

Eaton's Dude Ranch Trip (a journal)

September 2-12, 2005



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Saturday, 08-04-05 - Denver Train Station

My headache journal is going to become my trip journal. It sort of fits since I just took 2 Excedrin. Didn't sleep much, or very well the night before last (too excited to sleep) and on the train I just sort of dozed. Sleep deprivation is a migraine breeder, for sure. Yesterday, I was able to leave my house in good order, and I feel happy knowing that the reason for not getting enough sleep accomplished something. I made it to Lafayette yesterday with little time to spare. The train was on time, arrived and left Chicago on time. It left Chicago earlier in the afternoon than it used to which is nice. There was less time to kill at Union Station and more daylight hours to enjoy the scenery from the train before it got dark. We crossed the Mississippi in daylight, and I never did that before when going to visit Jennifer.

The train was full. My seat was assigned by the matron on board and my seatmate was Margaret—a most interesting individual. I'm not sure she owns much besides the clothes on her back which were neat but not new. She said she has traveled the world looking for "peace" and she has found it on her 4 visits to India and says she will probably not visit India again. She seemed like she could be a few years younger than I. She was very attractive in a no-makeup, natural way. I thought she might be an "old hippy" who never gave up the life-style. I saw a lot of them when I visited Jennifer in Guatemala years ago. But she said she started the traveling in 1988. She didn't speak of husband, children, college or any vocation. She had just spent 2 months with her parents who are well into their 80's and live in the Upper Peninsula where she was raised. She was on her way to New Mexico where she is helping a friend pick organic vegetables. She planned to spend some of the winter there, then the two of them will go to California, and may go to Hawaii after that, a place she loves. I didn't have the nerve to ask how she supported this life-style. It was obvious she was capable of living frugally, but still eating and train travel require some input of funds. I don't know where hers

came from.

At the train station in Denver, I couldn't make any of the bank of telephones work to call Enterprise where I was getting my car. Finally I asked the Amtrak ticket agent to call them for me. Enterprise picked me up shortly after and took me to their office. I am driving a small chevy, fire engine red, similar to my Focus, though the Focus has a much larger trunk.

Sunday, 08-03-05 – Guernsey State Park

It was easy to get on I-25 north from the Enterprise office. The speed limit is 75 m.p.h. and drivers seem aggressive. Soon I was in Wyoming and I ate an early lunch on the south side of Cheyenne. Then I drove to Guernsey State Park near Guernsey, WY where I planned to camp for the night. It breaks my heart to spend \$60 or \$70 to sleep. The campground fee was \$12. The park lies along a lake created by a small dam that I drove over to get to the campgrounds. The campsites are scattered a few to a cluster along the canyon high above the lake. So far I'm the only person in this particular cluster that has a nice view of the lake and a log shelter made by the CCC. This is where I am sitting now as I write. There is a nice breeze coming off the lake which is lovely as it is HOT. Much hotter than I expected. The lady at the park museum said the weather is typical. The camp cluster next to me has a nice family group that is within sight and earshot.

One last thing—in spite of major differences between Margaret and me, we had a lot in common, too: organic food, regret at the materialism of America, dismay over the unfounded fears that people live with, the brainwashing and wasteland of the American media. I'm happy, however, that I didn't have to travel the world to find "peace". I've experienced it most of my life, through my faith in Jesus Christ and His plan for my redemption, and I know that this life is just the starting point.

Sunday, September 4, 2005, 9:00 a.m. IN time, 8:00 Mountain time

There were some blustery winds last night. Using the tent's pegs was out of the question due to the rocky terrain; I used large rocks to hold down the corners of

the tent and with some gusts, my body kept the tent from blowing away. There was some distant lightning and just a few drops of rain on the tent. The high spot I had chosen didn't seem as good a plan in the evening, as in the hot, mild afternoon when I erected it. It was a new experience to hear the wind blow through the canyon. Sometimes it would take what seemed like a full minute from the time I heard it far off, until it's screaming reached me and shook the tent up pretty good. This shake-up came at dusk, and I had an idea (which proved true) that when the transition from day to night was completed, the wind would settle down.

