



My name is John and I'm retired (except for some freelance translation) and like to travel alone. I take lots of photos, look for second hand books which become part of the journey, keep a log and collect fridge magnets. I try to give my trips form and meaning with missions and quests. This is Part 11 of my **Pilgrim Chronicles**.

Cowboys & Indians Road Trip

It's May 12, 2016, and the plan is a 20-day road trip beginning and ending in Calgary, Alberta, with Dinosaurland, the Great Plains, Yellowstone and the Canadian Rockies as destinations. Like all boys growing up in the fifties, Cowboys and Indians imagery and notions are etched into my thoughts and memories and the idea now is to use them to give structure to this ultra-scenic trip.

I begin the journey with *The Accidental Universe: The World You Thought You Knew*, by Alan Lightman, a collection of essays on what is scientifically known (and not known) about the world around us. In preparation for the trip, I've already read a biography of *Crazy Horse*, by Larry McMurtry, Buffalo Bill's *Autobiography*, and a couple of Montana and Wyoming memoirs laden with metaphors of emptiness, stoic cowboys and big skies.

Lightman will be the first of three authors on this trip to caution against relying on science to explain everything. He's a scientist and fiction writer who calls himself an atheist but acknowledges that science can never identify the origin of life or disprove the existence of a Higher Power, the two most important questions.

Like the Canadian Maritimes which I rode through last fall, there aren't many humans where I'm going. Montana and Wyoming have a combined population of less than two million, but there will be no lack of vistas to photograph and I have a list of used bookstores to visit.

First stop will be the Alberta Badlands, the dinosaur capital of the world. It's almost dark when I leave Calgary Airport with my rental car. The road and countryside are flat and treeless and within minutes I spot the first of many animals I will encounter on this trip when a coyote bolts across the highway about 100 feet in front of me. There's a scent of burning wood in the crisp night air, probably drifted down from Fort MacMurray, the oil-town burning 400 miles to the north. The haze will be noticeable down here the next couple of days and there will be references to the apocalyptic fire everywhere I go in this province. Tonight, I sleep with the dinosaurs at the Badlands Motel on North Dinosaur Trail in Drumheller.

I wake up very early on Day 2 and treat myself to a big breakfast in the diner attached to the motel. Dinosaurs dominated the planet from 231 million to 66 million years ago when they were supposedly wiped out by an asteroid. The planet itself, according to scientists, is 4.5 billion years old, with first signs of life appearing 3.5 billion years ago and recognizable humans less than 200,000 years ago. Some people actually believe that humans and dinosaurs co-existed but nobody talks about dinosaur cowboys so I'm not sure how the over-sized creatures fit into the theme of this trip, but references to the mind-boggling scope of certain numbers will be a consistent pop-up in the books I find. It's said, for example, that our sun will burn out in 5 billion years, but I'm more concerned with my own mind-boggling numbers: after 62 years, my own extinction looms.

So many bones and fossils in this part of the world, including the fossil fuels that drive the economy. Some say there is a karmic element to the catastrophe in Fort Mac, suggesting that Mother Earth is protecting herself or expressing wrath. One way or another, our need to tap these ancient repositories of energy seems to be coming to an end. By noon I'm exhausted after seeing the major sites in and around Drumheller, including a coal mine turned museum, the weird geological formations they call the Hoodoos, and the Royal Tyrell Museum where I see the remains of countless millions of years of life beautifully displayed.

The reconstructed dinosaurs in the museum are ridiculously large and some are ridiculously ferocious-looking, almost over-designed to destroy and devour other improbable creatures. The most incredible of course is Tyrannosaurus Rex, the apex predator they call the Lizard King who could gobble me up in one bite. After a short nap in the museum coffee shop, I decide to drive slowly to my room at the Econo Lodge in Taber. I struggle to stay alert on the dreary drive through flat, featureless grasslands on a very hazy day.



Lightman says that religion is based on a feeling that the universe makes sense and is fundamentally benign. He quotes William James' definition of religion as "the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto." He also says that science and religion share the same sense of wonder, and he's living proof. I would think this feeling of wonder would make him a believer in some kind of Higher Power, but he seems determined to look the other way.

Day 3 is supposed to be sunny but it begins hazy again. The earth is still relentlessly flat, with hardly any trees and no sign of mountains yet. The plan is to find some books in Lethbridge, drive to Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo-Jump, and end up in Waterton National Park near the U.S. border. I'll see mountains by the end of the day.

Downtown Lethbridge is empty on Saturday morning and I like it. I visit two fine shops, Echo Books and Big John's Books, where I find several titles, two of which will prove to be important to this trip. *Savage and Beautiful Country: The Secret Life of the Mind*, by Alan McGlashan, was written in 1966 (and subsequently forgotten) by a renowned psychiatrist who as an RAF pilot skirmished with the Red Baron in World War I and whose patients later included members of the royal family. I also pick up *The Marriage of East and West* by the monk Bede Griffiths.

I explore Indian Battle Park in the Oldham River Valley where I get a couple of good shots in special, orange-tinged light, probably infused with billions of tree atoms released by the fire raging up north. Lightman says everything we see is evaporating. The Second Law of Thermodynamics, also called *The Arrow of Time*, states that everything in this world is falling apart. Do our own atoms color the air when our bodies are cremated? Maybe the law is incomplete - maybe everything that is falling apart is also reconstituting in a circle of redemption.

Lightman says we should not forget that we are also part of nature. "We are not observers on the outside looking in. We are on the inside too."

Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo-Jump, a World Heritage Site, is more interesting than expected. For 6,000 years it was a place where Plains Indians enticed then chased buffalo over a cliff to their deaths. The name originates from the legend of a young brave who wanted to watch the carnage from below but died when the animals started falling on his head. The museum is first-rate and the buffalo burger in the cafeteria is intense. A wall quote says, "After Napi (a Blackfoot demi-god) finished making the earth he decided to make people. He took mud and molded it into human shapes." A very familiar story indeed.



