

JOURNAL

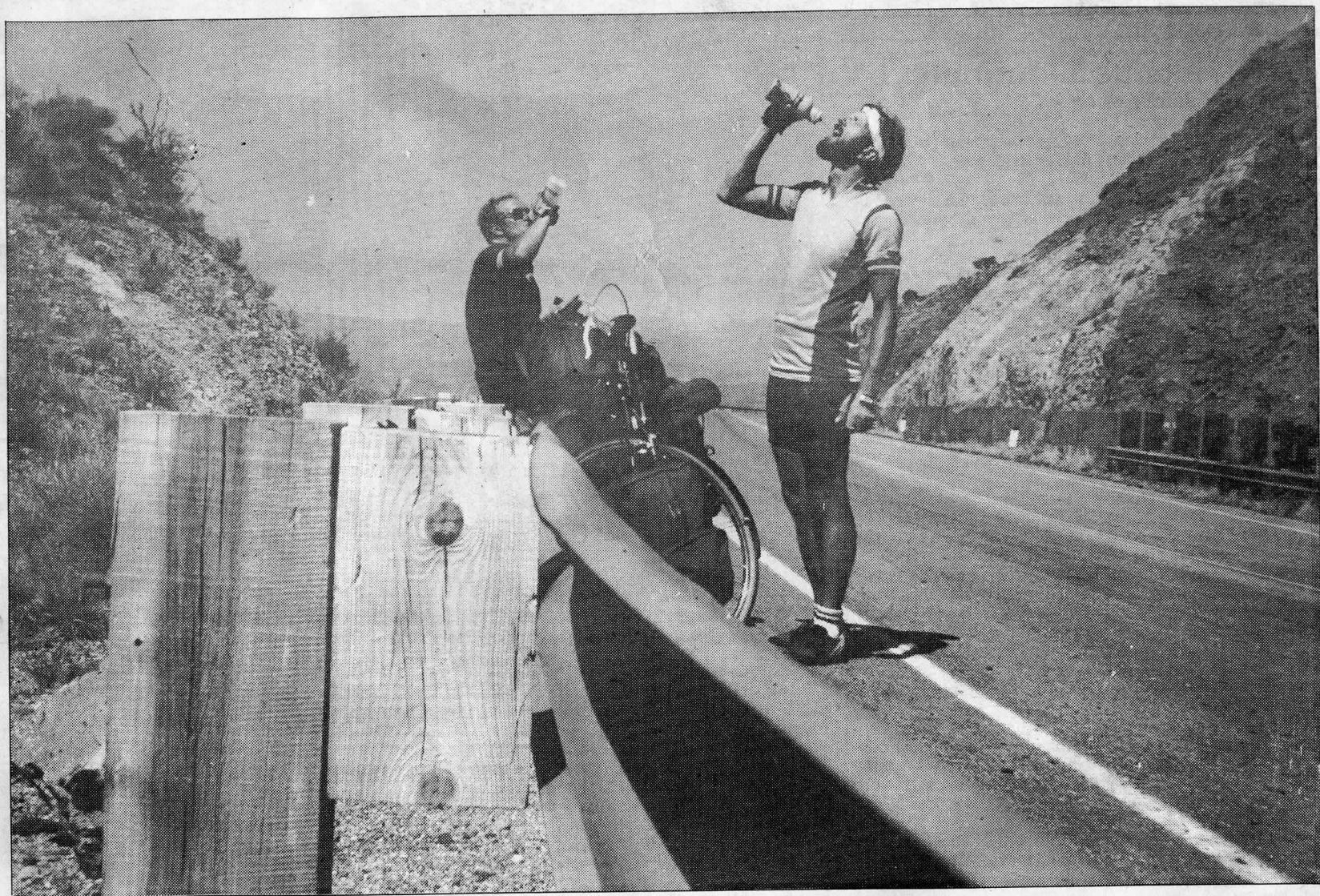
Enjoy Magazine

Friday, August 30, 1985

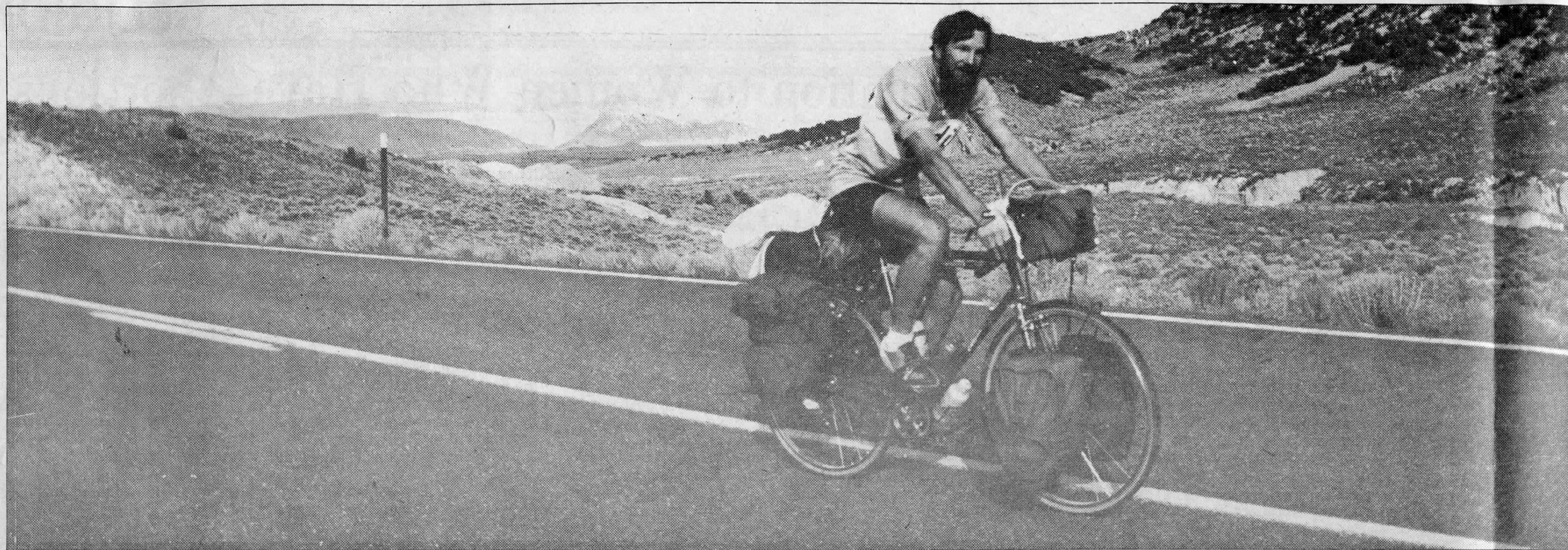
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From Border to Border: Bicycling the West



Rob Jones found the worst roads in Montana, the worst drivers in Utah, and the prettiest women in Colorado

Border to Border

Two Southeast Idahoans peddled from Mexico to Canada in 31 days this summer

By **BILL FRANCIS**
Journal Staff Writer

Heading for Logan Pass in Glacier National Park, through a cold misty morning, passing a moose in a side drainage, pumping pedals past beargrass and marmots, the two cyclists had almost reached their goal — to ride their bicycles from Mexico to Canada.

It was cold that morning on July, but they had been up and on the road by 6:30 a.m. "I tied a handkerchief around one hand and my hat around the other," recalls Rob Jones, 35, Pocatello, who was making the 1,950-mile trip from Nogales, Mexico to Carway, Canada in 31 days with Marv Miles, 37, Moreland.

They saw enough wildlife on that stretch of the trip. Besides the moose and the marmot, Jones also saw a bear. "On the way down, a yearling black bear tumbled across the road in front of me," Jones wrote in his trip journal.

But they had no time to dawdle on what Jones calls the "Canadian Blitzkrieg." They were forced to ride a 120 miles that day because officials have restricted bicycle travel on two sections of the Going to the Sun Road.

"It's very difficult to get around in that country — not because of the terrain, but because the Park Service gets in the way," says Jones.

