tent, we carried it assembled (and sagging) between us. Alan carried his tent single-handed over his back, like a billowing cross. It made for quite a sight, carrying our tents across the hills to our new home.

Day 3 – Bald Knob Lake to Fossil Lake (*continued*)



Our dream site at Fossil Lake—beautiful lake views, rocky fellfield vistas, and an enviable slope of rock that fell straight into a deep patch of water. See the cover for our perfect diving ledge and another view of our campsite.



We hiked up a steep hill near our first campsite and saw Fossil Lake stretched out below us, octopus-like.

Day 4 – “Rest Day” at Fossil Lake



I put “Rest Day” in quotes for a reason—our rest days were some of the most exhausting of the trip. We trekked off-trail up one drainage to Rough Lake then followed a different drainage to Windy Lake. This off-trail hiking took us through some stunning country, with fellfields and valleys absolutely empty of people except for ourselves.

Day 5 – Bonus Rest Day at Fossil Lake



Some of the coldest water you'll ever experience is at 10,000+ feet in the Beartooths. When you dive in the breath goes right out of you. The frigid waters leave you numb, but the warm sun thaws you out and leaves you feeling cleansed, purified, invigorated, buoyant.



One of our best decisions was to take an extra day up at Fossil Lake to enjoy our premier campsite in the true high country of the Beartooths.

Day 6 – Fossil Lake to Dewey Lake



We left our great campsite at Fossil Lake and hiked two miles downhill through rocky terrain. We descended to treeline, crossed a stream, and had some unexpected uphill hiking before reaching Dewey Lake. The waters were emerald green from above, with an enormous cirque towering behind. Imagine having such beautiful country all to yourself! Such was our good fortune.

Day 7 – “Rest Day” at Dewey Lake



Alan went solo on a grueling 7-hour dayhike over some incredible terrain and took the dramatic pictures above.



Robin and I started our day by visiting the spillway on the far side of Dewey. This is a gentle outflow of water that seems to disappear over the lip of the lake, flowing in a broad series of steps and pools and shallow flumes.

Day 7 – “Rest Day” at Dewey Lake



Robin and I went on our own 5-hour off-trail adventure up to beautiful Medicine Lake. We should have stopped there! But we pressed on to Cairn Lake and finally returned to Dewey with our legs shaking from exhaustion.

Days 8 & 9 – Dewey Lake to Lake At Falls (and Rest Day)



We hiked downhill past a number of waterfalls, the most notable being Impasse Falls at Duggan Lake (left), before arriving at dramatic Lake At Falls (right).



We saw (and ate) lots of raspberries and blueberries growing trailside. Finding a place to camp at Lake At Falls was no easy matter; this was our first spot—cramped—but once again, Robin found a better spot and we moved.

Days 10 & 11 – Lake At Falls to Elk Lake (and East Rosebud Lake)



Our final campsite at Elk Lake was pretty enough, but too close to civilization for our taste—it was overrun by fishermen during the day. The skeletal trees in the background are the result of a huge forest fire several years back.



We hiked out of the Beartooth Wilderness, finishing a backpack trip of 10 nights and 11 days—the longest ever for Robin and Alan, the second longest for me. As we hiked to the trailhead, our packs were much lighter than when we started but still enough to make us perspire as the day turned warmer. Nothing like reaching your car after a long backpack—it's the only time I look forward to seeing a parking lot. Our first stop was the Grizzly Bar, where we had big, juicy quarter pounder hamburgers with cheese and all the trimmings, including lots of fries.

We rewarded ourselves for all our hard work with a two-day stay at Chico Hot Springs. We relaxed our tired muscles in the hot springs pool. Robin and I even got full-hour massages as a thank you gift from Alan. This was a real treat, something we never would have done for ourselves, but boy did it feel wonderful.

Backpacking Trip Along “The Beaten Path” – Beartooth Wilderness

A great trip! The backpacking portion lasted 10 nights, 11 days, from August 11 to 21, 2001. The trip continued after that to include a few days at Chico Hot Springs to soak our cares away. Life should always be so good.

August 10 (Friday)

We met Alan at our motel, the Best Western Lupine Inn in Red Lodge, where we stayed in adjoining rooms on the second floor. We went for a walk into town, where we had an early dinner at a small restaurant there. We had salads and soups for entrees, and Alan splurged on a fine bottle of wine, the 1996 Jordan Alexander Valley, in celebration of our reunion. Back at the motel, Alan joined us in our room as we emptied our backpacks and reviewed what we were bringing. Getting it all to fit was quite a task—I had an enormous cardboard box of food in ziplock baggies that had to be distributed fairly. Robin got the gorp and Gatorade and Tang, I got the breakfast and lunch stuff, and Alan got most of the dinner stuff. We were done before 10 pm and got to bed in reasonable time for an early rising.

August 11 (Saturday)

Robin and Alan went for an early breakfast in town; I chose to sleep an extra hour. At 7 am we met Mike, our shuttle driver, at the motel parking lot. He drove with Alan in his diesel pickup truck, with our packs loaded in the back, while we followed behind in our Olds. Mike led us to the East Rosebud trailhead, about an hour away from Red Lodge over gravel roads. We saw antelope and deer and enjoyed the rolling hills and hay bales that dotted the land. The trees around the town of Alpine, however, were burned from the fire there five or six years ago. We parked our car at the trailhead, then sat in the back seat of the pickup for the three-hour drive back through Red Lodge, over the Beartooth Highway, and to our destination at Clark's Fork Trailhead (near Chief Joseph Campground) just outside of Cooke City.

