

# Summer Sneakers



"Cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to tour!"

## Hot Air Ballooning — The Last Travel Frontier

BY BUDDY BASCH

In our highly mobile society, most American students have toured this country (and overseas) by plane, train, car or bus. Some have traveled by bicycle, motorcycle, mule, horseback or gone via skateboard, tram, surfboard or the original way — on foot. Very few, however, have had the fun and excitement of a hot air balloon ride, a sport that's becoming increasingly popular. Owning a balloon and its gear isn't

cheap, but flights in them at fairs, meetings and balloon rallies are relatively inexpensive, considering the unique excitement they provide. There is literally nothing like soaring among the clouds.

Ballooning is different for several reasons: speed or direction cannot be controlled, the wind decides that. Wind direction determines landing sites, and there is obviously no steering apparatus or brake. There's also no noise (except the gas burner's comforting sound) and, since balloons move at the wind's speed, there's no breeze and very little feeling of motion.

Our initial experience was at the Great Wisconsin Dells (Wis.) Hot Air Balloon Rally. We arrived at the field at 6 a.m. Balloons were lying on the ground, burners were lit and huge fans were forcing hot air into the balloons, which were already hitched to gondolas. The bags filled with hot air and rose slightly, tugging gently at the gondolas.

Pilot Ray Johnson, an Illinois state transportation official, an expert balloonist and a fixed wing pilot, received permission from a rally official and motioned me into the gondola. It being upright, this entailed something like leaping over a four-foot fence. Johnson and his co-pilot friend followed me in and Johnson turned on the propane burner and adjusted the mixture. We started

what I thought was our ascent, but the gondola tipped over, piling Ray, his friend, my photo equipment and me on the cold Wisconsin Dells dirt in a heap.

Onlookers from other teams rushed over and righted the gondola, because laughter had rendered us unable to help. "Not enough juice," muttered Ray. "Hang on, this time we're going!" The heat blast reflected down and I was glad I'd put on the motorcycle helmet given me earlier. Then came a funny sensation — not like the effect of going up in an elevator, an airplane, escalator or swing, but the feeling that I was remaining still and the ground was falling away from me.

We quickly gained an altitude of 500 feet. The only instruments on board indicated fuel, altitude and direction. Our speed increased to about 50 miles an hour and Johnson explained the two ways balloonists can slow down: bump gently on the ground or bang along the treetops. He did the first, after showing me how to brace myself. It felt like I'd jumped off a four- or five-foot ladder. He hit the ground, immediately increasing the gas and rising. Then he started banging treetops, too high and we wouldn't slow down, but too low could be disastrous if we got caught in the treetops and the gondola tipped. It's worth mentioning here that no one wears parachutes. They wouldn't help, as we were too low to allow them to open properly.

After about twenty minutes aloft, Johnson said we were getting low on gas and asked us to look for a level field. I pointed to one about a thousand feet ahead. The wind shifted and Johnson sighed, "We'll never get near it. We need one ahead, a little to the right — about one or two o'clock." We spotted another area and Johnson turned down the gas jet. Suddenly an unnoticed power line loomed up just ahead. Johnson hastily cranked the gas way up and we did a motion like jumping over the line, all agreeing we hardly wanted to land on it!

Gas was getting quite low and Johnson looked a bit worried. "We should find a landing spot quickly," he said, emphasizing the last word. He grabbed the radio. "I'm near a big swampy field, just north of a railroad crossing with a pond on the right. The farmhouse is white with a red roof on a dirt road. No more transmissions. Out!"

The field looked as though it was under water. "Can't help that. Brace yourself for the landing." I grabbed the two nearest ropes, squatted slightly and we bumped down surprisingly softly, right on the edge of a bog with almost no fuel left. "Get out before the bag collapses," shouted Johnson. We jumped onto damp ground, feeling as though we had "sea legs," a sensation which lasted only a few minutes.

A farmer ran over, surprised at the way visitors had arrived on his land. He was pleasant enough, inquiring about equipment, how we happened to choose his field, how hard it was to fly, etc. (Most U.S. states have a "Welcome Trespasser" law which says, in effect, one cannot be prosecuted for trespassing, because you have no control of where you land, but you are responsible for any damages caused by your landing.)

