

Corps of Discovery travel out West

Day 12 - July 8, 2002

Departed Devil's Tower, heading toward Yellowstone.

Got up early this morning, no rain after all last night. Just lots of wind and lightning. We don't even wait for breakfast, just eat donuts as we go down the road. We're on the road by 6:00 a.m.

We take state roads into Montana, passing through the Wind River Sioux and Crow Indian Reservations. We stopped at a small gas station in the Crow Reservation to get a pop and use the facilities. A group of our kids immediately started playing hacky-sack beside the bus. Soon an Indian teenager drove up on a riding-lawnmower and starting talking to the kids. Then a man pulled up in a pickup, came on the bus and asked me if I was sure I knew where we were going. When I assured him that I did, he said that a lot of people were having a hard time figuring out where to go. I then told him that I thought it was fairly simple, just stay on the highway. When he started to give me directions to the local high school, I asked him just who he thought we were. Come to find out, he mistook

us for a fire-fighting team which hadn't showed up at the local assembly point. Talk about confusing.

We finally arrived at the Little Big Horn National Battlefield. After a quick lunch of sandwiches, we walked through the National Cemetery to the visitors center. We attended two interpretive talks at the visitors center. The second one was given by a retired Army Colonel, who was without a doubt the most dynamic and interesting instructor any of us had ever heard. He gave an outstanding talk about the leaders involved, the events leading up to the battle, then the tactics used by both sides. I have always considered myself a student of military history, but I learned more in that short talk than I would have believed possible. After the interpretive talk, we walked out to the monument where the final battle took place. As always, I can't help picturing in my mind, what a grim day that must have been for the men of the Seventh Cavalry. We also drove out the ridge to where Reno and Benteen fought their own battles that day. This was a first for me as well as the kids.

We need to get on down the road, so off we go again. Or as Tim keeps writing in his journal, verses from Willie Nelson's "On the Road Again." It's 110 degrees today, and for the first time this trip, it feels like it. The wind coming in the bus feels like a blast furnace. We need fuel and ice before heading up into the Big Horn Mountains, so we stop in the town of Sheridan where we also eat supper at Subway. We are really running behind schedule today, but we haven't wasted any time either.

We finally get off the interstate and start heading up the mountains. You can feel the temperature dropping each mile as we get higher. The view is spectacular and it seems like you can see a hundred miles.

When we finally get to the top of the mountain range, the temperature is in the low 70s and the vegetation has completely changed. We pulled off on a Forest Service road to let the kids stretch a while and just walk around. We're at close to 10,000 feet elevation here and it just feels strange. Without giving any explanation, I tell everyone to race to a point about 50 yards away, and off they go. Many of them don't make it that far, and those that did really felt it when they stopped. It was probably mean, but I wanted to really show them what a change in elevation does to your physical ability. It backfires though, they all want the Raider Team to train here next year.

Further down the road, we pull over to allow Jenny and some of the kids to photo and video a moose and her calf. I didn't even know they had moose in Wyoming. We also see another solitary moose off in the distance. Still further down the road, we start passing patches of snow. When we got close to one, I stopped the bus just long enough to have a short snowball fight. Jenny chickened out and hid behind her camera. Every-

body else though, really got into it.

It's starting to get pretty late, and we still have to get down off the mountains before dark. We make one more stop. There's a pull off where you can see the desert we'll be descending into far below, where it is already dark. We also see one of those scenes that most of us will remember for the rest of our life. Off in the distance, several miles away, is a flock of sheep. We can barely make out three or four dogs working the sheep across this mountain side towards a covered wagon type vehicle which is right on the skyline. What kind of life-style does this shepherd have, to be up here so high, surrounded by some of the most beautiful scenery God placed on this earth? Everything I've read about these shepherds says that they stay up here alone all summer, moving their flocks from one mountain side pasture to another, until winter arrives.

Finally, we start down the mountain. Low gear all the way for probably twenty miles. The only time I need to use the brakes is when we come up to cattle standing in the road. I guess it's the only level ground they have. It's a little too dark to see if their legs are shorter on one side, but it sure would help if they were.

It's further into Cody than I thought, and we don't arrive at the campground till around midnight. With the weather being perfect, we decide to just sleep under the stars tonight. We've got a good soft bed of grass, and an almost cold breeze, with a beautiful sky above us. A perfect night.

Day 13 - July 9, 2002

We departed Buffalo Bill State Park, where we spent the night, and head into Yellowstone National Park. On the way, we stop at one of the first Ranger Stations, where we read about bears (Grizzly Bears) and how to avoid them. In fact, a couple of campgrounds in the area are closed due to

trouble with bears in the area, several others are limited to campers with hard sides only.