We had stopped at the supermarket on the way back through Red Lodge, so we had bagels and sandwich meats to eat at the trailhead. We sat at a picnic bench overlooking a pretty cascade dropping into a pool of water. It was about noon when we finished our meal and saddled up for the first time. Alan asked a passing hiker to take the “before” picture of us on his tiny Elf camera. God only knew what we would look like “after.”

I had divided the 26-mile “Beaten Path” hike into relatively short hikes of 3 to 4 miles each, with rest days in between. On the first day we were scheduled for a 4-mile hike to Fox Lake—although at any point we could decide to stop sooner or push on further than planned. This particular hike turned out to be easier than we had expected. We walked through pretty pine forest. Much of the terrain was level or gently rising. This was a good thing, since our packs were *heavy*! It's amazing how much food can weigh. Before long our hip bones (or “iliac crests,” according to Robin the R.N.) were sore, our shoulders aching, and our backs (and fronts) covered with sweat.

We reached the Fox Lake turnout and continued past it, per the suggestion of the backpacker who took our picture at the trailhead. He said the loss of elevation to get to Fox Lake wasn't worth the pain of the re-ascent. We camped instead at the far side of a stream bordering the trail, about a

quarter-mile past the turnout, in a tufty meadow. The meadow was, unfortunately, full of pockets of horse manure but, on the plus side, offered very soft bedding. Orange tape was tied to the trees along the stream to keep horses from straying into the water. A cliff face to the east was dramatic to look at but also kept the sun from reaching the site until late in the morning. All in all, it was a utilitarian campsite. We ate our dinner of garlic mashed potatoes with roast beef (from a can) and enjoyed it immensely despite the light rain that fell during and after our meal. For a time that evening I stared up into the sky with my head resting against a stone. A light rain misted, but I was well protected in my rain gear. That night it rained gently on the tent as we slept.

August 12 (Sunday)

We got a late start because the sun remained hidden for so long behind the eastward cliff face. Our tents and sleeping bags were dewy from the rain and the nearby stream. We had a quick breakfast of raspberry granola, then packed up and started hiking. The uphill was much more severe but we only had to cover 3 miles.

After some heavy slogging, we got a gift—an unexpected swimming hole by a waterfall along the side of the trail. This turned out to be a highlight of the trip, one of those idyllic moments in time that crystallize into what you recall as “perfection.” All three of us went swimming in the chilly waters. The sun shone bright, we were all alone in the wilderness, and we reveled in the feel of the cold water as we plunged in and swam around. The river water sluiced over the smooth rocks in places, eddied in deep crystal pools in others. It was the perfect swimming hole. We each dove in and clambered out several times before laying flat on the gently sloping granite to dry off in the sun. A man on a horse leading two pack mules passed us, followed by a party of three older campers who were headed up to Fossil Lake, with most of their gear on the pack mules (including a kayak!). We thought pack mules sounded pretty good right about then as we re-shouldered our packs for some more hard, steep hiking.

Our original destination was Ouzel Lake. A rest stop just short of Ouzel turned into a lunch break. There was a beautiful overlook back over the terrain we had covered. We were all surprised when we reached Ouzel Lake just five minutes after saddling up again—but it worked out fine, since we decided that the lake wasn't quite what we were looking for anyway. We pressed on to Bald Knob Lake, just around the bend about a half-mile further. This spot we all felt happy about. The lake featured an island with a memorable isthmus of green grass in between two higher knobs. The lake itself wound about in such a way that it almost seemed to be two lakes; we camped in between the “two” lakes, with a view to both, but with our campsite centered on the smaller.

Once our campsite was erected, Alan and I both went swimming again, washing off the sweat of the day in the cold mountain water. This would turn out to be a daily ritual—the first time I've ever swum in mountain lakes on such a regular basis. It was invigorating—the frigid waters leaving you numb, the warm sun thawing you out. Cleansing, purifying, it left you feeling buoyant afterwards. Robin and I tended to do most of our lake swimming in the afternoon sun, but Alan somehow brought himself to bathe each morning before the

sun was fully up. He did this each day, despite the weather, and sometimes shivered for a good long while in his fleece jacket as he read his lesson and ate his breakfast before finally regaining his heat as the sun reached our camp. I can testify that even with the sun shining, it takes a good while for your inner body temperature to return from the cold depths of that plunge.

Dinner that evening featured three-cheese risotto and lasagna. These were very successful, but my first attempt at bread turned out awful—undercooked and almost raw in places, burnt on the bottom. Alan bravely ate the burnt sections, and I stomachached some of the semi-raw stuff with some strawberry jam, but we buried the rest.

Since I did most of the cooking, Alan and Robin tended to do cleanup and filling of the water jug and water bottles. Filtering that much water took a good deal of time, and it was usually accomplished as a two-person operation, pumping with both filters to fill the two-gallon jug.

We noticed lots of trout in the waters of the lake. I didn't bring my fishing rod on this trip, so they were in no danger from us.

This lake marked the beginning of the high country for us, being just at the border of treeline.

August 13 (Monday)

Bald Knob Lake to Fossil Lake. An easy hike of 2.5 miles. A light rain kept us sleeping until 8:30. After a quick breakfast of oatmeal, we started our hike. It rained lightly on and off during the journey. We were above treeline for most of the way, so there wasn't much to do but keep hiking. But it wasn't so bad that we needed our raingear, and by the time we reached the lake it had stopped.

