

Dupuyer, July 7, '77

Dear J&J--

Shades of our London days. I'm at a point in our trip where I can usefully set down some meanderings about what we've been doing, and the Rodens make a good excuse and target for me to do so.

We're about to close out a gala three weeks here in northern Montana--intending to pull south for White Sulphur in the morning. Both of us hate to go, because this north country is more intriguing and likable than the White Sulphur area, for reasons I'll try get into later. But we've put some pretty memorable days on our string, the most recent of them the five-day hike in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. I banged out a descriptive article about it yesterday for the Chicago Tribune, so that'll eventually give you a day-by-day account. Suffice to say it was a testing and exhilarating trip, featuring five fordings of creeks, at least one of which likely wouldn't have been possible except for the drought year's low water; frost on and in our tent on the morn of the 4th of July; crossing and re-crossing the Continental Divide, then going up for a full hour more of wicked climb across a 7100' ridgeline; wind which sometimes stopped or staggered us on the trail; and tenting next to a fishing-camp teepee which had muddy paw prints where a bear had investigated and slashes where he had let himself in. Also, in the entire five days, we did not see one other living soul.

This hike was not the one we had originally intended--the long loop ~~intm~~ to the Chinese Wall from behind Choteau. Instead, after talking with people hereabouts and seeing afresh the colossal mountain scenery right in this area, we went in from Swift Reservoir, twenty miles west of Dupuyer. The trail is mainly used by autumn hunting parties; also, there isn't much back-packing done here. The local folk wouldn't dream of such a thing--any of them who have been back in there have gone on horseback--and I think we're a bit talked about for having done the 40 miles on foot. Also, we're perhaps credited with a bit of judgment, or more likely luck: we came out day before yesterday, in blustery weather, and yesterday there was a howling wind out of those mountains and some snow back in them.

One last item about the backpacking trip: on Strawberry Creek, our farthest point back in, I caught fish like a pro (or maybe at least a semi-pro) and fed us for three meals on cutthroat trout. Not as easy as it sounds on paper, though; I calculate--John is always asking me what my time is worth--that for the entire trip, I caught about one trout per hour of fishing. I don't really consider fishing a relaxation--just a different kind of work.

One of the best of several pleasant surprises for me on this trip has been how comfortably we've fit into this household where we're staying, the Chadwicks. This is the family I stayed with while in high school. Gertie, the mother, died about three years ago. Harold and his son Tom continue to run their Conoco service station, and batch it here at the house. While they remind you a bit of a pair of old gray badgers in their living style, they fend incredibly well, and we've been fending right along. Each morning about 6:40, Harold shambles out of his bedroom, I look up from the pull-out couch, and we mutter "Mornin'" to each other. Then he goes wordlessly to the kitchen and begins banging frying pans onto the stove. I quickly dress, go in the kitchen, wordlessly set the table and make toast while he paws things together at the stove. Carol is dressed by now, and Tom has emerged from his bedroom, so Harold and I begin slewing breakfast onto the table. It is always the same--two fried eggs apiece, bacon and toast--and it is always delicious as hell.

Then maybe some talking will begin, but maybe it won't, either; in any event, Harold gets up from the table a few minutes before 7, puts on a greasy cap and goes down to open up the station; Tom looks sleepily around for about 5 minutes, gets up and heads for the station too.

Both these guys are automotive geniuses, doing things in the mechanical innards which the two of us, with our five college degrees, can't begin to grasp. After supper last night, Harold triumphantly announced: "Learned today you can use the valves of a '61 Ford in a '57 Chevy, by the God! Just got to shave 'em down a 64th, is all." I went down to the garage this morning, and there he was, grinding 1/64th off each valve and fitting it in with offhand precision, all right.

