

*On The Road To
Mt. Washington*



with Jean Calkins

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MT. WASHINGTON

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a haibun

J & C Transcripts
Kanona, New York 14856

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ISBN: 0-9609744-8-2

This book is dedicated to
Lorraine Ellis Harr
with sincere appreciation
for her help and support.

Copies are available for \$2.50 ppd. from:

Jean Calkins
P. O. Box 41-2749
Garland, TX 75041

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DAY I - 9/12/82

Early morning fog -
yet, from the autumn treetops
birds twittering

We leave our home in the small Southern Tier Hamlet of Kanona on a bright, sunny, late summer day. To pass the familiar scenes and more quickly arrive at our New Hampshire destination, we head for the New York State Thruway. Just yesterday we learned this is the most dangerous superhighway in the nation, claiming an average of two lives per month, but we are not greatly concerned. This seems such a small number, compared to the many thousands who use the highway. It is a fast way to travel - no towns or stops to slow the traffic flow and many beautiful natural scenes along the way. We pass the Seneca Falls exit and approach the wet country.

Montezuma swamp:
It gets just one foot wet
the blue heron



Bridges mark the landscape. We pass a golf course dotted with Sunday players. Occasionally a house or trailer-home appears. So the miles pass by - swamps, woods, open fields.

This autumn tree
can't make up its mind -
green, yellow and red

Motorcycles are everywhere along this toll road,
many loaded to the limit with traveling gear.

So many cyclists
along the superhighway;
last days of summer

Haze dims the ridges as we enter the beautiful Adirondack Mountain region of New York State. The temperature has already risen into the 80's and we resort to air conditioning as we weave in and out of the hills, briefly paralleling the Barge Canal. This active waterway splits the state horizontally. We have long been familiar with its sights in our own area, and with its colorful history.

The Erie Canal
a tugboat waits nearby
drawbridge closed

Personalized license plates catch the eye. From New York: "Self-made," "Victory," and "Laborlaw." From New Hampshire: "Bash," "Denim," and "Skidoo." The highway cuts through a chain of mountains, some black as coal, others multicolored.

In the mountain cuts
layers and layers of rock
measure the years

Amtrack speeds by near Canajoharie. Living in a rural area, we have never seen the patriotic-colored red, white and blue coaches. They are indeed impressive. In an area of high cliffs, ivy is growing here and there on the surfaces, and in one spot, someone has expressed his faith for all to see.

Ivy covered cliffs;
a three-foot silver cross
suspended at the top

From the Thruway at Amsterdam we head north on Rt. 30, East on Rt. 29, then North again on Rt. 4. We anticipated the crossing of the Hudson River, for we had crossed its picturesque waters farther south many times, but now, it seems, we have crossed it without knowing. Later, looking at the map, we find the River and the Champlain Canal are one in this area.

Champlain Canal;
hidden in the shipping lanes
the Hudson River

The Canal is crossed twice more after it separates from the River.

Champlain Canal;
it looks no different
without the Hudson

By mid-afternoon we enter Vermont, still following winding U. S. 4. The farther north, the more abundant are the signs of autumn, and the temperature has climbed, unbelievably, into the 90's. Approaching the Green Mountains, the country rapidly becomes more rugged.

Mountains everywhere;
like clouds, their forms suggest
all kinds of things

Wooded fall ridges;
higher and higher they climb
then slip into valleys

So suddenly
above the mountain crest -
a soaring hang-glider

Farms line the narrow valleys, but there is little tillable land. A small town nestles in the hills, serenely settled below the highest ridges. Soon we find the city of Rutland huddled beneath the peaks.

"Ledbetter for Senate
Sept. 14" streams behind
a circling plane

On leaving Rutland, there is just a glimpse of the old brown house of Norman Rockwell's heritage. It is tucked insignificantly among equally insignificant buildings and passed so quickly it is hardly noticed.

Even the famous
come from small beginnings;
Norman Rockwell's home

Now ski trails can be seen on the highest slopes,
looking unmaneuverable and frightening.