We crested a hill and came to an enormous sign on a cairn that notified us no fires were allowed. Fossil Lake stretched, octopus-like, beyond. We probably hiked another quarter mile just to get to the peninsula where we decided to make our campsite. We debated for a time between two different sites, trying to decide whether one was windier than the other—and in the meantime, of course, it started to rain. We hurried to get our tents set up. Alan got his up in time to beat the worst of the rain, but for the longest time I couldn't find our tent stakes, and in the meantime the rain just started coming down harder and harder, and in no time at all we were soaked, our exposed tent was soaked, and I was cursing up a storm. It was awful—funny in retrospect, but awful at the time. Finally I found the stakes, at the very bottom of my bag, and we threw our tent up in record time, getting the fly staked down as quickly as we could. But literally everything was wet. We sat in our wet rain gear, shivering inside on the wet floor of our tent, perched on our wet thermarests, and had a wet lunch of Manchego cheese and turkey jerky. Alan climbed in our tent with us for lunch, and he helped lift our spirits with camaraderie and his attitude of "it's all fun, even the unfun parts." The food helped, too, and once we started drying out a bit it was okay. We used our towels and bandannas to mop up the wettest spots in the tent, and eventually the rains abated.

We all napped for a bit. Afterwards, Alan and I went on a hike up to a high knoll overlooking Fossil. We gained 500 feet of elevation very quickly. Alan hikes very fast uphill, and it was a challenge to keep up with him. But when we got to the top it was worth it. We had great views in all directions. We identified Mt. Dewey, Pilot Peak, Index Peak, and possibly Castle Rock Mountain—but there was a pesky lake in the distance we just couldn't seem to get a handle on. We

hiked back down a different way, through a boulder field. This was one area where I could go faster than Alan, although he caught on quickly and came to enjoy boulder fields as much as I do.

Late that afternoon, Alan read *Fountainhead*, Robin hiked locally along the shore of the lake, and I went for an extremely brisk swim in Fossil Lake. Brr. This was at 5:30 pm, so I caught the tail end of the sunshine before it turned colder again. Robin, meanwhile, had found a fantastic campsite. After taking us to see it, she convinced us to move. We did it in two trips. Robin and I carried our assembled (and sagging) tent between us, while Alan carried his single-handed over his back, like a billowing cross. It made for quite a sight, carrying our tents across the hills to our new home. Then we returned for our packs.

The new site offered beautiful lake views, rocky fellfield vistas, and an enviable slope of rock that fell straight into a deep patch of water. We ate a tasty dinner of Lipton garlic noodles with chicken while enjoying the to-die-for views. That evening, as the sun fell, I rested with my head against a rock on a hillock behind our campsite (a marmot lived up there) and watched it turn dark over the fellfield.

August 14 (Tuesday)

"Rest day" at Fossil. I put that in quotes for a reason. As it turned out, our rest days were some of the most unrestful of the trip—but a hell of a lot of fun. We did some off-trail exploring on this day that left us all feeling great.

For some reason we all had a hard night sleeping. We got up at 8:30 and Alan went for an early morning swim with no sun. It was gray and windy. We made scrambled eggs, which took forever—later we determined it was due to the wind that things took so long to cook today. At the time I thought our stove was broken, or dysfunctional above 10,000 feet. We napped a bit after breakfast, then the sun came out and we went for a day hike starting at 11:15. Alan carried a daypack with our lunch.

First we went to what we dubbed "Duck Lake," due north of Fossil. Then we bore west to Stephanie Lake. This turned out to be good topo practice. We tried going the long route around—and this would have worked, but we gave up too soon and ended up going much higher than necessary to reach our destination. It was quite tiring, but we did reach the lake eventually. We ate a quick lunch at Stephanie. Then we bore northwest to Rough Lake. Alan has a natural ability for orienting and soon was leading us with a clear sense of going up such-and-such a drainage and coming back a different way by such-and-such a drainage. It's a lot harder for me to keep track, but if I pay attention I can keep myself from getting too lost.

We went up one drainage to Rough Lake, then came back down by a different drainage to Windy Lake. This off-trail hiking took us through some beautiful country, fellfields and valleys absolutely empty of people except for us. The whole time we were in the backcountry (i.e., off-trail), we never saw a single person—although we did see a lone tent set up along the inlet stream cascading into Rough Lake.

At the inlet to Windy, we decided the easiest way around this tentacled lake was up and over. We cut up over a hill and reached an unnamed lake just north of Windy. This turned out to be an idyllic spot. Alan sunned during the heat of the day, while Robin and I went swimming.

Then it was back to Fossil, where we rejoined our trail and returned to camp. We took a well-deserved nap.

Then came our disaster dinner in the hail and rain. It took forever for the water to boil (again, because it was very windy and we were at high altitude). Of all nights, I had picked this one to make Vigo Red Beans & Rice, which required 25 minutes of simmering. Well, once I dumped the rice into the water, it never boiled again. I sat there in full rain gear as it hailed on me and waited 45 minutes for the water to return to a boil, which it refused to do. Finally I gave up, with much cursing, and dumped the red beans and rice in a rock crevice, not knowing what else to do with the stuff. Hopefully some marmot found it and had a feast. We subsisted on cheese and beef jerky in a cold wind that evening. But we made the best of it, laughing at the irony of not having a hot dinner on the one night we really could have used it the most. Good attitudes saw us through many small challenges along the way on this trip. The wind died down eventually, and we went to bed around 9 pm.

