

# The Bainbridge Blabber

**Holiday Edition**

**December 2008**



## **Merry Christmas**

*A time for friends and family to reconnect and renew our relationships*

*Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all.* As we reflect on 2008, we are thankful for the blessings of the year, and continue to grow in the experiences of life.

### **Travel Report: ALASKA**

This year's big event was a trip to Alaska. We decided that since the price of gasoline was at an all time high, that this would be the time to go. So after two months of trip planning (Sandy wanted to see it all; Bob wanted to fish it all), we left for Alaska on May 15th.

At the start our RV had a floor leak that flooded the trailer from rain that was kicked up by the tires as we drove along. Sandy was not amused as the first "souvenir" we purchased was a wet/dry vac. Undaunted, Bob persevered and after repair stops in one state and two provinces we finally got it fixed.

It took about two weeks to get up to Prince Rupert in British Columbia where we boarded a ferry on the Alaska Marine Highway System which took us up the Inland Passage stopping at Ketchikan, Wrangell, Juneau, Haines and Skagway along the way. The Inland Passage is mostly rainforest (360" rain per year); consequently, the weather was usually dark, dreary and cloudy most of the time. In the afternoons, however, it would often clear off revealing the awesome snow capped mountains along the way. Sandy particularly enjoyed seeing Juneau as it was one place that her dad had been during WWII and he had mentioned it often.



From Haines we drove inland through the Yukon to get back into Alaska where we visited the Copper River area, Valdez, Anchorage, Seward, Homer and the Kenai Peninsula, and then headed north to see Denali National Park with Mt McKinley, and Fairbanks. We returned home taking the "top of the world" highway back to the Yukon, and eventually drove the Alaskan Highway from North to South. After a brief stop in Minnesota to see family and friends, we returned home on July 31st after 11 weeks on the road! In all, we passed through customs 6 times.

Aside from the often gloomy weather along the coast, we saw lots of fabulous mountain scenery, acres and acres of scrub black spruce growing in the permafrost and a variety of sub-arctic tundra. Sandy wanted to do or see it all and feels satisfied in seeing 40 or 50 Totem Poles, 9 museums, 6 glaciers, 6 national parks and monuments, 2 botanical gardens (to please Sandy), one cave tour, the Alaskan pipeline, the World's largest mall (in Canada) and the signpost forest at Watson Lake. We also traveled via 7 ferries, excursion boat, fishing boat, tram, bus, our truck and hiking. And yes, we did stop in Wasilla and saw the governor's mansion in Juneau. However, it was not a big deal at the time as Sarah Palin had not yet been chosen to be the VP candidate.

Wildlife abounds everywhere – we saw moose, black bear, brown (grizzly) bear, caribou, sheep, mountain goats, reindeer, elk, bison, Sitka deer, whales, harbor seals, sea otters, eagles, and a wide range of other birds. While we were prepared for legendary hoards of giant flies and mosquitoes, we were bothered by neither the entire trip!



We each had dueling cameras and took around 2,000 pictures. Thankfully, digital cameras save money on film & printing, but pose immense editing/selection problems. After all, how many pictures do you really need of a cute harbor seal sitting on an iceberg? And after while, all those snow capped mountains start to look alike (at least to your viewing audience)! We whittled it down to the "best" 700 and if we talk fast can get through the lot in about an hour and a half.

Unfortunately, Bob missed out on salmon fishing. We had planned the trip for the best coastal weather, but we didn't realize that we would be before most of the salmon runs. We did go fishing for Halibut on the ocean near

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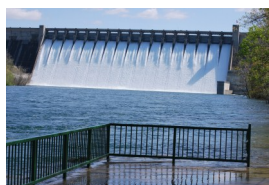
the Kenai Peninsula. Both of us got our 2 fish limit and neither got seasick in spite of fairly rough seas. While we missed most of the salmon season, we did get to observe “Combat Fishing” during a brief salmon run on the Kenai Peninsula. This is where fishermen stand 2-3 feet apart on the bank and continuously cast trying to catch a salmon driving by. Somehow the entire idea did not appeal to Bob. We did learn that there are many different kinds of salmon and in Alaska, “Pink” salmon is the lowest of the low and is fed to the dogs! Remember that when you buy that can of “pink” salmon at the store – you’re really eating dog food!



All in all it was a trip of a lifetime, but surprisingly, after almost 11 weeks of mountains and awesome scenery, we felt relieved to start to see farms and bright yellow fields of Canola. Guess it just reminded us of our Midwestern roots, and signs of civilization – not to mention much better shopping per Sandy. And, after 11 weeks of 24/7 togetherness, we still came home smiling!

### ***How high’s the water, Mama?***

This spring was a wet one for much of the Midwest. This area had record setting rainfall in March and April. As a result of flooding in the upper Mississippi, the water in our lake (reservoir) was not released and rose some 44+ feet (think of a 4 story building). It finally got so high that the Corps of Engineers were forced to open the dam floodgates in April to release water – the first time the floodgates had ever been opened since the dam was built in 1951. We expected the water level to be back down to normal when we returned but on July 31<sup>st</sup> it was as high as when we left. It finally returned to normal level in late November. Needless to say fishing and water sports were less than optimal as that level of flooding adds shoreline debris to the water and hidden hazards like trees completely under water are dangerous to boaters. We are glad to have the lake return to normal.



### ***Gardening Report:***

Since we were going to be gone during the summer gardening season Bob planted alfalfa in our vegetable garden and Sandy put down extra mulch to keep down the weeds in her flowerbeds. What they don’t mention in the *Gardening for Dummies* book is that record setting rains followed by more rains and hot weather leads to record setting weeds – 6+ feet and growing as we arrived back home. Picture an almost impenetrable thicket of unwanted vegetation in some of Sandy’s gardens. Picture a determined Sandy with weed whacking resolve in her eyes followed by a sore back and callused hands.

### ***Sandy’s Doing:***

Sandy also had some fun dressing like a rapper for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary party of the Red Hat organization that her group put on for all of the Red Hat groups in the area. There were over 140 women there and Sandy and her group performed a “rap” song that she had written. You never know what those crazy ladies will do next!



### ***Bob’s Doings:***

Sandy casually mentioned that the deck needed to be refurbished some day, and Bob immediately sprang into action on a two week marathon of sanding, painting and replacing the ballasts or spindles. It turned out quite nice, but Bob is insisting on a “no pooping” sign for the birds since Sandy has her birdfeeders out there.

### ***Christmas Parade***

Once again, it is time for our neighborhood Christmas parade of decorated RTV’s or utility vehicles. Bob & Sandy dress up as Santa and Mrs. Claus and this year Bob added a 200 watt stereo and speakers with Christmas music to play as we drive along. One of the songs that Sandy insisted on was the Christmas song by Alvin and the Chipmunks. Nothing says Christmas like the Chipmunks!



Hard to believe we’ve lived in Arkansas for 5 years already. Come visit us - our door is always open and the welcome mat is always out! Merry Christmas to you all!

***Bob and Sandy Bainbridge***



***May this Christmas Season be one filled with love and joy for all of you, and may you find the New Year filled with blessings and all good things for you and your loved ones.***