

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (V)
Columbia River, Mt. Hood, Bend and Weed Oregon, Mt. Shasta, Old Town
Sacramento, Palm Springs**

Traveling America (V) Report One: Columbia River, Mt. Hood, and Bend, Oregon

January 23, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This report takes your reporter and his team through parts of western America. As shown in Figure 1, we departed from Northern Idaho, traveled through the middle of Oregon and California, and ended-up in Palm Springs, California. There we languished for a week, taking in the sunshine and defrosting ourselves from a Northwest winter.



Figure 1. Route for Traveling America (V).

The Columbia River

Traveling in Northern Oregon, we drove for over an hour while paralleling the Columbia River. Initially, I thought we had come across a lake, as the river is wide at the point where we encountered it, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The Columbia River.

This part of the river is lined with treeless banks and brown ledges of scrub; scenes not found in tourist bureau brochures. But what this part of the river lacks in looks, it makes up in commercial value. We saw many large ships and barges, as well as dams along about 80 miles of our journey. We did not travel the part of the river where the Grand Coulee Dam is located (in central Washington). We did pass by the John Day dam, another important power project in the system.

Once a cornucopia for salmon, dam construction, and pollution have killed-off most of the fish stock on this river. In an effort to revive the fish canning industry, plans were established in 1994 to restock the river with salmon and increase the water flow through the dams.

One would have thought these efforts would have led to political tranquility among the Greens and Browns. Tranquility did not come about. As of this writing, squabbling and resultant lawsuits are springing-forth between: (a) Browns, who want more dams, (b) Greens, who want more fish farms, and (c) a group of people who want no dams or fish farms.

Mt. Hood

On the return journey a few weeks later, we took a different route through northern Oregon and passed around Mt. Hood, as seen in Figure 3.¹ A spectacular mountain, it is the tallest point in Oregon (11,239 feet). As you see, even during the fall, its top part is already covered in snow.



Figure 3. Mt. Hood in the fall.

During our time in this area, several hikers lost their way on the mountain. They were lucky. All were rescued by emergency patrols, which are set up to take care of adventurers who spend our tax money playing-out yuppie roles of lost and inept adventurers.

I favor a lost-inept hiker assessment. Similar to a road toll towing assessment, a person pays for the rescue service, but only if it is used. Plus, they pay ahead of time. No credit:

- Ring, ring. "Hello this is the Mt. Hood Rescue Service, at your rescue!"
- "You're calling from your cell phone....and you're lost somewhere on Mt. Hood?"
- "Describe your surroundings, so we can get an idea of your location."
- "You say it's white? Yes, I suspected as much. Lucky for you we keep a log on hikers, so we have an idea of their locations. Before we launch our rescue team toward your rapidly solidifying body, we must go-through some administrative matters."
- "First, your full name please?...Thanks, and what credit card will you be using for this service?"

¹ Dave Lowe, picture by ALLSTOCK, *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*.

- "Don't get upset! I don't make the policy around here. Yes, I recognize you're freezing to death. As you are aware, climbing an exposed mountain during a snowstorm tends to introduce hypothermia into the adventure."
- "OK, Visa. Thanks...Card number?...Thanks. The three-digit security code? You know, on the back of the card."
- "Don't swear at me sir! I'm not the person stupid enough to be stuck on the side of an icy mountain without a compass, a tent, or a Bunsen Burner. That would be you...Fine, I have the information and I'm now verifying it with Visa."
- "Sorry, sir, Visa tells me you've exceeded your credit line. Do you have a MasterCard handy?"

Maybe I am a curmudgeon, but I do not favor paying for the poor judgment of wanna-be Edmund Hillaries. And I will wager my favorite bubble gum card of Nepal Sherpas that a few more National Geographic week-enders might exercise a bit more caution if they knew they were responsible for their own safety.

Bend, Oregon

We spent the first night on the road in Bend, Oregon. After finding a place that admitted dogs (It was named We Let Sleeping Dogs Lie Motel), I attempted a conversation with the night desk clerk (and no jokes here):

- "Say, how did Bend get its name?"
- "Dunno. Don't much care about Bend or its name."
- I was tempted to ask if he would refer me to the motel concierge, but I let it go, as Motel 2 did not have a concierge desk. The next morning, I asked the day clerk. "Say, how did Bend get its name?"
- "It used to be named Farewell Bend. In the old days, when the loggers left town for the season, they would say, 'Farewell Bend.' So, folks started calling it Farewell Bend. Later, Farewell was dropped from the name."
- "Thanks. I think I just learned how Bend got the part of its name, which is no longer part of its name. How about the part of its name that is still part of its name? What does 'Bend' mean?"
- "I wouldn't know about the Bend part. I just know about the Farewell part."

Who cares? I care. And so should you. Why live in ignorance? Determined to get to the bottom of this mystery, I remembered one of my sisters-in-law used to live in Bend. As we departing the town, I called her.

- "Hi Beth, we just left Bend, your old stomping grounds. Say, how did Bend get its name?"
- "Bend had a lot of trouble getting water. Something to do with the volcanic rock. It got a late start because of the water problem."

Thanks Beth, and that is how Bend, Oregon, got its name.

Traveling America (V) Report Two: Weed, California

January 24, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. To clarify a point, the stories about Bend's name in the first segment of this report were not made up. As I have stated, there is no need to create dialogues for these reports. We leave it to our fellow humans for the discourse. All we do is ask questions. Their answers provide the entertainment.

The second day of our trip took us through southern Oregon. I wanted to stop at Crater Lake National Park, but it was closed (snowed-in) for the winter. We proceeded into northern California, an area of America I have long wished to see. I had heard this part of our nation has spectacular geography. I was not disappointed. From north of the Oregon/California border down to Sacramento, and especially the northern parts of Klamath National Forest, the Trinity Mountains, Shasta Lake, and Mt. Shasta (14,162 feet, seen in Figure 4) were as pretty a country as any I have seen in the western United States. Some 700 miles of highways, surrounded by a beautiful America.



Figure 4. Mt. Shasta.

How Did Weed Get Its Name?

Arriving at Weed, California, around lunch time, we drove and walked around the community, eating a fine sandwich made for us at a local deli. Walking past the police station, I asked one of the locals, "Say, how did Weed get its name?"

You might be thinking, "Who cares! Maybe weed is the town's cash crop. Maybe the burg has an annual Weed Festival, and weed revelers come from all parts of the world to sample weedfare. Does it really matter Uyless?"