Ski slopes
on towering Pico Peak;
how small one feels

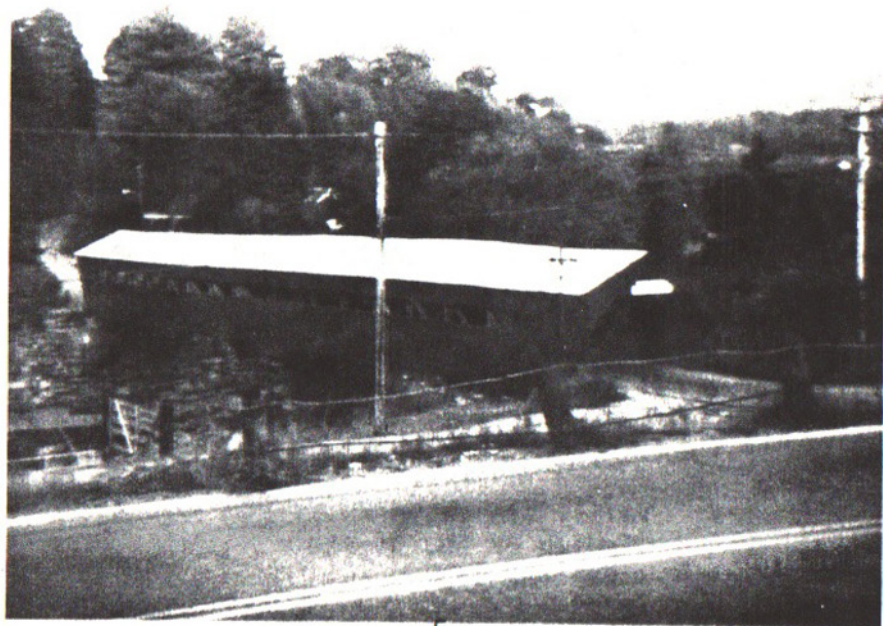
Through the narrow pass -
the towering Green Mountains
touched with reds and golds

On Green Mountain slopes
the road and the rocky creek
wind side by side

We have passed through Vermont's Green Mountains
and wind our way onward to Woodstock. It is a quaint
and charming New England town. The shops and homes
are well-kept and neat. Flower boxes decorate the
Main Street. It seems to open its arms to welcome
the traveler.

Sunny autumn day;
Woodstock nestles in the valley
peaceful - inviting

At Taftsville there is picture taking of the



covered bridge and a browse through the Country Store, buying only a postcard and a small bag of potato chips. The proprietor tells us the bridge was set afire by vandals soon after it was built. It was re-stored and then repainted just last year, but he "doesn't like the color they painted it."

We soon reach I-91 and head North again. At the junction, the cut through the rocks shows unusual formations, with the layers running vertically, evidence of the gigantic land upheavals which created these mountains, eons ago.

Vertical rock layers;
the mountains reach
toward heaven's blue

At Bradford, a turn-off on Rt. 5 follows the Connecticut River valley north to Rt. 302. Here the river is smooth and glassy, and it is hard to tell which way it flows. Only occasionally does a ripple give any indication.

Smooth as glass -
the Connecticut River
snakes southward

Rt. 302 enters New Hampshire near Woodsville, then winds north through the valleys. New Hampshire Rt. 117 is a shortcut over the mountain range and deposits us on Rt. 18 near Franconia Notch, where we look for the "Old Man of the Mountain," a natural stone formation we have often seen pictured as a tourist attraction. We stop briefly at the designated parking area but see nothing resembling the "Old Man" and since it is growing late, we decide to call it a day.

Vainly searching -
Old Man of the Mountain
where are you?