I knitted a few rows before I broke camp in the morning, then drove down to see the Oregon Trail ruts. It was puzzling to look at the layout of the land there and figure why that path over the rocks was the best route available. It looked like it could have been skirted, but perhaps forest stood in the way of the wagon trains at that time. There was a circular hiking trail from the parking area and I walked it counter-clockwise and came up to where the ruts first appear. I was pretty amazed by what I saw as I had supposed they might be barely visible. However, the trail a few hundred feet further brought me to a truly remarkable rut, several feet deep and a hundred feet long, apparently in solid rock though in reality must it have been of some softer material than it appeared.

At one of the Wyoming Visitor's centers (I visited the one on the south end of I-25 and the north end of I-25) I saw a blown-up copy of an old, actual photograph showing a covered wagon family and their "team". The team consisted of single heavy horse in front of the line, next a pair that appeared to be a donkey and an ox, the next pair consisted of a milk cow and I couldn't see what was on the other side.

After a false start that consisted of me parking at what appeared to be the parking for the Registration Cliff, taking off on a long cement walk (for wheelchairs, I supposed) that then ended in a hump of dirt and proceeding on a dirt path from there, I ended up on the road that I had just driven, and so walked back to my car. I got in the car and tried again, driving further to reach Registration Cliff which is a long mesa type

hill with exposed rock at the bottom. The rock is the same soft stuff that has worn down so deeply with the wagon trains, and is easily carved. Apparently everyone who has ever passed by has scratched their name in the side, including some old ones from the original wagon trains. There was also a Pony Express marker near the cliff. These sites were very near the North Platte River. In a brochure I picked up, I read that the organizers of the Pony Express advertised for "400 gray mares" four to seven years old. I wondered why they were to be gray and why mares, and then I started to wonder about the song "The Old Gray Mare She Ain't What She Used to Be". What is the mystique of the gray mare?

The rest of the day was a drive of about 200 miles. I got gas in Guernsey and ate in Douglas where I finally got hold of Jennifer and caught up on her news. Gas is \$2.89-2.99 here.

I should just mention that while I am here enjoying this beautiful western scenery, the complete evacuation of New Orleans has been accomplished from Hurricane Katrina. While I ate supper tonight, I got caught up on that tragedy in the Billings paper.

I am camped northwest of Sheridan at Connor State Historic Site. It is next to the town of Ranchester and is very different from yesterday's campground – a dry, sere, rocky canyon. Here, I'm in a valley, the campground is in a horseshoe bend of a clear stream, and I could push the tent stakes in the ground with my hand.

Monday, September 5, 2005 a.m.

Save for the trains that pass by and whistle every few minutes, it was not a bad night. It seemed like twice an hour at least. The night before in the canyon, I could hear trains too, but they were far off. And someone nearby in Ranchester has a rooster.

Monday, September 5, 2005 p.m.

I'm at the ranch!

Sheridan turned out to be pretty much a bust. It being Labor Day, the streets were all but rolled up. Two stores (J.C. Penney and a western clothing store) were open along with two saloons. I walked most of

main street; the town has been well preserved. I thought I'd do some antique shops out here, but they were all antique and crafts, and judging by what I could see in the windows, mostly "crafts". I think this neck of the woods hasn't been prosperous or populated enough to produce much in the way of antiques.

I came across signs for the "Trails End Museum" and followed those to something that did prove to be open for business. It wasn't what I was expecting, but was the Kendrick mansion. Kendrick, orphaned and raised by relatives in TX came north on a cattle drive, then bought land and stayed. He must have had a most successful cattle operation (210,000 acres) as he went on to become governor, then U.S. senator from Wyoming. The house was beautiful, well maintained and 80% of the furnishings were from the Kendricks. Predicted to cost \$45,000, it ended up costing about \$165,000 five years later. Would that be a significant cost overrun? The house was open from the laundry in the basement to the ballroom in the "attic".

I'm staying in Storybook cabin. It is spacious and western-quiet. It has a lovely fireplace, stoked and ready to light a match. It is supposed to get into the 40's tonight and might feel good come morning. Getting so sleepy. Will finish later.

Tuesday, September 6, 2005 at 7:10 a.m.