You may opt to live in ignorance. That's your choice. Not I. After all, the esteemed Mark Twain said, "Nothing is so ignorant as a man's left hand, except a lady's watch."² There you go.

² R. Kent Rasmussen, editor, *Mark Twain: His Words, Wit, and Wisdom* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1997), 139, in Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World* (Hartford, Connecticut: American, 1897), ch. 22, 214.

- Anyway, the local said, "The town is named after a Weed."
- I replied, "What kind of weed?"
- Do you see my confusion? Notice the upper case "W" in his response. He was speaking a proper noun, with a capital "W," such as a person's name. But how was I to know? I responded with a lower case "w," such as a plant's name. But how was he to know? I am certain Mr. Twain would have an explanation for this situation. And anon tells us, "What we do not know, we do not understand. What we do know, we still do not understand."
- "Take a walk up the street to your left. Your answer is there."



Figure 5. Abner Weed.

As suggested in Figure 5, the town Weed is named after the man Weed. The statue had a plaque next to it explaining Abner Weed started a successful logging company in the area in 1897, and opened several other businesses. For a while, he was the town's principal benefactor and employer. He operated the Weed Cookhouse, the Weed Bakery, the Weed Bunkhouse, the Weed Post Office, the Weed Mill # 1, the Weed Mill # 2, the Weed Lumber Yard, and the Weed Mercantile Store. Thus, its citizens, with an ample supply of Weed signs already painted---and being practical folks---named the town after their boss.

More the wiser, we left Weed. Now on Interstate 5, we made headway through California and stopped for the evening at Williams, California, which owes its name to a man named Williams. I know. I asked the desk clerk at our motel.

La Ciudad de Williams

I spent an hour or so visiting this small place. I was struck by the prevalence of signs in Spanish. Not just the Taco Bells, but authentic Mexican places. Take a look at Figure 6. On the streets of Williams, California, USA, there are as many Spanish signs as English signs.

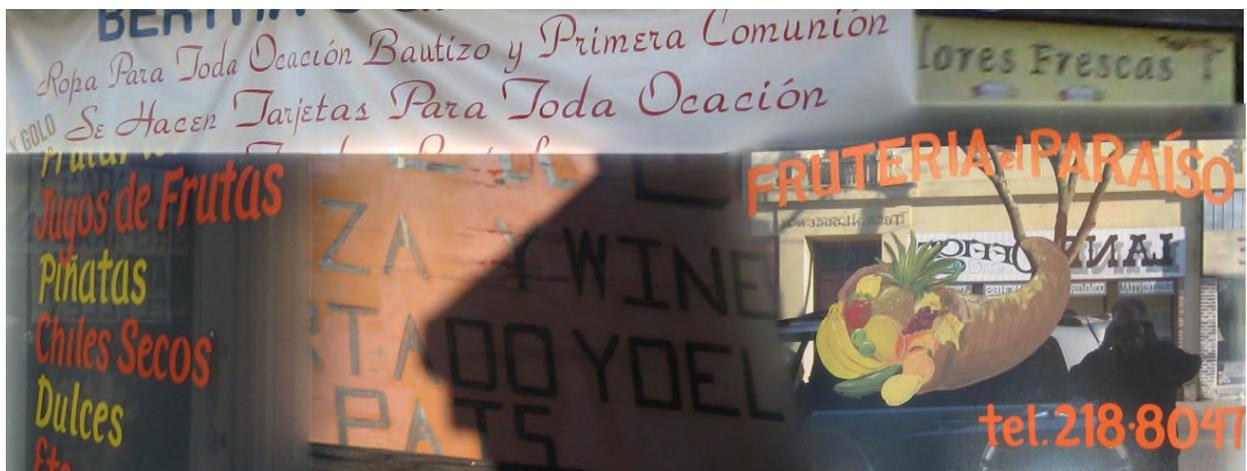


Figure 6. Spanish spoken here.

My hometown of Lovington, New Mexico, has also been transformed. Once a mostly white community, it now has more Latinos than Anglos. With the Mexico/U.S. border issue heating up, during this trip into Southern California, I paid special attention to the prevalence of Latinos in this part of the country.

Throughout southwest America (and other areas as well), immigrants from Mexico and points farther south are working jobs we native Americans shun. Flipping burgers. Digging ditches. Mowing the lawns. Jobs I did as a young person, but jobs I seldom witness being performed by Anglos today. Is this a problem? I do not know. Maybe Americans are so affluent we will not do minimum wage and must bring in cheap labor for these low-paying tasks. It is a complex issue, beyond the subjects of this article.

Nonetheless, I am certain of two points. So certain, I'll call them truisms: Truism 1. An unassimilated nation cannot survive as a coherent nation. Truism 2. Eventually, a balkanized country will self-destruct.

Consider a standard dictionary definition of a nation: *A community of people or peoples living in a defined territory and organized under a single government.*

This (first) definition is valid *only* if the second definition holds true (or partially holds true): *A community of people who share a common ethnic origin, culture, historical tradition, and, frequently, language, whether or not they live together in one territory or have their own government.*

With rare exceptions, people who do not share common bonds (a) do not form a nation, or (b) do not keep a nation intact.

That stated, I do not believe a common ethnic origin or common culture is a prerequisite to the ability to build a nation. But I do think the respect and love for historical tradition and the use of a common language is. So, I'm split down the middle on the dictionary definition.

I have Mexican friends in Santa Fe who are more "American" than I. They are more appreciative of America's legacy to the world than I. They are more thankful to be citizens than I. Why? Among other reasons, they've seen the other side of the non-American coin: Living in a third world country gives one an appreciation of a first world country. And no small point: They've had the opportunity---*and they've taken this opportunity*---to be assimilated into the culture and milieu of America.

For these reports, we will have other opportunities to visit this subject. We'll also review and offer thoughts on Patrick J. Buchanan's statement that America is going to hell in a racial basket because of, "The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America."³

I look forward to our dialogues. For now, let's hit the road again and visit a grand town of America's past (and present), Sacramento, California.

³ Patrick J. Buchanan, *State of Emergency, The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006).

Traveling America (V) Report Three: Old Town Sacramento

January 25, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This morning, we left Ciudad de Williams for points south with a stopover in Sacramento, California. We spent most of the day visiting Old Town Sacramento.

Give Me My Land Back!

John Sutter is credited with the founding of the area now called Old Sacramento. He was the first non-native person to take up residence in the area (1839) and built a fort at present day Sacramento. He called the place New Helvetica, named after a pre-telegraph printing font style.