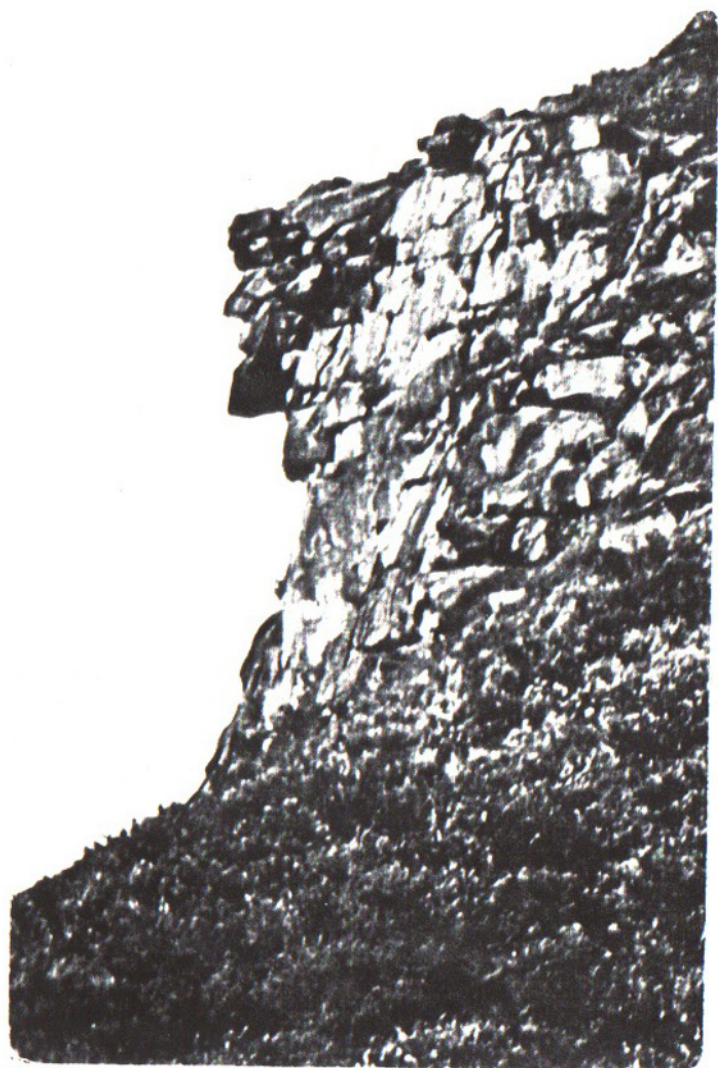
Franconia Notch - view looking South

DAY TWO - 9/13/82

Skipping breakfast, we drive back to the Notch, following directions received the night before. We park, follow a dirt path a short way from the road to the shore of Profile Lake (seen above) and at last we see the "Old Man" as the early sunshine illuminates him beautifully - a "just right" time of day.

Ah, Old Man,
so you were only hiding
there you are!

A plaque commemorates the pastor who labored ten years to have the "Old Man" preserved as a monument and the man who in 1916 risked his life to place a turnbuckle over the forehead to keep the profile intact. This is a peaceful scene - Profile Lake in the early morning quiet. Not a soul around. Just as we are leaving, a worker comes to gather the rubbish from the weekend. How litter-free this area is!



Mt. Washington is now only a few hours away, so we continue our journey, north on Rt. 3, north-east on Rt. 115, then south on Rtes. 2 and 16. The mountains loom larger and larger as we progress deeper into New Hampshire's White Mountain Range. This section is also called the "Presidential Range" with the

peaks named for various former Chief Executives.

Haze dominates the ridges and fog lays heavy in many valleys. However, we reach Mt. Washington in bright sunshine and begin the ascent on the eight-mile toll road, completed in 1861, to the summit. In low gear, 10-15 m.p.h., the climb is up and up. At this level, both sides of the road are lined with trees and boulders - there is no view.

Winding road -
through jutting boulders and ferns
up and up it goes

Above the two-mile marker, at 3000 ft., the view unfolds. Here and there among the trees are glimpses of the lesser peaks and green valleys. At three miles the summit is visible. Birch are brilliant yellow; pine are getting smaller and smaller. Mountain ash extend their red berries on laden branches.

The autumn mountains:
red of the mountain ash,
gold birch, green pine

Suddenly, a helicopter appears from nowhere, dangling a new full of packages. On the next turn, we see where the load is dropped - a small construction sight half-way up the mountain.

Again and again
the helicopter brings its load
to the mountain side

Just beyond is a pull-off and a stop to cool the motor. Pull-off areas and barrels of water are provided at regular intervals for the motorist in trouble. I get a camera shot of the chopper unloading.