I think they don't ring the bell for breakfast so I'll finish yesterday's account and go up to the dining room at 7:30.

The cabin is neat, tidy, well furnished. It has a few too many imitation wood patterns (walls, floors, beds, dressers, game table). The walls have lots of small, framed, dim (old) western cowboy prints. The ceiling is low and tiled, but it all makes a clean and cozy place to stay. There are over 50 cabins here and no two are alike in either style or building materials. My cabin is log and nestles along a high bank. Some cabins have mowed grass around them, some have whatever nature provided. I like my location because I can see the traffic up on the road. Eaton's feels remote, but I notice the UPS man comes every afternoon as do semi's bringing food and other supplies.

Yesterday I arrived at noon in time to take an afternoon ride. I went riding with two other older women from Milwaukee and Stephanie, our wrangler. We went to Chocolate Drop, a peak in the pasture, and crossed Wolf Creek to get there. The views going and from the top were everything I hoped they would be. The ranch is at the head of a wide valley and rests against the Big Horn Mountains and you get a good view of it from Chocolate Drop.

I decided I don't have much natural padding between me and the saddle, but it numbed up somewhat. After the ride, I wondered how long it would be before I could walk normal again. It took about four minutes. But now I'm ready to go again. ☺

Oh, something the cabin does not have: no telephone, no television, no radio, no locks on the doors.

Tuesday, September 6, 2005 p.m.

I'm beat. I rode twice today. After breakfast J.R. – my table mate to the right and Theresa a Ph.D professor/cancer researcher from Pittsburg (across the table), took a ride in the same vicinity as yesterday, but instead of turning up Chocolate Drop, we continued east past a prairie dog town, crossed a narrow creek, then up and around a hillock. There are quite a few trail gates, all painted white and all able to be opened and closed on horseback (they swing both ways). We went back through the hay fields in the valley. It was about a 2-hour ride. My knees and seat bones took a beating as Jose, my horse, is a slow walker and urging him to catch up results in a bone jarring trot. After dismounting the knees do not care to support me or bend, but after a while "normal" returns.

Breakfast is from 7:00 to 8:45. It is served like a restaurant. There is a breakfast special (today it was a cream cheese and chive omelets) or you can order pancakes, cereal or whatever. There is always some kind of fresh made coffeecake. Lunch is at 12:00 and supper is at 6:00. Somebody beats on a huge metal ring to summon you. Lunch today was do-it-yourself tacos. Dinner was half a baked chicken with dressing and frenched green beans. There is always a fresh greens salad bowl on the supper table.

I debated whether to ride after lunch, but when everyone else saddled up, I asked Stephanie if she was taking anyone and she said “no” but she would be glad to ride with me. I think the riding is like eating hot salsa. It hurts, but I just can’t stop.

We went up South Red Canyon, a spectacular ride. Riding up, there is a wall of red across the canyon on the left. Part of the ride is through a high meadow and you get into sweet smelling pines. The trail skirts the canyon edge, uncomfortably close sometimes. It is not a straight drop off, but still awfully steep. Ahead of me Stephanie signaled to me to look at something, I can hear her, but can’t understand her so I plod on. Finally, I see she is pointing at a moose. About that time her horse sees it and starts to spook which sets off Jose as well. He starts backing off the edge of the trail, and I can’t stop him. I look back behind me, and decide the safest place for me is going to be on terra firma so I “hit the dirt”. He runs off a short way then stops. Steph comes down to retrieve him and I crawl back up to the trail. I have a mouth full of dirt and road (trail) rash on my right arm, but seem to be okay save for the pounding of my heart. I remount and we continue. At one point before this incident, I’d pointed to what appeared to be a narrow ridge across the canyon and asked if there was a trail there. Stephanie said “Yes, we’ll go home that way”. Frankly, I was less than enthused about this prospect. However, when we got over there it turned out to have a wider top than it appear from across the way. I asked Stephanie about a marker under a pine tree along the rim. She said, “Oh, there are people buried up here.”