Just testing your telegraph and typing knowledge. The term refers to things related to Switzerland, and is actually spelled *Helvetia*. A bit confusing, as Sutter emigrated from Germany.

Sutter received a land grant of 49,000 acres from the Mexican government (California was a Mexican province). He and his partner, James Marshall, built a lumber mill nearby (at Coloma), and in 1848, Marshall discovered gold at the mill site. The two men tried to keep their discovery a secret, but suspicions were raised when they used gold nuggets at the local saloon to pay for whiskey and women. Their discovery became even more obvious when Sutter and Marshall appeared on the game show, "Who Recently Became a Millionaire?" leading to a horde of men flocking to their property to plunder their booty.

In honor of this extraordinary discovery, the exodus from the east coast led to the famous term, *The Forty Eighters*. It also led to the naming of the football franchise, the *San Francisco Forty Eighters*. I looked up several references on the subject. All verify that Marshall found the gold in 1848. I'm sticking with the nugget of this historical find: The books, papers, movies, and football teams with the name of *Forty Niners* are incorrect.

I offered my gem of wisdom to a store clerk in Old Town. She responded, "Sir, the prospectors did not come out in great numbers until **1849**."

Reporter, "OK, but the big discovery actually happened in **1848**. Granted, people came out in **1849**, but they also came out in **1850, 1851**, and so on. They're **Forty Eighters** to me. If not, why aren't they called the **Fiftiers**, the **Fifty Firsters**, or the"

"Next in-line, please."

The new owner of California's government---Uncle Sam---did not take to Sutter's Mexican land claim. The United States allowed the Forty Eighters to settle on Sutter's land. He protested. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled against the man because he wanted to keep the acreage pastoral, and thus subject to "unimproved property taxes."

His opponents wanted to build farms, barns, bunkhouses, and outhouses, which would have translated into more tax revenue for city, county, state, and national governments---as the land would now be subject to "improved property taxes."

In 1852, Sutter declared bankruptcy. Later, the state of California awarded Sutter a monthly pension of \$250, but he received nothing from Uncle Sam for the land seizure. An early instance of our government robbing a citizen under the guise of Eminent Domain

Main Street Old Sacramento

With these exceptions, modern Old Town Sacramento resembles the original town of the mid 1800s: The original city had outhouses, ice houses, bunkhouses, and whore houses. Unless I overlooked these establishments, none were in the restored version. Instead, fast food shops, curio shops, and simulated old-time stores lined the streets. Fine by me. At least the city planners have attempted to resurrect parts of those old times---and anyway, I prefer our modern versions. As a youngster, I had considerable experience with outhouses, icehouses, and bunkhouses. I'll not discuss the other house in the list. Anyway, Figure 7 is a snapshot of a section of the main street of Old Town (Second Street).



Figure 7. Old Town Sacramento.

This reproduction is similar to the structure of the 1850s. Notice the signs "Supreme Court," and "Wells Fargo." The California Supreme Court had its first permanent home here. The building housed the offices for the Wells Fargo stagecoach and Pony Express services. In one of these rooms, the plan for California's first railroad was established, and a man named Theodore Judah kept an office here as he designed the western link of the intercontinental railway. If you're in this part of the country, be sure and stop for a walk around and through these buildings. For history buffs, they're a gold mine.

The Wells Fargo Stagecoach Lines

This building is now the site of a museum featuring exhibits about this part of the country and the role Wells Fargo played in its development. My earliest recollection of this company was

the Saturday afternoon cowboy movies in my hometown. In real times, some of the Wells Fargo stagecoach drivers were heroes. In reel times, no self-respecting celluloid hero would demean himself to drive such a contraption. The cowboy (Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Lone Ranger, etc.) would always ride his horse, (Trigger, Champion, Silver respectively) alongside a stagecoach, usually strumming his guitar and singing cowboy songs, while accompanied by a 100 piece orchestra.

The only time these manly stars would lower themselves to come close to the stagecoach was to jump onto the horses of a runaway wagon in order to save a beautiful blonde-headed woman who had passed out inside the coach. Invariably, we movie viewers learned the reason she had fainted was because she was from *back east*, and not very hardy. Anyway, after the rescue, everyone was happy. Depending on who was in the movie, the scene usually ended with Roy kissing the blonde or his horse.

One of the stagecoach drivers was a real-life hero. He was a legend *in his own time*---but especially *after his own time*. Charlie Parkhurst drove a stagecoach in California for nearly 20 years, and during the first few years, he did not carry a gun with him. Word got around town about this fact, and Charlie's coach was soon robbed of a big shipment of gold and bank notes.

Necessity being the mother of invention, Charlie purchased a gun, and thereafter kept it next to him on the stagecoach driver's seat. One time, a bandit---who had been on vacation, and had not yet learned about Charlie's gun purchase---rode up to the coach and ordered Charlie to stop the wagon. Charlie, "...whirled, and fired a blast into the chest of the outlaw."⁴ Thus, a legend was born.

But this situation gets tricky folks. If I may take a bit of Mark Twain-type license with metaphors, here is a classic country song that pertains to our subject ---made famous by Jimmie Rogers. Let's call it, *Ode to Charlie Parkhurst*.⁵

*I'm a pistol packing papa.
And when I walk down the street.
You can hear those mamas shouting.
Don't turn your gun on me.
Now girls, I'm just a good guy.
And I'm going to have my fun.
And if you don't want to smell my smoke,
Don't monkey with my gun.
Oh de le de de oh, de le de oh, de le deee.*

The Wells Fargo literature has this to say about Charlie Parkhurst⁶...with additions (in italics) by your reporter:

Charlie was about 5'6", slim and wiry, with alert gray eyes. Well liked, Charlie rarely smiled. Apparently shy, Charlie never talked much about personal business. *And during stagecoach stops for stretching and such, Charlie would always find a private clump of bushes to attend to his private*

⁴ "Charlie Parkhurst: Appearances Can be Deceiving," Well Fargo History Museum literature, July 24, 2006, brochure on Charlie Parkhurst.

⁵ The song's name is actually, *Pistol Packin' Papa*, Jimmie Rodgers, from *The Essential Jimmie Rodgers*, RCA Records, and has absolutely nothing to do with Charlie.

⁶ Charlie Parkhurst, "Appearances Can be Deceiving," 2006.

business....When Charlie did speak, it was in an oddly sharp, high-pitched voice...Charlie kept quite a secret over the years. When the body was prepared for burial, it was discovered that Charlie was in fact a woman! And a doctor maintained, at some point in her life, she became a mother. Her Wells Fargo workmates wondered why Charlie kept a bassinet next to her for a couple years, but this mystery was solved during Charlie's embalming.