A New York car stops and a woman gets out quickly, hurries to a rock on the inside of the curve and sits down. After parking, her husband joins her. They sit a few minutes, then climb back into the car; he turns around and reluctantly heads slowly down the mountain. Evidently her fear of height got the upper hand, here where the mountain falls away abruptly and there is little protection along the narrow, winding road.

Winding mountain road -
the woman, afraid of heights,
turns and goes back

I, too, am afraid of heights, but am over-awed at the stark beauty of this place. Having come a long distance to climb this mountain, how can one give up before completing the challenge?

Granite boulders
towering peaks, open chasms,
and still we climb.



At five miles, the narrow road turns again to dirt and narrows even more. There seems to be no place for cars to pass and no protection on the sheer cliff to the left. (It will be worse coming back, when I am on that side.)

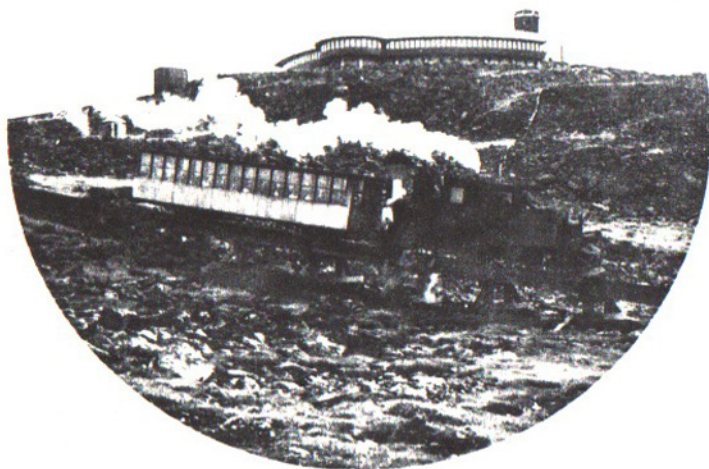
From the 5000 ft. elevation we look back at the lower levels far below. Here the rocks are covered with green lichen and unknown creeping plants of brown and red. Only an occasional scrub pine grows at this height, and those are less than a foot tall. So we continue along, sometimes on the mountain side of the road, sometimes on the cliff side. (It is a good thing the New York lady turned back; if she was frightened before, here she would have been terrified!)

Now it is straight up the mountain for a short way. At the seven mile marker, we are above nearly all the surrounding peaks.

Presidential Range:
miles and miles of mountains -
miles and miles of space

The peak is reached nearly an hour after the ascent was begun. The last hundred yards or so are on foot, made easy by wooden steps over the rocks. The summit is bathed in sunlight. There is, for a wonder, little breeze. Winds are clocked at 3 m.p.h. this day, so it is comfortable. The hills are hazy, looking all ways from the top of the observation deck. The weather station at the summit celebrates its 50th anniversary this year; there are also small experimental solar collectors which feed their power through heavy cables to the station.