I'm truly thankful that we're seeing Harold just now, because he seems to be at a particularly rich point in his life. He is 67, not yet being beset by old age--still works a 7-to-6 day, usually 7 days a week--by now is over his wife's death, and knows he has made something of himself and his life (he's the one who was a ferocious quart-a-day drunk until he took the Keeley Cure 30 years ago and has been a substantial citizen ever since). Also, the memories are beginning to come out in him, and he has some dandies. Told us the other night, as we had him help map our hiking trip, of his first hunting trip into that part of the mountains, 50 years ago. On that hunt, he said, was an 83-year-old veteran of the Riel Rebellion against the Canadian government in the 1880's--old Toussaint Salois, a blood-free hunched in his great buffalo coat, oblivious to the snow and wind and able to ride all day even though he could hardly walk any more.

This town of Dupuyer is peculiarly rich in personality. The total of the place is 3 gas station/garages, two saloons, one cafe, two stores, and an odd art gallery/museum run by a guy who is a godawful painter but a not-bad sculptor. Population is about 140-150, I guess. The place has a steadiness, a kind of deep keel of character, which, say, White Sulphur lacks. I've just begun to figure out that part of it may be the lack of really big ranches in this area; instead, with all the creeks fingering down out of the Rockies, many small and medium ranches have been established, and lasted, along given stretches of water right. It's somehow a much more equable area; Carol is constantly amazed by the lack of ostentation among the ranches here. Everybody's house looks pretty much the same--and pretty plain--even if the site is just begging to have a grand place aimed straight out at one of the most colossal mountain skylines anywhere.

The only mis-stroke of luck so far is that we've come too early for Dupuyer's centennial celebration, which is a week from Saturday; it would wipe out at least a weekend to come back from White Sulphur for it, and we're not sure we're up to it. But there's going to be grand doings: a frontier breakfast, a parade--\$500 first prize for best float!--a barbecued beef, greased pig competition, and a street dance. Also, Carol saw an Olympia beer truck unloading a colossal supply at one of the stores yesterday. (John, you've followed the Oly saga; in driving around up here, we've noted that a prelude to any of these community-wide shindigs is for an Oly truck, sometimes two, to come rolling into town.) And the organizers--the town has a few take-charge ladies who would put the Seattle city council to shame--have assembled a 400-page book about the town's people and past, which I much look forward to seeing.

We have been here for an interesting small saga, however--the reopening of the town's sole cafe (the only eatery this side of Valier, 22 miles away). Harold of course owns the cafe; it shares his garage building. When I lived here with them, he and Gertie ran those twin enterprises 364 1/2 days a year--half a day off for Christmas. Harold told us the other night that in those days--20, 25 years ago--Gertie sometimes would take in \$80-\$100 a day, the equivalent of at least \$300 now, I suppose. Since he did about the same in the station, you can see how they began to build a poke during those years of hard work--I leave the exact figuring to John. When Gertie's heart went bad, they began leasing the cafe, and Harold has had countless itinerant cooks and would-bes in there. We arrived just as the last operators, real floppercoos,

were clearing out after Harold had given them notice. He had a new operator lined up, he thought--a woman who had been ~~cook~~ cooking at The Corral in Shelby. But day after day, she didn't show up. At last Harold could take it no longer, and took off to Shelby to find her. No luck on that, either, and for about ten days, the cafe stood empty and the town kind of shuffled around and wondered where to have its coffee and gossip. (Actually, Harold got so desperate he opened the place a few days himself, just serving coffee to the local ranchers stopping by. I was in there when a tourist wandered in by mistake, was poured a cup of coffee, and nearly fell over in surprise when he went to pay and Harold mumbled, "No charge, that's okay" -- surely the only place in America today where free coffee was to be had.) At last, just before the 14th, the cook arrived--a worn lady with an Appalachian face out of those Walker Evans photos of the Depression, and five kids of a vast span of ages. Yesterday morning, re-opening day, the 4 of us trooped down for breakfast. She opened at 7--her announced hours, for which she'll do all the cooking herself at first, are 7 a.m.-10 p.m., 7 days a week); when we got there about five minutes after, two people already were forking down hotcakes, and four others flocked in right behind us. Since the total capacity is 9 counter stools and 4 little tables, the Home Cafe was soon doing near-capacity business; this new operator truly can cook; and Dupuyer once again is fully functioning.