Head-Smashed-in-Buffer-Jump



Lethbridge, Alberta

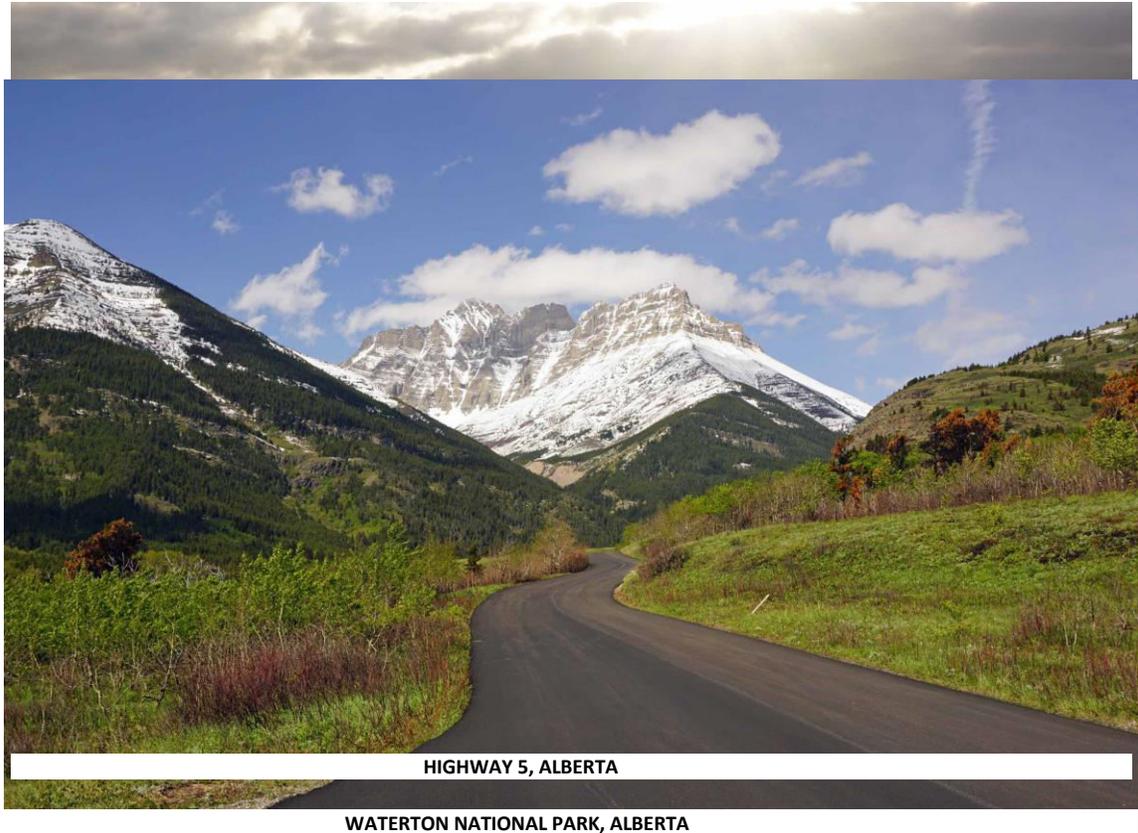
Finally, mountains start to rise up on the horizon and I make it to the spectacular park in late afternoon. I get some very nice shots, including one of a herd of long-horned sheep overlooking Waterton Village. I'll return tomorrow morning from my room at the Outpost Motel in Cardston.

Highway 5 between Waterton and Cardston is magnificent, with snow-covered mountains behind me and on my right. I glimpse something wonderful in the rear-view mirror and pull over for a nice shot of the road like a silver ribbon disappearing into the mountains behind me in pre-evening light. Back in the car, I see a deer running parallel to the road beside me in open meadows, gracefully and effortlessly leaping over fences.

Cardston is a Mormon town settled by a wagon train from Utah at the end of the 19th century. A huge, impressive temple dominates this alcohol-free town of 3,000. A sign on the door of a very tiny Catholic church says, "There is no wine or money kept on church premises". A fountain on the main drag commemorates a visit from the actress Fay Wray, who "is known to almost everyone on the planet as the woman with the problem boyfriend", referring to the 1933 film *King Kong* which immortalized her and the big monkey that loved her. I'm guessing she is the most famous person to be born in these parts. Nothing but a Subway sandwich shop is open for dinner.

Except for some sad looking Indians lingering on the steps of the Cahoon Hotel, Cardston is deserted on Sunday morning, Day 4. Breakfast is gas station coffee and a sticky bun. Then it's back to Waterton, "Where the mountains meet the prairies". I will be straddling the Continental Divide between these two geographical regions for the next three weeks.

I don't linger in the park very long before crossing the border into Montana at noon, stopping for lunch in Browning, a depressing town on the Blackfeet Reservation where once again Subway seems the only option. I finish the Lightman book along the way. He says that modern science is only five hundred years old and that just as much suffering has been caused in the name of science as religion. He says the central doctrine of science - that our universe is governed by laws that apply everywhere and can eventually all be discovered - is obviously unprovable. Faith is required, just as it is for religion.



HIGHWAY 5, ALBERTA

WATERTON NATIONAL PARK, ALBERTA





CARDSTON, ALBERTA



CARDSTON, ALBERTA

He says scientific believers may be people who are fearful of the chaos we see in nature; they want to believe that everything can be measured and understood. Later in the trip, I will hear a psychiatrist on the radio say that conspiracy theorists are also afraid of chaos and would prefer to believe the less scary notion that a handful of diabolical people are controlling everything, a scenario in which at least somebody is driving the bus. Lightman also says that science, with seductive gadgets and glimpses into microscopic and astronomical worlds invisible to the human eye, has de-emphasized the real world and created the false impression that we can eventually see and understand everything.

The Greystone Inn in downtown Great Falls is perfect. I walk around for a couple of hours before treating myself to something good at Bert & Ernie's Restaurant. Downtown is saloons, casinos, tattoo parlors, pawnshops, gun shops and lots of vintage stores. People on the streets look a little destitute but maybe it's just because this is the only significant city center within many miles. Or is it drugs? I saw a billboard coming in that simply said "Meth: not even once". Rain forecast to the east is a welcome excuse to sit still for Day 5 in Great Falls. I book a second night at the Greystone Inn.

Breakfast at Tracy's Diner the next morning is Old School and very good. The older men (my age) all look the same, with droopy mustaches, baseball caps and a newspaper next to their plate. The only young man is a picture-perfect, thirty-something cowboy with a rugged, sun-exposed face. His right hand is in a cast – did he fall off a horse? The blonde fortyish waitress is obviously in love with him. "Good luck getting your rig going," says one of the droopy mustaches when he gets up to leave (and break my waitress's heart).

Even the owner of the Cassiopeia Bookstore just down the street from my hotel looks like a handsome young cowboy, not your typical disheveled, slightly-disappointed-in-life used bookstore owner. The store is neat and well-curated and I find two small books that will eventually help explain this trip: *The Soul of the Indian* by Charles Eastman, and *The Sacred Journey* by Frederick Buechner. I ask the owner for advice and take his suggestion to drive up River Road to the Lewis and Clark Museum (which will end up being closed). On the way, I stop several times beside the Missouri River to read a chapter of *The Soul of the Indian*.



GREAT FALLS, MONTANA



GREAT FALLS, MONTANA

Charles Alexander Eastman (also known as Ohiyesa) had a foot in two worlds. His mother was the half-breed daughter of a captain/painter and granddaughter of a Dakota chief. His Dakota father had converted to Christianity in prison and taken the surname of his dead wife. Eastman went to university and became a doctor. His first job was on the Indian Agency at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, where he witnessed and dealt with the aftermath of the infamous Wounded Knee Massacre. The introduction to the book suggests that "Although Eastman adopted many of the white man's ways, Wounded Knee destroyed any hope that those ways might be superior to those of his own people." He wrote eleven books and made it his mission to teach people about Native American culture.

I return to my hotel to park the car and explore the town again on foot, to get a sense of this city of 58,000 souls that feels a lot like 1958. The Web says Great Falls is 88% white and only 1% African American. I find a café where the coffee is tepid, the pastries gigantic and a guy talking about the current gender controversy over bathrooms on a Christian radio station calmly says that the damage was done in 1962 when the federal government banned prayer in schools, separating church from state as prescribed in the Constitution. He says, "We should have gone to Washington before the sun set on that day and taken them out and shot them!" Holy Jesus!

The plan on Day 6 is to drive slowly southeast into the Black Hills, which might result in some bad weather in Yellowstone later in the week but it's still the best plan. I feel like I'm the only one on the road driving through the Lewis and Clark National Forest with plenty of time to get to where I'm going. I'll finish the very short Eastman book on the way.

I pull over to read a chapter where the author says that for the Indian religious worship is lived, not talked about and "silence is the absolute poise of body, mind and spirit". Silence is the Great Mystery. The silence up here in these woods is heavy, a blanket of natural calm. Just then I hear the flapping wings of an eagle directly above me.