I want to note that Robin was a real trooper today. I'd guess we covered 7 or 8 miles during our "rest day" and she kept up and never complained. At one point she did an army roll after tripping on a rock—one minute she was walking just behind me, the next I heard a grunt and she was rolling in the grass in front of me. It was pretty funny, and the Bible quote she read me that evening was apt, something about "falling headlong" and being upheld. During our dayhike we also got to hop across many boulder fields and traveled through lovely fellfield meadows with brooks. The one disappointment for me was the lack of wildflowers. It looks like this has been a summer with below-average rain and below-average snowmelt. The result is practically no wildflowers, other than two species which seem to be everywhere—pink monkeyflower and fireweed.

August 15 (Wednesday)

"Bonus" rest day. One of our best decisions of the trip was to take an extra day up at Fossil Lake to enjoy our premier campsite in the true high country of the Beartooths. In retrospect, this period was the best of our experience, and we would have felt shortchanged if we had left the high country any sooner. All along, we had left the possibility of adding an optional day, and we added it here at Fossil Lake. Yesterday's rest day was great but hardly restful. So today we slept in and agreed over a breakfast of granola to take the day off, as it were.

Robin and I stayed put at our awesome campsite while Alan went on a day hike east of Fossil Lake, exploring a valley that was "calling" to him, as he put it. Robin read a book by Jude Deveraux. I just sort of hung out and enjoyed the day. I hadn't brought a fiction book, thinking I would spend all my free time studying wildflowers, of which, it turned out, there were very few to study. Early on in the day we both did laundry on a flat rock that sloped into the lake. We hung the laundry from trees or laid it out to dry on rocks. Later I dove into the lake. Boy, was it cold—the coldest water I ever dove into. I got out quickly, lathered up all over, dove back in again, and surfaced with a head rush. I got a few more head rushes as I dunked and redunked my head to get all the soap out. Robin washed her hair but didn't dive in. I helped her by pouring cups of icy water over her head.

We went exploring locally in the late afternoon along the edge of the peninsula. We saw many fish in the lake, and also the surprisingly quiet marmot on the knoll near our campsite. I should note that by this time Robin had grown comfortable enough that she didn't even bring her bear spray with her. We actually went on long off-trail dayhikes

where she chose to leave it behind. The high country inspires her with confidence. This was a pleasant development, given the fear with which she went into the wilderness.

Today was a Teva day for us; we never wore our boots. Tevas are wonderful for dipping your feet into the water or doing some local exploring. I'll be sure to bring them on all future backpacking trips. At some point we ate lunch on a mossy rock near the water, down below our campsite. I pigged out on gorp—I love that tropical fruit mix with the yogurt-covered almonds!

Alan got back around 3 pm. We took more naps as the rain and sun came and went all day. By 5 pm it was raining *and* thundering. Dinner was at 6:30 during a break in the downpour. We had Japanese noodles and cheesy mashed potatoes—good and filling.

The rain started again just as we were finishing. The rain always seemed to make its appearance just as we were eating dinner or setting up our tents or putting our stuff away. Fortunately, it rained very little the second half of the trip, but we didn't know that then. Alan said, "You know, it's incredibly beautiful here, but it does rain a lot." What could I say? Certainly it seemed to be the case both on this trip and the one we recently took with Todd.

At 8:30 pm it was still raining lightly. I looked over at Robin and strands of her hair were standing straight up almost two feet high! Talk about electricity in the air.

August 16 (Thursday)

A good and relatively easy hike from Fossil to Dewey Lake. Got up at 7:30 am after plenty of sleep and broke camp over a period of 3 hours. This included Robin and me jumping twice each into the lake from our "diving platform"—a granite shelf that slopes right into deep water. Alan has been jumping in each morning: he gets out, suds up, and jumps in again. I don't know how he does it because it's *cold*—I wait until the sun is shining.

We left our great campsite at Fossil and hiked two miles, mostly downhill, through rocky and lovely terrain. We descended again to treeline, crossed a stream, and had some unexpected uphill hiking before reaching Dewey. We came at Dewey from a different angle than I had during my college backpack trip. The waters looked emerald green from above. There was the same towering cirque, but now it was in the distance behind the lake, instead of directly above us. We are camped in a forest glen overlooking the lake. A headland juts out into the water, with a small bay in front of it above which we are camped. A great many trout inhabit the waters; we can see them bobbing to the surface repeatedly to feed.

Alan went exploring in the afternoon. We napped while it rained, then went for a brief hike up to the top of a steep knoll that provided grand views over the lake. From there I could see my original Dewey campsite, in a meadow a good ways in the distance over rough-and-tumble countryside.

Alan returned at 5:30 after having hiked over the rough-and-tumble terrain we had seen. We had a dinner of turkey stroganoff—with no rain! It was a beautiful, peaceful evening on the lake.

August 17 (Friday)

In the pre-dawn, Alan and I both heard an owl hooting. Very mystical.

This was a "rest day" at Dewey and our first rainless day of the trip. The day started out easy and ended hard. Very

hard. The hardest day of the trip for all of us, and one of the most memorable.

Alan went exploring on his own, leaving at 8:45 for a solo climb up Dewey Peak. He accomplished that with ease and went on to hike along the ridge of the entire cirque, then took a gander over the Falls Creek Cirque, then came back down what he called the "goat path", a very steep route by the "tooth" of rock in Dewey's cirque. He said he couldn't believe we had actually hiked up that with backpacks on our original college trip; we must have been in great shape. Alan himself must be in great shape to accomplish what he did today. Even he was tired by the end of it.

Meanwhile, Robin and I started our day by visiting the spillway on the far side of Dewey. This is a gentle outflow of water that seems to disappear over the lip of the lake. The waters flow in a broad series of steps and pools and shallow flumes, with many small waterfalls. In places the water runs underneath enormous slabs of granite and out the other side. We bathed for a good long time in the pools, shampooed and stuck our heads under a waterfall of water, and sunbathed on immense flat rocks just to the south. We returned to the campsite for lunch.