All of which raised a big stink about the country music songwriter, Jimmie Rogers, whose song with dubious metaphors of poor taste about Pistol Packing Papas was rendered worthless because of incorrect metaphors of poor taste. After all, Charlie wasn't a Papa, Charlie was a mama.

The Wells Fargo museum features an original stagecoach, shown in Figure 8. The ride over rough terrain was not an easy one. The designers placed "through braces" underneath the carriage to help absorb the bounces. As seen in the right photo in Figure 8, they were made of strips of cowhide, each about 1/4 inches thick. Attached front-to-rear, they provided a swinging motion to the ride.



Figure 8. Stagecoach and undercarriage.

Mark Twain described a stagecoach ride as a "cradle on wheels," but a long journey across the country in a stagecoach was not all that pleasant. The wagon traveled an average of five miles an hour, changing horses at swing stations every 12 miles, and stopping for meals at home stations about every 45 miles.⁷ A trip from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco took 21 days and nights. The small cabin could have as many as nine people seated on three benches, all lodged-in together like sardines in a wooden container.

⁷ "The Stagecoach," Wells Fargo Historical Services brochure.

Another Wells Fargo document reprints a newspaper article from the *Omaha Herald*. Published in 1877, it is titled, "Hints for Plains Travelers." Here are a few excerpts. (I have not altered the list but added my comments in parentheses.) While you're reading these guides, imagine the traveler's world of 1860 to that of today.

- If the (horse) team runs away, sit still and take your chances; if you jump, nine times out of ten you will be hurt. (That's it! No mention of OSHA regulations. No insurance company lawyers. It's your responsibility. You get hurt, that's life in the stagecoach lane. In times past, Americans were advised to take care of ourselves. There was no one else to blame.)
- In very cold weather, abstain entirely from liquor; a man will freeze twice as quick while under its influence. (Who said alcohol was anti-freeze?)
- Don't growl at food stations; stage companies generally provide the best they can get. (Growl! Have you ever growled at an airline stewardess? I don't mean the good-lookers. However muted, who doesn't growl at them? I read recently where a passenger threw his food tray at a stewardess. Get a grip man. The cook wasn't aboard.)
- Spit on the leeward side of the coach. (If you're on the other side of the coach, before spitting, it is a good idea to lean across your fellow passenger and then spit. Spitting directly through the coach cabin often results in an unintended trajectory.)
- Don't swear, nor lop over on your neighbor when sleeping. (And if you happen to swear while you're sleeping, just swear you were sleeping.)
- Never attempt to fire a gun or pistol while on the road, it may frighten the team. (Not to mention the passenger next to you.)
- Don't discuss politics or religion, or point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed. (But it's OK to point out places on the road of the non-horrible murders.)
- Don't grease your hair before starting or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable 'tater' patch. (Any resulting taters are the property of Wells Fargo.)

I sometimes wish I had a time machine, if only for a brief spell. I would like to take an 1865 ride from---not Missouri to California---I'm a nostalgia buff, but I'm not demented. Say, a jaunt for a day or so. A vicarious thrill back to the old days. I think about the mountain climbers on Mt. Hood. Like most of us, perhaps they are looking for something that is no longer part of their lives. Adventure. Escape. Even danger. A Walter Mitty experience.

Today, we live an easy life, but I am thankful for it. I will gladly genuflect at the grave of the inventor of air conditioning. Still, I do miss those past days of ice houses and bunkhouses, or a bit of dust during my travels. As absurd as it may sound to my son, these aspects of life were once part of my life. But then, it is perhaps best to acknowledge that past artifacts, those symbols of the past, are meant to be just that: the past.

Nothing is simple. Was it the movie character Forest Gump who said, "Life is a bowl of mixed condiments?"

Next on our report: The Pony Express; the telegraph in Old Town Sacramento, and an extraordinary museum featuring America's railroads.

Traveling America (V) Report Four: Old Town Sacramento

January 25, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We continue our visit of Old Town Sacramento, California. The last segment of this report highlighted Wells Fargo's famous wagons: the frontier stagecoaches. In researching for this report, I learned Wells Fargo also operated the western end of the equally famous Pony Express.⁸

Many hours of my childhood daydreams were devoted to fantasies about being a Pony Express rider. With good reason, I admired this person. A rider rode an average of 75 miles in nine hours, which translates to riding a horse at an almost continuous gallop (at least, a fast trot) for the better part of a day. The rider changed horses up to five times, pausing at a station only to transfer 20 pounds of mail in especially designed saddlebags to another horse.

The ride was dangerous. Roads, if they existed, were spotty. Chuckholes could bring the horse and rider down. Weather did not keep to the Pony Express schedule. The Native Americans had not yet migrated to their appointed reservations and occasionally took shots at the riders---just to let off a bit of anti-genocidal steam. Insured letters and proof of delivery were not part of the service.

As seen in Figure 9, the Pony Express mail service operated 1,966 miles between Saint Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. It began April 3, 1860, under the direction of the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company (COC & PPE). Customers paid \$5 per half-ounce for the transport, but COC & PPE could not turn a profit. In April 1861, Wells Fargo took over the western end of the route. In hopes of attracting more customers, the company lowered fees to \$2 per half-ounce and later to \$1.

The Pony Express operated for only 18 months. During this time, it carried 35,000 letters, mostly from west to east because the gold miners in California often wrote home for money. The installation of the telegraph put an end to this larger-than-former life legend. October 25, 1861 was the last ride of a Pony Express pony.

Old Town Sacramento has several sites and a large statue commemorating the Pony Express. If you are walking around the main street, you will come across them. To honor this saga, a nearby café features delicious chicken-fried horsemeat. Just joking. The café serves New Orleans fare. Go figure.

⁸ "Wells Fargo and the Pony Express," Wells Fargo Historical Services brochure.



Figure 9. The Pony Express route.

The Telegraph

I mentioned the Pony Express route was hazardous but only one mail delivery was lost. Nonetheless, the service was too expensive and too slow. It was discontinued after the Pacific Telegraph Company connected its communications line to San Francisco with a link to New York.

During my Boy Scout days, I was required to learn the Morse Code to qualify for a First Class Badge rating. While studying the code, I looked all over town for a telegraph machine, just to hone my muscle memory. Nada. Even Lovington's museums had no telegraphs. OK, we didn't have any museums either. The town had lots of telephones, but talking was not part of the First Class Badge requirement.