After entering Yellowstone, our first stop is Yellowstone Lake; where several of the kids take a quick dip in the water. It's quick mainly because it's cold. We make several stops along the geyser basin where you find all different types of geyser pools. Some are just mud pots, boiling and reeking of sulfur. Others are crystal blue pools that seem as though they have no bottom. Temperatures of the pools vary, with the color of the pool indicating the temperature of the water. Later, we finally pull into the main lodge area, where Old Faithful is in the process of erupting. We let the groups wander after setting a meeting time to rendezvous beside Old Faithful, 10 minutes before the next eruption.

After watching Old Faithful erupt, Jenny and I are surprised to learn that the kids are disappointed in the eruption. Most thought there would be more noise accompanying the event. After getting a little diesel at the lodge, we continue our circle through the park. Yellowstone is beautiful in many ways, not just the geysers and hot springs that are all over the area. We saw a large number of buffalo and only a few elk. What Yellowstone has a lot of though is waterfalls and fast running streams throughout the entire park. After stopping at one of these streams, we noticed a large cloud of smoke in the distance. The cloud was enormous, reaching so high that the top half was white as snow. We kept our eye on this cloud the rest of the day, since our route brought us closer and closer. We found out later that the fire was far

(Cont. to A-10)



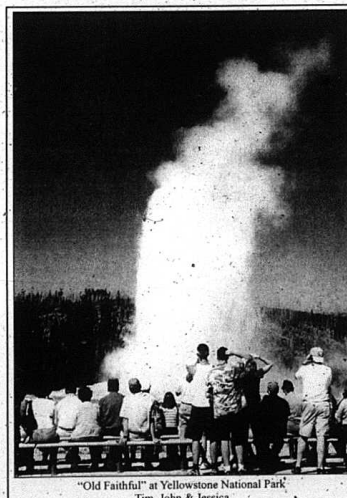
Battle of Little Bighorn Interpretive Center
John, Andy & Brian



Why we didn't camp at Yellowstone



"The Rule" - Standing on your head at the "Continental Divide"



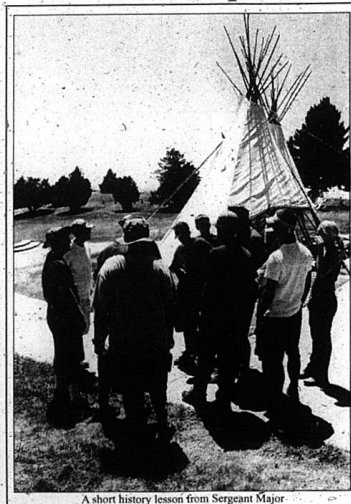
"Old Faithful" at Yellowstone National Park
Tim, John & Jessica



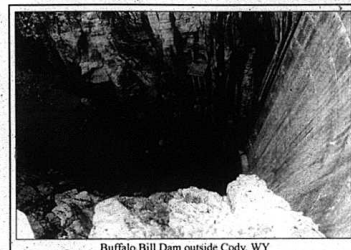
Snowball fight in the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming



Battle of the Little Bighorn National Cemetery in Montana



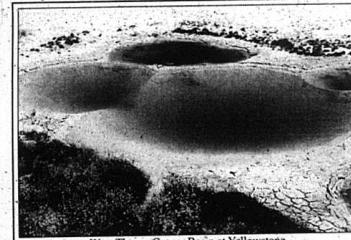
A short history lesson from Sergeant Major



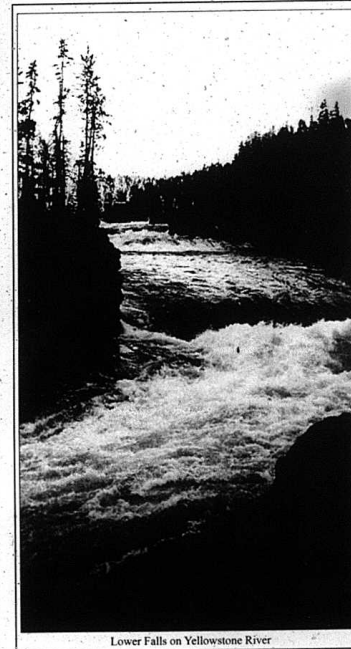
Buffalo Bill Dam outside Cody, WY



Enjoying a cool dip in Yellowstone Lake



West Thumb Geyser Basin at Yellowstone



Lower Falls on Yellowstone River