GREAT FALLS, MONTANA



GREAT FALLS, MONTANA

According to Eastman, the love of possessions was considered a weakness by Indians and there was no price attached to property or labor. The invading culture, especially the flood of gold-seekers, couldn't have been more different. The Indians were shocked by the whites who "spoke much of spiritual things, while seeking only the material. They bought and sold everything." As Lewis and Clark moved further and further into uncharted territory, they were commissioned to tell the Indians they met that their land now belonged to the United States government. The words meant nothing to people with no concept of private property, and they were greeted warmly.

The warrior was an individualist with the spiritual power that accompanies solitude. "There is a magnetic and nervous force that accumulates in solitude and that is quickly dissipated by life in a crowd." Eastman says two ceremonies are common to native culture: the sweat lodge and ceremonial pipe. The sweat lodge he describes as a sort of baptism, meant to purify and re-create the spirit; the ceremonial pipe is an expression of thanks or grace, a sort of communion.

By the time I get to Livingston I'm feeling like I want to keep driving but my room at the Country Motor Inn on a sketchy bit of highway is already paid for. I have lunch at the Forty-Niners diner next door where a woman walks in and asks for the manager. She says she needs gas money get home and the local police were only willing to give her ten dollars. The manager dismisses her like this is a common event, probably related to desperate patrons of the dingy casinos on this strip of road. But the gentrified Old West downtown is only a few blocks away and I quickly find another excellent bookstore/café. The Elk River Bookstore is so hippie there's no milk or cream for the coffee, just some weird vegan substitute. It's a huge place, set up for readings like Cassiopeia in Great Falls. I pick up a Bernie Sanders sticker in the bathroom for the back of my notebook.

Each time I turn to CNN in my hotel room for some news they're talking about the presidential primaries and showing video clips of the idiot Trump bellowing about himself and his possessions, the antithesis of the native warrior Eastman says was admired for his soft, low voice. The shameless Fox fake-news network is trying to sanitize and embrace the racist blowhard as one of their own now that it looks like he will be their nominee. What's wrong with a country that could even consider this devil as their leader? So much hatred in some hearts.

Livingston seems like a mixture of hippies, Jesus people, cowboys and rednecks, with some of the Wild West spirit of the Gold Rush and lawlessness of the frontier still resonating. Just off downtown, Sacajawea Park on the Yellowstone River is a nice place to spend the rest of the afternoon.



LIVINGSTON, MONTANA



SACAJAWEA PARK, LIVINGSTON, MONTANA

Sacajawea, I learn, is a fascinating character in the history of the Old West. As a guide and interpreter, she accompanied the Lewis and Clark expedition - the original Cowboys & Indians Road Trip - on its two-year westward trek through the Great Plains and over the mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The status of women, says Eastman, is a test of a civilization, a test which native cultures pass. He also says there was a feminine refinement to the typical young warrior, not something we might expect to find in a "primitive" culture. The Sun is the father, the Earth is the mother. The Sun penetrates the Earth and there is life.

I'm up at six on a clear and sunny Day 7, eating breakfast beside a window at a McDonalds, looking directly at a highway sign for Yellowstone Park, which is just an hour south. But I'm heading east into the Great Plains this morning to Little Big Horn.

When Lewis and Clark first entered the Great Plains, one of the largest grasslands in the world where 50 million buffalo once roamed, they felt like they had gone back in time to the Garden of Eden. They were struck by the beauty and vistas of a land without trees and teeming with wildlife. After near extinction, there are now 30,000 buffalo living free in this part of the world.

The battlefield where Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer met his doom is a National Monument now, with a tasteful and informative visitor's center and a road to tour the site and places to pull over and read accounts of what happened on each spot. It's a surprisingly moving experience.

The battle is called Custer's Last Stand but it really was the Indians' last stand, the last effective resistance to the tsunami of soldiers and settlers that would inevitably push them into smaller and smaller enclosures. Within a few years of this final victory, all of them would give up their strenuous nomadic life and "come in" to the spaces assigned to them.

The battle occurred while the centennial of the United States of America was being celebrated in Washington in 1876. An 1868 treaty had given the Sioux the Black Hills, but when gold was discovered in 1874 Custer led an expedition to open a "Thieves' Road" to fortune seekers in direct violation of the treaty. Government attempts to buy the Hills from the Sioux failed but whites just kept moving in. Many Indians complied with orders to move onto reservations but those wanting to remain free, including Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, gathered at Little Big Horn. After they wiped out Custer and his regiment, Sitting Bull fled to Canada but Crazy Horse persevered. He eventually gave himself up and a dream-prophecy was realized when he was held back by one of his own and bayoneted by a soldier.

Little Big Horn Battlefield, Montana



I spend the night at the Quality Inn

in



Gillette where I finish the Eastman book

and review some notes on Crazy Horse and Little Big Horn, most of which were taken from Larry McMurtry's short biography of the legendary warrior. Indians were despised for their poverty and simple ways when in fact their "religion" forbade the accumulation of wealth or enjoyment of luxury. There was an obligation to share with the less fortunate, a trait exemplified by Crazy Horse who was a sort of Robin Hood to his people, a light-skinned member of the Lakota, the most powerful Sioux tribe in the northern plains.

He was a fearless warrior who avoided contact with white people and whose life was guided by a dream he had after two days of fasting on a vision quest as a teenager. In the dream, a horseman floating above the ground tells him four things: not to adorn himself, to throw a little dust over his horse before going into battle, to wear a small stone behind his ear, and to never keep anything for himself. After the dream, he would always dress simply and be a man of charity. The vision also warned that he would be unharmable in battle but would eventually be betrayed with his arms held back by one of his own people. Both predictions came to pass in a very Christ-like story.

Day 8 will be Monument Day: Devil's Tower, Rushmore and Crazy Horse. I have a room booked at Deadwood Dick's in Deadwood, South Dakota.

There are scarcely any people on the 1.3-mile path that circles the base of Devil's Tower, a magical site sacred to Indians for thousands of years. At one point, I see three deer beside the path and gaze, for about 30 seconds, into the eye of one of them, whose profile is almost invisible among large boulders. She doesn't seem concerned by my presence, twitching her huge ears every now and then as if to communicate something to me or her buddies.

The path is spectacular as I move from shade to the sunny side of the tower where I take a break on a bench to begin the McGlashan book whose goal is "to reawaken the pristine power of regarding the phenomena of the external world in ... such a way that they begin to grow translucent and reveal something of the mystery that sustains them." He says we live in an age that insists that feeling should always be guided by thinking. To see the translucence, we need to change ever so slightly, we need to achieve "a stillness – a willed suspension of conventional judgment." He says this "quiet secret" is a solitary journey.



DEVIL'S TOWER, WYOMING



DEER IN THE ROCKS, DEVIL'S TOWER

The rest of Monument Day is nothing much. The only partially finished Crazy Horse monument is a disappointment, basically a construction site that can only be accessed by a school bus. Mount Rushmore is impressive but so iconic it's a visual cliché. But once again, I'm impressed by the classy and non-commercial way these sites are administered by the National Parks Service.

Deadwood Dick's in Deadwood, South Dakota, is old and authentic but the town itself seems little more than a tourist trap. Aside from saloons and gift shops, it's full of depressing casinos. I walk up and down the main road but can't find a restaurant without gambling machines. The GPS comes to the rescue with a Taco John's a half mile down the road and for \$6 I get to eat at a table with no bells and whistles or rip-off machines in the background, and it's actually not bad.