I spoke with a guide at the Wells Fargo Museum about their telegraph service:

- She asked, "Did you know the telegraph operators developed their own set of short-hand codes, similar to the SOS signal?"
- "Nope. Wasn't in the Boy Scout Handbook. Do you know the codes?"
- "Yes, and they called them 'ciphers.' The cipher most frequently sent from the Sacramento office to points east was NIMIS."
- "What did it mean?"
- "Send money!"
- "Ha! Those gold miners had trouble finding gold, eh?"
- "Yes, and that's a code my husband and I often receive from our children."
- "Yes, I know that code well. Here's a telegraph story to add to yours. When I was a kid, I recall watching a cowboy movie scene. A man was attempting to send a distress message to a sheriff in another town. He keyed-in dash, dash, dash; dot, dot, dot; dash, dash, dash. How stupid! He was sending "OSO," and not "SOS," as in dot, dot, dot; dash, dash, dash; dot, dot, dot. At the next meeting of Troop 44, I proudly shared my discovery with my scoutmaster.
- "That's an interesting story. Next in line please"

The California State Railroad Museum

As you may have noticed, I like Old Town Sacramento. I like history. I sometimes wonder why I ventured into writing a book about the future (*The Deadly Trinity*), as my disposition is to read and study about the past. And nowhere is a part of America's history more beautifully displayed than at the California State Railroad Museum, a short walk from the Wells Fargo office we visited earlier. I have taken a picture (Figure 10) from the museum's brochure to show the beauty and elegance of the exhibits.⁹ As you see, the building is huge. This photo shows only one of the trains. I counted over ten, many with several cars, and a tour guide informed me the building houses 21 restored engines.

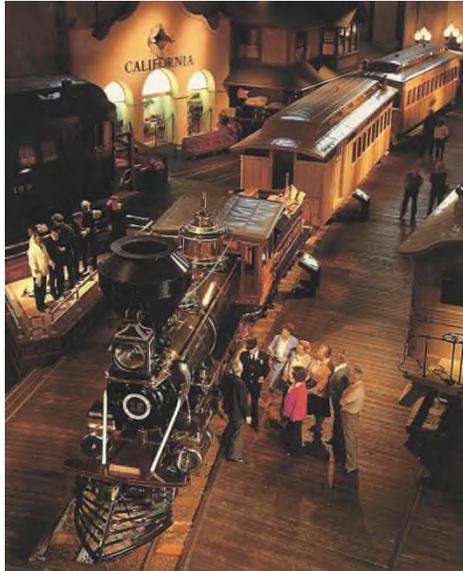


Figure 10. A snapshot of a piece of Americana.

The museum had its beginnings in 1937 when several men decided to acquire and preserve old locomotives. Realizing they did not have sufficient funds to pay for their dream, they eventually persuaded the state of California to take over the project. Today, about 500,000 people pay a visit to the museum each year.

We spent much of our time at the museum viewing the exhibits about the building of America's first transcontinental railroad. My interest was in the "Big Four." Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins were key figures in the building of the Central Pacific Railroad and linking it to the Union Pacific Railroad on May 10, 1869, at Promontory, Utah. They made a modest investment relative to their eventual returns. Abraham Lincoln granted extensive government assistance for the construction. His motive was to bind the west to the Union through the railroad. It worked. In addition, because the South did not participate in the building of the transcontinental railroad, the entire rail system ran through the northern United States.

Like today, America in the 1860s was suffering from a shortage of cheap labor. Some of the workers walked off the job to seek their fortunes at Nevada gold mines. Others weren't too keen on the dangerous and tedious working conditions, and spent much of their time drinking whiskey. Crocker proposed using Chinese laborers, but some of his partners thought they would

⁹ *California State Railroad Museum*, 2nd edition, revised 1999, California State Railroad Museum Foundation.

not be good workers. Crocker replied, "They built the Great Wall of China, didn't they?" Case closed.

As seen in Figure 11, they worked at all phases of the constructions: laying track, climbing mountains, and building bridges. They proved to be better workers than their Anglo counterparts because they did not fall ill to booze, tainted meat (they ate vegetables and rice), or dirty water (they drank heated tea).



Figure 11. A museum exhibit of the Chinese workers.

If we could only linger longer at this museum. But our Reports must be somewhat brief, so permit me to list some other highlights of this wonderful place:

- We sat in the seats on one railroad car as the conductor (guide) told us about its features. The car was rocking and swaying as if it were moving on a track.
- Two dining cars were on display, as well as displays from many railroad lines of the dinnerware used for the meals. (Reporterette and Milli check out the arrangements in the left photo in Figure 12.)
- A complete kitchen was set up for us to see, including a wax figure of a chef tending to his cooking. (the right photo in Figure 12.)

- A refrigerator car was on display. As was a narrow gage train and its cars. A railway post office car. A freight car. A sleeping car. And others.



Figure 12. More displays.

More Old Buildings

We left the railroad museum and paid a call on a couple more old buildings. Luckily, we came across the hardware store that was owned and operated by two of the Big Four: Huntington and Hopkins. While touring this place, it struck me that these four men did not start off wealthy. For example, two of them were storekeepers. But they were all shrewd businessmen. They were keen self-promoters who knew how to use others' money for their ventures.

The four men are both lauded and vilified in the history books. Whatever your opinion of them may be, the name Crocker was later associated with the huge Crocker Bank in California, Leland Stanford: Stanford University. Mark Hopkins: The Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco.

Figure 13 shows the original hardware store (left photo) and the reconstructed building (right photo). Perhaps the word *reconstructed* is not a fair description of this historical treasure. To understand why, take a look at Figure 14. The guide at this store informed me:

Guide, "The cabinets and shelves are the same as those used by Huntington and Hopkins. For many years after the boom times, the hardware store stayed in business. During the Old Town restoration, all this hardware and wood was moved to a storehouse. The man who was in charge of the reassembly and restoration took everything apart by hand. After the building was fixed up, he came back to put everything back together. He did some repainting and refinishing, but the set-up is the same as in the 1860s. It took him three and a half years to put it all back together, and finish it as you see here."



Figure 13. The Big Two's hardware store.



Figure 14. Inside the store.

- Reporter, "What can I say? Just beautiful. He was a fine craftsman."
- "Look at the floor."
- "Yes?"
- "That's the original floor. Redwood. Tongue and groove. He pulled it apart and put it back together."
- "Impressive. Say, are any of those old screwdrivers for sale?"
- "Ha! No, but I'll sell you a reproduction of an 1860 awl."