Then the hard part of our day began. At 12:15 we started off-trail on a hike to Medicine Lake. Robin and I ascended slowly up a very steep slope. We paralleled a stream on our way up, staying to the right of it. We made good progress and reached the lake without mishap. We should have stopped there! But instead of relaxing, we circled the lake from the left and headed up an extremely steep slope in an attempt to get to Cairn Lake. I forged ahead of Robin as the slope got dicier, dislodging several pieces of rock which fell to the lake far below. Finally I hit a roadblock—a glacier that reared up above me, stopping my progress. I crossed below the glacier, with glacier water running across the slanting rocks I was crossing (scary), then started climbing up a clifflike face with a dropoff to death before I realized I was being a friggin' idiot and desisted. I came back down the same extreme slope, legs shaking a bit, met up with Robin, and headed back down toward the lake. We discussed giving up, but by this time I was possessed. I didn't want that lake to defeat me! It sounds so dumb, but that's how I felt. So I convinced Robin to continue on, despite the fact that my knees ached and I was already tired.

We angled off toward another steep slope, climbed it together, and finally reached the saddle, huffing and puffing all the way. From there we could just see the corner of Cairn Lake far below and to the northwest. A knoll blocked most of the lake from view. Robin decided to wait there and rest while I, with Ahab-like obsession, decided to press on to the lake itself. I spent the next hour hiking to Cairn Lake and back over rough-and-tumble terrain just to confirm that it was Cairn. Stupid! Utterly unworth the effort. But I did it. I was utterly exhausted by the time I got back to Robin. The whole time I was on my own, I kept looking back over my shoulder saying, "That ridge, that one." I knew if I got lost or confused it could be big trouble. But it was all quite obvious and returning was no problem except for the fact that I tried to hurry the whole way back because I had told Robin a half hour and it was more like an hour.

We still had a long way to go to get back to Dewey. We hiked back up the ridge, over the saddle, down a steep slope to Medicine—where I stopped to take a quick swim—then picked around boulder fields to the far side of the lake, where we went down another very steep slope to arrive back

at Dewey. My knees hurt bigtime and I was beyond tired by the end of all this.

Alan was back when we arrived around 5:30. He had been gone for seven hours, so our five-hour ordeal still didn't top him, even though the hike to Medicine Lake was listed in our book as being "Animal" (very hard), not to mention Cairn Lake beyond. So what was Alan's hike? "Extraterrestrial"?

It was still sunny that evening as we made our chili mac for dinner. Alan first, then Robin and I, strolled over to the spillway to enjoy the gentle cascades. We saw a woodpecker near our campsite for the second time that day hammering away at a nearby tree, breaking off big pieces of bark. We also saw a water ouzel at the spillway making a peculiar pumping motion up and down with its legs.

August 18 (Saturday)

Dewey Lake to Lake At Falls. We got up fairly late after a hard night with little sleep—surprising after how physically exhausted we all were. I didn't get to sleep until after 4:30 am, and Alan got up for some star-gazing in the middle of the night.

I went for an early swim in Dewey, then made a tasty breakfast of scrambled eggs and cheese. We broke camp in two hours and were on the trail by 10:30.

We hiked downhill past a number of waterfalls, stopping to rest by several—the most notable being Impasse Falls at Duggan Lake, which fell some 150 feet directly into the lake. At one rest stop I put my head under a waterfall—and Alan and I both felt daring enough to drink directly out of the stream. The water looked so clean and lovely and pure—and cold—that we couldn't resist. It seemed like an artificial barrier not to be able to do this simple activity when you're surrounded by so much pure water right near its source.

At our last waterfall rest stop, Alan fell in as he was crossing some slick boulders. He immediately stood up and reached for the camera in his pocket. While he was unhurt, his camera malfunctioned from that point forward, and we had to rely on our little disposable camera for the rest of the trip. Alan's boots were sopping wet but we lucked out and had almost straight sunshine for the rest of our trip, so they dried out quickly.

We hiked to Big Camp Lake, where we had planned to stop, but the lake was shallow and mossy looking in color and none of us liked it as a camping destination. We decided to press on. By this point we were hiking through continuous forest at around 8000 feet, and all of us already missed the high country. On the plus side, we were seeing (and eating) lots of raspberries and blueberries which grew right by the side of the trail.

We continued on for another mile until we reached Lake at Falls. Here, about five miles from our starting point that morning, we found a lake that was stunning and had the feel of the high country to it even though it was below treeline. We found one of a very few campsites at the western entrance to the lake. It was right on the water, with great diving-in rocks—something we had come to look for in our campsites with all the swimming we were doing. We set up camp, got rained on briefly in a strange sort of sun shower, and had a late lunch. We were starting to run low on certain provisions by this time—beef jerky, gatorade, hot cocoa, gorp. That's not to say we were going hungry—if anything, I brought too much food.

Alan and I pumped water from a precarious perch at the water's edge. Then I went for a swim around 4:30. A bit later, Robin reported that she and Alan had found another

campsite at a higher location. This was more private than our current campsite, being located in the trees, though further from the water. It was also flatter, with better sitting rocks and less ants. I knew better than to put up a struggle with Robin on any matter concerning real estate, so we moved our tent, carrying it up a very steep slope as if it were a travois. As we were setting up again, we saw two deer stroll right through our campsite.