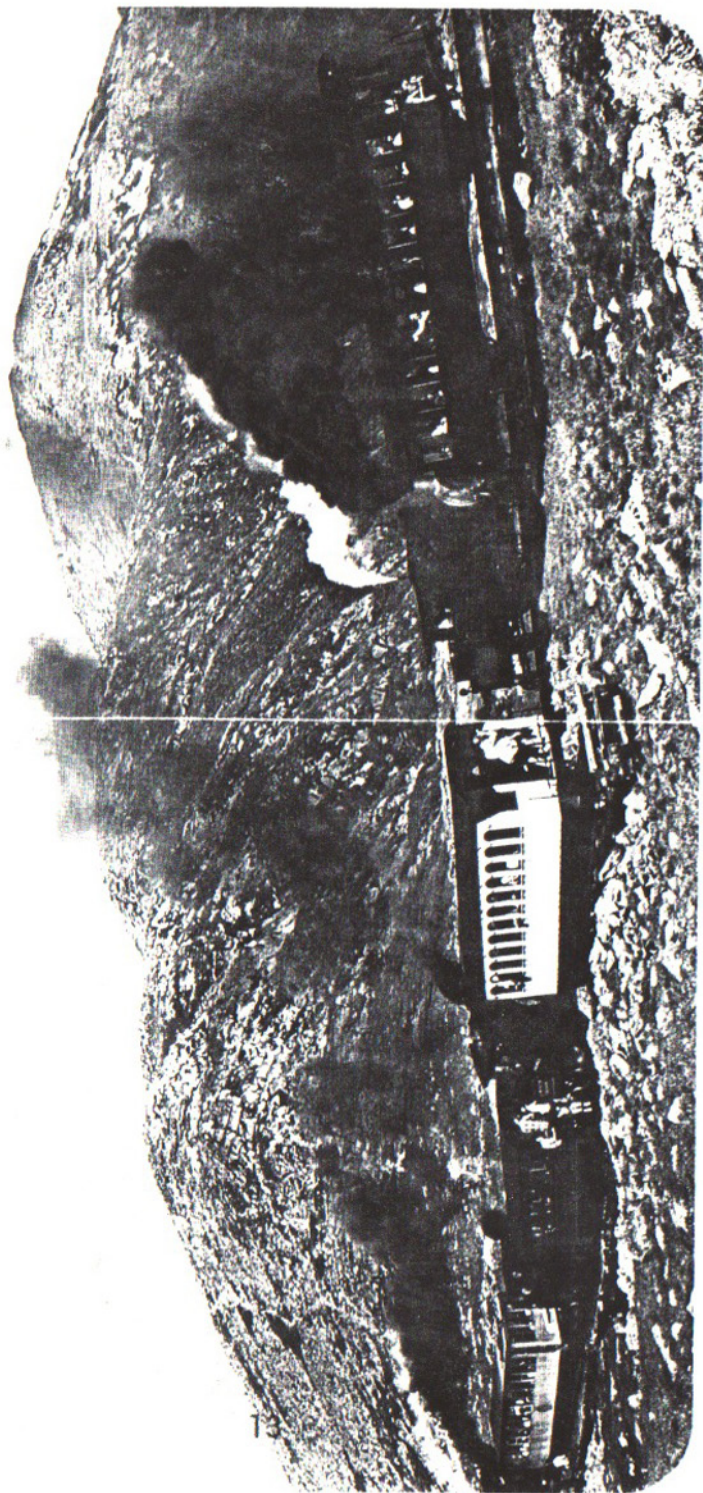
A short way across the mountain top we watch the Cog Railway bring a carload of passengers along the crest and right up to the observation area.



Cog Railway approaching the Sherman Adams Building on top of Mt. Washington, New England's highest mountain—6,293 ft. above sea level.

A busy day at The Mt. Washington Cog Railway

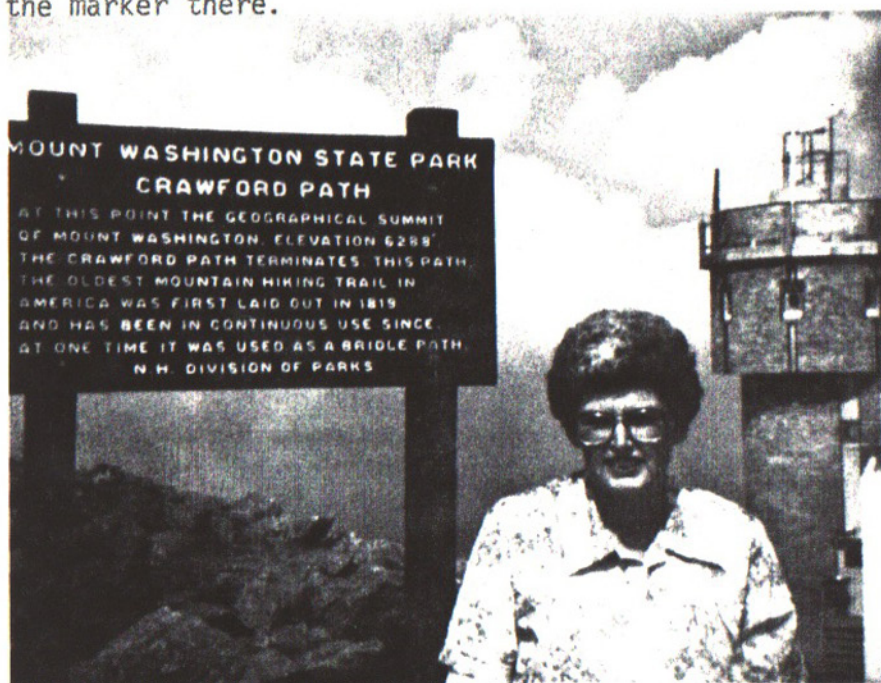
The skyline switch and siding where the trains pass one another, with view of the northern peaks of the Presidential Range.