We left this remarkable place and prepared ourselves to hit the Interstate again. As I walked away from Old Town Sacramento, I was reminded of that famous anon utterance, "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." Maybe Forest Gump said it.

Traveling America (V) Report Five: Global Warming and Palm Springs

January 25 and 26, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We left Sacramento with the intent of reaching Palm Springs, California, with only a couple days of easy driving---much easier than the arduous trips taken on horse-drawn wagons. Thus, Wells Fargo stagecoaches and Pony Express ponies were in the rear-view mirror of our SUV and in the back seat of our memories. We were looking forward to a couple days of slothful luxury.

Tips on How to Get Rich from Global Warming (Tips 1, 2, and 3)¹⁰

Throughout this trip---from northern Idaho to southern California---I observed the low water levels of many streams, rivers, and lakes. I was impressed by the giant viaducts, brimming with water, carrying H₂O to the LA basin, an area of brown landscapes. I wondered if the current whipping post, global warming, was to blame for the paucity of water down south? What do you think? Send your opinions to TooManyPeople.com. At this site, we will tabulate your input and issue an unbiased finding.

From what I can gather from television's Oprah, Bill, Phil, and other venues to vent the missives of the masses, the main culprit is not too many people, but as stated, global warming. I find this contention puzzling because I have thought global warming's Green House Effect was supposed to produce green things. Even more, green things are associated with water. If LA's problem is attributable to the Green House Effect, why isn't it basking in green-ness and water-like ambience?

If the Green House Effect leads to Brown Effects, why use the word *Green*? But I am told the Green House Effect produces *both* green and brown landscapes. It's a confusing issue and that is why I'm going to give you some tips about global warming: tips that will make you very wealthy.

Tip Number 1: Buy real estate in Greenland. First, about the name: Greenland is not very green, which is also confusing. But if the warming trends continue, Greenland---a very cold country---will experience an economic boom. In fact, it is rumored Greenlanders are trying to prevent the Kyoto Accords from succeeding. They want Greenland's landscape to change from white to green and become climatically pleasant in order to take the place of south Florida as a tourist attraction. In the future:

- One Canadian to another Canadian, "Getting ready for a bit of reverse snow birding, eh?"
- "Yup. Headed north for the winter. I'm going to Greenland. I'd go to Florida, but my condo was seized by the U.S. government for use as a seeding site for a coral reef."

Tip Number 2: Sell real estate in Florida. Even people who do not believe global warming is a consequence of the Green House Effect do acknowledge the ending of the Ice Age will result in melting glaciers, icebergs, and disenchanting Polar Bears. I don't know of anyone who thinks sea levels will not rise. Fine, it's time the Miami Dolphins earned their name. And

¹⁰ Gregg Easterbrook, "Global Warming: Who Loses---and Who Wins?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2007, 52-64. Source of several of my tips.

while you're at it, I recommend an IRS 1031 property exchange of your Miami lot for some turf in south Greenland.

Tip Number 3: Sell real estate in Europe and do not buy European stocks: The only caveat about investing in Greenland is the possibility that Denmark, which owns Greenland, may move all its citizens out of Europe to Greenland because current studies indicate global warming will have a reverse effect on temperate Europe. In the future, it is predicted Europe will take on the climate profile of Newfoundland, therefore leading to a depressed Europe and a devalued Euro.

You're welcome. My six percent real estate commission can be processed on-line through PayPal. Later, I'll provide more tips for you to get rich on global warming.

Avoiding LA's Freeways

The principal disadvantage of driving from Idaho to Palm Springs is dealing with the congested highways around LA. As we neared the area, the once beautiful landscapes and open spaces of northern California morphed into strip malls, run-down housing developments, brown terrains, and---with a few exceptions---70 mph bumper-to-bumper traffic.

I have read in local and national newspapers that law authorities are experiencing difficulty ferreting-out illegal immigrants after they have made it over the border. A bit of advice: Many of them can be caught by simply pulling-over the cars that drive on these freeways in the right-most lane at 15 mph. Like most rookie freeway drivers, these folks are terrified of the high-speeds and tight traffic. Sure, this act is blatant profiling. But just consider: Not only does it snare illegal immigrants, it also puts dottering elders where they belong: off the road.

While passing through Pasadena, we pulled-off the road for gas. At a service station, I had an encounter with an ARCO station gas pump and an ARCO attendant:

- The display on the pump instructed how to insert a credit card, which I did.
- The display on the pump informed me my card was unacceptable.
- With my earlier purchases in Sacramento of railroad, stagecoach, Pony Express, telegraph memorabilia, as well as an old-timey awl, my credit may have been used-up on this card.
- I tried another card, which was also rejected.
- I made my way to the cashier, "Hello, I think my credit cards are OK, but they aren't accepted at your pump."
- "We don't accept credit cards."
- "Then why is there a credit card slot on the pump?"
- "It's only for a debit card."
- "ARCO, one of the biggest companies on earth, won't accept a credit card?"
- "You got it."
- "How 'bout a check."
- "Out of state?"
- "Yes."
- "No can do."
- "Hmm. OK, no out of state check, but my debit card is out of state."
- "Yeah, but you could have stolen the check."
- "Yeah, and I could have stolen the debit card."
- "Look, you want gas or not?"

I wish I could have come up with a Clint Eastwood or Jack Bauer response to his question. But I couldn't. Anyway, what on earth was I doing? Debating the pros and cons of credit debt and debit float with a gas station attendant---and a non-economist to boot. I forked over a tidy number of bills for gas and a stale Baby Ruth. Next, I returned to the LA Grid Interlock System to try to make it into a less populated and more accommodating climate in Palm Springs.

You Can't Pump Gas in Oregon. While on the subject of gas pumps, we stopped a couple days earlier at a service station in Oregon. I opened my car door, stepped out, and...

- "I'll handle the pump, sir."
- "That's OK. I've got it right here."
- "Sorry, you're not allowed to pump your own gas."
- "Who says so?"
- "The state of Oregon."
- "C'mon! It's a law that I can't fill-up my own tank?"
- "That's correct."
- "So, thousands of folks in this state are paid to do nothing more than man gas pumps?"
- "Yep."
- "You guys must have a strong union."
- "Beats working."