Mount Moriah Cemetery is at the top of a high hill with two attractions according to the Web: the gravesites of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane and a panoramic view of the town below. But it starts to rain heavily moments after I enter. I return the next morning for the view but it's just an aerial view of casinos and saloons.

Day 9 was going to be a day of slow driving east towards Yellowstone but an old guy at a Wyoming Visitors Center suggests a detour through the Big Horn Mountains and, wow, I get some nice shots on the deserted road, even in problematic light. I find a room at the Antler Motel in Greybull and decide to return to the mountains in the morning before driving to Cody which will be home base for Yellowstone for a couple of days.

McGlashan says that modern man is lonely, that "in his haste to master new skills he has forgotten more than he can afford to forget." He says that as children we were once aware of the hidden realities that make the world magical, but we forgot them, and now there are three ways to re-enter the world of magic. The first involves war, a dark, exciting path of destruction where opposites collide to form new truths and heroes are created. The second is ritual, a path that leads to a fourth-dimensional world of meaning, exposing realities "of a different order from those of which guns and computers are made." The third is the carnival which evokes forgotten mysteries, something premodern people don't need because they already live each day in touch with the chaos and forces of nature. This would, I suppose, include movies and most modern entertainment.

Day 10 begins with breakfast at the Uptown Café on Main Street in Greybull, a large two-sided restaurant with smoking still permitted on one side. It's been years since I've seen this anywhere: the brownish tinge on the walls and furniture, a haze in the air and the rancid odor.



CRAZY HORSE MONUMENT, SOUTH DAKOTA



MOUNT RUSHMORE



DEADWOOD DICK'S, DEADWOOD, SOUTH DAKOTA

Big Horn Mountains, Wyoming





The return to Big Horn is a bust. The sky stays mostly white and the wind is almost overwhelming. The crazy knock-you-down wind follows me all the way to Cody where my room at A Wyoming Inn is just down the street from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

A sign on the museum door asks that you “Check your visible weapons at the desk.” I had read Buffalo Bill’s *Autobiography* before I started this trip, a book he wrote just before he began his career as a world-famous entertainer. The book was full of guns and violence, but mostly guns. I learned that Buffalo Bill, like many of his white contemporaries, enjoyed scalping his victims, something never shown in my beloved Westerns growing up, something adopted from the enemy. Maybe the cowboy got his stoic demeanor from the Indian warrior as well.

The museum is world-class with five sections. One section is devoted to the nature and wildlife of Yellowstone, a useful preparation for the days ahead, including how to tell an ordinary bear from a grizzly and tips on how to avoid being eaten. A short film explains how bears who discover human food never go back to the arduous work of foraging and have to be removed or euthanized because of the threat they pose when they keep coming back for more. I also learn that Yellowstone is where the last few buffalo avoided extinction. Eliminating the buffalo was one of the strategies used to get Indians out of the way of settlers and gold-seekers. Once the buffalo were gone, they would be forced to come into the agencies for food handouts.

The Plains Indians and Buffalo Bill sections of the museum are extensive and informative. “I believe that a man is closer to God out here in the big free West,” says an actor playing Bill in a short film. “It gives him a chance to expand, to know himself, to think.” The Western art section is wonderful, with colorful, romanticized images of cowboys and Indians and horses and buffalo and wide open, magnificent vistas, already beautiful to begin with, made almost mythic with paint and brush. The special exhibition in the Firearms section couldn’t be more appropriate (or boring), with thousands of handsomely-designed vintage killing machines from the Smithsonian Collection on display.

McGlashan says modern culture has become over-masculinized. He says the destruction of premodern values - “the de-sacralising of the world of archaic man” - is seen by some as the greatest of all human catastrophes. He says we need to recover the way we used to see our consciousness as extending upward into the spiritual sphere and downward into the animal. To pursue either the

scientific (thinking) or the religious (feeling) impulse exclusively is “to live on a lower dimensional level than the truly human.”



YELLOWSTONE



YELLOWSTONE

He says the Theory of Evolution is only one aspect of a polarity. "The keynote of nineteenth-century scientific thinking is the unconscious deification of the Evolutionary Process: that is to say, the evaluation of this Process as standing outside all polarities, instead of being one aspect of a pair of opposites – the other aspect being 'the timeless now'." He says the struggle over this viewpoint is nothing new: "Evolutionist and mystic, Time-worshipper and Time-scorner: these two archetypal figures face each other today as... they have always done, each pointing his half-truth as if it were a sword at the heart of the other."

After the best night's sleep on this trip, the sky is blue on Day 11 and it's much less windy. Eastman says the Indian had no temples or shrines, except for nature. It's Sunday and today I will visit God's cathedral. The fifty-mile ride up to Yellowstone through Buffalo Bill State Park and the Shoshone National Forest to the East Entrance of the park is spectacular until it clouds over and actually starts to snow at 8600 feet.

Half of the world's geothermal features are in the Park and the huge lake sits in the Yellowstone Caldera, the largest super volcano on the continent. When the volcano blows it will be catastrophic, rendering two-thirds of the continent uninhabitable. It hasn't blown in 640,000 years but they say it's overdue. I'll take my chances that it doesn't happen when I'm in the Park.

Yellowstone is wonderful but cold and windy when I get to Old Faithful – so windy that when she finally spurts after an hour's wait the fountain is flattened and dispersed. There are geysers and springs and bubbling mud pots everywhere, the unpleasant smell of sulfur oozing out of cracks, fissures and holes on a thin layer of earth. The buffalo are everywhere too, and magnificent, some as tall as six feet, all of them shedding their winter coats. At one point, I pull over to join a handful of other travelers watching two wolves, the apex predators of the park, roaming a vast open meadow.

After another good night's sleep in Cody, it's back to Yellowstone on Day 12. This time, I take the long scenic drive on Chief Joseph Highway and Bear Tooth Highway to the North-East Entrance, and both routes are splendid. Just as it did yesterday, it starts to snow before I reach the entrance and I get a nice shot of the road lined with snow-covered fir trees.

It looks like it's going to stay cloudy and cool all day and I'm feeling tired for the first time on this trip. I take two ten-minute car naps and never make it back to Yellowstone Canyon where I hoped to get a nice shot of the falls. All in all, not a great day with the camera. I leave from the West Entrance of the Park, through

the tourist town of West Yellowstone to the Rainbow Motel in Bozeman, Montana.



BUFFALO BILL STATE PARK, WYOMING



CHIEF JOSEPH HIGHWAY, WYOMING

Yellowstone Park





I have dinner at another Taco John's where I eavesdrop on two older women bemoaning the evils of liberals. The excessive coverage of the primaries and the country's obsession with Trump is depressing. These old ladies, who probably think they are Christian, will likely vote to make this godless bastard the leader of the most powerful country on earth. Maybe they admire his reptilian greed and dream of being (or being married to) world-famous apex predators themselves. This reality TV star is leading in the polls, which could actually result in the end of civilization. A sense of doom is hard to resist. But then wasn't Buffalo Bill Cody the first reality show star with his lavish re-enactments of shoot-outs and Indian wars staged all over the world? This is different: the buffoon is deliberately tapping the dark psychological forces of chaos and destruction that lie within us.