So—yesterday on my ride I saw pronghorn and mule deer. This morning I saw prairie dogs. This afternoon, a moose. (Jerry and Doris who have been coming here for years have never seen a moose.) People have been reporting seeing a bear near the cabins. I have no wish to see the bear.

Wednesday, September 7, 2005

It is interesting what a little mishap will do. It seems everyone knows me now. Even the old wranglers call me by name and this morning, my horse was out even before I signed up.

In the dining room we sit at the same table with the same people for each meal. We have hand made napkin rings with our names on them. I’m at a table that has mostly “old timers” at it. J. R Teegarden is on my right. He is the octogenarian from New York, who just started riding 5 years ago and comes to Eaton’s for a month every year. He dresses very western, has longish white hair pulled back in a band, sort of Indian style. He is 1/64th Cherokee, and the rest of agreed he looks more Indian than that. He is nice, seems to be a non-drinker, is mild mannered and says that is a recent change in his behavior. He has had a recent “God” experience and talks about God quite a bit. He is a widower. He told me on one of our rides that his wife had heart surgery, was recovering very well, when they walked down the hall to call her mother to say she was staying in the hospital through the weekend, and while talking on the phone, she fell back into his arms, and was gone.

Jerry and Doris Cogan (?) sat across to my left and were Irish and from Boston and have been coming to Eatons for several years. They were a friendly couple (especially Jerry) who went almost overboard making me feel at home and telling me that Eaton’s was absolutely the best of all guest ranches, serving the best food with the best trails, in the best location and the most freedom to ride (no guide required, not required to only walk horses). He is very proud of being Irish and is a great Notre Dame fan (imagine that). They took an all day ride one day. When you let the kitchen know, they have a sack lunch ready at breakfast for you to take with you. They were in their mid 60’s, I suppose. Old enough to be retired anyway.

The Nimicks – Theresa and Tom. Theresa is a cancer researcher with the University of Pittsburgh and Tom told us with some pride that she travels all over the world speaking at seminars. I believe he is somewhat older than she, and I don’t think it was the first marriage for either of them. Tom has been coming to Eaton’s since he was a boy in the 30’s. Theresa was an attractive woman in her 50’s, I say. She wore her gray hair short and in a no-nonsense style that professor’s seem to prefer. She had a nice, bit of an

accent, (emigrated from Poland as a child) and wore hundreds of dollars worth of turquoise and silver jeweler every day. She has her own horse (a Missouri fox trotter) that she boards 20 miles from Eaton's and brings to Eaton's when she is in "residence" She and Tom come to Eaton's several times a season. The first time I met her she was mercilessly rude to Tom, interrupting him every time he attempted to talk, until he finally gave up. She must have eliminated whatever burr was under her tail because she was nice enough to him after that. But she let us all know that she was a very busy woman with no time to waste and would usually order breakfast, then leave in something of a huff before it arrived as she had no time to spare. I think she spent time each day talking to her "office". Tom, on the other hand, was always very sweet. He used a cane and I don't think he rides any more. He told us about a cave up on the mountain that has a lake in it and if you cross the lake and have a flashlight with you, you can see his initials on the ceiling that he made with smoke from a tallow candle decades ago.

The day after I arrived the Sempstrot's, Bill and Linda came. Here is a "small world" story. Eaton's makes individual napkin rings for their guests. They look something like a horse with a hole through the middle where the napkin (cloth no less) goes. They are painted in a variety of colors and our names are painted on them. At lunch I saw new napkin rings next to me and I took note of their unusual name because Hickman Heights Christian Church (where my family went for many years) once had a preacher with that name. I'd made up my mind not even to mention it since any relationship seemed too remote (in remote Wyoming) to be possible, but when they arrived for supper and said that they were from Danville, IL, my resolve dissolved. As it turns out, Bill is the preacher's brother. They were an interesting couple. He was a very good looking guy. He said he was 6' 6" and I hadn't guessed him that tall, but he was taller than average and very nicely put together. He was sort of the Marlboro man, sans the cigarettes. I guess one never gets too old to notice such things. They were very "into" horses having owned them, and worked at an Arizona dude ranch themselves at some point. He was in the burial vault business that evidently supported them very well. Linda was friendly

and attractive. They seemed a good match.