Palm Springs



As we neared Palm Springs, I had expected the wide freeways to merge into highways with fewer lanes. But an eight-lane expressway took us all the way to this resort town, a fanciful, fertile oasis in the middle of a stark desert. Its greenery was in vivid contrast to the surrounding brown terrain, as shown in Figure 15.¹¹ A modest suggestion. If the Green House Effect will make those brown mountains a bit greener, let's burn more fossil fuel, stoke-up the Boy Scout campfires, and encourage cows to belch more.

Trouble is, I keep reading that areas like Palm Springs will experience the "Brown House, Green House Effect": More earth brownness will come about because of increased atmospheric greenness. With side effects of more heat, less moisture, and depleted water tables.

It's too complex for your Reporter. I look forward to your wise advice on correcting this situation and....

Figure 15. The Green House Effect?

Tips on How to Get Rich from Global Warming (Tips 4 and 5)

And...so what? Glad you asked. Here are some more tips on how to get rich from global warming.

¹¹ <http://www.ci.palm-springs.ca.us/>

Tip Number 4: Do not invest in sprinkler systems in Palm Springs. Because Palm Springs will have neither water to sprinkle, nor any greenery on which to sprinkle its nonexistent water.

Tip Number 5: Invest in sprinkler systems in Alaska. Because Alaska will have lots of water to sprinkle, and ample greenery on which to sprinkle its ample water. Of course, so will Greenland, but we've covered Greenland in previous tips.

I have been to Palm Springs a number of times. I like the place and look forward to visits---in the wintertime. The summers put the dire predictions of the global warming pundits to shame. Anyway, the main reason I like Palm Springs is because it is first and foremost a resort and tourist place. Resort sites are in my list of Top One Favorite Places to hangout. Most of the folks you see are cheerful. They're relaxed. No grinding business matters to attend to. Almost all my real estate investments are in places built for fun. I suppose it's part of my escapism mentality.

Downtown Palm Springs retains the flavor of art deco, and I hope you have a chance to walk around this part of the area. Make a point to pay calls on some of the old hotels built in the 1930s and 40s. They'll take you back to a pleasant era.

Who Makes Up Names?

An interesting aspect of this city and the cities nearby is the many businesses, streets, parks, etc. that have taken on these words in their names: Palm, Bloom, Springs, Desert, Sage, Flower, Cactus, Mirage, Canyon, and Rancho. I've conducted no survey, but I'd wager all these names are used in combination with each other to identify a spa, golf course, condo, or some other business.

Example: Palm Springs, Palm Bloom, Palm Desert, Palm Sage, Palm Flower, Palm Cactus, Palm Mirage, Palm Canyon, Palm Rancho, Palm Sands.

Or: Desert Palm, Desert Bloom, Desert Springs, Desert Sage, Desert Flower, Desert Cactus, Desert Mirage, Desert Canyon, Desert Rancho, and Desert Sands.

What's the point? After all, a hotel or café has to be named something; otherwise, the Yellow Pages would fall into disfavor. Your reporter has given this matter considerable thought. I think the City Fathers and Mothers could make Palm Springs even more attractive to the Snow Birds if they would use names to help Snow Birds think about the winter they are avoiding:

- Ice Free Avenue.
- The No Snow Spa.
- The Ice Melt Swimming Club.
- The Tasty No-Freeze Ice Cream Parlor
- The 80⁰ Tennis and Golf Club.
- The Windless Canyon Hotel.
- The Frost-Bite-Free Hamburger Stand
- And for the seedy part of town: Skidless Skid Row.

Send in your suggestions. We'll pool our ideas together, and I'll forward them to the Palm Springs Thing-Naming Committee. I'll make sure we work from a commission: For every name they use, we'll charge a usage fee. You'll get your cut at ForgetAboutIt.com.

While we're on the topic, let's do another survey. Send in your candidate for the sorriest street name you've come across. I'll start. While living in the Shenandoah Valley, I sometimes traveled a local street named: Dismal Hollow Road. What were the city founders thinking when they named this road? Who wants to live on a road with the word *dismal* in it?

I've another one. Our mailing address in Idaho is a street named *Government Way*. Bummer. I'd rather have Dismal Hollow Road on my stationery.

Thousands of Windmills

To the west of Palm Springs, a few miles before entering the city limits, we came upon hundreds of acres of land, populated with thousands of gigantic windmills.¹² Our first observation was that they were so numerous, it was impossible to count them all. Figure 16 provides a photomerge of just a few of them.



Figure 16. Who got the earmark passed for this pork barrel?

Our second observation: "Jesus! They are big suckers!" ---was also about the fact that almost none of the blades were rotating. Maybe one in fifty. No wind. No moving blades. No electricity generated. Which led to our third observation, "Who are the Congressional representatives for this part of the country? Has Senator Byrd migrated from West Virginia?" We concluded they must have received a lot of campaign contributions for their ear marking this project in a bill to combat terrorism in Palm Springs. To be fair, this fantastic enterprise may make sense. It may be cost-effective.¹³ This issue will be left to another report. For now....

Let's use the wind chargers to make an observation about activities in Washington, DC. I'm combining these windmills, built some years ago, with recent goings-on in Washington, DC and adding some dialogue:¹⁴

First Congress person, "This legislation for maintaining 10^{10} windmills in and around Palm Springs is absolutely essential to our national security. Palm Springs,

¹² A more accurate term is *wind charger*, as they are designed to generate electricity.

¹³ I am told by several readers that my satire is misplaced; that these windmills generate much of the electricity for this part of America.

¹⁴ Ken Dilanian, "Farm Aid Plumps Up Iraq Funding," *USA TODAY*, March 22, 2007, A1.

Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, and the Windless Canyon Hotel are vital to America's defense."

Second Congress person (Rep. Sam Bishop, Georgia Democrat), "Sounds good. But only if you'll support my \$74 million earmark on the Iraq Emergency Funding Bill for peanut growers in Georgia. Peanuts are the nuts and bolts of national defense....OK, maybe the nuts." (Bishop received \$37,750 in contributions from peanut interests. Not exactly peanuts.)

Third Congress person (Rep. Sam Farr, California Democrat), "OK by me. But only if you'll support my \$25 million earmark for the spinach growers in my district. Spinach is associated with strength! That's what America stands for: Spinach!...Eh, Strength!" (Farr's last campaign received \$30,600 from spinach interests.)

Fourth Congress person (Rep. David Obey, Wisconsin Democrat), "Same here, but only if my earmark for \$252 million for milk subsidies is placed in the Iraq Emergency Funding Bill. Milk is All-American. And I'm dedicated to milking the general American populace to help the folks who elect me." (Obey has raised \$113,000 from dairy interests since 1989.)