Dinner was chicken fettucine and peas. We drank hot cocoa while enjoying our first campfire of the trip. A fire ring and firewood were already in place, so it was quite easy to make and lovely to watch as night fell. Something about a fire seems to spark good conversation; we talked late into the night.

August 19 (Sunday)

A real rest day at Lake At Falls. We woke up around 8:30. I sat on top of a knoll and looked out at the lake and the falls. We had a late breakfast of granola with raspberries. Alan went for a "Teva stroll," then Alan and Robin read the lesson on a rock. I washed my shirt, which was much in need of it, and bathed in the lake, jumping in, getting out, lathering, jumping in again, getting out, and, for good measure, jumping in a third time. Robin came down to join me. She got daring and went topless as she jumped into the lake despite the visibility of the trail (but no visible hikers on it). We have seen so few people overall that it's noteworthy when we do see them.

Back at camp, Alan returned from his hike with a third of a Nalgene bottle filled with raspberries and blueberries. When you realize how small each berry is, this is quite an accomplishment. It must have taken quite some time to collect so many. I made banana nut bread to supplement lunch, and it actually came out great. Between the bread and the berries we had a different sort of lunch than usual.

Alan went for an afternoon swim. Robin and I napped for two hours during the heat of the day. There were a lot of biting flies out, and they tended to become particularly pesky when it got hot. Later that afternoon Robin and I went for a stroll in our Texas, making it all the way to an overview of Rainbow Lake. We picked blueberries in one particularly thick patch and brought them home to eat as an appetizer to dinner.

That evening Alan and I talked about his business of buying Japanese dolls and selling them at a sizable profit. Around 6:30 we started dinner, beef and potatoes with onion, which was very thick and filling. We lit our second campfire and kept it going for a good long while with all the deadwood Alan had collected. We drank hot cocoa and ate chocolate pudding in the dark. I laid on my back and looked up at the stars. It was a very clear night. Alan and Robin eventually joined me. We saw half a dozen satellites moving in stately fashion across the sky and saw a handful of shooting stars and a pulsing light that we think may have been the "edge" of the aurora borealis. Our conversation ran the gamut of topics—light speed, satellites disappearing past a certain point on the horizon, life after death, arrows through the heart, etc. We went to bed around 11:15 pm.

August 20 (Monday)

Lake At Falls to Elk Lake. This was our last full day in the wilderness. We got up at 7:30, had oatmeal, and broke camp in record time (80 minutes). We were on the trail by 8:50. We hiked down a "take no prisoners" slope, as Alan called it, down the knoll on which we were encamped to get

back to the main trail. By 10:00 we had reached Rainbow Lake itself. We reached Rimrock Lake before 11:00. We ate an early lunch in a wooded peninsula on the lake. Back on the trail by 11:30, we hiked hard downhill through an impressive canyon area with steep granite walls. The trail was blazed into the side of the canyon wall. The muted roar of the river reached us from the canyon floor below. Whole tree trunks were crammed in heaps against the rocks—a testament to the flood of water that must come pounding through here in springtime. Eventually we got down to the flat, reaching a burned area, and continued to hike fast with our lighter packs and stronger legs.

We reached Elk Lake sooner than expected, by 12:50 pm. This was a six-mile hike, accomplished in about four hours with lunch. Alan and I waded into the lake, which had a very mucky bottom, and reached a small island about 50 feet from shore. Alan cannonballed into the shallow water, scraping his butt on the muck. After he did it a second time, I couldn't resist, and followed suit, if not with his panache. I dried off and took a nap. Our tent is located in a tree-covered area with a soft pine floor and an enormous boulder behind it, shielding us from the trail. The inlet stream is close enough that we can hear it from our tent. This proved to be a bit of a curse, though, as a goodly number of day fishers arrived, tromping through our campsite, and fished in the stream all day within earshot of our camp. We went berry picking but didn't find many berries, so we strolled the trail instead, enjoying the rapids at the outlet stream. But it's undeniable we're in the low country now (as we think of it). We're only 3.5 miles from the trailhead and within easy day hiking distance. There are more people, less privacy, and less astounding (but still pretty) views.

We waited for the fishers to leave before starting dinner around 5:45. Dinner was chicken and rice. We have eaten most of the food that we brought on the trip—including all the puddings! Quite a feat. We watched the sun fade from the mountains in the evening. Robin and I have taken to wearing our rain gear as an easy way to thwart mosquitoes and (more importantly) biting flies. I sat in my rain gear by the inlet stream that evening and watched water ouzels, ducks, minnows, and dragonflies. The lake is tranquil, with a gentle inlet and a roaring outlet.

Alan read his book for awhile outside with his headlamp on. I sat outside as it grew dark, watching the water until there was nothing left to see. As I headed for my tent, I noticed other headlamps in the darkness across the water. A late group of hikers appeared to be night fishing off a rock. Others seemed to be scaling the cliff face behind the lake in complete darkness—I could see their headlamps winking high above the lake. I thought this might have been an optical illusion, but Alan confirmed that he saw it too. Very strange, and a bit creepy.

August 21, 2001 (Tuesday)

We hiked out of the Beartooth Wilderness this morning, finishing a backpack trip of 10 nights and 11 days—the longest ever for Robin and Alan, the second longest for me.

We got hiking by 9:50, leaving Elk Lake and proceeding mostly downhill towards East Rosebud Lake, 3.5 miles away. Much of the hike was through burned forest. Scenically it was the low-point of the trip, but still there were mighty mountains behind us, raging creeks below us, and the lure of the parking lot ahead of us. Nothing like reaching your car after a long backpack; it's the only time I look forward to seeing a parking lot. Our packs were much lighter

than when we started but still enough to make us perspire as the day turned warmer. The final hike out was uneventful.