McGlashan says our first aim must be to recover a connection with the translucent mystery, if only momentarily. He says our brain is an organ of limitation that we need to see beyond. We need to find points that lie outside our everyday consciousness, which he says can be found in dreams that can be "an instrument of liberation, capable of breaking up conventional patterns of human perception, and releasing new forms of awareness." He anticipates a sudden mutation of human consciousness that will transcend the world of opposites. He says the world has forgotten that we are instruments – potential alchemists - designed to merge opposites into something incorruptible. I like his suggestion that no intellectual or spiritual expertise is required. I've always felt that the intricate and competitive arguments of (mostly male) philosophers, theologians and commentators are not just a waste of time but an obstruction, the truth being usually either simple and obvious or unknowable.

The plan on Day 13 is to drive slowly through Montana to Butte. I start the day at the Used Book Emporium, which smells like Bibles, in Bozeman. It's a friendly store with plenty of titles by conservative wingnuts and shelves and shelves of books on Christian living and Christian fiction (which I didn't even know was a genre). I have trouble finding a book and almost leave empty-handed before stumbling on a short biography of Charles Darwin by Paul Johnson.

I'm heading back to where I started now with not much of a plan except to drive west as far as Spokane, Washington, before heading north into British Columbia and then back east through the Canadian Rockies to Calgary. I find good coffee at a shop just off the road in the middle of nowhere and take a long break to get my bearings.



MONTANA



BUTTE

Eastman said that whenever the Indian hunter encountered a scene of beauty, he would “pause for an instant in the attitude of worship”. Sort of what I do with my camera on the road. It was supposed to be cloudy all day but the sun peeks out, offering just a bit of warmth, and I realize, not for the first time and not just for the camera, how important the sun is when I’m travelling.

I eat a sandwich on Boot Hill in Virginia City with a great view of the Old West Town maintained as a tourist attraction below, and get some very nice shots later in the afternoon, driving in and out of rain on deserted roads.

I’ve done some research on Butte which sits on the Continental Divide and at one point 100 years ago was known as the “New York of the West” and the “Richest hill on Earth”. A city of 100,000 people at its peak as a mining town, there are 33,000 people living in “The Gibraltar of Unionism” now, most of them white. With less than 1% African American or Asian, it will feel a bit like 1958, like Great Falls last week.

It’s a fine-looking, hilly town, with big old mining shafts and mountain and Edenic valley views everywhere you look. I go directly to Second Edition Books downtown, a first-rate store, the kind of place I would visit regularly if I lived here. I explore the town a bit before heading back to America’s Best Value Inn on the outskirts of Butte where my room has big windows filled with big sky and a beautiful sunset. The full Montana effect. I begin Frederick Buechner’s *Sacred Journey* which will be a quick read.

It’s a cloudless and promising Day 14 and I’m determined to see all there is to see in the city. I would love to have visited Our Lady of the Rockies, a ninety-foot statue of the Mother of God on top of the Continental Divide overlooking Butte, but the roads are not opened yet – there’s still snow at the top of the mountain.

I start the day at the Granite Mountain Memorial Outlook on top of one of the hills being reclaimed from its mining past. Then, I’m the first visitor of the season at the Dumas Brothel which was built in 1890 and remained open until 1982. It’s a mostly unrenovated museum now which definitely feels haunted. The smell of crumbling plaster mixed with the smell and elaborate floral patterns of ancient linoleum carpets reminds me of my childhood. I wander the three stories alone and have a nice conversation with the attendant, whose son is the present owner, on the way out. An old newspaper article on the wall says there is no such thing as a happy hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold, that many begin the lifestyle enjoying the money and frolic but end up alone, disillusioned and rejected.



BUTTE

Berkeley Pit is a mile-long, 900-foot-deep abandoned copper mine pit full of



BUTTE

acidic, arsenic-tinged green water. In 1995, 342 migrating Canada Geese were found floating dead on the surface of the toxic lake. For \$2 you get to stand on a platform overlooking the Pit with eerie sounds (meant to discourage other unsuspecting birds from landing) echoing off the walls of the gigantic hole. It's a special, oddly beautiful and serene place I will end up visiting twice, both times finding myself alone on the platform.

Late in the afternoon, I return to Second Edition Books where I pick up *The Truth About Butte*, a book about the battles between unionized mine workers and owners. I struggle to stay awake past ten o'clock. I'll get an early start and try to make it to Spokane tomorrow.

It's Day 15, the beginning of the third week when I know from experience that a skin has been shed and fresh thinking is possible. The themes of the trip will start to emerge and a narrative begin to form. I'm up stupidly early and begin the five-hour drive at 6:45. It's cloudy now but there's supposed to be sun (and green) in Spokane. Driving through mountains and Idaho along the way, I take lots of breaks, including a visit to the Montana Valley Bookstore where the shelves are much too tall and I can smell and feel the damp mustiness of each book I touch. I don't linger.

I thought I didn't get much from *The Sacred Journey*, the short Frederick Buechner early childhood memoir, but a couple of things are resonating. We both lived in too many homes to ever feel grounded and lost a father (after which he was never spoken of) to suicide at a young age. He says the suicide was a demarcation event and that "childhood's time is Adam and Eve's time before they left the Garden for good and from that time on divided everything into before and after". Before they understood they were meant to die.

Buechner had an epiphany when during military training he was so hungry he picked up a turnip that had been thrown his way but fell onto the muddy ground. He ate it anyway. "With my mouth full of cold turnip and mud, I could see at least for the moment how if you took truly to heart the ultimate goodness and joy of things, even at their bleakest, the need to praise someone or something for it would be so great that you might even have to go out and speak of it to the birds of the air." He's also not the first on this trip to say that God can only be heard in silence, in the absence of the "endless chatter of human thought".

The Berkeley Pit, Butte, Montana



I make it to Spokane by mid-afternoon and head straight to 420 Friendly, a legal weed shop. I have a nice room booked at the cool Ruby 2 Hotel downtown and decide to spend the rest of the day and all of tomorrow on foot, getting to know Riverfront Park and the core of this very attractive city, built around a genuine landmark. The Spokane Falls and River are impressive and the Sky Ride is precious: little purple gondolas moving slowly over the falls, pausing for a couple of minutes over the abyss. I have to do the ride, I would never forgive myself if I didn't, and I'm not disappointed. Alone in my purple gondola, moving from one side to another trying to keep it from swinging too much, I thoroughly enjoy the view of the river and the falls below me.

I like the architecture, including the downtown mall and bus depot. The modern Spokane Transit Authority occupies an entire block and seems to be the hub of the city and a gathering place for people who look like honest-to-God hillbillies. I will see the same people in the area all day tomorrow, just hanging around, talking to each other constantly.

Everybody seems to be talking nonstop here. I will see not one but two young couples arguing so openly that I can hear every word of their conversation. The first couple is sitting on a bench in Riverfront Park where a woman in a pink dress keeps telling a boyfriend who looks like he is trying very hard to understand, "This is what I need from you." The second couple has a tall, rough-looking young man walking away from a young woman who is pursuing him. He has a garbage bag (full of his belongings?) thrown over his shoulder. "This is why I can't live with you," he says. "I would give up everything I have to keep my self-respect." I never overhear conversations like this anywhere else and I kind of like the talkativeness, even though it contradicts the odes to silence I've encountered on this trip. People seem authentic, addressing face-to-face what's happening in the moment.