He has other memories of wildlife, of elk, deer and bear, buffalo and marmots, of roadrunners and rattlesnakes and of drivers who saw no reason why bicycles should be on the road.

In fact, Rob, who finds himself with strong opinions about the people and places he and Marv met and saw on their trip, has even ranked them: "The worst roads were in Montana; the worst auto drivers were in Utah; the most glass on the road — Idaho, with Montana a close second"... and the best looking women were in Colorado."

He says the "biggest gouger" was a commercial campground in a small community in Arizona, while the nicest people were in Montrose, Colo. "They let us stay in their city park, people came by and offered to give us things to barbecue, and when we went into stores to buy things, they told us where everything was," Jones said.

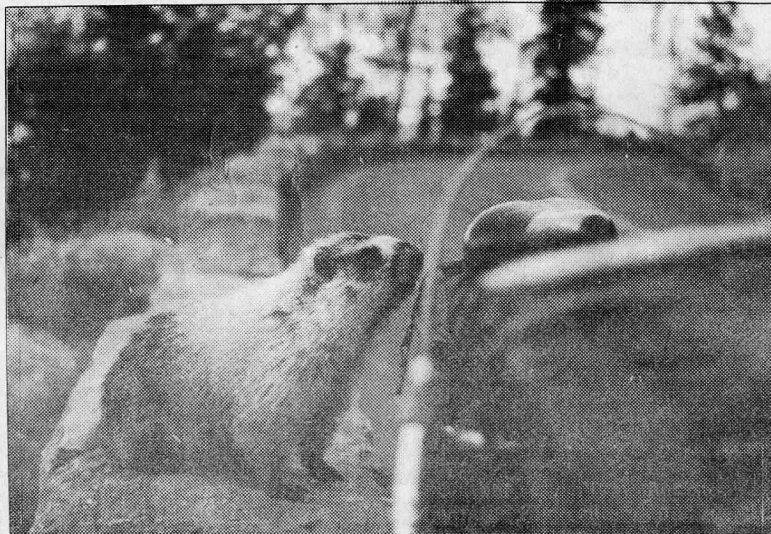
They also met some interesting people. "Frank Kral, from Michigan, was 70 years old and was riding border to border (from Virginia to Astoria, Ore.) By the time we saw him, he had already gone 3,000 miles," says Jones.

"He started out with a guy 80 years old and another guy 69. The character who was 80 had ridden across the country when he was 75 and had talked the other two into going. He developed heart trouble, so they propped him up in a motel, called his wife and took off. The 69-year-old had a poorly designed toe clip; he hit the front fender of a car, fell, broke his shoulder, but didn't quit.

"He rode another four or five days, but became so delirious he didn't know which way he was going. So Frank propped him up in a motel, called his wife and took off again.

"This is a true story," says Jones. "At least this is how Frank tells it."

Frank, according to Jones, was "one hell of a bike rider. We did a 100-mile day and he rode with us. We rode with him for about five days, and in those five days we did about 350 miles."



Enjoy photos courtesy of Rob Jones

GOING TO THE SUN—Rob Jones found the drivers more cumbersome than the steep grades on the Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park, Mont. (at right).

Above, a hoary marmot investigates Jones' gear during a rest stop in Glacier.

To begin the trip, Jones and Miles had packed their 18-speed touring bicycles in boxes, drove to Salt Lake City and flew to Tucson, Ariz., where they put their bikes together in a corner of the airport. Then they rode to Nogales.