Well, this is about long enough--at least. One thing you might watch for, Jean, or perhaps alert someone at the Shoreline library for me: the NY Times, apparently gone giddy, is rushing my Montana travel story into the July 17th travel section. They think it's a nice one, are doing it with a map and pictures; I'd much like the library's copy of that travel section when microfilm supersedes it. Meantime, hope all is well with you folks; thanks hugely for keeping an eye on the place for us while we cavort through Montana.

best

p.s. Carol is becoming a crockpot (no "a" in that last word) chef; the fresh meat situation here, and I suppose in White Sulphur, ranges from desperate to none.

p.p.s. Have had rip-snorting wind during much of our stay; wish you were here to enjoy it.

Sunday, July 17
White Sulphur

Dear J&J--

Well, another opus--because as the enclosed clipping will evidence, we did indeed hie ourselves north again for Dupuyer's centennial. As a result, here am I, featured in the NY Times travel section and pictured in the Great Falls Tribune, all on the same Sunday--talk about a media monopolist. The Trib photo is by my high school classmate Wayne Arnst, who, I discover, entirely outshines me in reknown hereabouts. After a number of inconclusive jobs and sailing around the world in a small boat, Wayne entered journalism school at Missoula when he was about 30, and has been on the Tribune for about five years; as he both takes photos and writes an outdoors column, all the local folks see his stuff all the time and are quite proud of him. Me, they simply know as having dropped off one end of the state or the other--most still have the impression I've been living in Chicago--and wonder what I'm doing these days.

Ah, the centennial: We decided to go because last week was such a successful one. I spent the first few days orienting myself to White Sulphur again, and managed a useful interview with 83-year-old Tony Hunolt, who worked with my dad on the 45,000-acre Dogie ranch here. "Why, when I came into this country in 1936 at shearing time, your daddy staked me to a bedroll," Tony recited, and a lot more besides. Then came a real stroke of luck. One great aim of this research trip was to try find the mountain cabin where my mother died in the summer of 1945, because the book is to begin there and I need accuracy and detail about the place. By a chain of letters made up of about half luck and half diligence, I did locate the son and daughter of the rancher my folks were working for that summer. These people, the Morgans, still run the family ranch in the Bridger Mountains about 25 miles north of Bozeman. I phoned over to see if there was any possible way I could get to the cabin site. Horace Morgan paused for about a second, then said, "Well, I can take you in there tomorrow." By 10:15 the next morning, with 3 hours' drive behind us, we were pulling up to the Morgan ranchhouse at the very foot of the Bridgers. After meeting the family and downing a cup of coffee, Horace said we ought to be on our way, as it was about an hour's drive. Carol and I piled into ~~my~~ his pickup, Horace took a fresh chaw of tobacco (he slopes around the place with a chaw in his cheek and wearing unbuckled overshoes, but he is also an economics major from Gonzaga and the honcho of the family's 900-head-of-cattle spread), and we were off. The hour's drive turned out to mean 12 miles, the last few of it in a slow tobogganing of the pickup down long gulches and across a dicey crossing on the South Fork of Sixteenmile Creek, and at ~~last~~ last we jolted up to the cabin. Carol has pics, and details of the location will be in the book; suffice to say it is 15x20, which I would guess is smaller than your kitchen, and is used now only as a hunting cabin. Carol photographed, I took notes, Horace salted his cattle, and we jounced back out, to a waiting lunch of chicken and noodles back at the ranch. We left mid-afternoon, thinking the Morgans were hellish fine people, having gone far out of their way for us.