Little more than five minutes later the "chase car" arrived, we all lifted the gondola onto the trailer attached to the station wagon, removed the burner unit, folded up the balloon and tied everything down securely.

On the way back to the starting field there were refreshments from the beautifully-equipped wagon's refrigerator. There were also comments about our flight, seemingly-exaggerated tales of

earlier flights (probably for this novice's benefit, judging by the smiles) and anecdotes about other balloonists. It was all in fun — which is precisely the way one could describe the entire exhilarating experience.

*There are so many balloon rallies and clubs, as well as other special events, it would be impossible to list them or to quote prices for participating. It's fair to assume that approximately \$20-\$50 (depending on length, location, fuel cost and other factors) would be an appropriate charge for an ascent. Interested readers should contact their state's Department of Transportation or Aviation, Civil Air Patrol, the Public Library or the Public Affairs Section at your closest airport.*

## North to Alaska

BY DON ROBERTS

The most primeval path in America heads north. Wisdom from the simplest waterfowl dictates the direction — turn right at the blue Pacific and keep pounding pavement until the neon glow of civilization fades into mountain darkness. Immediately west of Anchorage and north of Fairbanks the ardent nomad will discover a corner of continent coolly uncivilized by roads — one vast vault of wilderness. Wilderness and nothing but...

Alaska... it's more accessible than you think. However, getting there is more than half the problem and way more than half the expense. But it is a misconception that you must sacrifice your entire net worth, plus violate unguarded piggy banks, just to secure passage to Jack London-land. Whether travelling by land, sea or sky, your brain (not your life savings) will get you farther north, more miles-per-wiles, than the most foodloose statesider would imagine.

## Not All Can Alcan

The Alaska-Canadian highway is hard in more ways than one. Nearly all of the Canadian portion of this timbered thoroughfare is gravel-surfaced and in some places barely surfaced at all. The dust is so overwhelming that it is illegal to drive without your headlights blazing and even then cars are often swallowed up like the victims in a B-grade sci-fi flick. Any vehicle which is not sealed as tightly as an Egyptian tomb soon acquires the interior of a can of Calumet, while the shrapnel-like gravel gnaws the exterior and chews steel-belted radials as if they were Hubba-Bubba.

But don't let these practicalities numb your Nikes. The meandering mercenary who is motivated may harness some cheap, possibly free, horse power. The tactic is prosaic but not altogether artless. Simply run a classified ad in the Portland, Seattle, or Vancouver (B.C.) newspaper offering to help with the task of driving to Alaska. Timing and not a little luck will make the difference between wheeling 'n dealing or just spinning your wheels.

## High Planes Drifter

By winging it to Alaska on Wien or Western Airlines you can leave home in the morning and ogle a moose on the muskeg by late that after-

noon. But sky travel has lofty disadvantages: 1) you can't get there on pop-bottle refunds and 2) you miss a lot of country, a sense of the scope of the continent, when soaring over the planet at 40,000 feet. Obviously it is necessary to hug the stratosphere to avoid bumping the landscape, but the ticket can be brought down to earth.

If you join a group you may capitalize on tour rates — 25% to 35% less damage than individual fares. By remaining with the flock, you may also receive considerable discounts on lodging, overland transportation and even grits. For the self-starter there is one other scam ripe for the squeeze. Most airlines (depending upon the rules of the specific carrier) will absorb the bill for any cowboy capable of mustering a herd of 15-40 simultaneous passengers.

Camaraderie also allows the cost effective hiring of a bush plane, the most common mode of "mush" in modern Alaska. Float plane fees average about 120 cents an hour, but these sturdy craft will haul four passengers and enough camping gear to establish an incorporated town. Split four ways, a relatively ambitious flight may be financed for mere bird seed.