Your Reporter could provide other perverse instances of our trusted public servants helping themselves to America's wealth. If I had the stamina of a real reporter, I could ferret out hundreds of these "earmarks": Taxpayer subsidies for ridiculous endeavors, endeavors that should be left to capitalism and private enterprise to fund.

Yes, I know. That's politics. That's life. You and I must deal with it. And America's politics remains one of my ideals, one I continue to admire. But I must say that the earmarks I have just summarized are offensive to me. I'm not a goody-too-shoes. I know humans are greedy. I go to sleep at night with the realization that humans---other than you and me---are contaminated critters.

But consider two men's' statements about their earmarks:

- Bishop, "That's what politics is. Who gets what, when, and where."
- Obey, "I represent dairy farmers. You got a problem with that?"

Why should we expect a person to rise above their own vested interests? It has not happened much in the past, so why should we hope for it now? Answer: It will not happen. If I'm growing spinach in California, Farr is my hero and others' earmarks are corruptions of our hallowed democratic process. If I'm growing peanuts in Georgia, Bishop is my hero and others' earmarks are corruptions of our hallowed democratic process. Hang on to your politician folks. Keep him or her in office. In this way, you will get a piece of America's pork barrel pie.

Doesn't matter what *should* be done. Doesn't matter if the Iraq Emergency Funding Bill is laden with provisions that dilute the intent of the bill: to help our troops. But Obey says about his milk earmark, "You got a problem with that?"

Yes, Congressman Obey, I do. You are a corrupt, arrogant, and vainglorious person. And so is the system that spawns you and your ilk.

Back to Palm Springs

Ah! Off the track again. I just can't seem to keep my focus on Palm Springs. So, go to this area. Play golf at the Marriott Desert Springs resort. The course is stunning, not one brown twig among acres of green, lush flora. Don't pass-up the tennis facility at the Marriott resort. It is one of the best I've seen anywhere. Cement courts, but with options to play on grass. Not a speck of dust on the court surfaces. A beautiful tennis pro shop. Ball machines galore. Practice backboards. Several fine teaching pros. Ice-cold water, served by the pitcher, delivered to you at courtside.

Try dinner at the Piazza Trilussa, in Cathedral City. For that matter, try Sunday brunch at Piazza Trilussa. I am not sure they open that early, but their sauces would be delicious on just about anything you put in your mouth.

More Tips on How to Get Rich from Global Warming (Tips 6-8)

We close out this report with a few more tips on how to get rich from global warming.

Tip Number 6: Buy real estate in Buffalo. This is a deal you can't pass-up. The real estate values in Buffalo, New York, are about as low as they can be. The city is a basket case. Yes, for now. But global warming experts tell us that Buffalo---and even Detroit--- will become locales of pleasant climates. Besides, unlike Houston, Texas, they will not be under water. There you have it. Maybe another opportunity for an IRS 1031 property exchange.

Tip Number 7: Buy real estate *and mineral rights* in Siberia. Siberian real estate is another deal you can't pass-up. Your first advantage is that Siberia has a public relations problem and the real estate market is deeply depressed because the place itself is depressing. Siberia is notorious as a cheerless site of exile for Russian low-life; the former prison locale used by Stalin, Lenin, and Trotsky; the former home of Ivan the Terrible; the infamous work camps and gulags that housed Cold War dissidents.

Even worse, Siberia is an ecological mess:¹⁵

- The open-hearth furnaces of Magnitogorsk have so polluted the atmosphere that about two-thirds of that region's children and more than half of its adults suffer from respiratory illnesses.
- Some of the lands around Lake Karachai, where a nuclear weapons factory dumped its waste for years, contain more than 20 times the radioactivity released by the Chernobyl' reactor accident in Ukraine.
- In 1990, a Russian government commission reported that more than 18 billion cubic feet of Siberia's freshwater lakes and streams had become radioactive from the dumping of nuclear waste.

Pretty bad, eh? Not to mention that Siberian winters last around eight months. The average temperature on the Siberian plains in January is -6° F. Farther north: -60° F. Cool! But of course, with global warming, Siberia is slated to become temperate. If you can put-up with lung disease and a bit of radioactivity, then you're in for a windfall. What is more, many parts of Siberia, continuously covered with snow, have not yet had the mineral resources tapped by the

¹⁵ "Siberia," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*.

ARCOs of the world. So, make certain your contract on a lot next to Lake Karachai contains a mineral rights clause.

Tip Number 8: Sell in Singapore; buy in the Arctic Circle. This last tip may not be as obvious as tips 1-7. The Arctic ice has already begun melting, as seen in Figure 17.¹⁶ The photo shows the Arctic Sea in September, when it is at its lowest. The dark blue color shows the difference of the ice in 1979 and 2006 (the white color). Therefore, capitalists with an ounce of foresight are making plans to sell their shipyard docks in Singapore. Before long, there will be a Northwest Passage around the world---but through the area shown in Figure 17, thus rendering Singapore irrelevant. After all, why travel south to go north?

Even better, if trends continue, you can reach your Siberian lakeside resort by sailing over the former North Pole.

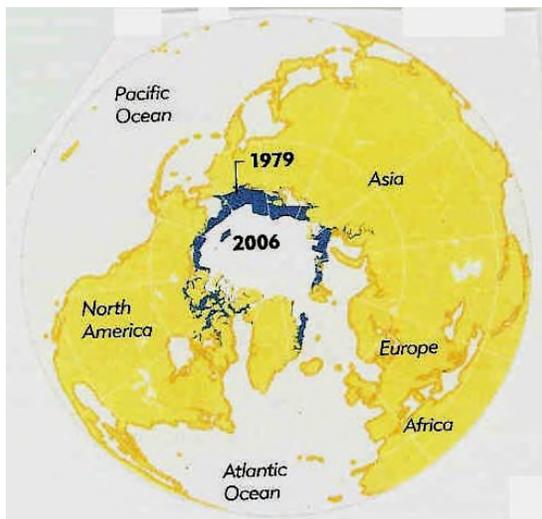


Figure 17. A new northern passage.

Traveling America (V) has been a kick to write. I hope you had fun, too. It's time to move on. I've promised you a report on the museum and library of Ronald Reagan. It will be in your email shortly and my Website shortly. (available in "Presidential Places" series.) But I need a break from this arduous work. I can hear on old song, rummaging around in my gray matter...26 miles across the sea...*Santa Catalina is a 'waitin' for me.*

Ronnie can wait a while.

¹⁶ Greg Easterbrook, *ibid.*, p. 58.