Stayed in Bozeman that night--went to see Star Wars, and were enchanted with the wookie, R2D2 and all the rest of the androidal and more-or-less-human cast--and the next day tackled the archives at Montana State U., where the records of the Dogie ranch have ended up. (Owners of the Dogie until about a dozen years ago, incidentally, were neighbors of yours--the Donahoe family, who lived in The Highlands.) Miss Minnie Paugh, head of special collections, absolutely looks like a librarian who would be named Minnie Paugh--and be a Miss--and she simply turned over the 7 big boxes of records to us, gave us a long table, and let us delve. We found my dad in the canceled checks and payroll records at the two junctures when he worked at the Dogie, and some other stuff useful to me. Carol typed and photocopied valiantly for me, and we'd winnowed it all, and some other files besides, by mid-afternoon.

Which is how we came to be on the main street of Dupuyer yesterday morn at 8, gulping pancakes as a Frontier Breakfast kicked off the centennial. Just before 8:30, there was a commotion over in front of Harold Chadwick's service station: a horse was fighting his way up off the pavement, and his rider was lying there with a leg askew. Here was another of Dupuyer's mini-sagas, with the two of us again figuring in as witnesses. During our first stint in Dupuyer a few weeks ago, we went into the saloon called Pinky and Jay's, and found, in about this order: 1) a thin Indian boy of about 7 in the doorway, (2) his mother tending bar, (3) Pinky--a fat bearded guy who looks like a pirate--sitting on the customer side guzzling his own booze, (4) a couple of Hutterites who apparently were trying to peddle Pinky a pair of gloves they'd sneaked from their colony, and (5) a bedraggled looking rancher, several beers into his evening, who at once began telling us the woes of the cattle business, his Korean War stories, and assorted pure bullshit. He was a classic barfly nuisance--a local guy named ~~recognized~~ Dave Wall, whom I recognized but never indicated that I did--and we began getting rid of our drinks so we could leave him behind. (There'd been a bit of a delay in getting the drinks at all; Carol, that snobby city slicker, ordered a Bourbon on the rocks; the squaw bartender blankly turned to Pinky and asked, "What's rocks?") Just then a tourist came in, and Wall of course demanded to know where he was from. "Seattle," the guy said, and so of course we talked with him a bit, with Wall butting in all the while. The three of us finally downed our drinks and left, and as we went to our cars, the Seattleite asked if we were going on to Glacier Park, where he'd just been. I said no, we were staying in Dupuyer with friends, because I lived there at one time. He stared, said "That's unbelievable," and drove off. Anyway, after that bar melange, we talked with Harold and he told us Dave Wall really was on the booze, both marriage and his cattle business going to hell, he wasn't even managing to get his puny hay crop put up. And naturally, the rider sprawled broken-legged in the first half hour of the centennial was--Dave Wall. He'd been riding an unshod horse, and on the blacktop--the main street of Dupuyer is also Highway 89--the horse had gone down as if on ice.

After they scooped Wall into the ambulance and off to a hospital--all the way to Great Falls, because his leg was shattered--the Dupuyer folks simply went on with the centennial, and quite a schedule it was. They fed pancakes to the multitude until about ten. The calf-roping club meanwhile served as parking guides; as cars came into town on Highway 89--the park-to-park route I wrote about for the Times--a cowboy would lean down from his saddle and ask if they wanted to be parked; if they did, another rider would lead them up one of the gravel side streets somewhere. ~~By now the town was chockablock with cars, rec'l vehicles, pickups, trucks, horsebackers--and down on main street, us old-timers were meeting one another again.~~ In effect, Dupuyer had its own mounted traffic force, just like them there New York City folk. By now the town was chockablock with cars, rec'l vehicles, pickups, trucks, horsebackers--and down on main street, us old-timers were meeting one another again. I encountered untold people I had known--all of them eerily, and unlike me, having put twenty years on their faces since last seen.