## Sea Alaska

Since Alaska has more coastline than the rest of the United States combined, the Alaska Marine Highway system is as natural to the north as sordough pancakes. Nine vessels comprise the fleet and although these ferries do not feature the opulence of *Love Boat*, they are the most snazzy and snug "busses" in Alaska. While private staterooms can be reserved in advance, both the dorm and deck rates better accommodate the pilgrim on a pittance.

Ferry passage costs a quarter of the simoleon required for air travel and it is twice as educational, not to mention the immeasurable entertainment factor. During the off-season, which is most of the year (September to June), you can well afford the ferds. Tickets on the Alaska Marine Highway are never cheaper and one may elect to extensively sail the "inside" with the express purpose of floating into scenic delirium — including whale in their favorite wallows and the most extraordinary mountains-meeting-sea on the globe.

To gain access to parlors of jutting ice and the satin hysteria of a thousand waterfalls, write to the Alaska Marine Highway, Pouch R, Juneau, Alaska 99811.

## Beating Around the Bush

There is too much wilderness in Alaska, both designated and undesignated, upon which to merely reflect, much less leave an impression of your Tyrolean hiking boots. Consequently, to become familiar with even a small percentage of the natural wonders you must limit your scope... select the specific geologic decor which focuses in your mind's eye.

The Valley of the Ten Thousand Smokes, a lunar-like landscape created by volcanic tantrums, resides in short-fused harmony within the forested boundaries of Katmai National Monument. Apart from the eerie, ash-filled valleys, this 16,800 square kilometer monument — more than twice the size of Delaware — offers boating on island-studded lakes, countless hiking trails and more wildlife than a Disney feature. Come to Katmai prepared for any barometric extreme from sunshine and skivvies weather to sudden *williwaws*, cold and gusty rainstorms that can blow your socks off with your boot laces tied.

With subtle transfer from fire to ice, Glacier Bay Monument is sanctuary for creeping phantoms of ice. This 13,579 square kilometer park hosts slumbering remnants of the ice age that began 4,000 years ago, including 16 active tidewater glaciers, gouged-out fjords, and bays silently populated with drifting icebergs. Although this area is starkly foreboding, wildlife, particularly sea birds and mammals, abound. The few rugged hiking trails ensure isolation. For those who wish to press muzzle-to-muzzle with deer, moose, bear, foxes, wolves, caribou, and the rare dall sheep, Mt. McKinley National Park is unrivaled. Dominated by a mountain so high (6,194 meters) and massive that it creates its own weather, this broadly based park is divided into separate ecosystems. A limited access scheme guarantees that you may explore any one of these distinct areas and never bounce an eyeball off another soul.

## Advice and Ascent

Before blithely treading unfamiliar mountain terrain one must acknowledge the implied dangers. The ignorant and ill-prepared often set themselves up for surplus suffering. Carefully study your routes and destinations in Alaska and always leave a copy of your itinerary with the nearest ranger station or county-mountie before proceeding into the depths of the bush. If anything should go awry they'll start looking long before your bones are unearthed in an archeological dig.

Shape up before shipping out, there is no substitute for a backpack bivouac and taking measure of your lung and leg power. Do not for a moment consider skipping — Spartan is silly. Top dog foul-weather wear, munificent mountain tents, minus-0 sleeping bags, and cushy ground pads are often the only articles keeping the rigor from turning mortis.

Do not under any circumstance leave home without your Foster Grants. The sun ricochets off the ubiquitous waterways and snow-fields with penetrating ferocity and only polarized singlasses will keep your vitreous humor-ous.

EVERYTHING you have heard about the curse of Alaska's militant and mutant mosquitoes is true. But if you dip your dermis in *Muskol* daily you will remain relatively immune to a bloody blitzkrieg.

If you should forget your sunglasses and Muskol, first you'll be struck blind, then the "mosies" will slice your hide thinner than corned beef at a New York deli.

No creature on the tundra can inspire terror like the bear, especially *Ursus horribilus* — the grizzly or brown bear. Since visitors to National Parks are not allowed to pack Howitzers, the best safeguard against belligerent bears is intelligent pacifism. Bears are grumpy, near-sighted warlords but they will leave you alone if you do not crowd their territory, holler at them, or wave your arms and act demediate. Bears interpret such behavior as aggressive.

