

## Merry Christmas, 1996

It is nice and nippy out and the furnace is on full blast. I'm sitting in my *New Home* and enjoying every minute of it. Yep, I finally bought a house again. My former landlady retired from the business and sold out to this guy who raised my rent another \$400/month. So I bailed out. Now my mortgage is lower than that rent would have been. I bought a little two-bedroom, one-bath cottage on a bit of county land between Atherton and Redwood City. It's about three miles from my office at USGS and on a quiet little street. My new address is 154 Rutherford Ave., Redwood City, CA 94061-3511 and my new phone number is (415) 369-6094.

I have a garage big enough to stuff the Jag in with a shoehorn, my little deck in the backyard is nice in warm weather and serves as a sort of family room for me. I need to spend some time working on the front lawn but hey what are lawns for?

Chris is still in a quandary about what to do since his job comes with full benefits including vacation. He's thinking of a trip back to Virginia next year and if all works out well, he'll be back in school right after that. He is applying to the Masters program in Political Science at San Francisco State which will start in the Fall of 1997.

The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) is now published. The ink is dry and all three volumes are at Congress and on the street. There was never a dull moment getting that thing into print. The government shutdown last Christmas came right when the galley proofs were back from the editor in Berkeley. I snuck into my office, forwarded

my

email to CompuServe, and stayed home to edit my paper. I got it off to the typesetter in January and everything looked final. Then, after my earthquake map was all nice and ready to publish, there was a 6.0 down in Ridgecrest. I called the typesetter and explained that there hadn't been an earthquake of even 5.0 within 100 miles of that place since before 1910 and I *had* to add it to my map. Well, typesetters don't like to hear from scientists once the paper is submitted. They don't want to hear about new earthquakes. So, I fell on my sword, promised that there would be no more earthquakes or volcanic eruptions in the Sierra between now and press time and I was allowed to change my map. I got funded to put the entire 4,000 pages for all 104 authors out on a CD-ROM as soon as a handful of addenda papers are completed in Davis. U.C. Press is working on a boiled-down version for a book to come out later in 1997, perhaps. We all got etched plaques from the Forest Service and I even got a nice award at work for it. I presented a paper at our public meeting in Placerville in June and left for Europe three days later before anybody had a chance to question me. In fact, I wasn't even around when Martha had to fetch my truck (Hillary) with its new engine. the Visa Card folks had fun figuring out how I could buy an engine in Sacramento and dinner in Prague the same day.

This Europe idea started a couple or so years ago when cousin Peggy decided to teach a watercolor class where my sister Barby lives in eastern France. Well, it didn't happen the first year, and I think a trip to Japan took out the next year but by 1996, it looked like the class might take place. Then my other sister, Linda, thought it might be a nice trip. Well, pretty soon more and more people started talking about it and I even pretended to be interested. To make a long story short, every member of my generation and half a dozen of the younger generation showed up in Dole for Bastille Day. There were 18 of us in all, counting the three that live there already. To make things more fun, six of us decided to get a head start and gather in Frankfurt from three different airports and head to Prague. Lenka Pelcová, Linda's friend's son's wife's sister, took us around town with her local knowledge and made the visit particularly special. We listened to some arias from Don Giovanni in the very theater where Mozart conducted the premier of that opera. In Vienna we listened to Strauss waltzes. In Venice Linda and I sipped coffee at the very site where Marco Polo introduced that drink. In Switzerland we bought Thom a Swiss Army Knife with which he opened plenty of wine and managed to break into the locked hotel after hours and bring on the gendarmes. We took over an entire inn in Dole and ate all of the goat cheese Barby had made recently. Alison and I got in a nice run through the fields and along some funny linear features that we think used to be stone walls a thousand years ago or so. Martha (after parking my truck at her house) flew out and joined us and when the senior Penns got there, the group was complete. We spent a few days feasting and swapping family myths. Barby set us up with a household that worked with the winery across the road and presented local dishes each with the appropriate local wine. We got an explanation of each course and each wine; the process took

the usual three hours for a lunch. Just before Peggy's class was to begin, we all filtered off to various parts of Europe. Martha and I met our friends Debbie and Larry from the San Francisco Bay Area and spent a day up on the flanks of Mont Blanc hoofing it around on the glacier and crossing a crevasse on a little snow bridge. We stopped at a road cut on the way there so I could collect a Jurassic rock from the Jura Mountains.

Backtracking to Lucerne after the snow trip, the four of us went to lunch at Freddy Girardet's. Girardet is the heir apparent to the throne of Best Chef In Europe now that some Frenchman is retiring. The meal was wonderful. It took about three and a half hours to finish it. We had ray, baby sea scallops, some red-meat dish, lots of types of breads, cheeses, and deserts, sorbets made into little ellipses and laid out just so on the plate. Debbie got up and left the table for a moment and while she was gone, they took her napkin off her chair and replaced it with a fresh folded one (put there with the use of tongs).