We got in our car and drove to Roscoe, about 10 miles away over dirt and gravel roads. Our first stop was the Grizzly Bar, where we had big, juicy quarter pounder hamburgers with cheese and all the trimmings, including lots of fries. Yum. Robin had a bottle of Grizzly Wulff Wheat beer from Bozeman and I had a Dr. Pepper since they didn't have Coke.

We drove to Livingston, where we stayed at the Budget Host for about \$50. The rooms were basic but seemed luxurious after 10 nights in the wilderness. We spent the next couple of hours getting ourselves clean again. Robin went first, having her first shower in quite a while, grinning from ear to ear at the chance to get fully clean. "It was a thrill just to flush," she said. I had my first Coke while I waited for Robin to finish up. I went next and spent a long time in the shower trying to rub off the sap and accumulated dirt from a week-and-a-half in the wilderness. My feet were especially worn-looking and covered with bruises and blisters. Shaving my beard off was also challenging with just a disposable razor.

Clean at last, and dressed in clean clothes to boot, we met up with Alan at 5:00 and went for a brief driving and walking tour of downtown Livingston. We had dinner at The Sport around 6:00. Alan and I each had the T-bone steak and Robin had a rib-eye. That plus a salad with bleu cheese dressing and an appetizer platter left us beyond full.

We went for an evening drive after dinner down Highway 89 South and along the East River Road. The Absorokee Mountains looked dramatic as a rainstorm swept through but the sun continued to shine. We pulled off onto several side roads running deep into the foothills. We drove along these for several miles admiring the beautiful terrain and houses that ran the gamut from quaint to magnificent. Finally, on our way back home, we stopped at DQ for ice cream. We called home, checked on Chaucer, who is doing fine, and called it a night around 10:00.

August 22, 2001 (Wednesday)

This was our first day at Chico Hot Springs, but check-in wasn't until 3:00 so we spent the morning and early afternoon checking out the surrounding area. We drove to Bozeman to see if that would be a nice place to live someday. Alan was kicking around the idea of owning a ranch here in Montana, although he will likely settle in San Francisco for the time being, and we are always looking for Boulder-like places to live. Bozeman was nice—plenty of great scenery nearby, a downtown that reminded me a bit of Longmont, and a college town to boot, being the home of Montana State University. While Alan and Robin did some shopping down the main stretch of stores, I worked on this journal while sitting in the car. When they got back, they told me they had run into Nancy Collyer, who used to work at Travel King in Boulder. Apparently Nancy recognized Robin from across the street and waited for Robin to cross to say hi. She is living in Clyde Park about an hour away from Bozeman, with her husband Rusty and her adopted son Cody. It was quite a coincidence that they met.

We ate sandwiches at The Pickle Barrel on Main Street. Then we went for a long drive down Highway 191, an area where Alan thought there might be some good land opportunities. He's looking for 30 to 40 acres, he says, but also seems quite willing to consider 160 or more if it looks cool enough. His price range is way higher than ours, anywhere

from \$400K to \$1.2M. The best locations we've seen so far are along Paradise Valley (on Highway 89 along the East River Road), but there are millions of acres' worth of land to explore in Montana, including in the Missoula area, an area Alan wants to check out in the future. Anyway, on this day, we drove almost to the town of Big Sky on Hwy. 191, then had to turn around and come back because there was no road crossing over the Absorokees to Chico. A long drive finally got us back to Livingston and on our way down Highway 89 South to Chico. (We almost took Pine Creek Road crosswise to Hwy. 89 but turned back when we realized it would be gravel for 30 miles.)

During the 30 miles left on our way to Chico, we practiced identifying horses, with Alan's help. He talked about Arabs, quarterhorses, Morgans, Tennessee Walkers, thoroughbreds, mustangs, and several other breeds, then got into the colors of horses: chestnut (brown), buckskin (tan with black mane), palomino (tan with blond mane), bay (brown with black socks), sorrel (reddish), pinto (or paint), roan (spotty of one color), apaloosa (spotted), etc.

When we arrived at Chico, there was a big forest fire blazing just to the west of us, near the town of Emigrant. The enormous cloud of smoke rose like a towering thunderhead over the burning area. We realized that the pretty sunset/rain mix we had admired the evening before was probably not rain but smoke from the nearby fire. By now it was much bigger, covering some 2500 acres. In the next day or so, the fire grew to cover 10,000 acres. We could actually see flames burning on the hillsides just a few miles away on the west side of the Yellowstone River. The "thunderhead" clouds roiled and grew before our eyes, and on several occasions in the evenings flames suddenly spurted up as the fire raced out of control. A strong gusty wind must have made it impossible to control. We watched helicopters trailing enormous buckets of water on tethers and planes with fire retardant flying over the affected area. The staging area (or one of them) for the fire crews was along our drive to Chico.

None of us have ever been this close to a major forest fire before. According to the papers, it was the number one priority in the northern Rockies and the number three priority nationwide. It was distressing to see so much good, beautiful land go up in smoke, but we tried to comfort ourselves with the thought that it was a natural process, started by lightning. In the evenings, the thunderhead seemed to disperse northward, being drawn out like a spool of yarn into a long thread, creating a smoke cloud that stretched far north beyond Missoula. In fact, it was during our excursion to Missoula that we first smelled the smoke from within our car and began to wonder if there was a forest fire somewhere nearby.