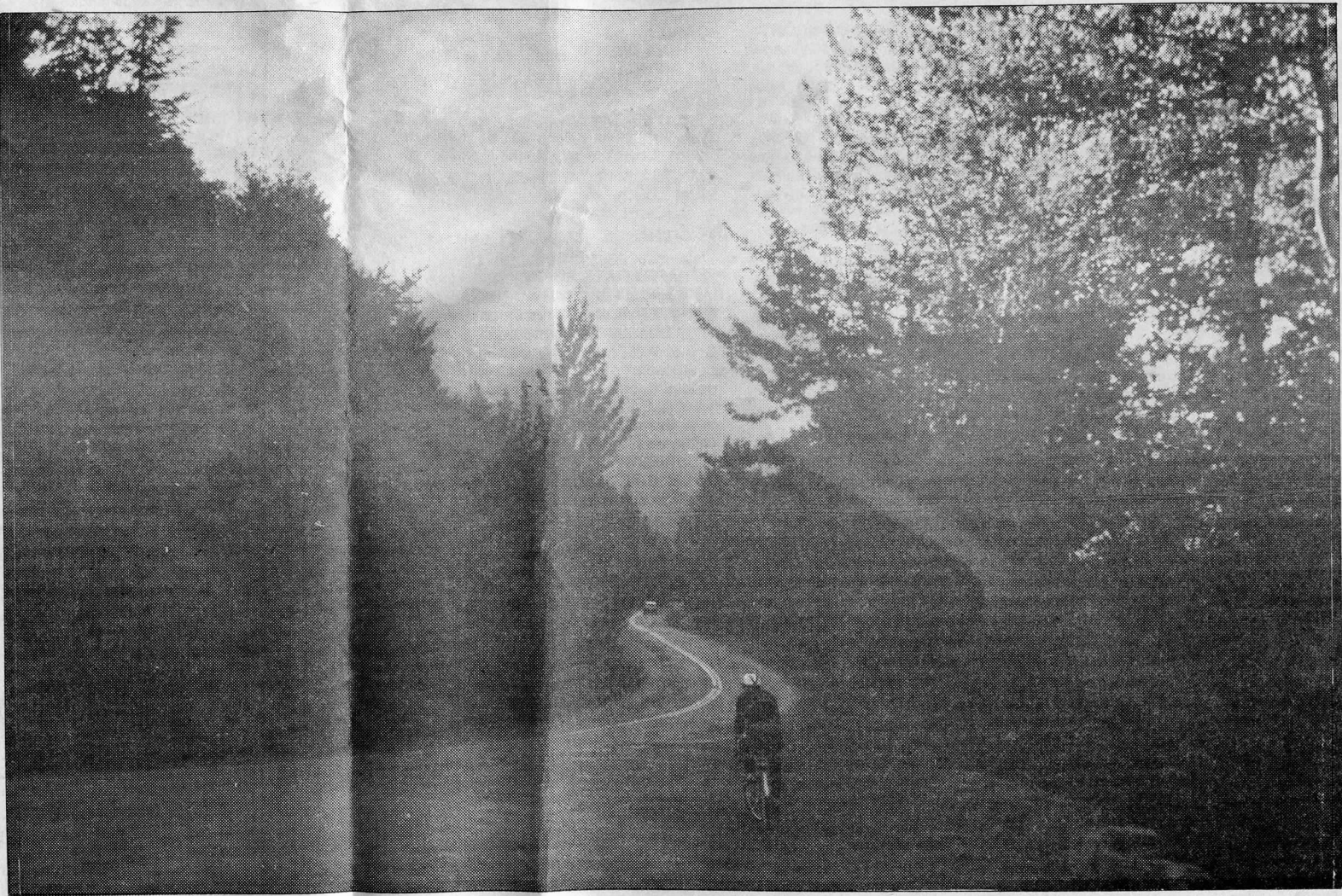
"I saw roadrunners in Arizona — I've never seen roadrunners before — and we saw all kinds of rattlesnakes on the highway going up through New Mexico," says Jones.

The two had some difficulty adjusting to the southwestern heat, because when they left Pocatello, temperatures were hovering around the 70 and 80 degree mark. In Arizona, it was 117 degrees when they arrived.

One problem was the "Utah rule the road attitude," says Jones. "It got to the point when we saw a black and white license, we would assume these guys were going to run us off the road. The other problem we had was with the loggers and the stock truck drivers in Montana. The stock truck drivers did it deliberately — they would pass so close to you that you could touch the truck. But most of the people on the road were very good."

They saw — and almost ran over — another rattler near McDonald Pass in Montana, as the snake was warming itself by soaking up the morning sun on the tarmac. Later that day, 1,696 miles into the trip, Marv had a flat as he ran over glass. They both bought new tires, since Rob's tire was also beginning to show wear. He never used it, but instead rolled it up and strapped it alongside his sleeping bag.