One other guest I'll mention. He always did his afternoon riding "bare back" by which I mean he never wore a shirt. His pants fell so low on his hips, that the first time I saw him which was from the back, I was somewhat nervous at what I view I be subjected to when he turned around. (It was okay, barely. ☺) Later, I was riding and talking to one of the wranglers about him. The wrangler said he was there with his mother and a brother. The mother was about my age, was scared to death of horses, and had never been on one, but she did take one ride. The wrangler said that one afternoon he found Mr. Bare Back walking around the barns wearing nothing but a bath towel. The young wrangler was just amazed. He said, "Now there's a man who's comfortable with his body."

Well, I've been somewhat critical of my table mates, I guess, but it really is a lot of fun eating with them. Before I went to Eaton's I'd thought about taking a 2-day overnight trip into the mountains. But, even if my body could take it (it couldn't) I'd not give up the camaraderie of mealtimes. I feel fortunate to have been with a table of "regulars" who have been coming to Eaton's for years and have gotten to know each other in the process.

Okay—where did I ride today? I went with J.R. this morning to Harry's grave on a hill top. Harry is a horse that served the Eaton's for 43 years and has a regular grave marker. Then we went up to Indian Rocks from where we overlooked the "Duck Pond". J.R. brought us home through an alder grove beside Wolf Creek. The creek trail was all overgrown with small trees and was an entirely different ride from the mountains or the pastures. We saw a flock, maybe 20, of wild turkeys. They were considerably smaller than Indiana turkeys. From Harry's hill there were bunches of mule deer leaving a thicket and striking out for higher ground.

In the afternoon I went out with a couple of first time riders in their 70's, and Stephanie our guide. They made me feel like a pro—so frightened were they of everything. I finally finished a ride in something less

than complete misery. I asked Stephanie on this ride if she didn't think I was ready to trade up to another horse. She said, "yes".

One of the guests came in from a ride in the afternoon and said there was an exhausted horse stuck in black mud up to his neck along a trail. From the riding I've done, it is hard to imagine such an accumulation of water to produce such a mud hole, but there must be one because they rode out on horses initially to pull him out, then came back for a truck.

Each morning and evening the horses are driven a quarter mile from pasture to corrals. It is a beautiful sight as they sort of stampede them from place to place. There is a lodge along the trail with a porch across the front. If you sit there in the morning, you can see the wranglers go out to round up the horses. As you watch you can see them coming over the hills in knots of 2 or 3. Finally they are all behind a gate and one of riders leads the way and the horses (probably around 100 when I was there) follow him, trotting up to the corral. The horses winter pasture is about 100 miles south, and I understand that in they spring they are driven (in the spring there are about 250 horses) the 100 miles and the spectacle makes it way through the town of Sheridan.

Thursday, September 8, 2005 Last night ☺

It has been an unforgettable 4 days. Whatever I dreamed this place would be, it has exceeded my expectations by a mountain mile, by God's gracious providence. I love my Storybook Cabin. I like its location, just below the main road. I've enjoyed reading and knitting on the deck. It is a big cabin for 1 or 2 people. The ranch settlement is kind of messy looking, as things tend to be in the west, I think. It seems like all the trees are half dead and where weeds and shrubs grow, they look more unkempt here than in Indiana. Some cabins actually have grass around them that is mowed and some just sit in the weeds, and have vines growing over them. They still have their original row of bunkhouses that the put up 100 years ago. If I ever should come again, I'd like to stay in them. The Eaton homes are mixed in with the cabins and not much appears to be planned EXCEPT the

location of the ranch is just ideal for taking off on a variety of scenic rides.

The weather has been super. Not a drop of rain and the heat has been reasonable. I expected it would be cooler, and most all the guests say that too, but I understand that this is normal.

I expected that anything you would buy here would be pretty salty and the gift shop items are too expensive for my budget. But post cards were 25 cents, AA batteries were 50 cents each, soft drinks were a dollar which all seemed pretty reasonable for a resort type of place.