Martha and I finally got to strike off on our own. We headed to Provence and baked in the sun then went over to Limoges and Tours and stayed in old chateau that have become bed-and-breakfast inns. We wound up the trip in Paris just before we flew out so we could have some museum and cathedral time and have one last feast with Susan, Wayne, and Jon Penn. I did a classic "I forgot my passport" trick at the airport and had a final mad-dash taxi ride to fetch it just to keep me awake on the airplane home. I have yet to go through my 400 slides and make the copies I promised everybody. I'll get there sometime soon <he says>.

The Publications Group at work is moving its offices across the parking lot for a couple years so the old digs can be renovated. I have just about finished building my CD-ROM publishing lab and now I get to pack it up and put it back together again. I have been doing a bit of photography for that group and Stanford University now has me down as a Service Provider doing photography for events up there, mostly in Earth Sciences.

Martha and I got in our fair share of other trips this year. We did our usual weekend at Año Nuevo Elephant Seal Preserve in January and we had over 40 people along this time. We did a slide show of our dive trip to Fiji and had a nearly perfect weekend except that the Boardwalk at Santa Cruz didn't open until a week later. So the kids talked us into having the 1997 trip the first weekend in February so they can hit the roller coaster before the hike. Martha and I did most of the Sierra Century bicycle ride this year. I think we got in over 70 km of the 100 that we planned. We sagged out on a couple of hills and made it to the food stops before all the goodies were gone. We had a nice hike up the Rubicon River downstream of the Desolation Wilderness and saw very few of the folks who flood the vacation spots on Memorial Day. My canoe got yet another load of little kids at the Discovery Learning Center campout at Lake Tahoe this year. We had a little snow which was just enough for a good snowball fight on a little wildflower hike with the children. Our overnight backpacks consisted of one with Katherine that was the so-called "easy" one, and one without her that was supposed to be the more "challenging" one. Well, the hike with Katherine turned out to be easy enough yet we got clear up from Edison Lake to Second Recess and back. The other hike was just Martha and me where it was snowing as we left the car at North Lake. By the time we made camp, I was ill and just curled up in the tent as the roof sagged under the snowfall. Martha trotted off the next day up towards Piute

Pass while I napped under a rock. We went on down into Bishop and got a dorm room at the White Mountain Research Station the next night and we'll try again for some mile-burner hike next summer. In between those two hikes was the Boot 'n Blister trip to Crater Lake. That hike was one of our nice kid-oriented ones with an army of Humboldt naturalists leading us down Annie Creek identifying every flower. I did OK on the rocks (lava, lava, hmmm... lava). I even fit in the Yosemite Association meeting at Wawona and got to present a bit of a pitch about SNEP and show off the books. We'll be skiing again here really soon. Katherine has grown out of her ski shoes but her little skis will be useful for another year. We have our application in to do the High Sierra Camps loop out of Tuolumne Meadows this summer and since Katherine will be eight by then, we hope to get her over the whole thing. With light packs, we may do just fine.

The Peninsula Geological Society had a busy year with a lot of field trips and a nice series of lectures. I missed the trip along the coast because Chris and I ran Bay To Breakers instead (our fifth in 12 years; he dropped me on Hayes Street Hill). The Fall trip along the Diablo Range was wonderful and just in time for the last of the nice weather. I put a photo essay on the PGS web page for it at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/PGS.html> for your viewing pleasure. I was re-elected as VP of that group and am still their Webmaster as well.

The Explorers Club had an equally nice year. I went to the national meeting in New York and got into my very first tux. Not only that, I got into one again half a year later when we had a West Coast gig, the Golden Gate-Away. For the New York trip, I spent the plane ride doing page proofs for the SNEP paper. When I got to the Explorers Club building, there was a meeting about to start of the Society of Women Geographers to which I was invited. It turns out that their speaker was unable to attend so the meeting became a forum for other geographers to report on their recent research. When they got around to me, since I had just done my SNEP page proofs, I did a nice little presentation that looked like I can just *ad lib* these things without any preparation. Don't tell anyone. For the Golden Gate-Away event, I got to lead one of the pre-meeting Forays and did it out to Marin Headlands. It turns out that the entire four miles was wheelchair accessible so we took my friend Don along and only got him stuck in the sand once. But, we're Explorers, after all, and needed the adventure, right? For a photo essay on that, point your Web browser at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/EC.html>. I am up for re-election as Webmaster of that group also. I am running unopposed so...

Well, now that I have satisfied Congress after three years of working on SNEP, I have a greater challenge: I am the featured speaker at my little friend Margie's third-grade class soon. They've been studying geology all semester and I'm supposed to come in there and tell them what it's *really* like (lava, lava, hmmm... lava). It may be a great chance to clean out the rock warehouse with show-and-tell giveaway items.

Love,

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