Surprisingly, the high passes were not the most difficult part of the trip. "The worst day was when we did not have to ride a pass," recalls



Jones. "It was the day we rode from Lander, Wyo. to Dubois, Wyo. — the Wind River area. They got that named right. That was tough. It was only a gradual uphill with some rollers, but it was a nasty, nasty day because we had a headwind. The next day, from Dubois to Colter Pass, up to 9,600 feet, it was nothing; it was easy because we didn't have the wind."

For others contemplating a similar trip, he had some suggestions: to prepare the body for the exertion, start with short day trips, move into longer day trips while adding diversity in terrain, perhaps by taking rides to Fuzy Tree Farm on the Mink Creek Road, or to Crystal Summit, or by taking the Arbon Valley loop. He advises trying an overnight trip, perhaps

by riding to Yellowstone National Park.

"Remember to keep the cadence (leg RPMs) at least 60 per minute or more," he says. "Gradually increase intensity and distance — ride at least three times a week."

Marv and Rob had completed a difficult trip, but they were humbled twice. The first time was in Dolores, Colo., as they sat drinking beer in a city park. A man identified as a "Frenchman," peddled toward them in an archaic bike with a rusted crank and cord showing through on his front tire. He had been on the road alone for six weeks, cycling from New York to San Francisco, then on to Japan for more biking.

The second time came as they learned of the Tour de France results. "Those iron-legged athletes rode a bit over our distance, 2,580 miles, in 139 hours," he wrote. "Wow. Tougher terrain as well."

As the two made their speedy jaunt up and over Logan Pass, then down toward St. Mary, Mont., and Canada, they finished the "borderquest" and stopped for a ceremonial drink and photo (made possible by a self-timer on Rob's camera). They returned to their camp that night shortly after 9 p.m., having traveled 120 miles in one day — a trip record.

But they weren't finished. Now they had to ride back home to Pocatello. "Feeling a bit empty," Rob wrote in his trip journal. "Perhaps we should try to catch a ride? After all, the major quest is complete, right?"

He got over his weak moments.

It was another seven days before the two men cycled home after pedaling a total of 2,546 miles in 38 days, riding their bikes for a total of 262 hours.

On that return trip, they stopped in Missoula, Mont., to register their trip with the Bikecentennial office, an office constructed to help bikers who were traveling cross country. Frank Kral had already been there; then on to a bike shop "where we discovered a picture of Frank and his compatriots on the bulletin board. The old dog sure gets around."

Back in Idaho, near Salmon, Marv and Rob headed through occasional thunderstorms: and then it happened.

"Rounding a bend on a slight downhill, I noticed the brush was leaning, more in one location than in all surrounding locations. A gust funneling through a notch, I assumed. Wrong. A mini-tornado, which sand-blasted my face and legs, whipped me around — away from the river and in a semicircle onto the shoulder. I was stunned — it had happened so quickly. Puzzled that I hadn't crashed or gone for a deep swim, I looked around to see what 'it' was."

It was indeed a mini-tornado and was sucking up a two-foot water spout in the river a few hundred feet away. Stunned, but feeling lucky, he moved back on the road and headed for Challis and the final pass — Willow Creek Summit at 7,160 feet.