By this time the day had heated up--it eventually got over 90, I think--and I'd changed to my now-immortalized T-shirt. We watched the crowning of the centennial queen--ironically or not, the daughter of Dave Wall; encountered the parents of another of my high school classmates and went off to drink beer in their camper. Then ~~promptly~~ promptly at eleven--truth to tell, even a minute or so early--the parade started, and it was a beaut. Some of the enclosed Tribune pics can speak for themselves; what they don't show is that the parade truly was long, diverse and hilarious. When we left Dupuyer this morning, people were still talking about it with terrific pride, everybody reporting that they'd heard "some people from _____ (fill in Valier, Great Falls, Shelby or any other neighboring-and-rival Northern Montana town) talking and they said their place ought to come and take a lesson from Dupuyer!"

Indeed, Dupuyer could give lessons in community spirit. Among other attractions of the centennial were a 400-page book, which I find a fairly impressive portrait of the town's families; a genuine old sheepwagon, where they had everybody sign the guest book, and where people lined up as if for the World Series; and a barbecued beef lunch, produced by digging a pit 12 feet deep, 4-5 feet wide, 25 feet long, filling it with 8 or 10 truckloads of cottonwood, letting it burn down to coals, inserting two entire (but boned) beefs, about 800 pounds worth, and cooking for 14 hours. Terrific grub, and it sold like crazy.

But the best part, and this was consciously intended by the centennial organizers, was just the visiting: the sight of oh, maybe a thousand or more people, strewn all over town, peeking at each others' nametags and exclaiming either "Why, I'd never have known you!" or "I'd have known you anywhere!" The record reunion I heard of was two friends who hadn't seen each other for 54 years. And there were living ghosts: John Sullivan, shown in one of the Trib clippings, born in Cahirciveen, County Kerry--where Carol and I have been-- in 1882; John Rappold, the father of yet another of my high school classmates, 80 years old and crippled along one entire side of his body from where a tractor once ran over him lengthwise--but riding a horse and carrying a flag in the parade. Oh yes, and one other artifact: a community quilt, each panel done by a different ~~the~~ Dupuyer family. It is truly wonderful, the kind of thing which ought to be put in a time capsule to show the 21st century that we weren't entirely reprehensible, and the Dupuyer folk are handling its disposition exactly right: other things, such as a color TV, were raffled off on a general basis, but that quilt is being kept for a community-only raffle in a few weeks, so that it will stay in Dupuyer where it belongs.

And at last evening, and people still lining the street, but more a drinking crowd now, waiting for the outdoor dance to begin. A group came out of Pinky's bar carrying an Indian on a panel of plywood above their heads; he clutched a yellow bouquet to his chest. Beer cans piled and piled; the centennial trash cans--pesticide barrels which Harold had torched the tops off of--filled everywhere. Young shaggies were flinging a frisbee in the street; the county sheriff, showing the flag, eased his car alongside and cooled them down. A rented recreational vehicle pulled into Harold's station for gas, and out stepped a guy who likely was French. In his accent, he tried to find out what was going on; Harold, who talks through his adenoids and is one of the least intelligible Americans, told him just about everything was over but the dance. "Dances? Dances?" said the Frenchman, thinking he was going to see indigenous American footwork, and he drove toward the asphalt pad where the dance was to be. After a ~~long momentary~~ look at--or listen to--the 3 and One dance band, which was something like three electric guitars and a drum, he turned around and was last seen fleeing town to the north.

This morn, we went down to the Home Cafe for breakfast, and found the town fathers, such as Harold, raking and picking up the refuse. All agreed it was not as bad as expected--kids salvaging aluminum beercans for the money in it probably had accounted for several thousand of those--and ~~they~~ we all had admiration for the crowning achievement of the night before. Atop a gray AMC Pacer, someone had stacked a full garbage can, then three benches--then another full garbage can. It was so teetery it could hardly be got down--and given Dupuyer's chronic wind whooping down off the Continental Divide, no one can understand how the jugglery survived the night, instead of toppling and bombing a garbage can through the Pacer windshield, as obviously designed. It gives the Dupuyer folks--and all us centennial-goers--just one more thing to talk about.