I find Aunties Bookstore, which is big and impressive, but I'm asked to leave my bag at the counter which kills the vibe and I end up staying less than a minute. I don't feel like being separated from my bag and camera, forced to trust people who don't trust me. I also don't like stores that mix new books with used books. I like the smell of new books as much as old books, but together they cancel each other out. Make up your mind, pick a side!



SPOKANE SKY RIDE



I step into the public library for Wi-Fi and there's a book sale in the lobby. I have a long conversation with Karen the clerk, who is my age. She says people in Seattle call Spokaneites hicks and actually describes herself as a hick. She doesn't seem to know her own town very well: she said there were no cafés nearby but I find a nice one just down the street from my hotel where I don't think I have ever waited so long for coffee.

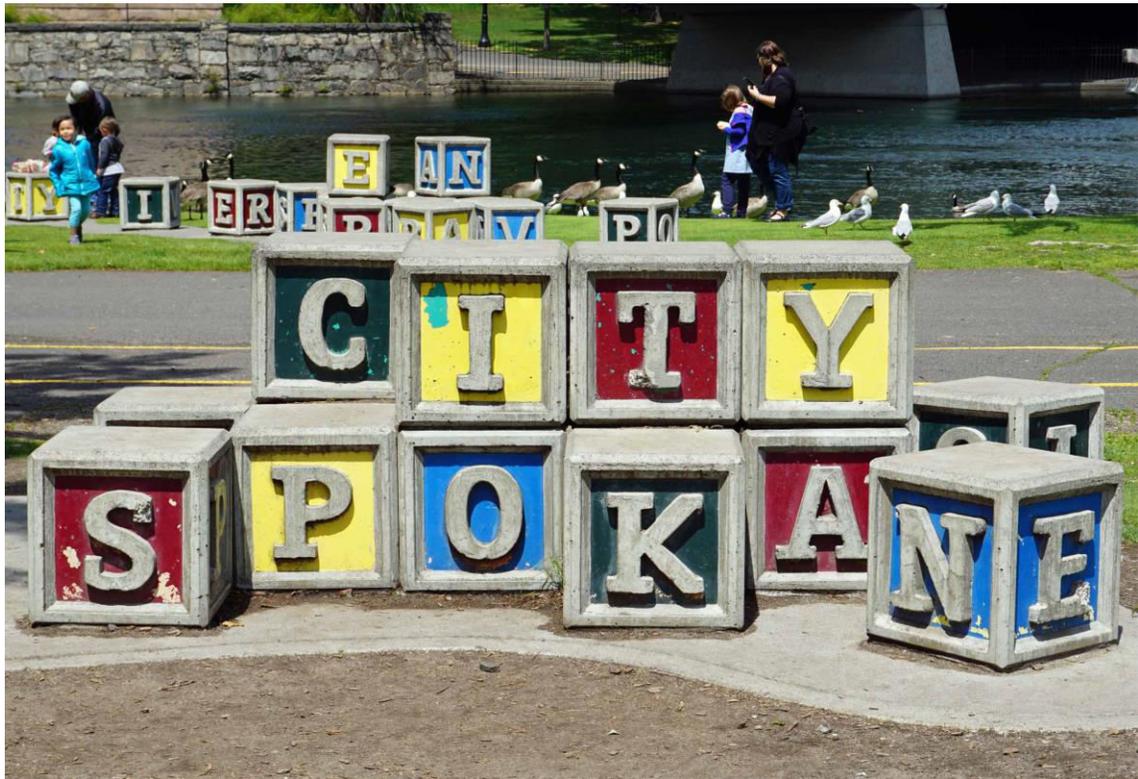
I will experience the same unusually slow and casual service later in a drug store and twice more at this same café. The first time, an older couple the staff treated like friendly, colorful regulars, were chatting to people in the lineup. The old guy, sporting a white supremacy Celtic cross on his shirt, was laughing and telling a dark-skinned young man in the lineup that President Obama could go back to Kenya now that his second term is about to expire. He seemed blissfully oblivious to his racist stupidity. Apparently, this part of the world, along with Idaho next door, is a hotbed of white supremacy groups.

More than once I notice young women wearing far too much makeup and even the nice-looking ones seem to walk funny or have an odd facial mannerism. There are lots of obese people with tattoos and men my age badly dressed and unselfconsciously unwashed. The city is very white, like Montana, but not cowboy white, more hillbilly white, I suppose: people who seem a touch feral, maybe from living in the hills, surrounded and closed in by towering old trees, the opposite of contemplative big-sky cowboy country. A 400-pound man in a huge, ancient parked car stuffed with clothes, bags, sundries and other morbidly fat people, leans out of the window of his car, which actually tilts with his weight, and dumps a load of cigarette butts into the gutter. Still, I like the city very much and know perfectly well that it's wrong to judge a city based on the people who choose to linger downtown.

Paul Johnson's *Darwin* is another short biography, my favorite sort of book. Darwin was a brilliant man with a brilliant heritage of geniuses on both sides of his family. He was a "gentleman scientist" who never had to earn a salary. His father was a very successful doctor who was unscientific in the sense of not being inclined to resort to the strange technology and practices (science) of his time, such as bleeding. According to Johnson, the best doctors of his era were those who paid the least attention to scientifically prescribed remedies.



SPOKANE FALLS



Darwin wrote his classic *Origin of the Species* based on information gathered during a five-year expedition on the Beagle, then waited fifteen years to publish it. He was concerned about how the public (and his wife) would react. It was a huge sensation when it finally came out in 1859, with people like Marx and Engels talking about it the very first week.

According to Johnson, Darwin experienced two shocks on his long voyage. The first was meeting “savages” who struck him as dirty, cunning and ferocious cannibals, a common reaction to first contact with a premodern culture based on fear and misunderstanding. Johnson says this unfortunately led him to see evolution as a violent process, a struggle. The second shock was his grasping of the immensity of time. His famous theory is based on everything being attributable to small, random, imperceptible changes occurring over unimaginable stretches of time, which some seem to regard as evidence that disproves creation when in fact there is nothing to suggest that our world was not designed to unfold this way, and Darwin’s book is called *Origin of the Species*, not *Origin of Life*.

It’s cloudy and cool and then rainy in the morning of Day 16 so I decide to drive up to trendy Garland Avenue for coffee and a visit to Booktraders where I find another Frederick Buechner book, *Telling Secrets*. The sun is out by the time I park the car back at Ruby 2. I’m a bit tired when I sit down in the Transit Authority on the way to Riverfront Park and end up sitting for an hour, observing the lingerers, taking a surreptitious photo and eavesdropping. A teenager sits between a chattering fortyish obese couple and, turning towards the woman (her mother?), says loudly and emphatically but with not a trace of anger or malice, “You’re so full of shit,” and the woman doesn’t blink an eye, like this is normal conversation.