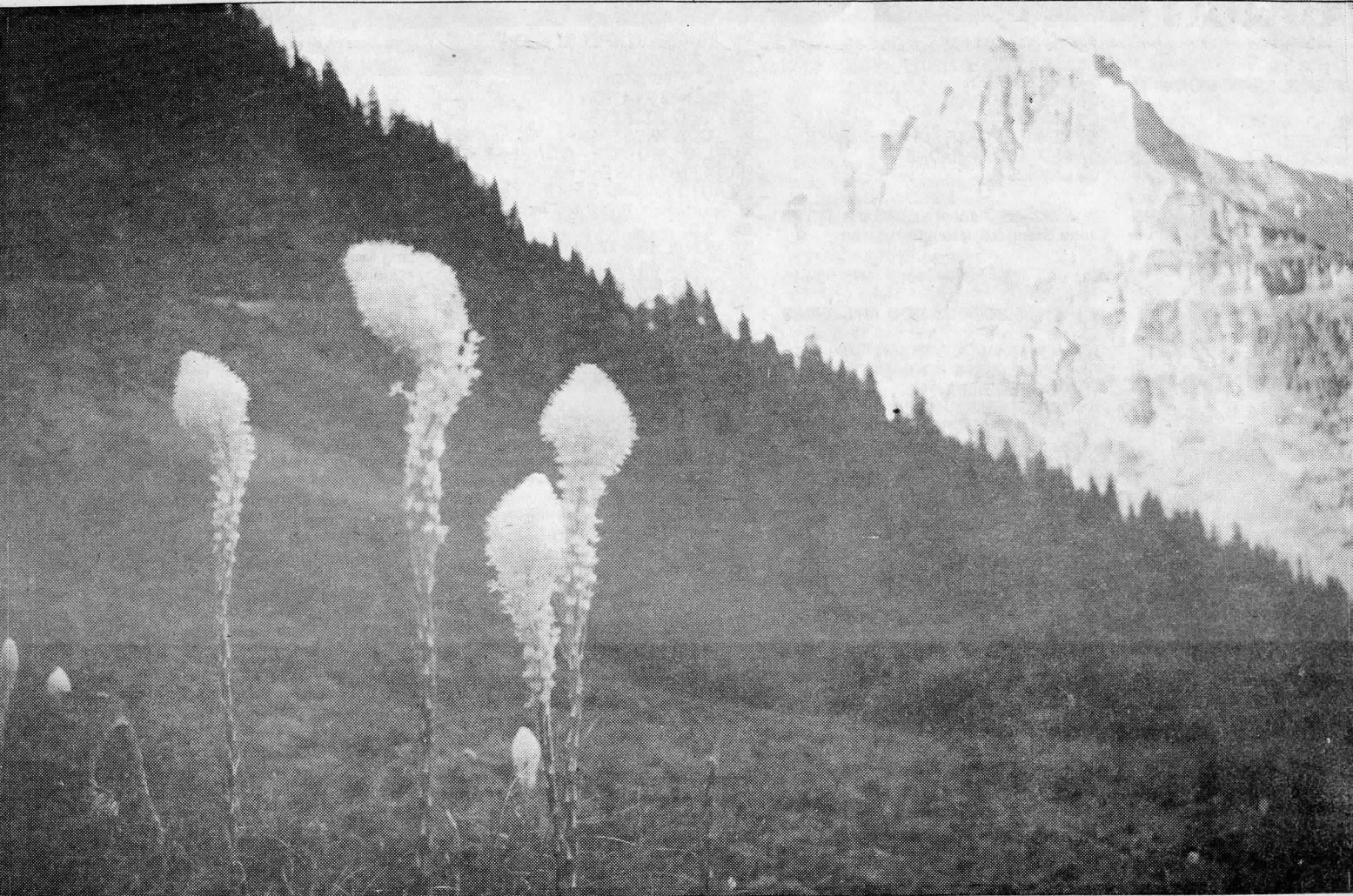
Rob spent \$520 for the trip — and \$120 of that was for a plane trip to Tucson, while \$335 went for food.

And what of his perception of western America? He was disconcerted about the direction it seemed to be taking as he wrote in his journal, perhaps somewhat angry at what he saw as conspicuous consumption (in the form of recreation vehicles), waste and "progress."

"Fat smokers, developers. Montana! Colorado! Idaho for Sale! RV drivers nearly totally insulated from any but artificial experience. Doltish cowboy truckers, criminal, inconsiderate and rushing drivers."

He wouldn't miss cold water bottle baths and the traffic, but he would miss the almost weightless cruising on the bike, the times when he and Marv found themselves lumbering up long passes and "the natural beauty of the people, of the country." □

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jones will give a slide show and talk about the venture on Wednesday, Sept. 4 at 7:30 p.m. in the Selway and Clearwater rooms of the Idaho State University Student Union Building.



Bear grass blooms in Montana's Glacier National Park