The Cog Railway -
clouds of black smoke and white steam
along the mountain ridge

We count the passengers as they disembark. For that carload alone, the fees amount to over \$700. In most areas we have traveled, there seems to be a charge even to walk a trail or see a sight.

Outside the observation building, we climb a few rocks to the very summit and I pose for a picture by the marker there.



Then on the west side of the mountain, we are amazed at the many trails disappearing from sight over the ridges.

Hikers trails
follow the mountain ridges -
soon lost to view

In a depression below the crest is a sizeable house. How do the residents get there? Who would want to live so high up on this mountain where the winds sometimes blow over 200 m.p.h.? It appears now that what looked like another foot trail is actually a road. The helicopter lands near the house. A load is attached and carried to a point near the summit. Perhaps the pilot lives here? Someone does.

High on the mountain
a house of questions
but no answers

A backpacker appears on a nearby trail, heavily loaded with clothes, sleeping gear, and even a guitar. Others are starting down the trail, and quickly disappearing from sight along the rocky terrain.

We return to our vehicle and slowly begin our descent. Part way down, a motorcycle is stalled - overheated, no doubt - and the riders are trying to ease it off the steep roadway.

One Gold Wing 1000
casualty of the mountain
half way up.

On the descent, the previously uphill watering places become stopping points to cool the brakes. A few stops to see the view, and at one point to take a picture of the area far below where we started this mountain adventure.

Going back down the mountain is not as frightening as expected, but it is good not to be driving. There are many cars on this narrow road now, and it is often necessary to pull off at a wide spot to let one pass.



Back on the main highway we arrive almost immediately at Wildcat Mountain and stop for a goldola ride to the top. Directly across the valley is Mt. Washington, yet it is too hazy to be seen clearly. The ride up is unexciting. From the crest of Wildcat Mt. mountains to the east are vaguely outlined. It is too hazy for pictures, so we walk around. Here on the mountain top the red raspberries, long since gone elsewhere, are just beginning to ripen. We eat a few and find them sweet and tasty. It is now past 1 p.m. and because it is late in the season, the restaurants are already closed and we are beginning to get hungry. We stay at the top only briefly.

WILDCAT **MOUNTAIN**

**RT. 16, PINKHAM
NOTCH, JACKSON, NH
03846
(603) 466-3326**

RATES: Adults \$3.75
Children (6-11) \$1.75
Under 6 free, w/adult

SEASON: Late May - mid Oct.



Mt. Washington's closest neighbor, with its colorful gondolas, offers spectacular alpine views of the Presidential Range, Tuckerman Ravine and neighboring valleys as you glide to the summit high above Pinkham Notch.



Early September;
on Wildcat Mountain
a hazy view

The ride down the mountain passes quickly. On both sides are ski lifts for nearby slopes. The Lodge is visited briefly and we continue on.

Dairy Queen for lunch and south on Rt. 16 to Conway, where we stop at the Conway Scenic Railroad to browse in the gift shop and museum. The train is about to leave on its 11 mile, one-hour scenic journey in the rural countryside, boasting a view of Mt. Washington, farms, streams, bridges, and other picturesque area scenes.

Conway Scenic Railroad;
the train puffs from the station
leaving us behind.



South of Conway we pass a quaint sign: "The last tourist to leave New Hampshire, please turn out the light." We chuckle.