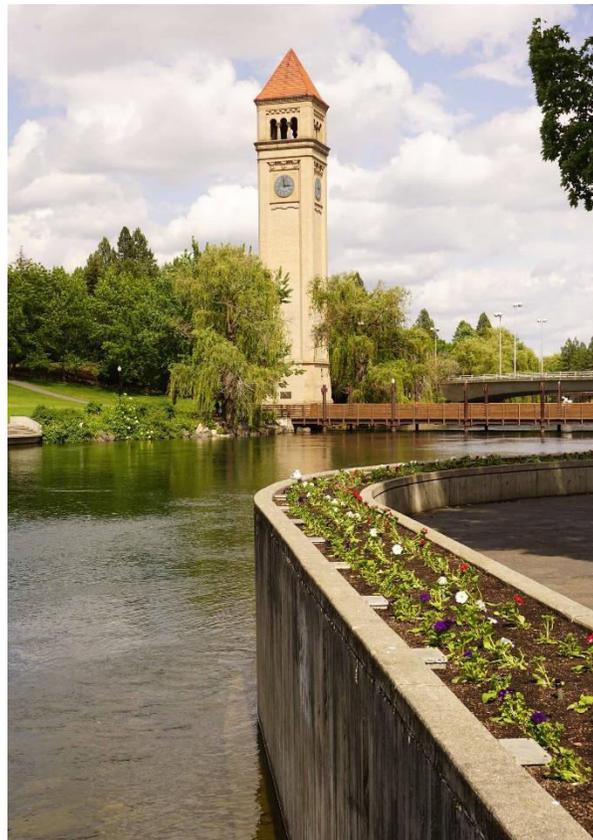
Back in the park I walk upriver, finding more falls and crisscrossing a couple of bridges. The air smells wonderful; is it lilac? The city’s official nickname is “The Lilac City” but its motto is “Near Nature, Near Perfect”. The area around the falls used to be a sacred gathering place for the local Spokane Indians. The city is beautiful but stolen, like everywhere else I guess, only here a bit more recently.

Once again it seems that everybody is a bit crazy here, but a different kind of crazy. In the park, I see a group of about forty extremely excited ten-year-olds running towards the landmark carousel, some of them bouncing balls, and I can’t remember the last time I saw a kid bouncing a ball. Is it 1958 here too? I find my fridge magnet, which is another depiction of a horse, not a real horse like the

Wyoming magnet I found in West Yellowstone, but a carousel horse like the ones in Riverfront Park.



SPOKANE TRANSIT AUTHORITY



THE GREAT NORTHERN CLOCKTOWER, SPOKANE

Darwin was not only worried about religious fundamentalists, he worried about his wife Emma's reaction to his theory. She was a remarkable woman who gave him ten children and they wrote to each other constantly; his nickname for her was "Chattel" and hers for him was "Nigger". In 1839, she confronted him with what Johnson calls one of the great love letters of the 19th century. In the letter, she says, "May not the habit in scientific pursuits of believing nothing until it is proved influence your mind too much in other things which cannot be proved in the same way, and which if true are likely to be above our comprehension." She saw the underlying problem clearly and immediately.

Darwin believed that women were inferior. He also believed in the Lamarckian doctrine that proposed that acquired characteristics could be inherited (that the offspring of a giraffe that has to stretch its neck to reach food will be born with a longer neck), a doctrine that completely contradicts his own theory based on random mutations (that giraffes accidentally born with longer necks are more likely to survive, reproduce and pass along their incidentally long necks). That such a renowned scientific genius could have such contradictory beliefs supports McGlashan's suggestion that the understanding of truth is not based on learning or expertise, that even the thinking of a genius can be obviously muddled.

I'm heading home to Canada on Day 17. I cross the border and drive through beautiful Osoyoos, B.C., a town that seems to think it's California, before heading up to my dorm room at the University of British Columbia in Kelowna, which is more like a cell than a hotel room (I like it).

After I check in, I head over to Pandosy Books and then St. Pius IX church where I walk quickly in and out of Saturday vestigial mass, instantly feeling like an alien intruder. Maybe because the church is unexpectedly packed, which doesn't seem normal on a Saturday afternoon. I'm not sure why, but I don't like Kelowna at first glance. Cooper Street, which seems like the main drag, is a long, seven or eight-kilometer strip mall and there's too much traffic. Maybe the city is expanding too fast.

Osoyoos, British Columbia



I can't decide what to eat and end up with a "classic roast beef sandwich" at Arby's, which is depressing and bad, even by my low standards, but it starts to rain heavily and I decide to wait it out with my book. Johnson says it was a great misfortune that Darwin seemed to not know about a contemporary scientist, the monk Gregor Mendel, who discovered genes. So, instead of adapting his theory to genetics, it evolved into Social Darwinism which applied his notions of struggle and violence to politics and social engineering. Famous, respected people like George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells supported eugenics and the highly esteemed Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, in reference to sterilization laws, that "three generations of imbeciles are enough." Darwin himself was opposed to vaccination for this very reason.

In fact, it was Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, who invented eugenics based on a fear of degeneracy, and Johnson draws a direct line from Darwin's emphasis on constant violence and struggle to Hitler and Marx. The communists used the theory of natural selection as justification for the violence required by a "class struggle" and Hitler once wrote, "If we do not respect the law of nature, imposing our will by the might of the stronger, a day will come when the wild animals will again devour us." Johnson says Darwin's words created a state of mind that promoted imperialism.

I'm up at five on Day 18, with the last two days of the trip planned and nothing left to do but enjoy them. I'm only six hours away from Calgary Airport so there isn't much driving ahead. I'll slow it down and linger as much as possible.

The drive along Okanagan Lake is beautiful but there's nowhere to pull over, so no photos. Slow, slow, slow... this will be the mantra for these last three days in the mountains. I drive all the way to Rogers Pass in the Rockies before heading back to my room (which looks like it hasn't been renovated in thirty years) at the Powder Springs Motel in Revelstoke.

I'm on the road at seven on Day 19, a bit early for good light so I'll move even slower. There's hardly anyone else on what must be one of the world's most majestic highways, and it's sunny at the moment, but there are some big clouds that might be problematic. I'll finish the Darwin book on the way.



SKUNK CABBAGE BOARDWALK, B.C. ROCKIES

First stop is the Skunk Cabbage Boardwalk, a nice long stroll through a wetland with gigantic skunk cabbage that smells like vinegar scattered among the lush and abundant vegetation. Johnson suggests that Darwin loses credibility when he decides that natural selection, in order to make sense, has to apply to absolutely everything. There's no such thing as a theory that explains everything and he misses the most important paradox, which is that natural selection has produced humanitarianism, which stands in direct opposition to a theory based on survival of the fittest.

The water is a wonderful green at Emerald Lake where I find a bench to read and absorb the silence. It's easy to see God in this grand setting, and to hear Him too in the silence. I'm waiting for the sun to come out from behind an enormous cloud. It could take a while but I've got lots of time and there sure isn't anywhere better to be. Johnson's last word on Darwin is: "This alliance of over exuberant science with bad philosophy is a formidable obstacle to truth and the expansion of knowledge." He ends his book with a quotation that suggests that the world is not only stranger than we imagine but stranger than we are capable of imagining.

I have a comforting feeling now that the discovery part of this trip is over. I spend the rest of the day lingering in one of the most beautiful places on the planet, gawking at mountains and spectacular glacial lakes. Lake Louise and Moraine Lake are the highlights. Needless to say, I get some great shots.