Stand still and show bruin your face. The furless human countenance is an awful sight and a natural deterrent. Never turn and run; bears spontaneously chase cowardly critters. Stay placid, even if pale around the gills. Grizz and you will come to a mutual agreement regarding space.

If you desire wilderness lodging but don't quite relish the uncertainties of camping out, then the Forest Service Cabin System may be your cup of comfort. These cabins are located in



two regions of southeastern Alaska — the Prince of Wales Island and the Ketchikan/Revillagigado Island area. Each cabin is splendidly isolated and access is possible only by boat, float plane or trail. Some cabins are situated on the salt chuck, while others reside on streams and mountain tarns.

Forest Service cabins are held by reservation on a first come/first served basis. Reservations are not accepted until the rental-maintenance fee of five frog-skins per night is paid. To keep lulled patrons from home-steading, the limit of stay is seven nights in the summer and ten nights in the winter. The Forest Service has prepared a sleek, 35-page catalog which is free upon request: Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest, Box 2278, Ketchikan, Alaska 99901.

## Mountain Matriculation

Noted ecologist Eugene Odum once stated that "... there is more information of a higher order of sophistication and complexity in a few square yards of forest than there is in all the libraries of mankind." The dedicated pastoral pupil owes it to himself to study a piece of Alaska — a veritable black hole in the terrestrial Universe.

## Making a Travel Guide

BY BARBARA J. ROCHE

When Harvard graduate student Linda Haverty traveled in Europe last summer, she dined on sheep cheeks, a cheaper menu item in Austria, snacked on a marzipan Ronald McDonald, and had a satchel of travel brochures and notes confiscated after a one-and-a-half-hour search when she entered East Berlin. These were some times to try a traveler's soul, but it was all in a summer's work for Linda, one of twenty student researchers contributing to *Let's Go Europe 1982*.

Over a half million student passports are issued each year, and the odds are good that students traveling to Europe will be packing an edition of *Let's Go* along with their passports and student I.D.'s. The *Let's Go* series is the only collection of travel guides written for students by students and updated annually.

*Let's Go Europe 1982* covers some 31 countries, including Iceland, the U.S.S.R., Egypt and Tunisia. The guide was researched, written and edited by Harvard students under the auspices of Harvard Student Agencies, a student service organization. From the basement offices off Harvard Yard, student editors work out itineraries.

Student researchers spend the summer in assigned countries, checking accommodations, tourist sights, restaurants and cultural information. The research priority is finding ways to make the trip affordable and interesting. Honesty in reporting is emphasized, and the result is a guide that tells it like it is... even when a city or hotel isn't so hot.

"If a place is cheap, but a little on the dirty side, we'll still mention it," said Rob McCord, student researcher who spent time in Iceland, West Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg. "But" he added, "we also mention that it's not the cleanest place in the world."

"We include these places and let people decide," added Linda Haverty, "because it's usually a relative thing. What one person considers to be a real lousy place, another wouldn't mind."

*Let's Go* has taken off since the first five-page guide to Harvard University charter flights was stapled together and distributed on the campus in 1957. Twenty-five years later, *Let's Go* is published by St. Martin's Press in six editions, including Europe, U.S.A., and regional editions on Britain and Ireland, France, Italy, and Greece, Israel and Egypt. Over 180,000 copies of the books were sold in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia and Japan last year, and one *Let's Go* staffer estimates that each copy is read by an average of five people.

What's the secret? "Most guides are written more for the fun of reading than to actually be used," McCord said, "... and not incidentally, they're written for a higher expenditure of money."

McCord pointed out two areas where *Let's Go* differs from other travel guides. One, they're paperback newsprint guides made to be taken with you, and two, cost is a constant consideration in the guide's recommendations.

"Unfortunately, we can't just charge things to the company," McCord laughed, "We're constrained by our own budgets, so we have to be looking for the best deals on things."

Unlike other travel guides, where advertisers can pay to be written up favorably, *Let's Go* keeps advertising out of its editorial decisions.