Lord willing I will complete my 8th ride tomorrow. I still hurt, but I'm doing better. This morning J.R. led the way to the Badlands, and a gentle ascent to the top of the north Red Canyon. Every trail ride has incredible vistas—sometimes short mountain views, sometimes long, wide views of the grasslands. We came down through North Red, a much steeper descent and hard on the knees. I am amazed by what the horses can negotiate. I ascended and descended passages that seemed to me should have been marked "For Mules Only".

I think J.R. is not able to do as much riding as in the past. He's only going out in the mornings. But I think he is pretty amazing to do what he does at 82. I can't imagine that I'll be in that kind of condition 20 years from now.

This afternoon I caught a ride with a California company retreat group. There were probably 12-15 of them going to South Red Canyon. That's where Steph and I saw the moose, and I figured he was gone so I wasn't concerned with that. However, I wasn't thrilled to be repeating a ride. As it turned out—it was not a repeat. We went up the East side this time, and returned a different way than we'd come down on Tuesday. The group was headed for the cave Tom had told us about, but one of the riders had a horse that had no intention of making the last leg to the cave. The wrangler worked with the rider (she was about as firm as a dead fish) for about 30 minutes, then gave up and led us through a Missouri gate (barbed wire)

down past Chocolate Drop and Windy Canyon and good 2 hour ride.

I got to talk to the Wrangler a bit. He asked me how I liked Tuco, my new horse. I'd requested an upgrade from Jose. Tuco was great. The wrangler said he'd worked at Eaton's since February when they hired him to build fence. He said he liked to build new fence, but hated repairing old.

If J.R. is willing, I'll probably do my final ride with him in the morning. It won't be as physical as some, but since I'll need to get in the car and drive 6 or 7 hours, a gentle ride will be fine.

September 10, 2005 9:50 p.m. Denver train Station

Best estimate is that we will leave in an hour. We were scheduled to leave at 7:20. I've been here since about 2:30. I've done a lot of knitting.

Yesterday I did ride with J.R. We attempted to go to a grassland peak called Bozeman (I think the Bozeman trail crossed Eaton's Ranch) but we didn't make it. J.R. was trying to get there without going through this brushy place we had traversed the first morning and we missed the trail. J.R. felt bad, but I had a slight headache, and it seemed hotter than the other days so I wasn't unhappy to cut it a little short. There comes a time when you must move on, and the time had come for me. So we rode to the barns and I settled my bill and hit the road back to Sheridan, then back down to I25. I'm not sure where I ate lunch and got gas at about 2:30. At Wheatland I took WY 34 down to US 30 into Laramie. The map indicated a mountain pass on WY34. It was a very good road, and I saw some penned Elk, but never knew when I crossed the mountain pass. It was not what I was expecting. Laramie didn't appear to be too much, but the road (210, I think) I took to get to the Curt Gowdy State Park, passed through the Medicine Bow National Forest and was very interesting. The terrain consisted of hilly grasslands with great collections of giant granite boulders.

Curt Gowdy State Park (yes the famous sports announcer—not sure how he got a St. Park named for

him) has many groups of camp sites surrounding 2 small lakes and oddly, all are in view of private homes. It is spread out quite a bit with very few sources of water. I settled on a site, pitched my tent, then went to the latrine with 2 cups of water to wash up. I can do an amazing clean-up with a pint of water, soap and rag.

An observation on Wyoming. It is a clean state. Streets, public restrooms and park rest rooms are very tidy. And somebody has figured out how to make pit toilets that have no odor. Observation #2: Wyoming seems to have a dearth of local restaurants, but every little town has several saloons (yes, in Wyoming they really are called saloons) that don't open before 11:00 or so. They serve food, but no breakfast, of course. Everyone must eat breakfast at home.

The ground is getting softer and I had a pretty good night until day break, when a ferocious wind broke loose. If I hadn't been laying in the tent, it would have blown to Cheyenne. I wasn't sure what I should do, but there wouldn't have been any way to take it down in the storm. I had an idea that the wind would subside as day overtook night and it did. I had a similar experience at Guernsey when the sun set. This was much worse, however.

There was a little bit of rain with the wind so I just spread the tent out in the trunk to dry some. When I left the park, I drove back a couple miles the way I had come the night before to take some pictures of the neat boulders and I came across 3 big turkeys crossing the road. They looked liked the Indiana varieties.