More unusual license plates. I catch a glimpse of one I think says, "Litter," but can't be sure. There is "Me & Reg," "Fugitv," "Alpine," "Maytag," "Much," "Move 1," "Whiskey," and "2-Gun."

South on Rt. 28 we gradually move back toward the mountains. This is off the beaten path, with little to do or see. The temperature has again risen into the 80's.

Late summer heatwave
but still the trees unleaf
for winter

North of Manchester we pick up U. S. 3 south. After two wrong turns, and upset by the rush-hour traffic, we are happy just to get through the traffic congestion and into more open territory. The city is no place for "country folk."

Just before 6 p.m. we find a place to stay near Nashua. It has already been a tiring day, and by the time we find a place to eat and finally call it a day, it is nearly 8. The air is surprisingly cold after the heat of the day.

Hot tempers
cool with the temperature
tired travelers

DAY 3 - 9/14/82

By 8 a.m. we're back on the road again. The clouds hang low. Mist forms on the windshield and forces us to run the wipers. Soon we are in the mountains and climbing Temple Mountain, sometimes above the clouds, seldom below them--most often among them. One valley through which we pass is filled with a large lake.

Dublin Lake;
misty fog rises slowly
from the still water.

Around a corner, Howe Reservoir appears. The Lake and the Reservoir seem to be the same body of water, yet we cannot tell for sure. It is 10 a.m. before the sun breaks through, just after we cross the Connecticut River into Vermont. And remembering the sign,

We leave New Hampshire
"turning out the light"
behind us.

At a gift shop on Hogback Mt. near Wilmington, I buy a gift for a soon-to-visit grandson. We have stopped here before, recalling the panoramic view.

Hogback Mountain;
scenic 100-mile view
fogged in

Tour busses unload senior citizens, come to see the colorful autumn foliage. Here there are more hardwoods and their colors are brighter than in the northern area where birch abound.

By late morning we are back in New York State, on Rt. 7, a poor road at this point with small, decaying towns.

Tomhannock Reservoir;
in the late morning sun
only the gulls

We re-cross the Hudson River at Troy. There is no possibility of missing the river here, though it is much less picturesque than farther south. Two more license plates flash by - a New Hampshire "M-A-D" and New York "00-7."

In Rotterdam there is a six-road intersection served by one simple traffic light and one can imagine all sorts of mishaps taking place here.

Rotterdam road
wheel-spoke intersection
fender-bender corner

Rt. 7 winds south into the hills. The scenes become more pastorale. We change roads. I-88 parallels Rt. 7 here and we can miss all the small towns. Traffic is very light and we move slowly through the countryside - past Howe Caverns, visited twice before, and past two college towns: Cobblestill and Oneonta, both members of the State University system, and not far from each other.

The Susquehanna River flows beside us. At Binghamton it is joined by the Chemung River. Used to seeing the larger river, how surprising to see it stream-sized here nearer its source.

In the hill country
the mighty Susquehanna -
just a rocky stream

The day has again turned hot and we face the sun, making us uncomfortable, yet we are thankful for this unusual weather.

We pause briefly for ice cream and later a cool drink. It is a long ride through the quiet rural area. As we near Binghamton, the River broadens.

Wider and wider
the Susquehanna flows on
shallow still

Wedding of waters
Susquehanna and Chemung merge
and flow south as one

We are now on familiar Rt. 17 west - the Southern Tier Expressway that will eventually take us almost directly to our doorstep. The city skyline is smoke stacks and town houses, Jewish temples and

Catholic spires, as we pass through on the final leg
of our journey.

Haze on the mountain
haze on the city, too:
Binghamton

Near Waverly, hard-hatted road crews work on
bridge repairs, their yellow hats the color of leaves.

On-coming winter -
road crews on the highway
fixing bridges

Twenty miles from home it begins to rain, but in
another ten miles, the local shower has disappeared
and beyond, no rain falls. We have traveled a thou-
sand miles in three days on our journey to the White
Mountains. What would Bashō think of these modern
roads? These modern times? We have tried to escape,
but we must come back

Home again;
back from the tall mountain
nothing has changed.