We arrived at Chico Hot Springs around 2:15. They were able to check us into our rooms, in the Upper Lodge, perched on a hill. Rooms 802 and 803 had two queen beds each, with porches that overlooked the property (and the forest fire in the distance). They were pleasantly decorated, certainly the nicest places we had stayed so far on this "roughing it" trip. We only stayed there the one night, since a big doctor's convention forced us to change to different rooms the next day.

Shortly after arriving we donned swimsuits and found the hot springs, which is designed just like a swimming pool but with natural hot springs water. A small rectangle contains the initial input of very hot water, while a larger rectangle contains more temperate water. It felt weird to swim in hot

water on a 90-degree day. Really the only cooling off that occurred was when you got out of the pool and felt the wind against your skin. We hung out on a wooden deck sort of tucked into the far corner above the main pool area. During that quiet afternoon, Alan came close to finishing *The Fountainhead*, Robin finished reading her Gabaldin book, and I started Scott Turow's *Personal Injuries*. I jumped in and out of the water, laying flat on the decking to get dry, then sitting on a cushioned deck chair with my feet propped up on another chair as I read. Every once in awhile we would look over the banister behind us to see how the fire was progressing. It always billowed bigger in the afternoons, then seemed to settle down somewhat overnight.

Our dinner reservation that evening was for 8:00. We got to the "fancy" dining room on time but had to wait for a table nearly half an hour. We placed our order then had to wait until 9:15 before eating so much as a bite of bread. Alan finally got ticked off and said something to the waiter, and after that our service improved. But while the food was good, the long wait put a damper on the evening. We didn't finish dining until close to 11:00. Robin and I split a tasty Chico halibut dish with melon and a mild brown sauce, along with a tender piece of filet mignon with mushrooms. Alan had the duck. We shared a bottle of Rioja. Alan also shared a tasty appetizer of brie en crouete with us. We finished with a Bailey's creme brulee. Bed that night came soon after dinner.

August 23, 2001 (Thursday)

Alan told us to go to the front desk at 10:00 the next morning for a surprise. This is classic Alan—he says thank you with an unexpected gift and loves to surprise you. We guessed it was either a horse ride or a massage, and were leaning towards horse ride since we had done so much talking about horses on the trip. But it turned out it was a massage—an extended one, too, over an hour in length. This was a real treat, something we never would have done for ourselves, but it felt wonderful. We were met at the front desk by the masseuse, a young woman. She said we would be sharing a room. We went there, where the other young woman waited—Robin's masseuse. They exited and we undressed, then each of us slid under a set of towels, face-up, on two adjoining beds. The masseuses returned. They started by giving us a vigorous rubdown with sea salts mixed with oil. This "exfoliating" rub was invigorating but we also thought it felt just plain nice. Our skin felt tingly and clean all over. The dead skin left behind by a sunburn on Robin's shoulders disappeared completely. When they were done we took a shower together to wash off the salts, then returned to our beds for the next stage, the massage itself. Both masseuses followed about the same routine, except Robin's spent more time on her neck at her request. Mine started at my head, having it "sink" into the bed as she slowly spread her hands beneath my head. Head, chest, left arm, left leg, right leg, right arm, each in succession, she

massaged. Some of it was just on the borderline of painful (occasionally crossing over), especially in the neck area. Most of it, like the arms and legs, was just plain heavenly. Robin and I looked over at each other occasionally, but most of the time we had our eyes closed, giving ourselves over to the pure pleasure of having our muscles worked over by people who knew what they were doing. My masseuse had me flip over, then worked my neck, back, and legs. By the time she was done I was so relaxed I was close to sleep. She very quietly told me that when I was ready I could get dressed again. Robin's finished up around the same time. What a wonderfully relaxing experience after the rigors of backpacking.

We met Alan, thanked him profusely, and proceeded to drive down to Corwin Springs, about 20 miles away, to a hole-in-the-wall lunch spot/gift shop for a quick lunch of turkey chili and mushroom soup (and unsweetened blueberry pie). We had planned on a visit to Boiling River Hot Springs, a rustic hot springs that locals use, until we found out it was in Yellowstone itself and has since been "found" by the masses and is no longer so isolated. So we drove back to Chico instead, spending another quiet afternoon in the sun reading and relaxing. Dinner this night was at the poolside grill, and much earlier than the night before. Around 6:00 we had a big nachos appetizer, baby-back ribs, soup and salad, and a mud pie for dessert. The food was good and the prices much more affordable than the night before.

We went for a brief but steep hike after dinner in search of a trout pond on the premises, which we finally found. There was also a garden on the premises. At one point I told Robin I could tell that such-and-such a flower was a member of the pea family by the shape of the flowers, at which point she held up a big pea pod dangling from the plant and said, "Yeah, I could tell it was from the pea family too." So much for flower identification skills.

The rest of the evening was split between the pool and our rooms. The hot springs was actually much more crowded in the evenings than during the days, a fact that made immediate sense to us as it felt much more appropriate to be lounging in hot water once the heat of the day had passed. We took a final dip in the pool around 11:30 pm, then called it a night.

August 24 (Friday)

Chico to Casper. We started the day with a last dip in the pool. Then we got dressed and checked out of the resort. We drove Alan to Billings and the airport there, arriving at 12:15 after a brief stop for lunch at a Taco John's. Robin is driving now, and we are about 20 minutes outside of Sheridan. Our goal is Casper, Wyoming, where we plan to have a delicious repeat dinner of "blackened" prime rib at the Silver Fox, a place we went with my parents on our earlier trip to Montana and Canada. Then it's home the next morning—and time to start dreaming about our next backpack trip, hopefully not too far in the future.