I headed for Cheyenne determined to eat down town. Cheyenne isn't very big, but is very clean and has an interesting, and apparently thriving downtown. There was a large farmer's market in the square where I bought a large and delicious peach for \$1.00. At last, I found the Capital Café, a part of the venerable old Plains Hotel, and here I had a very good breakfast.

There is a big Wrangler store in Cheyenne. I think it may be the original one. I could have a lot of fun in there with about \$2,000. I wouldn't have any trouble

at all going “western”. I waited around until 11:00 for a flea market shop to open. I’d seen in the window that he had a lot of used boots, hats, belts. But when I got in the store, there wasn’t too much else that interested me, so I headed back on I25 and stopped at the CO welcome station to fold up the tent and stow my gear. Then on to Denver. The traffic is horrific north of Denver. I wouldn’t care to negotiate that very often.

I filled the little car with gas and bought a subway meal, my last for the day. Enterprise brought me back to the train station. I’ll have been here 9 hours assuming the train does get here at 10:20.

Summary—Wonderful trip. I’m glad I rented the car and drove through Wyoming as I very much enjoyed seeing more of Wyoming than Sheridan and Eaton’s. Eaton’s Ranch, however is just amazing. It is believed to be the oldest dude ranch, begun by 3 brothers who bought land in North Dakota, then moved to their present location when they were over run by friends from the east who wanted to come and ride and work on their ranch. The original 3 brother’s offspring still work and run the ranch today and the hospitality of the 3 still runs thick in the blood of their progeny.

Will I go to Eaton’s again? Probably not. It is just too expensive. I like to bring my vacations in at under \$1,000 and I spent something less than \$1,500 on this one. I was gone 10 days. However, if one can go in the off-season which is early June, or mid August through September, the rate of \$160-175 a night is really very reasonable as it includes lodging, 3 excellent meals a day and all the horseback riding you care to do. There were no “hidden” charges. Eaton’s is a ranch that caters to horseback riding. If you think you want to round up and brand cattle, this won’t happen at Eaton’s. But if you want to do all the horseback riding you care to do, with a guide or without, walk, canter or run your horse, in variety of beautiful surroundings, with hosts that really enjoy having you around, I don’t think you could beat Eaton’s.

September 11, 2005 – 10:00 a.m. Rolling across Iowa

I slept better last night than coming out. For one thing

I had 2 seats to myself. For another, I bought a travel blanket at Wal Mart in Sheridan. I was pleased to find one on sale for just \$4.00 (Others were \$16.) On the way out I was chilly at night; this time I was toasty warm.

September 12, 2005 11:00 p.m. Sitting in my Indiana bed.

Home looks good and everything is in good order. I spent most of the day creating a slideshow with my pictures. Then I picked a bucket of tomatoes. I was rather hoping that the tomatoes would be over by the time I came back. Then I went to visit John and Debbie. Debbie fed Sally for me while I was away, and I’d bought her some earrings at Eaton’s. The only souvenir I bought myself from Eaton’s was a pair of luscious, soft deerskin work gloves, that have the Eaton’s horse logo on them.

The train got into Chicago 3 hours late, but I was still able to catch The Hoosier to Lafayette. Got there about midnight and home around 1:00 a.m. Fought a headache all day yesterday, but it is finally gone. Praises be, no headaches to write about on the trip!

Epilogue: Why did I take it upon myself to travel to a Wyoming Dude ranch at the age of 62 years?

About a year ago several secretaries and staff members from work, were standing around talking about vacations they had just taken, and the discussion turned to “dream” vacations. In my turn, I said that I had always thought it would be fun to spend time riding at a dude ranch. They turned to me and said with sincerity, “Do it.” Their response amazed me; it was not what I was expecting. But I decided if they thought I could, I could. The next step was to decide where to go. I googled “Big Horns” (mountains I have always enjoyed passing by) and “dude ranch”. Eaton’s is what came up and I didn’t look any farther. I decided to take the train and rent a car because I know it may be my last foray into the west, and I wanted to see more of it than flying in and out would provide. And the rest is now history, as they say.