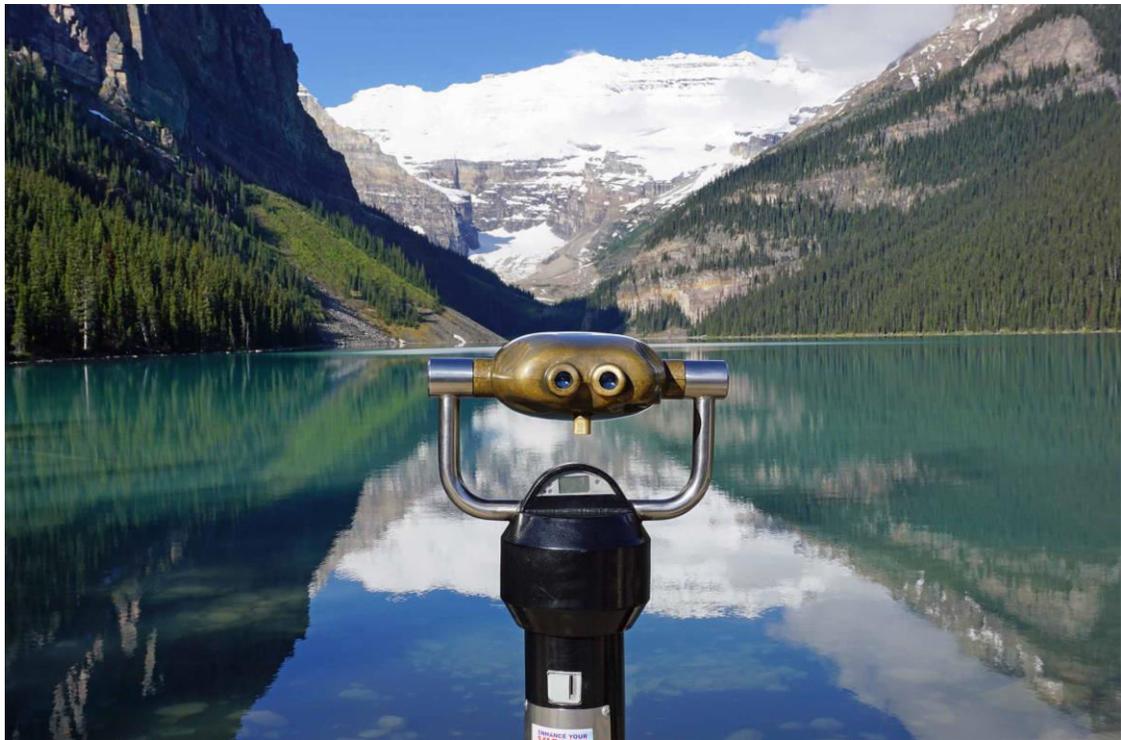
I eventually make it to my room at the King Edward Hotel in the center of Banff, which I thought would be a treat, but I remind myself to avoid tourist towns in the future. Nothing here for me. One more photo foray tomorrow before I head home.

Day 20: this is it, the last day is going to be a long one, endless actually if I don't get any sleep at the airport or on my overnight flight home. The plan is to revisit the lakes I saw yesterday, and Peyto Lake further up the Icefields Highway toward Jasper. The light is not so good at Emerald Lake but I get maybe the best shot of the trip at Lake Louise. I get some nice shots at Bow Lake as well and pull over further up the road to take a photo of a Grizzly Bear romping for tourists and their cameras on a ridge above the highway.

But I save the best for last. After a 15-minute climb up a path to above the tree line, the view of Peyto Lake below is literally breathtaking. It's interesting to see the reactions of people as they arrive. Some gasp, many talk to each other. Even I remark to a stranger about seeing a brand-new color for the first time at my age. A deep, dreamy turquoise blue. Is this the color of heaven?



EMERALD LAKE, B.C. ROCKIES



LAKE LOUISE, BANFF, ALBERTA

I'm done after Peyto and start to head back to Calgary, which is warm and bright but anticlimactic. I decide to return the car early and linger at the airport, which is so empty it seems unreal. I get a table to myself in the almost abandoned food court to pass the four and half hours. There are a just a few dried-out food offerings so it's one last Subway dinner and then time to leisurely finish editing and posting photos and read the notebook and look back at what I found.

It seems I learned more about Indians than Cowboys on this trip, probably because there's more to learn since more has been forgotten about this way of life. "Something forgotten" seems to have been the main theme of the trip. Something we need to remember.

Charles Eastman says there are no atheists or preachers in a culture where people live their religion, where the sacred and cohesive force of the universe can be felt in everything you do. The Indian saw miracles in everything: the tree, the waterfall, the grizzly bear... every thing was an object of reverence, every act a religious act. The woman whispers barely audible words of grace as she serves food and the husband murmurs words of thanks under his breath. The sun penetrates the earth and new life is created.

We've lost this connection that Alan McGlashan says is common to all premodern cultures, a connection that makes life meaningful. But both authors fail to mention the dark side of this olden way of life or the fact that there's no such thing as the good old days and, even if there were, there is no way back. We shouldn't romanticize premodern cultures by whitewashing the harshness. Eastman does this when he tries to justify Indian atrocities by suggesting that women and children were killed by victorious Indians after a battle because a woman without a husband is pitiable and it was thought that the spirit of the warrior would be happier if no widow or orphans were left behind.

Every person and culture has a dark side; they were no better than us and we are no better than them. We are still predators with an urge to eat the world and other living things, one moment following another in a circle of consumption, thing eating thing, teeth chomping, tearing apart, consuming.

McGlashan thinks that we can find our way back to an existence filled with meaning through our dreams. But even prophetic dreams are quickly forgotten or sublimated. We forget or sublimate all sorts of things, some crucial but just too big to ponder, like the fact that we could all be vaporized within hours by nuclear bombs in the hands of unstable politicians. How many important things

have we forgotten or sublimated because they would make our daily lives more difficult? God?



BOW LAKE, ALBERTA



When I finally get around to reading Bede Griffiths' *Marriage of East and West* he will reinforce some of the things that emerged on the trip. He will repeat the metaphor of the feminine being rooted in the unconscious earth, the masculine in the light of the sun. He will say we've split the world into two halves and the future depends on a "marriage" of the conscious to the unconscious. He will emphasize how important it is to understand that the "reality" described by science is in fact a reality reflected through our severely restricted human consciousness.

And he places Mary in the Trinity as the Holy Spirit, representing infinite love from which imagination and creativity flow. Where McGlashan says we need to reconnect through our dreams, Griffiths says we need to reconnect through our imagination, which sounds more plausible (and reasonable) to me.

McGlashan says the problem is we allow thought to govern feeling but I can think of at least two good reasons to avoid acting on feeling. Darwin acted on feelings of fear when he met "savages" on his voyage and assumed that evolution is a struggle, a mistake we are still paying for. And it seems that all good things come from delayed gratification – from not doing in the moment the thing I feel like doing but something better instead. Things go well when reason prevails and I turn away from grasping and devouring things in the world and allow the energy to follow me instead of me being carried outward by desire on the Arrow of Time, one tiny fragment of the Big Bang. When I step back and stand still for a moment and feel like part of something eternal.

But this "feeling" of eternal connection to everyone else and the natural world doesn't mean anything unless I act upon it, and this is where reason is the decider – the agent of change. It's reason that can lift me up beyond the dog-eat-dog chaos of Nature into a superior way of living.

And if there is an evolutionary leap to be made, it might very well come from science. Alan Lightman says our immediate destiny may be to become part machine, part human, capable of learning a new language in five seconds. How enlightening this would be – a leap to a place of deep understanding and empathy beyond the boundaries of language and words.

I can't know anything for sure but I can imagine. I can imagine rituals that when enacted lead to something real. Like this ritual of pilgrimage that takes me to so many places. Looking for something lost maybe.

I need to be conscious of brief moments of awareness when I can feel the presence of a Higher Power. And I need to practice the silence that evokes this presence, and pause every now and then, like the Indian (or cowboy) on his horse, to dismount and look at the world and feel it inside of me. Then maybe take a photo and get back on my horse and carry on.



PEYTO LAKE